

Sedimentation and Standards: An interpretation of the 2018 Alberta *Leadership Quality Standard* from a Gadamerian perspective

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is an interpretive document on the *Leadership Quality Standard* policy that was released in Alberta, Canada in 2018. In it, I examine the tensions, contradictions, and possibilities that emerge in this policy document. Using the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans Georg Gadamer I hope to gain insight into how people interpret policy. As well, this dissertation presents a metaphor of sedimentary layers as a way to understand and question policy formation, interpretation, and experience. The analysis done in this dissertation is informed by analytic auto-ethnography. Out of this process, the hermeneutic nature of policy becomes clear and emphasizes the importance of leaders to honour the voice of the individual. Ultimately, this analysis shows that leaders with a sense of hermeneutic wonder will be able to care for human complexity and recognize the importance of being wrong. This will allow for the generation of ideas and increase possibilities around policy. New and established leaders may use this work to help support the implementation of the *LQS* in Alberta.

Key words: Gadamer, educational policy, contradictions, teacher leaders, leadership, quality standards, *LQS*, hermeneutics

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Christopher Ian McNeill. The project, which this thesis reports, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, “Sedimentation and Standards: An interpretation of the Alberta Leadership Quality Standard from a Gadamerian perspective,” Pro00073887, June 5, 2019.

Dedication

Dedicated to Patty and Ian,

Examples I have always tried to live up to, but never reached. I follow your path knowing it never ends. You taught me to not objectify people and that objects are never more valuable than individuals. This work stands on that foundation.

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Lindsay, this would have crashed in a pile of frustration and anger had you not been there to support me with your friendship, kindness, and talent. You inspire others with your honesty, passion, and intellect. I am grateful beyond words.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Preface.....	iii
Dedications	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	xiii
Chapter I. Personal Trajectory	1
Experiences	1
Memories.....	15
Personal Sediments.....	15
Ideals.....	17
Work	20
Wonder	39
Studies	40
Recapitulation.....	43
Chapter II. Policy Process.....	45
Current Landscape	45
Policy.....	48
Contradictory Layers.....	54
Contradiction.....	56
Formation	58
Interpretation	67
Individuals Sediments	68
Teachers Sediments.....	79
Recapitulation.....	80
Chapter III. Alberta Policy.....	82
History.....	82
Policy Sediments in Alberta.....	82

Critique	89
Themes	94
Fear and Anxiety.....	94
Self-Protection.....	95
Frustration.....	96
Recapitulation.....	98
Chapter IV. Gadamer's Concepts	101
Rationale for Gadamer	101
Hans-Georg Gadamer	103
Hermeneutics.....	103
Gadamer and Educational Policy	105
Truth	106
Understanding.....	110
Text, Tradition, and Time.....	112
Context and Understanding	113
Purpose of Understanding	114
Hermeneutic Spiral	116
Objectivity	118
Tradition and Authority.....	120
Application	122
Conversation.....	124
Application of Gadamer's Work to the Alberta Context.....	125
Polytruths.....	125
Change.....	125
Fluidity	125
Instrumental and Operational	126
Solidarity	127
Tension	128
Recapitulation.....	128
Chapter V. Method and Truths	129

Research Layer.....	129
Hermeneutic tradition.....	130
Qualitative research.....	135
Interpretive inquiry.....	137
Hermeneutic Document Interpretation.....	140
Research Site.....	141
Sampling.....	142
Analysis.....	145
(De)limitations.....	147
Trustworthiness.....	148
Recapitulation.....	150
Chapter VI. The Alberta <i>Leadership Quality Standard</i>	151
Observations and Reflections on the Alberta <i>Leadership Quality Standard</i>	151
2. The <i>Leadership Quality Standard</i>	153
Reflections.....	154
3. The <i>Leadership Quality Standard</i> Applies to all Leaders.....	159
Questions.....	159
Reflections.....	161
4.1.a. Acting with fairness, respect and integrity.....	161
Questions.....	162
Reflections.....	165
4.1.b. Demonstrating empathy and a genuine concern for others.....	166
Questions.....	166
Reflections.....	167
4.1.c. Creating a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment.....	168
Reflections.....	168
4.1.d. Creating opportunities for parents/guardians, as partners in education, to take an active role in their children’s education.....	170
Reflections.....	171
4.1.e. Establishing relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents/guardians, Elders/knowledge keepers, local leaders and community members.....	173
Reflections.....	173

4.1.f. Demonstrating a commitment to the health and well-being of all teachers, staff and students.....	174
Reflections.....	174
4.1.g. Acting consistently in the best interests of students.....	176
Reflections.....	177
4.1.h. Engaging in collegial relationships while modeling and promoting open, collaborative dialogue.....	178
Reflections.....	178
4.1.i. Communicating, facilitating and solving problems effectively.....	180
Reflections.....	180
4.1.j. Implementing processes for improving working relationships and dealing with conflict within the school community.....	182
Reflections.....	183
4.2 Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning.....	184
Reflections.....	185
4.3.a. Communicating a philosophy of education that is student-centred and based on sound principles of effective teaching and leadership.....	186
Reflections.....	186
4.3.b. Recognizing the school community’s values and aspirations and demonstrating an appreciation for diversity.....	188
Reflections.....	189
4.4 Leading a Learning Community.....	190
Reflections.....	190
4.5 Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit.....	192
Reflections.....	192
4.5.a. Understanding the historical, social, economic, and political implications of:	
• treaties and agreements with First Nations;	
• legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis	
• residential schools and their legacy.....	193
Reflections.....	193

4.5.b. Aligning resources and building the capacity of the school community to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit student achievement	194
Reflections	195
4.5.c. Enabling all school staff and students to gain a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit	196
Reflections	196
4.5.d. Pursuing opportunities and engaging in practices to facilitate reconciliation within the school community	197
Reflections	197
4.6.a. Building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students	199
Reflections	199
4.6.b. Implementing professional growth, supervision and evaluation processes to ensure that all teachers meet the Teaching Quality Standard	201
Reflections	201
4.6.c. Ensuring that student instruction addresses learning outcomes outlined in programs of study	202
Reflections	202
4.6.d. Facilitating mentorship and induction supports for teachers and principals, as required	203
Reflections	204
4.6.e. Demonstrating a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and curriculum.....	205
Reflections	205
4.6.f. Facilitating the use of a variety of technologies to support learning for all students.....	206
Reflections	206
4.6.g. Ensuring that student assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate, and evidence informed	207
Reflections	207
4.6.h. Interpreting a wide range of data to inform school practice and enable success for all students.....	208
Reflections	209
4.6.i. Facilitating access to resources, agencies and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development	210
Reflections	210

4.7 Developing Leadership Capacity.....	211
Reflections.....	212
4.7.a. Demonstrating consultative and collaborative decision-making that is informed by open dialogue and multiple perspectives	213
Reflections.....	213
4.7.b. Identifying, mentoring and empowering teachers in educational leadership roles	214
Reflections.....	214
4.7.c. Promoting the engagement of parents in school council(s) and facilitating the constructive involvement of school council(s) in school life.....	215
Reflections.....	215
4.7.d. Creating opportunities for students to participate in leadership activities and to exercise their voice in school leadership and decision making.....	216
Reflections.....	216
4.7.e. Promoting team building and shared leadership among members of the school community.....	217
Reflections.....	218
4.8 Managing School Operations and Resources.....	218
Reflections.....	219
4.8.a. Identifying and planning for areas of need.....	219
Reflections.....	220
4.8.b. Applying principles of effective teaching and learning, child development, and ethical leadership to all decisions	221
Reflections.....	221
4.8.c. Aligning practices, procedures, policies, decisions, and resources with school and school authority visions, goals and priorities	222
Reflections.....	223
4.8.d. Following through on decisions made by allocating resources (human, physical, technological and financial) to provide the learning environments and supports needed to enable and/or improve learning for all students	224
Reflections.....	224
4.8.e. Facilitating access to appropriate technology and digital learning environments.....	225
Reflections.....	225
4.8.f. Ensuring operations align with provincial legislation, regulations and policies, and the policies and processes of the school authority	226
Reflections.....	226

4.9 Understanding and responding to the Larger Societal Context	227
Reflections	228
4.9.a. Supporting the school community in understanding the legal frameworks and policies that provide the foundations for the Alberta education system	229
Reflections	230
4.9.b. Representing the needs of students at the community, authority and provincial levels	232
Reflections	232
4.9.c. Engaging local community partners to understand local contexts	234
Reflections	234
4.9.d. Demonstrating an understanding of local, provincial, national, and international issues and trends and their implications for education	235
Reflections	235
4.9.e. Facilitating school community members' understanding of local, provincial, national, and international issues and trends related to education	237
Reflections	238
A Return to the Preamble	239
 Chapter VII. Interpretive Sediments	 240
Stratigraphy	240
Nature of Policy Interpretation	254
A Varied Topography	254
Geologic Drift, Slow and Steady	257
Forces of Nature: Resistance and Tension	260
Horizons	265
 References	 276

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Adapted Policy Model	66
Figure 1.2 Sense Making	71
Figure 1.3 Context Added to Sense Making	74
Figure 1.4 Tradition Fuses with Sense Making in the Context.....	77
Figure 1.5 The Policy Text Enters the Interpretive Movement	79

Chapter I. Personal Trajectory

Something awakens our interest—this is what really comes first!

(Hans-Georg Gadamer, 2001, p.50)

Experiences

I began this journey interested in policy—interested in the ways policy informed leadership. During my experience in schools, people kept talking about systems of change, systems of improvement, and systems of transformation. There was much talk very specifically about the ways a single “intervention” or “system” could be implemented and measured as a tool of success. They talked about ways interventions could be applied in schools to change students, teachers, and practice. They talked about the fact that these interventions could have measurable results. Initially, I wanted to verify whether or not these people were accurately using this data and whether these policies or interventions would actually help students in schools, whether they would actually create changes in school. I wondered whether the numbers these leaders were citing were accurate and/or meaningful in the process of school transformation. I wondered whether the seemingly “scientific authority” of their claims really stood true. I wondered whether the policies being created in response to these claims were accurate reflections of the intents of the researchers. This is what initially drew me to policy research.

When I entered graduate studies, I read many policy writers and policy researchers but felt their voice rang out with certainty and clarity that resonated with my own experience. On the one hand, policy researchers tended to focus on one idea in isolation, or suggest one improvement without consideration of the others. For example, they might talk about inclusion, accountability, a teaching methodology, a particular technology, citizenship education, identity,

or many other things but talk about them alone rather than in consideration of the ways that each fold and bend together in actual practice. On the other hand, policy researchers seemed to have a tendency to see education as a technical process—something simple to understand and explain, something that can be justified easily and clearly, often with numbers and quantitative data. What I struggled with was the fact that what was lost in these studies was the fact that education is a messy and, ultimately, human endeavour.

I began to realize the problem with these things was not with the research itself, but with the faith in and fetishization of the research. I struggled with what seemed to be the myth of—and subsequent worship of—control in educational spaces. For indeed, in my early graduate course work¹ and my career as a teacher, I felt most drawn to (if I had to be drawn to a myth) the myth of freedom and emancipation through education. To me, the emancipatory myths seemed to me what best described the ideal educational pursuit. To me, the human, rather than the scientific or mechanical, seemed to best describe the core purpose of education.

As such, this dissertation stands upon a foundation of allowing for—and embraces the human and messy nature of understanding. It stands upon a foundation of interpretive research unfolding out of many years of research in Alberta by such interpretive scholars as: Julia Ellis (1998), David Jardine (1992), Jackie Seidel (2007), and David Smith (1991). Interpretive research can take many forms, but this dissertation sits upon an Alberta tradition of interpretive research characterized by bricolage and personal exploration. Another layer—present in the Alberta tradition but elsewhere as well—is the philosophical support of Hans-Georg Gadamer².

¹ Work inserts itself into this dissertation in two ways. Firstly, as the product of academic, creative, and scholarly effort and secondly to sum up the tasks of leading and educating.

² Gadamer's career spanned much of the 20th century and his most important work *Truth and Method* was published in 1960 (Dostal, 2016). The version that I am referencing was first published in 1975 and revised in 2004. The

This dissertation draws upon inspiration and guidance from two key works: *Truth and Method* (2013) and *Gadamer on Celan: 'Who Am I and Who Are You?' and Other Essays* (Gadamer et al., 1997).

The fundamental academic foundation of this dissertation is Gadamer's work on interpretation, as already noted: *Truth and Method* (2013) and *Gadamer on Celan: 'Who Am I and Who Are You?' and Other Essays* (Gadamer et al., 1997)³. In *Gadamer on Celan: 'Who Am I and Who Are You?' and Other Essays* (Gadamer et al., 1997), Gadamer examines Celan's poetry (a text) and provides an interpretation. Drawn to read by his hermeneutic wonder, Gadamer (Gadamer, et al., 1997) applies his knowledge and experience to the text out of admiration and scholastic curiosity and creates an interpretation that offers new insight into the text itself. Gadamer's purpose is to present the text and his interpretation. As I consider policy and interpretation, I hope to do the same—to both present the text (the *LQS*) and my interpretation. My specific journey is presented later in this document, but I am drawn to read the *LQS* with my own sense of hermeneutic wonder and share my interpretation to offer insight into the text itself.

The word “wonder” speaks to a sense of awe or amazement when discovering a particularly beautiful new experience (as in “To feel or be affected with wonder; to be struck with surprise or astonishment, to marvel. Also, occasionally to express wonder in speech,” (Oxford English Dictionary [OED], 2020)) but it also speaks to a more casual everyday sense of questioning (as in “to ask oneself in wonderment; to feel some doubt or curiosity (how, whether, why, etc.); to be desirous to know or learn,” (OED, 2020)). In this way, I can have a sense of

paperback copy was published in 2013 and includes a detailed discussion of the translation which to my mind matches the spirit of Gadamer's work.

³ There are two 1997 Gadamer references in this work. Gadamer, et al. refers to *Gadamer on Celan: 'Who Am I and Who Are You?' and Other Essays* while Gadamer and Hahn is used to refer to *The philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*.

wonder at seeing a beautiful painting, but I can also wonder (to be desirous to know and learn) about the techniques, context, and interpretations that created the sense of wonder in the first place.

Gadamer (2013) tells us that the “wonderful and mysterious thing about art... [it] opens up room to play, for the free play of our cognitive faculties” (p. 47). But it isn’t only art that brings about opportunities to play and exercise our cognitive abilities; it is any interpretative moment (Gadamer, 2013). As a professional, I can hold “sense of awe” at a policy or marvel at an experience, but I can also ask questions, feel doubt, experience curiosity, and long to know more. It is this personal and professional desire to uncover possibilities, to play with words and meaning, and to learn that brings me to interpret experiences and policies. As such, I use the word throughout this dissertation.

In a world saturated with calls for objectivity, mastery, and control, this kind of research might cause some to question. After all, my research is not seeking to arrive at clear-cut answers or pin down conclusions about the problem of policy implementation in Alberta; it is not seeking to be “generalizable” in the traditional, scientific sense, as I am not surveying a wide range of individuals with varied experiences; and it is not seeking to eliminate bias from the data—instead it is full of bias and singular perspectives. All of these limitations might give a reader pause. However, this kind of work is not without merit nor is it without precedent. Advanced studies in humanities existed long before quantitative research and positivistic approaches to understanding the world. As early as the Middle Ages, individuals set out on predominantly philosophical interrogations of the world. These approaches were inherently biased and subjective, yet brought forth powerful understandings of “being in the world” (Heidegger, 2010).

In a world that today seems so broken and fragmented, an approach to research that focuses on how we might bring about “human solidarity rather than objectivity” (Smith, 1992, p. 102) seems to me to be an important and even necessary approach. My efforts here are to open up understandings, rather than pin them down. While my sample size of one is small, it offers a view into the some of the challenges of implementing policy. And because the sample is small, this interpretation is able to uncover multiple layers of thoughts, emotions, and experiences that lead to these challenges in a way that a larger sample would not. Here I am able to uncover the myriad layers of sediments that bring forth interpretation rather than simply skim the surface, as would be likely with a larger sample. My hope is that with this small sample, I am able “contemplate life in its wholeness and complexity” (Ellis, 1998b, p. 19) rather than expose fragments of multiple experiences. My hope is that this work can be the beginning of dialogue between voices that will help to fuse horizons and build solidarity. In the legal field, a legal statute is the text to be interpreted by an expert (a judge) who carries authority and an academic knowledge when interpreting the text. Eskridge (1990), however, has specifically applied Gadamer’s work⁴ in statutory interpretation. Eskridge (1990) illustrates how an understanding of interpretation informed by Gadamer could assist legal scholars to better approach legal statutes. In his work, Eskridge (1990) examines the case of *Boutilier v. Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 387 US 118, (1967) and three different interpretations of the same statute related to the case—each carried out in its own legal tradition. He discovers common hermeneutic elements in each of the interpretations, but Eskridge (1990) suggests that a Gadamerian hermeneutic approach to legal statutes might help to create a more layered, and thus robust, understanding of the law. Eskridge’s (1990) work draws the reader to appreciate the open, but not radical, that

⁴ Eskridge (1990, p. 612) notes that he is referencing a 1989 version of Truth and Method. Though using different copies, The version cited by Eskridge and myself are both the revised translation by Weinsheimer and Marshall.

comes with a Gadamerian approach to statutory interpretation. He explains: “one theme of Gadamer is that method—whether text-based, archaeological or present-minded—does not tightly constrain or even guide the interpreter in the way the legal literature seems to” (Eskridge, 1990, p. 612).

The article contains many insights into the subjective nature of legal interpretation, but, Eskridge’s (1990) “implications of Gadamerian hermeneutics for statutory interpretation” (p. 632) are particularly important for policy analysis in education. Firstly, Eskridge (1990) suggests that interpreters use precedents in a reflective way rather than confrontationally (pp. 660-661). Secondly, he explains that legal canons are always opposed by counter-canons, which suggests that the legal canon, in his words, is “indeterminate” (p. 662). Ultimately, this realization tells us that interpretation is not only always present when understanding policy, but also necessary. Further, it explains that understanding comes from acknowledgement of both the canonical interpretation and the counter-interpretation. Lastly, his work reminds us that the background assumptions and norms contributing to initial precedents should be tested in current cases (p. 665). These insights into statutory interpretation present Gadamerian hermeneutics as a way to approach policy in education: through reflection, openness, and consideration of tradition without being bound to it.

These tenants of hermeneutic research—the reflectiveness, openness, and awareness—are what Morcol (2004) suggests make hermeneutics a postpositivist⁵ approach to research. This is

⁵ Gadamer (2013) uses positivism and empiricism interchangeably to mean the application of scientific methods with a philosophy that implies that science can be a technical value free process. The idea of post-positivism is a broad one sometimes applied to a set of paradigms and methods developed after the positivist era (as described by Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Hermeneutics, if we accept the eras described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) isn’t post-positivist because pre-dates even the positivist era. Gadamer’s work (as it exists after the positivist era) could be considered post-positivist but I prefer to define Gadamer’s work as hermeneutic as it is specifically concerned with

important to Morcol (2004), a policy analyst, because there is a tendency in policy toward positivist approaches to understanding texts. Morcol (2004) is in line with Torgerson's (1986): notion that "the rise of the administrative state in our era has, however, involved a positivist approach to inquiry and a technocratic orientation to policy-making (p. 397). However, Torgerson (1986) states "we very much need efforts to understand public life in human terms" (p. 398). The path to these efforts to understand public life in human terms is found when one understands that "interpretive inquiry advances *communication* as the fundamental basis of research" (Torgerson, 1986, p. 399). Torgerson (1986) takes the position that hermeneutics allows a community of inquirers to engage in "the norms of genuine communication" while "dedicated to the common cause of uncovering the "truth" about their subject matter" (p. 399). However, Torgerson (1986) posits that if the world of the subject-matter is marred by "distorted communication" (p. 399) then interpretive inquiry would need to challenge that distortion. This challenge does not reject tradition, as Gadamer (2013) makes the impact of tradition⁶ and historically effected consciousness clear. Torgerson (1986) sees interpretive inquiry as way to consider that "rationality demands rigorous self-discipline from both radical and reactionary—and from all those in between" (p. 402).

Out of Torgerson's article (1986), there emerge a few ideas relevant to my own work.

The first is his claim that policy must be understood in terms of the humans who interpret and enact these policies—which I agree is accurate for education, because education is ultimately a

interpretation. Interpretivism (which Crotty applies to hermeneutics) focuses on "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67).

⁶ Gadamer (2013) presents individuals as the product of historical experiences (also noted in Crotty, 1998). These experiences are influenced by tradition. Tradition being those elements of the world that are transmitted to the individual through language and experience. For Gadamer (2013), this makes humans historically effected (meaning that we are the effected by our tradition and experiences which form our sense of self). It is this self, the historically effected one, that enters the fusion of horizons as we interpret something new. For Gadamer (2013), we always bring our effected consciousness to any new interpretive event.

human endeavor. Secondly, his article reminds us that policy interpretation should be non-confrontational and dedicated to a “common cause” (p. 399). Truth must be understood in such a way that one cannot pretend to be a radical or a reactionary, but rather a professional tasked with navigating himself/herself within a document in light of human complexity.

Another area where interpretive research finds a home is in the field of nursing. Debesay et al. (2008) argue that this is likely because of “researchers’ epistemological concerns when viewing the distinctive nature of nursing as a relational science” (p. 57). Following Gilje and Grimen, (1993, as cited in Debesay, et al., (2008)), Debesay et al. (2008) posit: “research into human activity requires our being able to interpret the players’ intentions” (p. 58). Like teaching, nursing is a fundamentally human and relational activity that requires understanding of people and their experiences. We can view these experiences and interpretations of these experiences “in light of the fact that Gadamer provides a philosophical description of how we understand” (p. 59). Both Fleming et al. (2003) and Debesay et al. (2008) speak to the importance of the “hermeneutic circle,” as described by Gadamer, in the process of understanding people and their experiences. It makes sense, then, for nursing researchers to draw upon Gadamer’s hermeneutics to capture experiences within nursing contexts. Fleming et al. (1993) argue that hermeneutics is an appropriate approach for it helps “to achieve a deep understanding of a phenomenon” (p. 117).

For educational studies, Fleming et al. (2003) article reminds us of the importance of the individual experience—that the experience of a text is true in a moment or feels true in relationship with the rest of the text. They also remind us: “there is no statement that is universally true, because no statement can escape the complexities of interpretation” (Fleming et al., 2003, p. 117). This is important to our understanding of educational policy in that policy, too, cannot “escape the complexities of interpretation” (Fleming et al., 2003, p. 117). Secondly,

Debesay et al. (2008) tell us “one should bear in mind the hermeneutic insight that the understanding cannot be final” (p. 65). Understanding is always shifting and layered.

As in nursing, education can also apply Gadamer’s hermeneutics to research and practice. I also stand upon the foundation of researchers such as O’Neill (2012), Leviska (2015), and Kim (2013), researchers that have found value in the application of Gadamer’s interpretive work to the field of education.

O’Neill (2012) proposes using Gadamer’s fusion of horizons as a metaphor to guide professional educators as they consider new possibilities that may seem foreign or antithetical to previous knowledge. O’Neill (2012) interestingly compares Lakoff’s (2004) frames and Gadamer’s fusions of horizons to contrast accepting difficult-to-change cognitive structures (Lakoff, 2004) with a possible approach to understanding how cognitive structures can change (Gadamer, 2010). O’Neill (2012) suggests that Gadamer’s fusion of horizons could help people clarify the “frames that define and separate us” (p. 66). This process of clarification would help bring people to a place of understanding that opens us up to “put our own horizons, our deepest meanings, back into play in hopes of finding more honest, humble, and humane metaphors to live by” (p. 66).

Leviska (2015) argues that Gadamer’s (2013) understanding of tradition has “a particular relevance for the philosophy of education that has been overlooked” (p. 583). She believes Gadamer’s greatest contribution to the field of educational research is that he “refutes the abstract opposition between tradition and rationality” (p. 583). Leviska’s (2015) work reminds us that the “particular, alien, and unfamiliar horizons of the past [tradition] ... can be encountered in education in a variety of ways, for instance, through historical texts, textbooks, or the different topics and ideas that a teacher presents students with” (p. 597). I’d argue that these traditions can

also be encountered in policy texts. Leviska (2015) suggests that through these traditions and the past horizons, “we ourselves recognize that there is something in it from which we can learn” (p. 597). By examining texts, she proposes that students (and I’d suggest *teachers*) are able “to see how their current horizon is formed and deformed” (p. 597). This “reflective reappropriation and transformation of tradition” is what she and Gadamer (2013) see as “a central aim of education” (p. 581).

Leviska’s (2015) article reminds us that humans, in general, are conservative in educational settings because they come to know educational settings bound by inherited socializations and knowings that operate in their experience. The process of growing and developing can’t give an individual complete autonomy because they are bound by structures that are too strong to reject. This preconditioned knowledge and structures “operative in students’ existence beyond their reflective grasp of these things” (Leviska, 2015, p. 593). Leviska (2015) further explains that no matter how mature or self-reflective a student becomes this process “does not lead to a complete state of autonomy, where the person is freed from all traditional preconditionedness” (p. 593). This lack of complete autonomy not only applies to students but also to teachers and leaders within the already established contexts of education. This happens, in many cases, without the teacher’s or leader’s knowledge as they introduce the student to a world “using a specific language and relying on historically developed categorizations, classifications, and divisions of subject matter” (Leviska, 2015, p. 594). However, Leviska (2015) stresses that “while Gadamer emphasizes the influence of historical forces over our finite human existence, he never questions the need to cultivate rationality and reflection within ourselves” (p. 594). Leviska (2015) emphasizes, particularly in educational spaces, that the individual can shift horizons through experiences and reflection, but that this

does not lead us to a “universal, context-independent, or final understanding of the world and ourselves” (p. 598). Ultimately, Leviska’s (2015) application of Gadamer to education tells us that our relationship with, understanding of, and reflection on education is neither an acceptance nor rejection of tradition or newness. A hermeneutic relationship with education and educational policy implies that we “are able to challenge and question, but also to preserve, cultivate, and cherish the tradition that constitutes our being” (Leviska, 2015, p. 600)

Kim (2013), also applies Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics to education, speaking specifically about the “cultivating process of the self as a teacher” (p. 1). She uses Gadamer (2013) as a foundation to understand the “meaning of teachers’ lived experiences of conducting action research” (p. 2). She speaks about action research as a way reconceptualizing teacher education, and uses the word *bildung*, “a German pedagogical term that refers to educating oneself or forming the self” (p. 2) to speak about this process. This process of “forming the self” is applied to action research, which Kim (2013) views as an important reaction to “outsider knowledge provided by so-called spectator research” (p. 3). As this outsider research does not seem to apply in their classrooms, teachers take on the responsibility for improvement based on self-directed classroom research (Kim, 2013). This action research allows teachers to transform the uni-directional critique of “politicians and corporate leaders” (Kim, 2013) into a defense from becoming “scapegoats of current school reform efforts” (Kim, 2013). This work reminds us that teaching is ultimately an enterprise concerned with “forming the self,” something that Gadamer (2013) believes is intimately tied to the act of interpretation.

This group of educational researchers (Ellis, 1998; Jardine, 1992; Kim, 2013; Leviska, 2015; O’Neill, 2012; Seidel, 2007; Smith, 1991) have laid a foundation for research that exists in the lifeworld. My research stands upon this foundation and attempts, in its way, to bring myself

and the reader to understandings about policy and education, but ultimately experience the process of cultivating (as in “to refine or improve (a person, the mind, abilities, etc.) by education or training” (OED, 2020)) myself as teacher and leader.

As I read more and more research and studied more and more policies, I kept hearing contradictory voices, seeing contradictory words, and remembering contradictory moments in my own experiences. The more I read about policy, the more I realized policy doesn’t operate in an exclusive voice or tone or mode. Instead, I realized that policy—like life—exists in multiple voices, modes, tones. Policy, like life, is layered.

Gadamer (Gadamer et al., 1997) used phrases, such as “every true poem stirs the hidden depths of the ground of language” (p. 121), that draw on the word ground and language. Through this tendency to connect ground and language other academics have taken up the idea of sediment to describe the process of interpretation. Fisher (1986) drew on sediment and layers when he wrote “language itself contains sedimented layers of emotionally resonant metaphors, knowledge and associations, which when paid attention to can be experienced as discoveries and revelations ... [The interpretive task] is to inquire into what is hidden in language, what is differed by signs, what is pointed to, what is repressed, implicit, or mediated” (p. 198). This was a concept that was picked up by Jardine (2003) which continued to use the idea of sediment and language and interpretation. I have taken the idea of a layered and sedimented language and elaborated this metaphor to illustrate the process of interpretation and articulate how layers and sediment shape our horizons. While this is different from Fisher and Jardine, I would be remiss to omit their contributions.

The second aspect of my metaphor is Gadamer’s (2013) fusion of horizons. For Gadamer (2013) the fusion of horizons is the moment of interpretation. The interpreter’s horizon fuses

with the horizon of the matter being interpreted. The reason the horizon is being fused is because both the interpreter and the matter being interpreted are transformed through the process of interpretation. This includes the interpreter, now changed with a new experience and the matter interpreted, now changed with a new interpretation. The idea of a horizon (the farthest point that you can see) and ground (the surface formed from layers of sediment) drew me to elaborate on the metaphor of sediments, landscapes, and horizons to help me better understand Gadamer, hermeneutics, and policy.

These two metaphors are brought together by the importance of experience. Our experiences lead us to interpretations which form a foundation upon which we stand. Gadamer (2013) makes no attempt to wade into defining or limiting these experiences, but rather indicates that the experiences of our lives form a foundation or ground that we stand on⁷. It is from this point on the ground that our horizons are also then formed. Tradition (defined as generally as “the action or an act of imparting or transmitting something; something that is imparted or transmitted,” (OED, 2020)) presents us with a base of understanding that pre-conditions us to certain interpretations. For Gadamer (2013) the important experiences, and therefore to me in this dissertation, are the ones that we bring to the moment of interpretation. It is these experiences that impact how we approach the moment of the fusion of horizons.

The movement of rocks, both individual particles and layers, towards the surface is called uplift (Zhang et al., 2010). I use this term to describe the process of experience revealing itself as

⁷ Gadamer (2013) uses aesthetic experience as a primary example. He uses the German words *erleben* (meaning “to still be alive when something happens,” p. 51) and *das erlebet* (meaning “the permanent content of what is experienced,” (p. 51) to begin a discussion of the emergence of the word *erlebnis* (p. 51) which, in a biographical literature tradition, means “insofar as it is being experienced makes a special impression that gives it lasting importance” (p. 51). However, Gadamer (2013) also notes that “everything that is experienced by oneself, and part of its meaning is that it belongs to the unity of this self and thus contains an unmistakable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life” (p. 61). Therefore, all of your experience is relevant to you but some of your experiences are more relevant to understanding the matter you are attempting to fuse with.

relevant from out of the sedimentary layers of my experience developing this dissertation. Tradition is one layer, policy context is a layer, hermeneutics is a layer, method is a layer, and my interpretations of all of these serves as another layer. Through the process of uplift, these layers reveal to me the resonating particles of interpretation that lead to my own improved understanding. I will periodically return to this metaphor of sediment, as the sedimentary layers are key to understanding hermeneutics and Gadamer. The important uplift at this moment is that all understanding is formed through experience.

During this process of policy exploration, there was a shift in Alberta of quality standard documents with the release of the *Leadership Quality Standard* (Government of Alberta [GOA], 2018a). This policy splits the old *Teaching Quality Standard* (GOA, 1997) into two, as the original standard applied equally to teachers and leaders as all were covered by the same standard. These new standards documents—the new Teacher Quality Standard (GOA, 2018b) and the *Leadership Quality Standard (LQS)*—followed a nearly decade long process of engagement and new policy resulting from the Inspiring Education Report (GOA, 2010). My interest in these policies—particularly the *LQS*—unfolded alongside my fascination with interpretation.

This thesis is an exploration of the sediments existing in a particular policy in Alberta and the ways interpretation of policy can be seen as layered and complex experience. This thesis, like policy, does not operate in a single tone, mode, or voice—instead, it too is layered: at times it is personal, at times academic; at times it is cynical, at other times filled with hope; at times the claims are crystallized and solid, at times they are fluid. In the end, the document is human. It is unified in its passion for understanding the muddy process of interpretation in lived contexts.

Memories

Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live.

(Gadamer & Hahn, 1997, p. 280)

The experiences I share with the reader in this initial sedimentary layer represent particularly strong elements of uplift. In the deepest particles of my sedimentary being I have always wanted to contribute to the world by helping individuals. In my youth and pre-service teaching years, I saw helping as providing quick fixes, having the answers, eliminating complexity. As I journeyed to become an educator and leader—and through the process of this dissertation—I have come to realize I could only become a teacher and a leader that tries to find meaning in complexity, rather than one that eliminates it.

Personal Sediments

I am first and foremost a teacher. I started my post-secondary education in a Bachelor of Arts degree, because my family expected me to be educated. As I began to see myself leaving the comfort of organized education, I applied to a faculty of education as an after-degree student. I didn't feel drawn to any other profession. After graduation I was hired quickly and 20 years later I am still working in my profession. Teaching, enveloped by the broad term "education," has become my primary passion in life. My interest in learning as much as possible about my primary passion drew me to complete a master's degree and subsequently to pursue a PhD. My studies have also led me to become more engaged in the school process as a teacher leader. My roles in schools have included being a team lead, a department head, a grade coordinator, and an assistant principal at various times. It is because of this passion and these experiences that I am drawn to research and learn more about my chosen profession.

Growing up, my parents were both teachers. My father was a social studies teacher who taught, elementary, junior high, and high school. He was a department head in the waning years of his career. My mother was an English teacher. She taught primarily in high schools, but moved to a vocational college level for half of her career. When I asked her why she didn't teach in the public K-12 system, she replied "she liked teaching people who had learned the value and purpose of education." We always talked about education in my home. My mother felt people needed to find their own purpose for education on their own; they needed to see the importance of it. My father felt everyone deserved education, whether they saw the value in it or not. It was a shock to think about education as a choice, since it wasn't presented as a choice to the children in our house, but rather as an expectation. This was one of my earliest experiences with educational contradictions—that authority figures⁸, at first my parents and then others, have contradictory beliefs⁹ about education and its importance.

After high school, I went into university. Growing up with parents that filled my mind with a liberal arts education from birth meant my first degree was in Arts: an English major and history minor. Initially, I enrolled in school to satisfy the expectations of my parents. It was the next stage of life after high school. I enjoyed learning about literature and history, so my major and minor followed logically from my interests. As an undergraduate student, I was rarely passionate about a singular area of study. I enjoyed reading and learning, which to my mind seemed the primary purpose of university, but I always struggled to be motivated by accomplishment. It took me a while to understand that there was an industry to the university.

⁸ As in *Truth and Method* (2013), I mean individuals that you at first trust automatically due to their positions. Part of this innocence is assuming that they represent a coherent and clear position; however, as represented in my experience and this dissertation—this is clearly not the case and quite possibly not desirable.

⁹ "mental conviction" (OED, 2020)

That students wanted higher grades, better classes, and university jobs as a result of their education. It wasn't until well into my undergraduate degree that I realized that averages and curricula vitae were possibly more important than learning. I graduated and had an adequate average to get into education, but I was conflicted about the purposes of my undergraduate degree.

In retrospect, it was pretty obvious I was going to become a teacher. My history with my family provided me with an additional sedimentary layer of education beyond the curricula taught in school. When I entered the faculty of education, I did so with a vision of education that involved going farther than the technical communication of information. From my mother, I saw the importance of accessing the desire within children to learn and a natural tendency of the individual to want to move themselves outward from a single point of knowledge to access a broader world. However, my mother left the public system to teach adults because she wanted to teach those that understood the importance of education and chose it freely as adults. She didn't enjoy discipline or apathy in learners. My father had and still does have unshakeable optimism for the benefits of all aspects of education, so I gained an optimism towards the possibilities of education. These foundational relationships and experiences drew me to question and wonder about the varied interpretations of the purpose for education. I continue to wonder about varied perspectives and how these perspectives can shape all aspects of education.

Ideals

My teaching philosophy forms an important layer of my understanding of policy. It is upon this sedimentary layer that my interpretations of educational spaces are unearthed.

As a teacher, I have always been drawn to the emancipatory, hopeful qualities of education. I was always less comfortable with the elements of control and limitation in education. For these reasons, I live by a philosophy of teaching informed by Freire's (1970) belief in "education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination" (p. 81). As I reflect on this and the impacts of my parents, it becomes clear that I have found this philosophy as a way to synthesize contrasting elements of my parents' impacts. Layered on top of that foundational belief, I hold on to Gadamer's (1992) assertion that education is about creating "free spaces" (p. 59) for students to "learn to move" (p. 59) and grow within. I hold firm to the belief that within those spaces, education is, as Smith (1991) writes, about finding a "genuine meeting of the different horizons of our understanding" (p. 197). Ultimately, I believe education is a space where humans come together "to create with one another new solidarities" (Gadamer, 1992, p. 59).

Yet, the contradiction that exists for me is I acknowledge the importance—to some extent—of the systems of control in place in education and I also acknowledge there is no ultimate way to truly free people from these structures of domination; however, the myth—as a teacher—I can help students find ways to live free and live well with others is ultimately what gets me up in the morning. This philosophy allows me to create environments where each student can exist comfortably as themselves within the larger construct of the classroom.

I have never felt comfortable as a sorter of students. It is not my role, I feel, to determine a student's fate. I attempt to help students to achieve their goals. However, all of this happens in a reflexive way, when considering the larger context of Alberta. The *TQS* and *new TQS* require teachers to sort students with grades and marks and to prepare students for large scale assessment. At the same time, the early years of my existence have enabled my fundamental

respect for each student's journey making them always more important than the number, unless the number is really important to them. In many ways, the best expression of my pedagogy is found in Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2013). Both of these texts present the human subject as the most important unit of consideration. I do not see these texts as revolutionary or even social justice calls to action, as Freire's writings may have been considered in the past (Horton, 1990). What I see—as the lost element of these works—is the emphasis on human complexity lost in the fetishizing of change or transformation—that individuals have a responsibility to larger conceptions of community or society to keep pace with what is considered contemporary dogma, regardless of what this suggests about personal preference or experience. These texts are important to me because I see them as philosophical reminders to re-orient our lens on the human.

My latest leadership role involves consulting in central office, working with schools and non-teaching planning staff to facilitate the accommodation of students and programs in a large urban school board. This aspect of the profession can often get bogged down in numbers and calculations. The works of Friere (1972) and Gadamer (2013) constantly foreground the importance of considering human experience, especially when our own intentions draw us to act as if human experience is absent when we calculate or measure.

My classes, when I was teaching, were developed to create assignments with the students and encourage students to write from their own experiences and curiosities. However, I understand accessing student experiences and allowing for students to have agency in the classroom doesn't mean they are in charge. I provide the direction in the form of learning outcomes and essential tasks students need to accomplish in each self-developed task. This balance between direction and control can be a difficult one to manage. Within schools, districts,

and communities, there are varying levels of comfort with student agency. Additionally, not every student is emotionally or intellectually prepared for high levels of self-direction. This has brought me into conflict at times with individuals wanting me to be more controlling and strongly directive. There are also times where students have not achieved as highly as I would have liked because they were not naturally self-motivated. My own personal development has lent confidence in my own perspective on education but also developed in me a fundamental respect for the perspective of others. However, the student is ultimately an emerging adult that can be at variable levels of maturity and engagement. By the time I encounter the student (potentially in their last year of high school), they have had many experiences shaping their perspective and ability to self-regulate. As such, it is a difficult balance between autonomy and control not only for the students, but for teachers and the community.

Work

My university education and preservice teaching is another layer that uplifts contradictory experience. My after degree in education was all about critical thinking and self-awareness. I was taught about reflection, critical thinking, and democratic citizenship in my methods classes. There was a sense of comfort, but also a sense of confusion related to knowing that this vision was not a universal vision but a personal one. I began my pre-service practicum, known as student teaching, at an urban high school. My first experience was with two levels of social studies (Social Studies 20 and Social Studies 30). This course would be similar to a combination of civics, geography, history, political science, and social science. I was excited to bring my new critical thinking and reflective practice to my students. I was presented with a half-year social studies class expected to write a province wide standardized exam in June worth 50 percent of their final grade. My supervising teacher had little patience for any discussion of

critical theory or thinking. The late 1990s in Alberta was a time of expanding competition and choice amongst schools. Edmonton, in both the Public and Catholic schoolboards, was specifically at the forefront of this wave of change. This new emphasis on choice meant that the ability of a school to achieve results became a way to draw students to a school. This particular school had a culture and the school needed to “show well.” Showing well meant the school had to have good results to convince parents the school was competitive and a good choice. This meant the students needed to do well on provincial exams, so there was very little time or room for anything but a focus on the exam. My process became the supervising teacher’s process which meant there were rows, memorization, acetate slides of sample questions, and practice writing. The curricular concepts of capitalism and communism—that I saw as abstractions to unpack and examine—became concrete definitions to be memorized. I felt out of place but knew I had to be successful in order to get a job at the end of my practicum.

My university facilitator (a faculty member who supported student teachers) directed me to follow the lead of my cooperating teacher. My cooperating teacher was professional in every regard, I respected her and she respected me, but our philosophies were quite different. It was very clear the overhead machine was the most important entity in the room. It was the major conduit for how information was given to students. The plastic sheets had all of the pertinent definitions and there was little consideration of much else. On the other hand, I represented an unwelcome questioning openness as it may have disrupted the necessary exam results. These results could impact the perception of success or failure for the school and could actually impact the success and failure of the students.

I came to realize that distilling the curriculum to a series of test preparation overhead sheets was an efficient way of ensuring students had received the testable information. Through

this experience I learnt how to present knowledge and test it. I also saw how technology and tests could control the organization of a classroom and the students. The passion for learning, the excitement of discovery, the engagement of participation was at a level that did not make my student teaching experience a comfortable one for me. In this space, I did begin to see the world of education as a contradictory one. Curriculum documents, at least in my experience, don't focus on selling the quality of the school to the public. Curriculum documents are the legal obligation of all teachers to teach. This means that all schools have to perform this function, yet not all schools show well on standardized measures, win sports trophies, or achieve large-scale arts scholarship awards. While the front matter of these documents tends to focus on big picture learning and development goals loosely tied to personal pragmatism, a school leadership group has goals going beyond the purposes of curriculum. The curriculum is assumed to be the job of teachers, and as a result it is getting taught. However, a successful school has to have students and in an era of choice, good schools (which may include sports trophies, art scholarships, student activities, and high results on standardized tests) get more students. To many, the concept of individual success means being successful on standardized exams regardless of the breadth of the curriculum. The personal pragmatic goals of getting into post-secondary colleges or universities or obtaining scholarships often conflicts with conceptions of learning for the love of learning or engagement.

In my second round of student teaching, I encountered a second contradiction related to classroom policy. I was assigned a junior high school in an urban context. This school was transforming from a primarily middle class, white neighborhood toward a more diverse, working class neighborhood. There was a distinct tonal difference to the students and the building from my first student teaching experience. Voices were raised more often when directing the students

and discussions focused on helping students pass and stay in school. There was less of the focus on post-secondary entrance and public facing test results. I had continued my education classes since my previous pre-service teaching experience and my focus for this round of teaching was the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. Through the change of subject and grade level, I was prepared for a different experience than my previous one. Teaching ELA, rather than social studies, was exciting as the emerging English language arts curriculum encouraged exploratory writing, critical thinking, analysis, and new perspectives. The program of studies for ELA was taught to our methods class and it was explained that our primary purpose was to serve as experts in the curriculum. This meant that we worked with the curriculum in an extensive way and this learning was supplemented with methodological learning focused on engaging students in cooperative learning, jigsaws, and visual literacies. The imagined classroom was of active and engaged students sitting in pods, cooperatively working towards a common goal.

On the first day, instead of walking into a classroom with pods of students talking, I walked into a classroom filled with students in rows doing spelling tests. Each student was being instructed to number their pages one to twenty in a very specific way. The list was read out, one word at a time, and each student wrote down their answers. A student was late and struggled to complete the task of numbering the list. The teacher and the student got in a conflict about how to number the spelling list that escalated into a shouting match. The student called my mentor teacher a bitch, fled the room, and was ultimately expelled from the school. I sat at the teacher desk, awkwardly collecting completed tests and marking them. The room was silent after and a new spelling list was handed out. That was my first class in my new student teaching round.

My cooperating teacher cared passionately about education and her students. However, in my view, she was a task master. Students did what they were told or they were punished (and

sometimes, though I hate to say it, shamed). I saw students cry, get suspended, and spend countless hours in detention. Many students, though, would probably say she was one of their favorite teachers and many parents wanted their students to be in that class. In a school where female teachers would often discuss the difficulty keeping the attention of a particular ethnic group, my cooperating teacher had no problems. She demanded and commanded respect from every student. My mentor teacher was the opposite of everything I was taught in my ELA methods class and my interpretation of the ELA curriculum. However, she was respected; she was listened to; she was effective. It was a fascinating contradiction to observe. It seems ironic, but control works in a utilitarian fashion. However, the ultimate ramifications of the authoritarian, top down approach, are unclear. I never again saw the student who disrupted the system of control by calling my mentor teacher a bitch. The tension was palpable as the whole class—myself included—reeled from the freedom embraced in that moment. It was never spoken of again; the student didn't return.

The process of creating a controlled and orderly environment was and is supported in policy. The atmosphere my supervising teacher created was desirable from the stand point on many of the teachers and students. It was also, at times, not a universally welcoming or engaging space. The policies of the classroom, while clearly stated, led to conflict and emotionally impacted students. The level of control was so rigid there was no room for students to exist outside of that control or develop their own critical thinking skills.

I went from a curricular contradiction, to a classroom management contradiction, and then to my first job as a teacher. In August 1998, I interviewed at a school and entered the teaching profession. My first school was a junior high; in Alberta this is grades 7 to 9. It had a magnet program based on the traditional schools movement. This program was a “program of

choice” within this public school system. Its focus was on “back to basics” learning with stand and deliver teaching, desks in rows, and an emphasis on memorization. Once again, the policies of this program were contradictory to the principles I was taught in university and what seemed to be encouraged in the ELA curriculum. In many ways, they were contradictory to the principles I was taught my whole life. Students had to sit in rows, listen to lectures, and do schoolwork individually (never in groups). Students were expected to memorize facts and take tests. As a new teacher, there wasn’t a luxury of arguing philosophy or changing the programs focus. It seemed to be my job to enter the profession, become successful, and ensure a job would be available to me in the future. I also wanted to start my career on an optimistic note and become a good professional. That meant students had to follow the principles of the magnet program and I had to follow the principles of the magnet program in which I was hired to teach.

The program’s slogan referenced Descartes’ quote from *Principles of Philosophy*, “Cogito Ergo Sum” (Descartes et al., 1983) meaning I think therefore I am. The reality of how the program was expressed seemed to be more “I do therefore I succeed.” It presented me with another tension between allowing the student to emerge from their own interests and engagement and the desire to transform them into a specific type of learner with a very specific skill set. As with my previous cooperating teachers' classrooms, there was little room for individuals that didn’t fit the model. Although this was my own classroom; the school policies in place required me to create a space where I was uncomfortable.

This local community and its expectations were at odds, to a certain extent, with the broader educational communities of practice. At the time, “best practices” was part of the professional development cycle for the program and the school. Consultants were coming out and identifying “research based” practices considered better ways to teach. The whole staff

attended a half-day PD session delivered by central office consultants on how to be the “best teachers.” Much of this advice was in direct contradiction to the principles supporting the traditional schools program. The staff was confused and, in some cases, upset by the claims of the consultants. All of the teachers in the traditional schools program had to have their desks in rows. They had to stand and deliver material. Lectures were a key expectation of this program at that time. The consultants were telling the staff about student centered learning, discovery learning, and group work. Though there was some overlap, it was frustrating as a new teacher trying to become good at the craft of teaching to negotiate these contradictions. Some of the staff spoke out. The principal asked the staff to be respectful and listen professionally to the presentation. Staff members expressed frustration with the conflicting messages. After a short amount of time the idea of best practices faded from the school’s messaging and staff meetings.

This experience has resonance for me. As I reflect on it, it is clear I had to fall back on my previous experiences in schools (both as a student and a student teacher) and my upbringing. As a student, I frequently understood that all of my problems were my own. I went to school and accepted the school’s authority decided what I could or couldn’t do and any rejection of that authority was my own choice. I often paid the price for rejecting this authority (albeit likely mildly through endless detentions, menial tasks, and low grades). My parents, while often discussing how they felt about my experience, didn’t advocate for me to my teachers (to my knowledge). They expected that I would solve my problems by being responsible for my actions. As a new teacher, the idea parents could direct very specifically their children’s education was challenging my perspective. The active parent group in this school was a new horizon that confronted me.

During my post-secondary teacher education, the program prepared me to be an expert on the English language arts curriculum. In fact, I was told that was what separated me from non-teachers. I applied the curriculum to my planning and preparation, but had to ignore aspects of the curriculum document to meet the needs of the parent community. When professional development staff presented at the school, there was an authority supporting and challenging some aspects of my teacher preparation. It also challenged aspects of the traditional school program's mandate to teach in a particular way. While the professional development staff presented many pedagogical elements supported by my teacher education, I had to make choices to support the direction of the program. It was significant moment because I had to negotiate the conflict between the contradictory messages of the school district. The school district allowed for the creation of the alternative program but also sent out the professional development staff. As an employee of the school authority I was tasked with following the direction of my leaders. It seemed an impossible contradiction to navigate. My authority, and my inclination, wasn't to change the various agendas, values, or opinions of the various stakeholders, but rather to professionally attempt to reconcile the contradictions. For the most part, I felt a reduction of my authority to make professional decisions and less successful because it was harder to meet the contradictory expectations I felt were being placed upon me.

It is important to note I didn't disagree with the professional development staff. They felt students weren't getting the opportunity to develop important critical thinking skills. Their message was that students needed to learn how to be independent self-motivated learners. In many ways, I agreed with some aspects of the research directing an attempt to shift the focus away from the teacher towards the student. My own experience supported the concept of allowing the students to direct their own inquiries and discover their own deficiencies and

strengths. The contradiction of the message was that shifting the decision making towards the student was supposed to create independence, but in this case, the shifting of authority towards the students meant these students—through the authority of the parents—chose to direct the authority back to the teacher.

Because the parents choosing the magnet program had another perspective, the shifting of focus on teacher-directed practice to student-focused practice bounced back to teacher directed practice. The parents in the program saw successful education through the lens of their own experience and saw student-centered learning as light and poorly quantifiable. It was a contradiction that the parents were using their authority as a school community to direct how teachers used their authority in the classroom. The parents were empowered to limit the authority of the teachers by ensuring the teacher's authority was directed in a particular way. In many ways, the resonance of this moment led me to this dissertation.

I was shocked by the incoherence in my emerging professional career. I felt comfortable with the idea of a school as represented by different programs and groups, and I wanted to provide them with an education that met their needs. However, my values were beginning to be challenged by a sense of dissonance around how difference was both encouraged and discouraged in policy. There was a complex negotiation between which policies applied to whom and when. I, quite ironically for me, felt myself yearning for something simpler to achieve, for something where I could be successful. At the end of the second year, I felt there was a sense of coherence to be found in another school at another part of the city without a traditional schools program—the dissonance I felt inside made me look elsewhere. In some ways, I felt there might be a school less contradictory. I moved to another junior high.

I present this past experience because it is indicative of how educational policies can bring forth contradictions embedded in society. The Alberta *Education Act*¹⁰ (GOA, 2020b) sets out the educational rights and responsibilities for all stakeholders in Alberta. While this Act (2020b) specifically lays out support for a single public education system, it acknowledges through the policy that there is a public demand and legislative support for private schools, separate school boards, francophone boards, and alternative programs. That first junior high school I was at had two different alternative programs plus a regular program. Teachers had to navigate working with and around three different pedagogical philosophies. The tensions in the larger local community (parents, staff, students) around what education should look like were magnified by having these different programs so close together. I valued, in a very real way, meeting the needs of different stakeholders, but I was also challenged by the differences between the stakeholders accessing each of these programs. The amount of time and focus on each program was clearly defined by the amount of pressure and presence of the stakeholders from the school community. If the various alternative programs were better, then why weren't all the students enrolled in the program?

At the new junior high (in my third year), I ended up being a lead teacher of a department comprised of five teachers. At this new school, there was another magnet program. It was an International Baccalaureate Middle Years (IBMY) school. This program was an example of an international program focused on different pedagogy from the traditional schools movement but also had a sense of elitism parents found appealing. It often felt—in parent teacher interviews, phone conversations, and correspondence—that the primary focus of the parents was the singular

¹⁰ During the course of my professional and academic experiences, and the process of this dissertation, there have been *School Acts* (GOA, 2000 and 2011) and currently an *Education Act* (GOA, 2020b). Historically, I reference *School Acts* (GOA, 2000 and 2011) but currently I reference the *Education Act* (GOA, 2020b).

future of their own children. The curriculum and *IBMY* program documents asked for broader social goals and more critical thinking and risk taking. My job was to navigate and negotiate between the singular focus of the parents and the goals of the program. On one hand, allowing their children to have their experiences broadened by an international and holistic focus and, on the other, directing their children to be successful in academics with a focus on marks and accomplishment.

Another example of how complexities were experienced at this school was through the implementation of a collaboration policy formulated by principal. The policies of the day (particularly the *TQS* 1996) included a requirement that teachers had an awareness of national and global educational trends and issues. One of these trends was an emphasis on collaborative process. The principal at the school, without a detailed explanation of the roots of the policy, moved all of the up-to-date teacher computers into a central area to encourage collaboration by teachers. The concept was to force teachers into a central location during prep time before, during, and after school. This left slow computers in the classroom intended for the sole purpose of taking attendance. The late 90s to early millennium was when educational data was becoming fully digital. New programs were being adopted that didn't run very well on the old computers which made taking attendance a long process.

The dual experience of new technology-on-old technology and the collaboration workroom was increasing the frustration of the staff (administration and teaching). I was given the position of team lead, so teachers were coming to me with their complaints about the changes. I believed if I could understand the rationale for the changes, then I could explain them better to my team. When I approached the principal about the motivations around this move, I was informed this concept was developed from the Japanese model of teaching. It was explained

Japanese teachers would work together in a central location which facilitated a collaborative approach. The concept was adopted from the Japanese paradigm, with the hope if teachers worked in close proximity within a common work space they would collaborate in a similar way. The faster computers were used as a motivator, or incentive, to draw the teachers into collaboration. This presumes that people are externally incentivized with new gadgets rather than internally-motivated to resolve contradictions in their lifeworlds.

This solution (to a lack of collaboration) was implemented out of its original cultural and professional context and without a sound understanding of the differences inherent to the Japanese education system. The schedule wasn't altered on a structural level, so there was very little time during the week to sit and work together. After several months of frustration, there were two significant consequences of this attempt at over-structured collaboration. First, teachers started leaving the classroom to record attendance on the computer because their attendance computers were so slow that it was impossible to accomplish this in class. Second, the principal paradoxically had to start ordering people to collaborate in the central computer work room. This created a lack of collaboration and an increased hostility towards the central work area. My work as a teacher leader was not made easier as the work life of my team became harder and frustration levels increased.

At the time, I was teaching the grade seven social studies unit included a case study of Japan. It seemed the organizational and cultural differences between Canada and Japan would obviously be too large to bridge by simply moving computers into a central location. Additionally, the working context of Japanese educators was completely different than Canadian educators. However, I also did not know what pressures the administration was under to create collaborative spaces. It would have been useful to be able to interview that principal, in

retrospect. To engage in a dialogue around why there was such a need to force this collaborative space on the staff was probably impossible as there had been no dialogue about the collaboration in the first place. At the time, I didn't know enough about management, policy, or technology to understand the full scope of why this policy was implemented, why it was implemented in the way it was, and why after a year it was abandoned.

I found myself navigating a contradictory situation again. The range of programs and policies of the school were making it difficult to follow all of the policies of the school. It was very difficult to understand and explain the issues when the structures of the school didn't create a learning space where the solutions to problems could be implemented effectively. The different educational programs meant the staff worked on different curricula. The various curricular subjects meant teachers had different collaborative needs. Because the school had teachers working in different areas, they didn't always need to collaborate on the same work at the same time. The foods and fashion teacher had different goals for collaboration than the *IBMY* math teacher. Technology change meant the tools for the work were not supporting the attempt to transform collaboration. As a teacher and leader, I wanted to learn more about the process of teaching and leading but it felt like there was no clear path to successfully accomplish these seemingly impossible tasks successfully.

At the time, I was curious about the natures of the change, but as I reflect back, my larger concern is the way this experience impacted my future interpretations. The nature of the experience—dealing with old technology, forced collaboration, a sudden shift in process, and a lack of support for critique—made me realize that for all participants in the education system, there are series of experiences shaping how any new experience will be interpreted. A powerful

outcome of this was I started to wonder about the concept of how contradictory experiences with control and autonomy impact teachers and leaders in schools.

I eventually left that school to move onto a larger high school. It had approximately five times the population of my previous school. My experiences definitely traveled with me and I wanted to step away from leadership at this point in my life. I had only been teaching for six years and felt I lacked the experiential knowledge to guide new teachers in their profession. After two years of feeling like a junior teacher at the school, there was a mass retirement and I became a senior teacher over that summer. While my defined role in the school was clearly as a teacher, various administrative individuals began seeking me out to take the lead on various initiatives. If I wasn't given a leadership role, then I was approached to be a teacher supporting the direction quietly in advance to help build consensus. Also, I began taking an interest in helping to mentor new teachers on how to survive the system. It wasn't a case of feeling like a master teacher that needed to bestow knowledge, but a desire to see hard working teachers survive the first five years so the system wouldn't lose them. This brought me to another powerful and resonating experience with interpretive conflict and individual autonomy.

I was quite happy as a high school English teacher. There was a bit of isolation from administration as most policies were filtered through a department head. In the larger school with a good reputation, the public at large seemed happy just to have their children in the school. There was a sense of value to the traditions of the school permeating the school and local community. This interpretation of the idea of the school meant the teachers were fairly traditional (desks in rows, rote memorization, teacher directed)—in my interpretation—but also the school processes were fairly traditional (bells, schedules, walls, structure). In this model, the school had challenges to bring new ideas to the staff.

My previous learning experiences in university had been informed by discussions of pedagogy and methodology implied optimistic changes. While I felt sheltered from these discussions for the first two years at the high school, eventually some of those discussions made their way to my new teaching context¹¹. The assessment conversation wasn't difficult or complicated during my junior high teaching contexts. Some of this was because the various alternative programs, as already discussed, had their own assessment policies or mandates that had to be followed. In the high school contexts, these conversations seemed like radical new ideas to some teachers.

This assessment policy was boiled down to not assessing zeros to students for work that wasn't handed in. It came to become known as the no-zero policy (Edmonton School District No 7 v Dorval, 2016 for example). At the time, this policy was not officially part of the school board policies or regulations, but rather a school-by-school attempt to stop the practice of using zeros in assessment. As in other teaching contexts, in this one I was also full of questions around this policy. It wasn't particularly new to the school district, but it was new to this particular school. How I experienced this policy implementation at my school was a shocking moment in my teaching. One of the ways this experience was distinct from my previous ones, was because there wasn't a significant local community demand for a change. There wasn't a parent group, as part of the school community, looking for a transformation in assessment policy. If they were, these groups were not made apparent to the teachers of my school. Additionally, there wasn't any

¹¹ Gadamer (2013) presents the world as a series of parts and the whole. This is called the whole part relational (Gadamer, 2013). You can't understand the whole of a text without looking at the parts and vice versa. This comes very near to the contemporary definition of the word context. The word context is defined as "the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood" (Stevenston, 2010). In many ways this mirrors Gadamer's view that we make sense of a text by moving back and forth between the parts and the whole to better understand both. As such, I use the word context to describe particular settings where events, statements or ideas occur and may only be better understood within those settings. Teaching could be a text within a context of a school, but a lesson may also be a text within the context of teaching.

significant assessment theory presented to the staff through professional development. There were, at different times, during my teaching experience at that school, professional development sessions on new and emerging assessment practices, but this assessment policy wasn't linked to those sessions in a meaningful or concrete way. The policy became that teachers were not allowed to give a student zero for uncompleted work. Personally, I interpreted this policy as an order from the principal and stopped giving zeros, but many on the staff had vocal questions and there was resistance.

During this time, at another school in Alberta, a teacher and a very vocal opponent of no-zero policies engaged in public debate after going to the media. While the case, in becoming a legal matter, caused a public or media furor in some corners of the city, the school I was at continued moving forward with policy clarification. Through this process, the issue became larger than a simple discussion with a school staff. While the Lynden Dorval case, as it came to be known in my circles, was a public quagmire for a particular school authority, the resonance of the experience for me was not about discussing assessment. The way different individuals in the school community interpreted the message of no-zeros and the way the implementation was experienced was very powerful to me. The relationship with authority is unique in schools because school authority leaders, principals, teachers, and parents are all allocated rights (legal power) and responsibilities in the *School Act* (GOA, 2011) to direct their education but these individuals experience schools in different ways.

Those interpretations existed within another dialogue around interpreting whose professional responsibility it was to assign grades. The legal interpretation of who was ultimately responsible for setting the direction of how grades were entered into software programs, what assessments were considered valid, and what teaching practices were considered appropriate, all

became part of the smaller conversation amongst teachers around individual interpretations of the numerical zero. These discussions looked very different than the ultimate policy forbidding the use of zeros; however, it was clear that a varied community, teaching staff, and leadership staff had a range of opinion on these issues.

At this time, I found myself caught in the middle of this policy discourse. When I arrived at this school, a respected school with a tradition of excellence, if a student didn't do an assigned task, they would be given a zero. In my own grade book, I would often treat this zero as a place holder showing the impact of not doing work for the student. The student would often see the negative impact of not doing their work and they would hand the assignment in. There were emerging trends in research being pushed out at the same time as the no-zero policy was becoming more widespread, which meant students started arriving in my classes with a sense of empowerment. Students would automatically ask if something counted towards a mark, they would announce that I couldn't give them a zero, and they would choose on occasion to not do assignments at all. The avoidance of assignments was no longer a risk, as I could not assign a grade for incomplete work, and the incomplete work could not affect their marks. This secondary interpretation of the no-zero policy and assessment theory defined by research trends, created another interpretation making the teaching environment very complex.

At staff meetings, teacher grade books were showed to the staff with names redacted. The staff was shown these grade books to illustrate the impact of zeros on grades. The teachers had questions not actually answered in a meaningful way. The grade book was taken to be a literal and objective fact. The messaging was fairly simple. It was basically: don't give a zero because the mathematical impact on the final grade isn't a good indication of the student's ability. However, when people interpreted this differently, there was little patience for the discussion. At

the school where I was, the process was implemented. It felt as if the lesson was to learn to not challenge the process of assessment policy the school was mandating. Any issues with students being unmotivated because of the policy became issues with poor teaching and relationship building. Ultimately, it seemed the most important aspect of the policy was to get “buy in”—an ability of leaders to state consensus has been achieved. Absolute acceptance of the policy felt like a more significant goal than actually changing assessment policy. The people who stopped giving zeros bought in and the people who didn’t were defying the policy. There was little room, in my experience, for deep or rich professional dialogue.

For some time after this, the Lynden Dorval case continued to be in the media. Lynden Dorval resisted the implementation of a no zero policy and was subsequently dismissed by the Edmonton Public School Board. In a Board of Reference decision appealing Dorval’s dismissal, the Board of Reference found “the basis for the suspension appeared to be that the principal viewed any form of dissent as insubordination which was not to be tolerated, despite repeated efforts by teachers to explain why the directive interfered with their professional judgment” (Edmonton School District No 7 v Dorval, 2016 ABCA 8). At the time of Dorval’s original dismissal, there was wide spread outcry (Staples, 2012b) from the public that students could avoid getting a zero without doing work.

As a teacher interested in the broader contexts defining education, I was aware of many of the arguments for and against this policy. I was also aware of the research suggesting giving zeros was having a negative effect on final marks or outcomes for students (Guskey, 2004; McMillian, 1999). Whatever the outcome of this event, the policy implementation was experienced by various stakeholders. In this particular district, the public, teachers, teacher leaders, and students were all impacted by this policy. They lived through contradictory push and

pull of different individuals, from different contexts, having reactions to this changing policy because what seemed rational to them was based on their own historically-effected consciousness (Gadamer, 2013).

What has stayed with me, long after the fact, was the experience of the implementation had a broader impact than the actual policy. The ability to give a zero was not a rationality the general public wanted to go away. From their own rationality, some of the general public found it difficult to accept students could fail to complete work and still get a mark. Additionally, the different educational professionals will have completely different experiences based on the rationality of giving a zero in the first place.

When I found out a teacher had been dismissed and there was a media furor around assessment, I stepped back from trying to mentor new teachers around the school. It felt what was needed was a staff member that just did as they were told. I became more observational and curious about how to reconcile this push and pull of agendas, beliefs, and policies I felt made it difficult to feel successful at my work. Around this time, I attended three days of professional development based on McTighe and Wiggins' *Understanding by Design* (2004). The consultant who was presenting the information kept asking us what we (teachers and leaders) thought was different about this approach. It was unclear what the exact answer to this question was, but eventually the consultant informed us *Understanding by Design* uses curriculum to plan units. This did not seem revolutionary or new in any way, but was quite exciting to the consultant who seemed to be under the impression nobody teaching high school English was familiar with the curriculum. This was problematic in the extreme. We spent three days with 13 teachers creating a unit fairly controlled by the consultant to address an issue that might not be an issue at all. When you consider Wotherspoon (2004) wrote "despite numerous concerns, no consensus

necessarily exists over the idea that the education system is failing or in crisis” (p. 249), it becomes troubling that a perception of crisis is enough to get a massive professional development process moving. Especially when you consider, as noted by Wotherspoon (2004), that “surveys of public attitudes towards education have revealed a relatively equal and enduring split in opinion between those who feel that governments or taxpayers receive satisfactory value for education spending and those who express dissatisfaction” (p. 249). My experiences did not present a career of success or failure. My career presented a difficult process of navigating individual interpretations that were often contradictory.

Wonder

What uplifts from my teaching experiences is a sense of wonder. I have wondered about how the layers of my own experiences have impacted how I know make sense of new experiences. In many ways, I wonder about how all teachers have been impacted by their own experiences. When new ideas are presented to me, I wonder if I don’t commit to them because I am waiting for the counter argument. Certainly, a strong theme from my own experiences is the dilemma of negotiating difficult contradictions. Part of my experience brings forth a second main theme, which is the people’s experience with education is often based on how they interpret the actions of the school. If the local community values a certain pedagogy, assessment policy, or technological advance then any movement away from these values will be looked upon as bad decision making. As such, schools attempt to be all things to all people. The policy environment of the past 20 years in Alberta support this approach in variety of ways. The third theme arising from this autobiographical statement is the tension between transformation and transformation resistance. While there may be differing opinions on this, my own experience leads me to the feeling that local and school communities don’t agree on what constitutes useful or beneficial

transformation. The system I started teaching in is both very different and very similar to the one I work for today. One thing that hasn't changed are the, often contradictory, demands placed upon the people tasked with leading and teaching in schools.

Studies

These experiences led me to complete a master's degree. One of my first interests came from being part of so many changes being implemented into schools and witnessing so many contradictions in theory and practice. My response to this change was to consider if change could be accomplished in a more positive way. Perhaps the contradictory experiences from my career could be reconciled through understanding change better. During my master's, I examined teachers and change and found research (Hughes & Keith, 1980; Johnson, 1969) presented teachers as essential but also negative to the process of change. Some of the research (Fullan, 1995; Spencer, 1996) focused on the difficult structural problems impeding change. Fullan (1995) found reforms "resulted in divisiveness and confusion" (p. 231) while Spencer (1996) found "the dynamic quality of classroom life was ignored" (p. 16). This initial focus of my graduate research drew me to wonder about how systems could be transformed to ameliorate the difficulties identified by Fullan (1995) and Spencer (1996). I was also affirmed in my own perception that contradictory demands placed on teachers and leaders weren't often considered with each new initiative.

This drew me to Paolo Freire, particularly *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972). I was curious about different experiences that could create larger scale change. The last part of my master's was spent examining the "non-dialogic" (1972) experiences of teachers and wondering about the effectiveness of struggle. Freire's (1972) work resonated with my perception that the different demands placed on teachers and leaders often had a dehumanizing or objectifying

approach. Freire's (1972) description of the way change was accomplished by applying change to people as opposed to changing with people, felt very similar to my own experiences. My first graduate degree was largely focused on the discourse of change and resistance, but my next degree took on a different focus.

After two years away from my studies, I entered a PhD program. Experience, reflection, and education layered on top of each other as I began to enter the next level. One of the elements that began to emerge was a sense that much of the research on education, based on my master's course work (cited above), was about wanting someone or something else to change. Through all of this, I developed a reluctance to want to change people. Rather, I became more interested in the idea of wanting to understand education. I also wanted to understand how policy interpretation impacted educational experience. Through my research methodology class, I was presented with interpretive inquiry based on philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer (2013) presented me with a more comfortable possibility. Rather than try to understand how to create change in people, the purpose of interpretation is to understand how individuals experience their own lives.

At this same time, there was a new emerging discussion of policy change. The uniqueness of this change, at least in my career, was the scope and amount of policy change. The Inspiring Education (GOA, 2010) document was released by the Alberta Government. This led to High School Redesign (GOA, 2015), Ministerial Order (GOA, 2013), new curriculum development across K-12 (all subjects), and finally a new *TQS* (GOA, 2018b) and *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) policy. Knowing, through my teaching experiences, that different interpretations existed of what it meant to change, what was able to change, and what quality meant. I became

interested in the complex possibilities of what these new policies would bring to teaching and leading experiences.

Near the end of my course work, I also began to wonder about the uniqueness of the teacher leader's role in navigating the spaces between the varying contradictory policy interpretations. As I had, and continue to work as a teacher leader, I was reflecting on my academic work and professional work in terms of how what types of experiences teachers had already had with policy affect how new policies would be received.

What is unearthed is a sense of empathy and solidarity for my fellow teachers, teacher leaders, and stakeholders in what appears to be a particularly complex and difficult profession. Gadamer (2013) suggested a research approach that wouldn't dismiss the complexity or personal identities of the participants in a research study of their policy experience. This approach also opened up the possibilities of examining how teacher experiences with policies have impacted their identities and sense making around new policies.

By this point in my doctoral studies, I was becoming more of a leader and mentor. I was shifting towards school leadership as an assistant principal and school authority consultant. My desire to share my experiences and understand the experiences of others, shifted towards an interest in leadership. Much of my graduate work had been in the area of leadership, but I had always struggled with balance between wanting to mentor and develop leadership versus control and punishment (not definitive, but certainly part of the job). My interest in leadership and policy drew me to how new leaders might interpret and experience the *Leadership Quality Standard* (GOA, 2018a).

I have many more questions than I have answers—as is expected in interpretive policy research (Gadamer, 2013). Ultimately, I am no longer looking for a solution to the problems of education. I moved from wanting to understand how to teach better to understanding there are contradictory views on “good teaching”. I moved from wanting to facilitate change to understanding changes are contradictory and often difficult to accomplish. I have moved from wanting to overhaul the system to wanting to understand better how the system exists. In this sense, this dissertation is about questioning and understanding that contradictions are innate to the nature of leadership. It may be better to understand what is bringing about these contradictory views on education?

And so I present my research questions:

1. What can hermeneutics—specifically considering the contributions of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (2013)—offer as insight into how people interpret leadership policy?
2. What are the layers of policy sediment that the *LQS* stands upon?
3. How do I—as an individual teacher leader—interpret the *LQS* in light of my layers of previous experiences with policies and contradiction in Alberta?

Recapitulation

My experiences as a teacher, teacher leader, and academic have not led me to see a world ordered and straightforward; instead these experiences have led me to see the educational policy landscape as an uneven topography shaped by diverse viewpoints, outlooks, and priorities of school communities, local communities, and the province. The word landscape emerges from modern English and originates as a “picture representing natural inland scenery” (Onions, 1966,

p. 514) and “a view of such scenery” (Onions, 1966, p. 514). Our landscape is our view of the land, the picture we form of our topography. I see it as a topography shaped by educational shifts that erode and uplift the varying sediments of human and educational experience. The word topography comes from the Greek topos meaning “place, locality” (Onions, 1966, p. 931) and graph meaning “writing, describing” (Onions, 1966, p. 410). What I have seen is humans stand on this landscape in different positions and, therefore, have different perspectives that provide differing descriptions of their localities. These differences in localities present themselves to the person because they stand on different sediments. As such, each individual sees a different horizon. To understand educational policy and education, then, is to understand these different horizons and find ways to fuse them. Ultimately, this leads me to wonder about what I see as the perennial challenge education: how do we fuse what may seem to be increasingly widening valleys of contradictions?

Chapter II. Policy Process

Continents and empires, revolutions in power and in thought, the planning and organization of life on our planet and outside of it, will not be able to exceed a measure which perhaps no one knows and to which, nevertheless, we are all subject.

(Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1992, p.180)

Current Landscape

The following section explores the current educational landscape—a landscape filled with efforts that push and pull on teachers and leaders, often creating rifts that are difficult to negotiate. This research in this section shows that not only do these rifts and valleys—caused by contradictory policies—shape the educational topography, they also shape the topographical experience of the teachers and leaders themselves.

The work of Russell and Bray (2013) presents the complex and tension-filled landscape of teaching and leading in the public education system. These authors identify numerous contradictions between unity and difference as well as both tensions and coherence in their American study of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The NCLB policy created a clear mandate for all students to achieve at grade level based on standardized assessments while the IDEA policy's mandate was to individualize meeting the needs of vulnerable students (Russell & Bray, 2013). These two policies, as represented in and framed by legislation, derive from different traditions and values related to unity and difference. The IDEA policy guided teachers to create unique, ability-appropriate, educational plans, while the NCLB directed teachers to prepare all students for a common assessment. Russell and Bray (2013) suggest both such initiatives struggle within implementation processes when teachers have to navigate seemingly contradictory mandates. Yet, these are only two examples of policies layering on top of one another to reveal

contradictions. To Russell and Bray (2013), the educational landscape is filled with these layers; they write: it is a “crowded field of mandates, incentives, and reform efforts that pull educators in different directions and at times represent conflicting priorities” (p. 3). In the eyes of Russell and Bray (2013), the field is suffering from, what they call, “policy incoherence” (p. 3).

This type of policy incoherence caused by shifting educational currents causes lasting impacts as they form a sedimentary layer of many educators’ experiences. Woods and Jeffery (2002) present a dire picture when they think about the ways these experiences can shape a teacher. These authors found new initiatives in schools can create “strongly traumatic negative feelings induced by the assigning of the new social identity—those of guilt, shame, fear, shock, etc.” (Woods and Jeffery, 2002, p. 98). Indeed, their work also implies all stakeholders do not just implement simple changes of process when asked to adopt a new policy. Indeed, Woods and Jeffery (2002) found the deeply embedded views of educators mean changes to the system bring on a “new social identity” (p. 98). I would suggest that these new social identities don’t get adopted because of a specific change, but rather, from the way that the change shifts how teachers see themselves. An ethical, professional, successful act can shift to the anti-thesis as a result of a simple change. Furthermore, I have experienced personally how changes have been implemented and created atmospheres of fear. As such, the impact of layers of such experiences must be particularly powerful for some.

These change experiences, when positive, can contribute to positive self-perception and workplace satisfaction (Lasky, 2005); however, they can also bring forth a lack of agency (Lasky, 2005) that contributes to a sense of frustration. Lasky’s (2005) definition of agency is presented in the broadest sense as an “individual agency to change a context” (p. 900). The impact of these changing educational currents alter the ability of teachers, leaders, and

stakeholders to feel a sense of agency, because they are often standing on layers impacted by historical frustrations. The complex layers of policy incoherence (Russel & Bray, 2013) and the difficulty of shifting social identities (Woods & Jeffery, 2002) suggest educational leaders experience frustration, and experience it deeply.

This sense of frustration and powerlessness has also been identified by Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (2013). These authors suggest the chaotic demands and complex navigation of expectations make education careers challenging. They go so far as to liken education to “a psychological dilemma” (p. 18). These authors go so far as to represent the impact of the complex and interdisciplinary nature of education as a nearly impossible challenge. The pull of demands on educators and the high expectations placed on the system contributes to an atmosphere of blame (Glickman et al., 2013). Because educators and schools have limited agency—according to these authors—to address and transform their contexts, Glickman et al. (2013) find the atmosphere created shifts the blame unfairly. They liken this to “blaming the victims” (p. 25).

In the Alberta context, this tendency to blame teachers has played itself out in the media. Tension between competing assessment policies and teaching methodologies have emerged in newspaper editorials and subsequent comments and opinion texts (Staples, 2014, 2015, 2016). Through this ongoing public discourse, teachers are inundated with calls to constantly improve their “failing practice” while at the same time being praised for being the best teachers in the world (Staples, 2016). This public conversation adds mandates and agendas beyond the school or local community and further crowds an already crowded conversation around the purpose of education.

The presentation of this research does not create a sense of confidence that working environments for educators are hopeful and free places. The direction of increased and complex expectations adds more and more pressure on educators to address not only curricular issues, but also social and political issues. The research examined here suggests educators are presented as victims, held accountable for transformations beyond their control. This research does not present a particularly hopeful view of the professional lives of educators. Nor does the research present a particularly hopeful view of any initiative brought forth to assist in the transformation of education, for each initiative must enter into an already rocky and crowded terrain. At the very least, these researchers present a strong case for the need to understand how educators experience the complex, incoherent, and contradictory field of educational policy. My hope, in this research, is to see how by interpreting policy through an interpretive lens we might better understand the experiences of teacher leaders as they navigate this complex landscape.

Policy

In Chapter 1, I related experiences with new initiatives, changes in assessment policies, and contradictory school communities. While it is hard to distill a 20-year career into a few moments, the amount presented here pales in comparison to the totality of moments from a whole career. One of the reasons I have chosen to focus on policy is because when the discourse falls apart, when there aren't good answers, when resistance is too strong, the fallback legitimization discourse was policy. As teacher leaders, we are empowered to shape the experience of all stakeholders through policy, and the ability of others to shape our experience is also empowered in this way.

For the purposes of this dissertation a policy is any text, action, or tradition that directs instrumentally or operationally the practice of a teacher, operation of a school system, or

participation of a stakeholder. For the most part, I am looking at experiences with policies that are texts. However, there are times when policies are discussed as actions or traditions that direct practice without the policy text. Practice is the way that the policy is lived or not lived in the school. A program in my context is a series of practices, sometimes legitimized in policy, that operate a distinct area of interest. For example, an alternative program may have a different set of policies to follow which make it different from the regular or normal program.

Education in Alberta is governed first and foremost by the *School Act* (GOA, 2011). School principals keep, or should keep, paper copies of the *School Act* (GOA, 2011) in their offices. In my experience, when it is a question of what you can or can't do, the answer was often found in the *School Act* (GOA, 2011). There is also an *Education Act* (GOA, 2020b) that at the time of this writing had just been proclaimed with amendments; however, my experiences are largely based the *School Act* (GOA, 2011). Within this Act, the school authority (sometimes referred to as school board or division) is empowered to make decisions and this authority is delegated to the principal.

The rights and responsibilities of stakeholders are laid out in the *School Act* (GOA, 2011) and all other policies are legitimized through this policy. An aspect of this policy context is the contradictory structure of centrally-controlled and locally-controlled education. The public education apparatus is itself a contradictory combination of direct control and localized decision making. David King (2012, 2013), former minister of education in Alberta and public education advocate, has written about this from the perspective of wanting to maintain a strong, singular public education system. It is not my desire to wade into the private/ separate/ public debate but rather to draw the reader's attention to a system that elects a provincial government and a local school board to manage education. The rights and responsibilities of both levels of governance,

provincial and local, create variety and sameness. This variety and sameness have been maintained in policies like the *School Act* (GOA, 2011—likely to continue in the *Education Act* (GOA, 2020b)—directing all stakeholders to comply with all provincial and local policies. Newton and da Costa (2016) have also written about the relationship of autonomy and control that permeates the educational structure of Alberta. They highlight there is a high level of autonomy and shared power between leaders and teachers within Alberta schools for several reasons but particularly because leaders and teachers are part of the same professional association and bargaining unit.

In many ways, the timing of this dissertation is prompted by a period of policy development. This continued as a result of the *Education Act* (GOA, 2020) bringing new policies and regulations to direct the rights and responsibilities of stakeholders in Alberta. This time of policy activity can be traced back to the *Inspiring Education* (2010) guiding document. The Government of Alberta engaged in public consultations to determine how to transform the education system to meet the needs of current and future learners (Newton & da Costa, 2016). While Newton and da Costa (2016) highlight the autonomy arisen from the shared power of leaders and teachers in Alberta schools, this situation is going through ongoing transformation as separate quality standards are implemented. The unfolding of the *Teacher Quality Standard* (GOA, 2018b) and *Leadership Quality Standard* (GOA, 2018a) means that for the first time, teacher leaders will be separate from teachers for the purposes of standards, evaluation, and certification.

During this period of policy transformation, there was also the release of the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning* (GOA, 2013) which mandates, in response to the recommendations from the *Inspiring Education* (GOA, 2010) guiding document, an increased emphasis be placed

“on the learner than on the system” (p. 1). In terms of policy, this shifts the emphasis from the systemic establishment of rules and control centrally towards the individual student. It also bypasses any mention of local governance structures. The large urban school boards in Alberta can have as many as 100,000 students. These policy documents don’t say learners but rather say “the learner” (p. 1). This presents a potentially overwhelming “situation of individuality.” Canadian public education classrooms, schools, and school systems have evolved out of a desire to educate the largest number of people in the most efficient way possible. The emerging focus on the learner draws the focus away from the efficiency of the system and towards the individual, an individual that may exist within a system designed to process and educate 100,000 students. This presents a potentially overwhelming transformation.

The research presented so far in this section suggests schools in a variety of contexts are already caught in a difficult situation of complexity, conflict, and contradiction. Decision makers, such as team leads, department heads, assistant principals, principals, and school district level leaders, are overwhelmed with a range of interpretations that are now, to a certain extent, legitimized in policy. The shift of autonomy to the learner means individual needs are empowered over systemic access to an educational system, at least in theory. The mandate is only controlled in the sense that leaders must be student centered. What this means, in a field that is complex, conflict filled, and contradictory remains to be seen as school boards move towards implementation of these new policies.

In addition to these new policies, there are also the complex differences between interpreters and contexts that vary across the province. My experiences, shared in the initial portions of this dissertation, present a series of events made complicated by contradictory interpretations of what is quality instruction and leadership. These interpretations exerted varying

degrees of control over my ability to interpret quality depending on the context. My policy journey has also been guided by one particular document that defined quality for teachers for the past 20 years. This document is the *TQS* (GOA, 1997).

In many ways, my interpretation of new policies is impacted by the combination of my experiences with my interpretations of the *TQS* (GOA, 1997). I believe the experiences of teachers and leaders, as the foundation of how the new quality standard documents will be interpreted, will be impacted by their experiences and interpretations as well. Particularly since the *TQS* changed at the same time as the *LQS* was implemented. Prospective school leaders' gloss for the *LQS* must necessarily be predicated in their understanding of the *TQS*, both in policy and in practice.

One aspect of the *TQS* (GOA, 1997) directed teachers to employ “best practices” and develop professionally. In my experiences, schools brought in professional development experts and new strategies to attempt to bring all teachers towards a common set of “best practices.” However, in the *TQS* (GOA, 1997), teachers were similarly directed to be self-aware and develop a personal vision for teaching. Teachers and leaders in Alberta schools have been directed—for the past 20 years—to develop professionally, use best practices, and develop a personal vision for teaching. The combination of shared professional development, embedded language of past professional development movements, and personal visions may create challenges for new policy documents.

Another aspect of the *TQS* (GOA, 1997) impacting my interpretation of educational standards is the broad scope of the standard. As new policies around standards unfold, creating a sense of empowerment in local communities, school communities and individuals—will these new documents apply as broadly to teachers and leaders? The *TQS* (GOA, 1997) meant teachers

(this included leaders) must meet the standards of behavior and professionalism at all times, not just during school hours. If the focus has shifted to even more diverse and complex negotiations of interpretation, how will this uplift in new standards documents? In educational systems with varied stakeholder interests, there can be numerous policies and numerous interpretations to navigate. Teachers leaders are placed in a position of tension that can ultimately be difficult to negotiate since the original *TQS* (GOA, 1997) stated teachers “are bound in moral, ethical, and legal considerations regarding their obligations to students, parents, administrators, school authorities, communities, and society at large” (p. 3). This could be an overwhelming and contradictory range of moral and ethical considerations when we consider the range of students to society at large. The *TQS* (GOA, 2018b) and *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) may pose complex challenges for consideration.

My purpose here is to draw attention to the policies that simultaneously empower teachers to make decisions, which makes them accountable to those decisions and limit those decisions, yet don’t limit their accountability. While some may argue there isn’t enough accountability for teachers (Stewart, 2011), the definition of quality has to be reduced to the simplest of measures. In the complex policy environment of Alberta, the measures of quality remain more complex than exams, at least when you consider the broader standards of the *TQS* (GOA, 1997), new *TQS* (GOA, 2018b), and *LQS* (GOA, 2018a).

As part of my own process of self-reflection on my personal bias, it initially seemed as if I reject control. However, this feels inadequate as a description of a complex bias. I struggle with erroneous control and accountability without reasoned understanding of complexity. Living and working—day after day—in a space full of tangled human interactions leads a person to make decisions based on context. Many of these decisions are designed to bring chaos into order and I

personally feel the worst thing for a school to be is out of control. This is the contradiction pervading schools and defines the experience. The reality of teaching is that it is controlled but by autonomous individuals. The *TQS* (GOA, 1997) obliged teacher plans that “outline a reasoned and incremental progression toward the attainment of a desired outcome” (p. 3). The *TQS* (GOA, 1997) also expected teachers establish “effective classroom routines” (p. 2) and “management strategies” (p. 2). As a result, current teachers have been meeting a standard expecting a certain amount of control and order in a systematic way. Teachers have been expected to have plans, follow curriculum, and assign marks. The movement towards decentralized control implied by Newton and da Costa (2016) combined with increased diversity of opinions around quality, means the systematic implementation of a singular system is practically impossible.

Teachers and leaders are placed in difficult situations to navigate. The way teachers navigate these situations is largely interpretive based on local contexts. These local contexts are controlled by a series of policies. In the Alberta context, new policies have embedded contradictory values of empowering teacher leaders to implement educational process and limiting this autonomy through standards and language around shifting emphasis on the individual. There is also a lack of empathy for teachers and leaders from the broader public (Stewart, 2011) when they fail to accomplish the transformations they aren’t empowered for. This tension between promise and outcome, in addition to placing agency increasingly onto teachers, has created an atmosphere contributing to growing issues of contradiction and confusion.

Contradictory Layers

The following section explores the contradictory layers that form our understanding of education and policy. It is important, in a hermeneutic sense, to examine some foundational

layers that underpin our conception of education and policy in order to better understand the topography upon which we stand. It is important to recognize these layers to help us to understand what people mean when they say “education” or what they imagine what education might mean for themselves and education. As Fischer (1986) writes, “language itself contains sedimented layers of emotionally resonant metaphors” (as cited in Jardine, 2003, p. 198). These “layers of emotionally resonant metaphors” shape, as Gadamer (2013) puts it, our “historically affected consciousness” which is formed by the traditions and contexts give meaning to the words and ideas we interact with.

For our conceptions of the idea of education, Bass and Good (2004) highlight two cognates present in the word “education” upon which our understanding of educational purpose stands. The word education is traced back to the two Latin roots of education—*educare* and *educere* (as explained by Bass & Good, 2004)—which mean to train or to mold and to bring forth, respectively. The authors present these two meanings to highlight a contradiction that has existed since that time. My own experiences with education have brought me to numerous situations where the desire to mold the educational experience to a particular form comes into conflict with individual desires to self-direct or naturally unfold the educational experience. As Gadamer (2001) says, the “tendency toward the unification of our world-picture” (p. 205) exists at the same time as “a tendency toward differentiation” (p. 205). In other words, a desire to make things the same co-exists with the desire for individuality. These two layers express to me the tensions in parents, educators, administrators, and government officials to create a useful educational outcome in the form of students and the desire to allow students to unfold as self-directed and autonomous citizens.

On top of the layered beliefs that education must draw out the individual mold a unified society rest additional layers of sediment. Taylor (1997, 1998) speaks to an additional sedimentary layer existing in the Canadian educational landscape: the practical outcome of education as being one that serves the interests of business, corporations, and the economy. In Alberta, we see sediments of this belief in documents and policies like *Inspiring Education* (GOA, 2010), which speaks to the importance of fostering an “entrepreneurial spirit.” In curriculum, Taylor (1997, 1998) points to the participation of the Conference Board of Canada in attempting to create an Employability Skills Index for student portfolios in Alberta’s CALM (Career and Life Management) curriculum. Thus, curriculum reflects not only the tradition of training and molding and drawing out the individual, but also, the tradition of economic imperative in Alberta. Once again, this layer contributes to the semantic record informing policy creation and interpretation in Alberta.

Contradiction

The research, already discussed, resonates with my own experience as a teacher-leader and my evolving interpretation of policy documents in the Alberta context. The nascent recognition that we must understand how policy functions is part of my process to understand my own context better. Understanding my context better means understanding how policy is developed and implemented. To a great extent, this is part of increasing my understanding of how my context is both created and legitimized through a policy process. One of my interests is to understand better the contradictions of autonomy and control in policy. Inevitably, hermeneutics moves from the smallest part to the larger whole. The initial wonder of the single word stays with us and meanings change as we consider them with the knowledge gained from the whole text. The way meaning is communicated to us and how words are defined is part of

our process of understanding. The idea of contradiction is “to speak in opposition to; to declare untrue” (Onions, 1966, p. 210). Similar to the etymology of “education”, the word stems from Latin and is formed from the root words “contra” and “diction.” I am drawn to the word contradiction because it encapsulates the tension of “opposition” (Onions, 1966, p. 210) I have experienced in my educational experiences. The word *diction* also speaks to the importance of “word, phrase; choice of phraseology, wording” (Onions, 1966, p. 266). The roots of the word contradiction draw out the importance of words and texts while acknowledging the existence of oppositions. This speaks to the complex reality of education I have experienced.

Throughout my journey to understand educational policy, there seemed a natural alliterative tendency to move my work towards policy paradox. Through my initial investigations the word “paradox” seemed to capture an idea similar to but not exactly the same as “contradiction.” The word paradox is defined as a “statement or tenet contrary to received opinion” (p. 649). The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology (Onions, 1966) notes that a “proposition on the face of it that is self-contradictory” (p. 649) is the popular use of the word paradox. From my experience, this doesn’t speak to the complex experience of schools. The statements I have heard about education don’t seem contradictory in their expression. They become contradictory when different expectations with equal power are brought together. This is the reason I have chosen to use the phrase “policy contradiction” over “policy paradox.” Paradox implies a grander purpose of challenging the “received notion” within an audience. From the standpoint of educational policy, the existence of contradictions—in my experience—does not challenge the “received notion” of the audience. In my experience, with educational stakeholders, individuals do not necessarily want to choose between autonomy or control in

terms of educational policy. In many ways, the polis has the luxury of being able to demand maximum positive outcomes from all public policy processes.

I began reading around policy formation to see how policy contradictions uplift out of the policy formation process itself. This hermeneutic wonder rose from my initial self-reflection, professional experience, and academic reading. The macro process of policy formation is complicated by what Stone (2012) described as a “special problem” (p. 25). This policy problem involves a complex negotiation between self-interest and public interest or—interchangeably—private and collective benefits (Stone, 2012). This certainly piqued my interest, since for many years as a teacher leader, I found it clear that what was best for one person in the moment could be quite different from what the same person wanted for the system. As I read more about policy formation, I came across Kingdon’s (2003) in-depth description of how policy is negotiated within the formation process in an American context. This drew me to wonder about establishing the how and why of contradictory policy formation. Kingdon (2003) described how “visible participants” (p. 199)—elected officials and cabinet members—set the agenda for policy directions, but shaped by the influence of “hidden participants” (p. 200)—consultants, bureaucrats, and specialists. Added to this negotiation is the issue of policy windows, as spaces of time to allow for primary policies to unfold coupled with secondary proposals (Kingdon, 2003). Through my reading of Stone (2012) and Kingdon (2003), it became clear contradictions do unfold out of public policy formation.

Formation

Karen E. Starr (2015) completed a macro level analysis of contradictions as they have emerged in public policy over the past 30 years. Starr showed how the policy process led to obvious contradictions: equity vs. excellence, efficiency vs. productivity, autonomy vs. control,

individual differentiation vs. standardization, and work-life balance vs. work intensification. Trowler (2003) found similar though slightly different contradictions as well. Trowler's list of policy contradictions are the following: centralization–deregulation, enterprise—traditionalism, idealistic rhetoric—pragmatic practice, and widening participation while increasing financial obstacles to learning. These lists of contradictions seemed overwhelming. However, they definitely resonated with my own reflection on the past 18 years. In a sense, there is an emergent feeling of educational policy as the way to accomplish everything. The policy formation process (Kingdon, 2003; Stone, 2012) is negotiated in a way that produces contradictory policy. The existence of contradictory policy places an onus on the policy recipient to interpret a policy environment Starr (2015) described as full of “paradox, dilemmas, ironies, and enormous complexity” (p. 2). These words, used by Starr (2015), don't conjure images of the “prudence in procedure...or course of action deemed expedient” (Onions, 1966, p. 693) that form the etymology of the word “policy.”

While the etymology of policy may suggest prudence in procedure or expedient action, in contrast, Pal (2014) and Bell and Stevenson (2006) consider policy in two ways. The first way policy is considered is as “instrumental.” Pal (2014) wrote “public policy [is] defined as a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a given problem or interrelated set of problems” (p. 2). Bell and Stevenson (2006)—describing instrumental approaches—wrote “one common approach is to conceptualize policy as a programme of action, or a set of guidelines that determine how one should proceed given a particular set of circumstances” (p. 14). As I have journeyed through my study of policy, what uplifts is much variance and difference. Instrumental policy presents itself as problematic, based on my own experience, because the issue of what is a problem or how to act is rarely free from interpretation or differences of opinion. Another issue

that uplifts from my reflection on instrumental policy is the presence of Kingdon's (2003) hidden participants. When people are responding to educational policy, who are they responding to? This separation between the front-line educators and hidden participants raises questions about the burden of accountability. Additionally, how individuals conceive of a problem is variable depending on their personal history and experience.

Bell and Stevenson (2006) presented a second way academics approach policy as "operational." This approach sees policy as the operationalization of values (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). When considered with Starr's (2015) and Kingdon's (2003) list of contradictions, there is a resonance that unfolds around operational policy. Words, such as, efficiency, equity, de-regulation, and rhetoric draw out conceptions of values as policy. Through working in schools, I find these words are more associated with conflict and confusion than solutions or logical agreements.

The one definition holding the most resonance for me is provided by Stephen J. Ball (1994): "policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate to or map on to the 'wild profusion' of local practice" (p. 10). While this definition gives us a combination of instrumental and operational approaches and provides a sense of policy as formed and implemented, the wild profusion of local practice captures my own experience with the greatest clarity. Additionally, the idea of policy as text and action comes closer to capturing my own experience in schools. While policies exist on paper, there are actions in the context of schools that 'transform the policies on paper' to policies in action and are named as school traditions, school responses, or school folk logic. Therefore, in my mind policy is any text, action, or tradition that directs

instrumentally or operationally the practice of a teacher, operation of a school system, or participation of a stakeholder.

Throughout my teaching and leading experience, I encountered inflexible and flexible approaches to policy. One of the purposes of this hermeneutic examination of policy formation is to question and uncover how policy comes to exist with both tendencies. This goes back to my initial wonder about autonomy and control. Some people want clear, concise, straightforward definitions and some people want to capture the complexity and ambiguity of wild profusion. What I have found are individuals, Pal (2014) for example, who prefer policy statement definitions such as “defines the problem, sets the goals that are to be achieved, and indicates the instruments or means whereby the problem is to be addressed and the goals achieved” (p. 35). If you were looking to simplify a process then this would be an adequate definition, but it leaves out all of the messiness of human interaction. At the very least, I would prefer to define educational policy text as texts that operationally and instrumentally direct the practice of teachers, operation of a school system, or participation of a stakeholder. As expressed by Ball (1994) the text works in conjunction with action. The policy is moderated by local practices and represents both an approach to a specific issue and the instrumentalization of values.

As I questioned and read how contradictions emerged in policy work and etymology, I was drawn to the policy formation process. As noted already, Pal (2014) tends to conceptions that define policy formation in a linear way. Pal (2014) presents policy development as moving from “problem recognition to implementation and evaluation” (p. 35). Closer to my own experience is Bell and Stevenson’s (2006) definition of policy formation as a “product of compromise, negotiation, dispute and struggle as those with competing, sometimes conflicting, values seek to secure specific objectives” (p. 19). My interpretive definition based on reading

both of these authors is: any process leading to the formation of a particular education policy that operationally and instrumentally direct the practice of a teacher, operation of a school system, or participation of a stakeholder. This formation process includes many other documents such as frameworks, guiding documents, focus group discussions, and various political processes. It also includes policy statements as defined by Pal (2014) above. All of these elements contribute to the establishment of the policy. Narrow definitions may help clarify or compartmentalize areas of policy formation, but more encompassing definitions resonate more with my own professional experiences.

Ultimately, I was drawn to Trowler's (2003) definition and model of policy formation. Trowler (2003) presents three steps to policy development: problem setting, the mobilization of the fine structure of government action, and the achievement of settlements (p. 96). In the first step, individuals or groups have experiences that draw them forward to identify potential issues that need a policy application. In the second step, there is a mobilization of the government. The various relevant ministries begin to mobilize the micro processes within their departments and the issue begins to take shape. The third step is the process of mediation and settlement. Trowler (2003) writes "wherever policy is being made, in schools, counties or at the national level, these three steps are important" (p. 97).

While Trowler's model for policy making is applied to a British context, it can be adapted to the Alberta context. It is presented here with relevant Alberta information:

Problem/issue setting: International test results, public outcry, special interest groups, national trends, and media pressure—all as individual events or in a combination of events—draw ministry attention to an issue or a problem needing addressing. Trowler (2003) notes in the British context, problem identification is less and less driven by teacher concerns.

The mobilization of the fine structure of government (or other agency) action: Trowler (2003) explains the form this takes will depend on the nature of the policy being discussed and the policy-making (government, school, local education authority, etc.). In the Alberta context of this study, Alberta Education has various departments having different mandates, but generally, major policy decisions in education are typically preceded by a form of public consultation, involvement of the professional association, special interest lobby group consultation.

The achievement of settlements in the face of dilemmas and tradeoffs among values: Trowler (2003) explains “the education policy-making remains a complex, non-linear process” (pp. 97-98). In Alberta, there is the negotiation of settlements at the macro level of the government and then contextual local negotiations across a diverse population.

Whole-part relation is repeated from the macro level to the micro level. It spirals from individual micro to macro level until the provincial level acknowledges the issue and begins the process of encoding the policy into a text. This text is then transmitted to the part of the system which is the board level and decoded. At this point, the school board is a macro to the individual school’s micro level. The school is the macro to the teacher or student level at which point policy begins to impact individuals. These individual experiences then start to create an impact until it reaches a critical mass and the provincial has to acknowledge the issue and policy formation process begins again.

This cycle from the macro to the micro isn’t unidirectional. It takes in feedback from parents and community—involving business, student, parent, institutional feedback, the media and special interest groups—and leads to or limits change in the system. At times, the feedback can go from teachers or school boards back to the provincial level, but generally, as noted by

Trowler (2003), this is less and less likely. The primary source of feedback is increasingly coming from the broader community.

Trowler (2003) wrote “the actual outcome, the policy as articulated, will be the result of a micropolitical process” (p. 98). Once the policy text is enacted (which is a process defined in the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology as the action to “enter among the acts or public records; make into an act, decree” (Onions, 1966, p. 311)) policy implementers enact the policy as part of the implementation process. Various agents are tasked—as part of the implementation process—with bringing the policy as operational and instrumental text to the intended policy receivers.

While Starr (2015) and Trowler (2003) provided evidence of contradictions in policy and Stone (2012) and Kingdon (2003) provided evidence of how such contradictions form, the individuals tasked with navigating these contradictions on a regular basis are the policy receivers. These policy receivers bear the burden of working with policies provided to them. While the atmosphere of critique and change seem, in my experience, to create a sense of failure and resistance, Spillane et al. (2002) write “research in political science suggests that bureaucrats tend to be hardworking and they do not typically work to undermine policy or directives from above” (p. 391). Additionally, they write “recent studies of the implementation of education standards show that teachers and school administrators frequently not only heed higher level policies but also work hard to implement them—citing Firestone, Fitz & Broadfoot, 1999; Guthrie, 1990; Hill, 2001; Wolf et al., 2000” (p. 391). Studies like this suggest the policy recipients in the system are actively working towards implementing the policies presented to them.

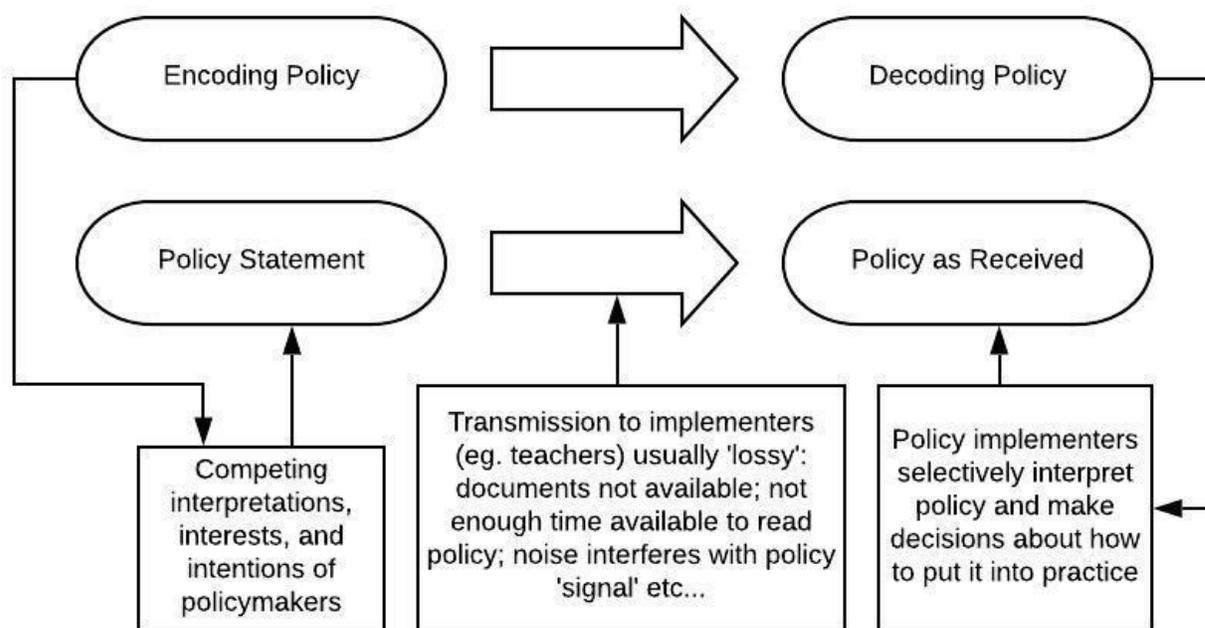
Policy receivers are the readers of the policy text. They are also, variously, the receivers of the policy implementation process. Karen E. Starr (2015) wrote “those who receive and are responsible for enacting policy mandates may subvert, fundamentally alter, resist, or ignore recommended or necessary changes” (p. 4). This suggests policy texts are read and interpreted at different levels, with different outcomes. The process of reading is intended to be distinguished here from the process of interpretation. Reading is the establishment of an “initial meaning” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 279) that only unfolds because the policy receiver is “reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 279). Whereas, interpretation suggests there is some openness to multiple meanings or a need to discern meaning. The policy interpreter is not looking for that which they already know or hope.

Policy-making in practice, then, is usually far from the rational, purposive model many people such as Pal (2014) conceive it to be: one in which a distinct set of policy-makers consider sensible policies in a logical way and carefully formulate them with a clear purpose in mind. Trowler (2003) has presented this process in three distinct interpretive phases of policy formation. The first phase is the process of encoding the policy where the various interpretations, multiple agendas, and values are mediated and laden into the process (Trowler, 2003). This is the process of policy formation. The second phase is transmission where the encoded policy is presented to the various relevant parties. The transmission phase involves another process of interpretation as the policy is sold or made manageable to the specific location it was intended for. And finally, the decoding phase where the policy is applied—in education most frequently schools—to the particular location. The policy is interpreted and moderated in the particular location to match the local micro political environment.

Trowler's (2003) model is adapted below (p. 98):

Figure 1.1

Adapted Policy Model



Trowler's model depicts the pathways of policy-making. At the top of the figure the general steps for policy making are shown—policy is encoded, transmitted and then decoded.

Underneath Trowler represents policy-making in more specific terms as would be seen in a school context. The policy statement would be given to leadership transmitted to implementers—usually teachers— and then implementers (with such things as lossy documents, which I imagine are compressed and simplified documents) decide on how to put it into practice. Trowler uses the small arrows between the constructs to show how the interpretations from different people influence the movement of policy from general terms to specific. The transmission of policy is represented by large arrows since it is an integral part of the policy process. The large arrows bring your attention to the importance of transmission which can often be overlooked. Many

stakeholders are consulted in the making and interpreting of policy, but not often in the transmission of it. However, the transmission of policy also contributes to its development as how policy is presented affects how it is received.

The particularities that are the most intriguing are that we don't understand how the policy receivers interpret the policy as decoded by the policy implementers in the Alberta context. The policy goes through such a process of encoding, transmission, and decoding that the final interpretation is a fascinating possibility.

Interpretation

Words have different meanings for different individuals. On the face of it, the dictionary definition of interpretation is to “expound the meaning of” (Onions, 1966, p. 481). For the lay person, this often means to explain or add detail to the meaning of the word. The word meaning, as part of the definition of the word, places meaning at the forefront of the purpose of interpretation.

As I continued to read about interpretive policy, the importance of meaning became more important to my understanding of how policy was experienced. Yanow's (2000) work on interpretive policy, for example, shifts the emphasis away from discrete moments of action to focus more on the meanings, values, beliefs expressed by policies and how those various meanings are communicated (p. 14). This encapsulates the more complex reality of interpreting texts. Bell and Stevenson (2006) wrote “the de-coding of policy texts by multiple readers ensures a multiplicity of interpretations. Readers have their own contexts—their own histories and values. All of these factors shape how policies may be interpreted by readers” (p. 17). The existence of

multiple interpretations and the complex nature of local contexts mean policy texts have to be read and interpreted in order to expound upon their meanings—a process active and reflective.

Individual Sediments. There is a need identified by Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) to take into consideration the complexity of human sense-making (p. 391). Based on my professional experience, I was shocked to find interpretive analysis favoring complex understanding of sense-making. My working experience had mostly presented me with an atmosphere of buy-in that discouraged complex dialogue. Implementations went through the motions of engagement but discouraged active participation and complex messaging. In my initial readings on policy formation, there was a divide between what was said about policy formation and how policy was experienced. The focus on policy buy in (in the Dorval case, for example) was closer to traditional policy analysis, as presented by Pal (2014). Traditional policy analysis was undertaken “to advance policy decisions” (Yanow, 2000, p. 1). As a teacher, I often felt frustrated when being told something was going to work. That far away from my context, policy analysis and formation is considered complete. It was satisfying to read policy academics had experienced a significant interpretivist turn (Hay, 2011). As I have identified, the work of Gadamer (2013) brought the importance of interpretation and experience to the forefront of my concerns. The difference presented by Yanow (2000) and Hay (2011) suggest a policy landscape that works to embrace the social nature of policy experiences and how these interpretations become applied (p. 170). Interpretivist policy research has begun to gain ground in the field.

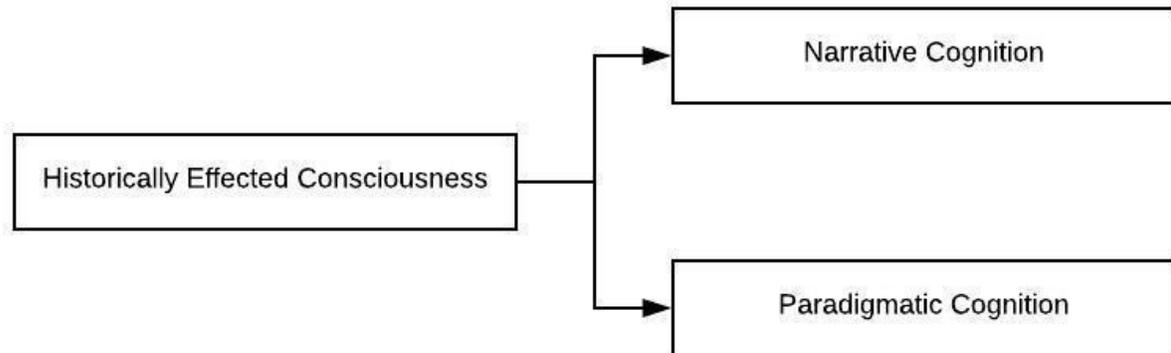
A gap identified by Spillane et al. (2002) in policy implementation is that of human sense making. Spillane et al. (2002) found that policy interpretation is an important part of policy implementation and that how educators interpret policies is informed by their previous experiences and interpretations of new policies. My own experiences have led me to question

how these experiences have shaped my own sense making. Through my hermeneutic wonder, I have come to literature suggesting the process of making sense of past experiences has an impact on how new experiences are received by individuals. While this is relatively omnipresent in Gadamer's (2013) work, I feel it is important to present the work of other scholars to illustrate how Gadamer can resonate with varied approaches to sense making. Coburn (2005), Evers and Lakomski (2015), Lakomski (2005) and Polkinghorne (1995) have all written about the impact of past experiences and pre-existing knowledge on individuals when making sense of new information. Coburn (2005) focused on educators implementing policies in the classroom. Lakomski (2005), Evers and Lakomski (2015), and Polkinghorne (1995) are further examples of research into how different individuals make sense of new experiences. While approaches and terminology vary across this research, certain trends are common in the research noted. If the specific words used may lead to semantic conflict, Gadamer's (2013) approach to understanding expresses that change is slow, perhaps slower than people would like. Firstly, the impact of past experience is strong and prior knowledge hard to change (Lakomski, 2005, p. 33). Secondly—while taking somewhat different approaches—Lakomski (2005), Evers and Lakomski (2015), Geva-May (2005) and Polkinghorne (1995) found individuals make sense using different forms of cognition. Polkinghorne (1995) used the binary of narrative and paradigmatic cognition while Geva-May (2005) used intuitive and analytical cognition to distinguish between ways of thinking. While Gadamer (2013) doesn't break down the process into different cognition patterns, it resonates with his work that sense making is impacted by prior knowledge and experience. Although I feel encouraged by my interpretation of this research, there is support for further hermeneutic inquiry into how sense making comes to bear on policies. Polkinghorne

(1995) is most consistent with interpretive approaches because his narrative cognition aligns with Gadamer's (2013) views on personal histories.

Through this reading, my interpretation suggests insights into the unfolding of sense making. In sense making there are two main cognitions that are involved. The first is narrative cognition which is the process of shaping experiences through a series of events (Polkinghorne, 1995). The interpreter makes sense of the text by accessing how it fits in the broader context of an event with plotted moments. The sense making act places the text into a shape coherent with previous lived experiences. The second is paradigmatic cognition which is the application of previously known structures onto the text. If a participant is interpreting a math question, they will apply previously known math concepts to the question to make sense of how to solve the question. If the participant struggles in math and doesn't have the necessary structures, then they access their past experiences to make sense of new information—in a sense, asking themselves how does this fit with my previous experiences?

The following figure depicts the basic framework I have just described for sense making that I will develop as my findings unfold.

Figure 1.2*Sense Making*

Another aspect that unfolds from research around interpretive policy is the importance of context. Identifying this shift, Wilder & Howlett (2013) explained that interpretive analysis moves from strategic thinkers and technical approaches towards “institutional bricoleurs” (p. 11) engaging in hermeneutic practices. Where policy research once existed as an advance step of official action—where professional or technical analysts would be called upon to determine the best approach for a governmental/corporate entity to take—the process of policy making/analysis now extends outwardly from government. From the macro to the micro level of policy interpretation, the context of the interpretation impacts what understandings may resonate with the interpreter. It resonated with my own experience to read that Yanow (2000) was identifying a shift to towards implementation activities rather than the policies themselves (p. 1). Wilder and Howlett (2013), sum up succinctly the shift from sudden policy as linear process, when they wrote it “may be much less sudden and all-encompassing than originally surmised, and instead a more gradual, hermeneutic and discourse-intensive activity” (p. 10). The process of encoding, transmission, and decoding creates an experience that has the potential to take a policy in many

different directions as it gets interpreted and applied over and over again. In the Alberta context, the movement from educational polices of the 1990s may be best understood as a long road of change rather than sudden policy change in the mid-1990s followed by new policy changes in the 2010s. This suggests interpretive approaches have something to offer, particularly in terms of understanding.

I am drawn at this moment to my experience with the forced collaboration room, identified in my opening autobiographical section. Borrowing a policy from one context and applying it to another did not lead to the intended results. On the one hand, I have seen how structural adjustments can lead to changes in behaviors in schools, but on the other—as in the collaboration room example—changes based on a single policy often miss the mark. Yanow (2000) identifies a problem with singular policy interpretation because the process of interpretation is located in the discursive meanings available to the individuals making meaning in their particular contexts (p. 17). Through my reading of the complex policy process described by Stone (2012), Kingdon (2003), and Starr (2015), it has emerged that complexity resonates with my own contextual history. The collaboration room that was forced upon a staff took on a very different meaning than was intended, largely due to the contextual history of the participants being different than the originating context. This isn't just about changing ambiguous language or redefining space because interpretation means language carries multiple meanings (Yanow, 2000).

The importance of context, doesn't mean to identify a singular defining context. Ball et al. (2011) explained that, in the educational context, individuals work with the “discursive possibilities” that allow them to make meaning (p. 612). A policy text is only one aspect of the complex world in which teachers exist. Ball et al. (2011) describe a working context that

represents “both a loving and hating of teaching, which together modulate contemporary teacher subjectivity—this is constituted by policy crowding and overloading, lack of time and opportunity to think, de-sociality, stress and pressure, and the oppressive requirements of performativity” (p. 622). When I consider the experiences from my own career, this long quotation resonates deeply with my own sense of frustration and accomplishment. The grind of the job, the stress and pressure to perform, and the beautiful aspects surrounded by negativity capture very well the complex relationship some teachers have with teaching and leading.

Being surrounded by messages of success and failure over a period of time impacts your orientation to new policies and ideas. Improvements that uplift out of different contexts or have to be accepted because of buy-in are introduced as solutions to problems a teacher may or may not be aware of. In my experience, many aspects of policy borrowing and buy-in are implemented without a sense of critical discourse or acknowledgement the changes could be incorrect or contradictory. Something that unfolded out of my reading—particularly Mercer et al. (2010)—is the tension to control results of change but wanting autonomous buy in regardless of the legitimacy of the change.

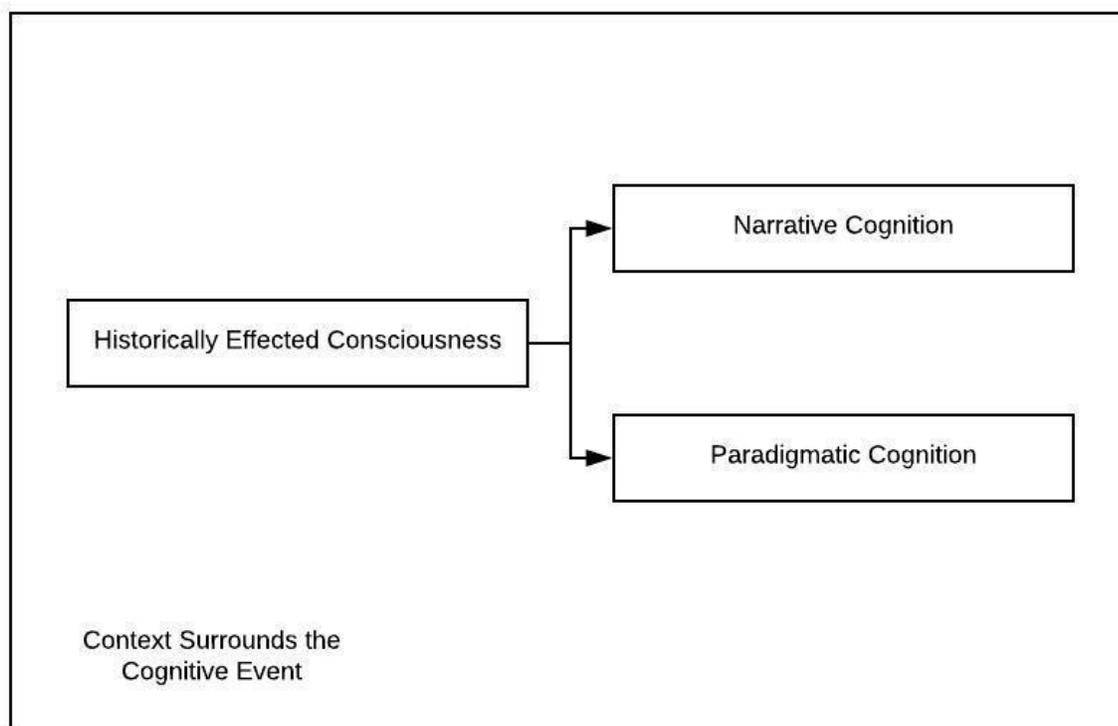
This initial forward arc of my research, a key aspect of interpretive work, brings my natural tendency to question authority to the fore, particularly the tendency to see uniformity as success. As I started to emerge as a teacher leader, more often than not a supervisor or a principal would hand me a book oriented towards business management and discuss how to be strategic around implementing a new initiative. While these books always had elements that could be considered helpful in some contexts, there was rarely a good answer when I questioned about how business literature is relevant to education. What has unfolded from these experiences is a sense that more and more variable practice raises questions or concerns from stakeholders. This

is perhaps is what Mercer et al. (2010) are addressing when they wrote “what is needed in the circumstances is not another repetition of the hollow exhortation to disseminate best practice more widely, as though uniformity were synonymous with quality” (p. 11).

This context can be added to the cognitive model suggested in Figure 1.3:

Figure 1.3

Context Added to Sense Making



As can be seen in the tacit agreement between Yanow (2000) and Mercer et al. (2010), is contemporary educational systems are constantly changing, dynamic, and directed.

My reading of this literature base affirmed a sense I was not alone in my thinking contradictory policy environments are part of the context and experience of teaching. In my own

experiences, the possibilities of meaning that made sense in one context often didn't make sense in another. This draws me to wondering about projections of completeness on contexts. While Yanow (2010) suggests treating the individuals within the context as the experts in their own context, doesn't mean a single individual can tell you everything about a policy implementation, local knowledge, or the policy debate. The individual, though, can express how they experienced a policy or a context. While no single individual can give you all the information, a projection of singular completeness is also problematic. From my experience, involving the individuals that live the policy in the context gets closer to a reasoned understanding of how the policy is experienced.

This micro model of educational policy incorporates individual interpretations as valid contributions to understanding how policy exists in their habitus. In their work, Wilder and Howlett (2013) explained "a critical component of paradigmatic change processes involves the manner in which these actors perceive and interpret policy anomalies, a process taken largely for granted in earlier models" (p. 11). Gadamer (2013) drew my attention to issues of change as events that happen and change as events forced to happen. In schools, there are numerous changes occurring because the world is changing. The way these changes are interpreted and experienced in the context shapes the rationality of the space. How changes are presented, rationalized, and enforced informs the overall tradition that begins to define the context. The sense making of participants through the process of discourse, both with others and the self, contributes to the way policy recipients incorporate parts or wholes of a policy shift (Wilder & Howlett, 2013).

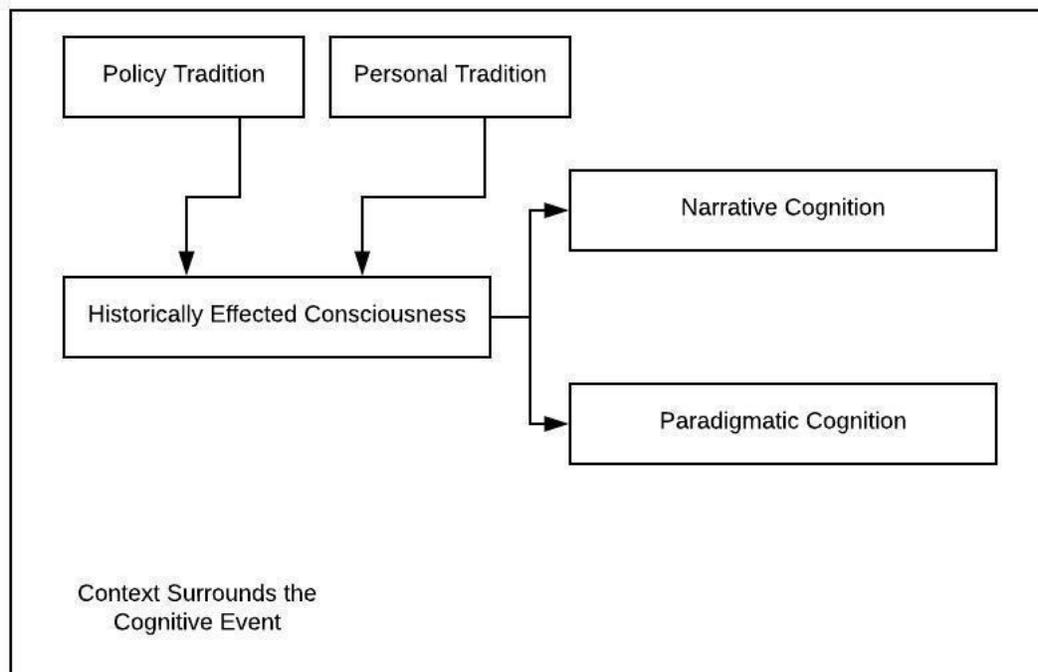
This adds another layer to the sense making model: the impact of tradition. Tradition is the historical horizon the teacher leader finds themselves in. It is part of the context but is also

individual. As the world is diverse, different participants emerge from different traditions to find themselves in the same context. For tradition then, there is the individual tradition and the policy tradition. The school, the teachers, the teacher leaders, and the students already have a contextual history before they walk into the context. Some educational traditions may be defined by Russell and Bray's (2013) "policy incoherence" (p. 3). Years of crowded spaces of policy, mandates, and reform efforts come to define an individual's experience over a period of time and make certain rationalities easier or harder to accept. Additionally, personal traditions can be from a larger context than the smaller contexts of schools or cities.

A second aspect of tradition is the policy text. While my research lends itself to understanding the importance of actors and contexts (Sin, 2013), the policy text itself has a tradition. This links to the concept that the policy object encapsulates the broader core values and concepts of the policy beyond the text (Sin, 2013). In Alberta, there is a tradition of pro-business market-based solutions that brings the word "entrepreneur" to Ministerial orders. While words—such as entrepreneur—can make their way into the policy, Sin (2013) posits the policy object finds its existence in actual practice (p. 437). It is interesting though that Sin (2013) identifies the practice of the text is made possible by the policy being a text. The policy and the policy tradition are mediated together, but the tradition of the text still provides authority to the words of the text. The text brings with it an authoritative tradition. It is how this authoritative text is interpreted in the context that provides an improved understanding of how the policy actually exists in the experience of teacher leaders. Adding tradition to the sense making model would look like this:

Figure 1.4

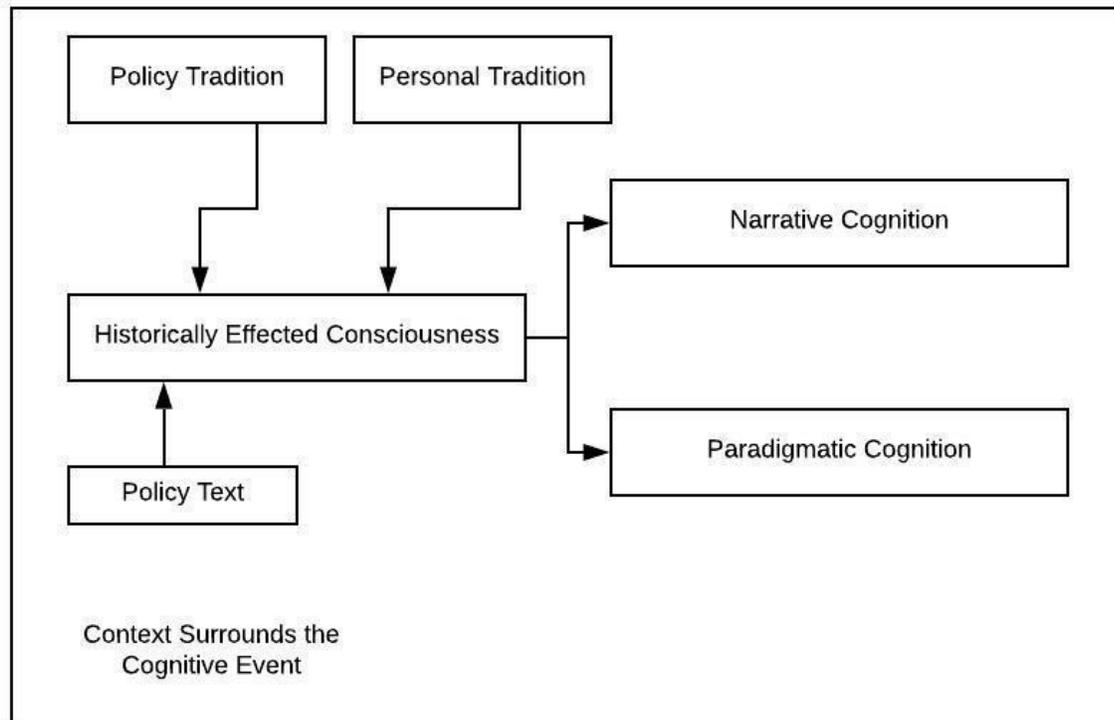
Tradition Fuses with Sense Making in the Context



Obviously, there is also a text. The text is what brings us to the moment of interpretation. It is being mediated through the sense making process described by the model above. The individual historically effected-consciousness is mediated with the context contains tradition, sense making, and the text. The affirming element of this work is that it doesn't take possibilities away. Different rationalities and approaches can still exist, and in a hermeneutic way, need to exist for different individuals. Where I want the discourse around this dissertation to take us is towards understanding how individuals experience the complex and contradictory world of autonomy and control in education. The caveat to this work is that interpretive policy research is not about scientific laws or experimental causality (Hay, 2011). The work of interpretive research identifies impacts. Words, texts, actions, tradition, values, and cognition all impact how

a person comes to make sense of their world. These impacts are temporally based and exist in the moment of the event. Interpretive work is about how an individual experiences an event, not what will happen in all cases to all people.

This is important to note for two reasons. The first is interpretivists attempt to move through understanding into explanation. However, the explanation is not a universal explanation. The second reason is the focus isn't on singular causes and singular effects. Texts and words have power. People and structures contribute to impacting the systems they work in. The interpretivist turn in policy doesn't discount the impact of people, texts, or ideas as they interact with each other. Interpretivist policy researchers attempt to understand how these interactions are experienced. It is a contextual explanation informed by an improved depth of understanding. We can add text to the model but each interpretive moment is a moment. With text included, the sense making model of interpretive policy is complete:

Figure 1.5*The Policy Text Enters the Interpretive Moment*

Teacher Sediments. Policy research exists in a varied landscape of approaches and theoretical orientations. There is research that has been done on how teachers, teacher leaders, or administrators deal with complex, confusing, or contradictory policy environments. While much of this research (Ball et al., 2012; Ball, 2015; Coburn, 2005; Singh et al., 2013; Webb & Gulson, 2013) also depicts a high level of confusion and frustration in the experiences of teachers, there are specific findings supporting further analysis. For example, Ball et al. (2012) found “our data taken as a whole convey a sense of overload and contradiction” (p. 71). The quality of the experiences is the foundation new learning and experiences are layered upon.

While traditional policy analysis—Pal (2014) and Geva-May (2005) for example—focuses on policy as defined process of problem identification and solution, this research is predicated on limiting factors to make problems solvable. While there are contributions to be made by many types of research, there is an act of separation between policy analysts and policy actors in this approach. These approaches are more likely to contribute to feelings of separation or dissonance in teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators when they attempt to implement solutions into a complex and contradictory world. The research of Ball et al. (2012); Ball (2015); Coburn (2005); Singh et al. (2013); and Webb and Gulson (2013) certainly resonates more with interpretive approaches but there is a focus on the agency and impacts of power. This focus on power relations tends to build more separation between interpreters as it implies or assigns responsibility to positions of higher power.

On the other hand, the process of interpretation shifts the focus from responsibility to understanding. Coburn (2005) found “when school leaders had superficial understandings of the content of policy messages, they made decisions that at times created incongruity for teachers” (p. 490). Rather than place the onus for success and failure at the location of school leader or teacher leader, it is important to recognize there are impacts. These impacts are the result of the interpretive act of the school leader. There needs to be a better understanding of the interpretive moment of the school leaders, to bring a sense of solidarity and unity within the process as opposed to increased confusion and separation.

Recapitulation

What I have come to see is policy doesn't so much direct human behaviour so much as it reflects it. Policy, like human experiences, is informed by traditions, context, political currents,

individual self-interests, and hopes for what education could be. Policy layers, therefore, are often contradictory and layered with demands for both autonomy and control.

Ultimately, this section reminds us that the policy formation process is complex, layered, and human. Though I might have begun this journey with a sense policy is created in a mechanical, technical, and objective way with a purpose to control and direct people and experiences, I have come to see policy is not mechanical or simple, but mediated through human processes at every step. These processes are messy and often informed by contradictory aims, goals, and values, which ultimately layer on top of each other creating textures, ridges, and folds that educators experience as they interpret the policy.

Chapter III. Alberta Policy

I always see limits to change. There is always something which cannot be made over or made at all.

(Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1992, p.130)

History

Individuals stand on layers of sediment that inform how they see the world. In hermeneutics, the position from which individuals view the world is described by Gadamer (2013) as a horizon. In order to understand how my own horizon has come to be, I have examined different layers of policy and research that both reflect and create the layers of sediment present for teachers in Alberta. While much research has been done on policy in Alberta, I have selected research and policies that have specifically contributed to my horizon and speak to my view of the complexities of mediating the policy environment in Alberta.

Policy Sediments in Alberta.

As an English language arts teacher, department head, assistant principal, and planning consultant in Alberta, there have been many different policy texts that have directed the operation of a school system, the participation of stakeholders, and my own professional practice. While the focus of my research will examine my own interpretation of the new *Leadership Quality Standard*¹² (GOA, 2018a), here I will explore the traditions that have layered one on top of the other to create the ground upon which I stand to view this new leadership

¹² It is worth noting here, that the Government of Alberta published the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline (PQPG)* in 2009 (GOA, 2009). This work formed the foundation for the *LQS* (GOA, 2018), however it wasn't part of my experience with the exception of applying for leadership jobs within my district and was framed as a professional development activity rather than a policy experience. For this reason, the PQPG didn't resonate through my experience and I didn't write about it. I might read George Jeffery Thompson's 2009 dissertation for more background on it.

policy. The purpose of examining this larger landscape is to show how individuals experience the layers of meaning in Alberta policy texts and take these experiences with them as they have new experiences.

Public interest in teaching standards began to gain prominence in the mid-1980s as a result of a very public case involving Jim Keegstra (Fenwick, 2003). Keegstra lost his teaching license and was fired for teaching Holocaust denial and anti-Semitic theories (Fenwick, 2003). This case drew public perception towards questions of teacher quality and supervision. In the early 1990s, the Conservative government of Alberta (Fenwick, 2003) began a series of reforms to downsize and privatize several aspects of the government. This included funding changes and increased accountability for teachers and schoolboards. While initially more forceful, Fenwick (2003) writes that “talks among government, the ATA, university and school-board representatives led to a compromise” (p. 338). Teachers and leaders began completing *Teacher Professional Growth Plans* (TPGPs) annually to show progress and professional growth based on meeting the *TQS* (GOA, 1997).

The *TQS* (at this point, leaders are included in this standard as teachers) states that “quality teaching occurs when the teacher’s ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher’s decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply result in optimum learning by students” (GOA, 1997). While mandated to follow the instructional leadership of a principal, a teacher in Alberta is also expected to maintain the minimum standard of the *TQS* which places the standard of “quality teaching” on the decision making (which is ultimately influenced by the context) of the teacher. The *TQS* also states that “teaching practices will vary because each teaching situation is different and in constant change” (GOA, 1997).

A specific contradiction unfolds when one considers all of the variables that a teacher or must consider when meeting the minimum standard of the old *TQS*. A teacher must consider:

age, gender, maturation, abilities and talents, relationships among students, subject area of study, prior learning, socio-economic status, cultural background, linguistic variables, mental and emotional states and conditions, resource availability and allocation, teaching assignment, class size and composition, collegial and administrator support, physical plant, parental support, parental involvement in children's learning, socio-economic variables, community support for education, multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, inter-agency collaboration, provincial, national and global influences. (GOA, 1997)

Any one of these variables can be in contradiction with the other, creating layers of policy that bend, fold, and rub against each other. For example: A community might support education in one context but be resistant to cultural pluralism. A student's cultural background might imply conservatism in some contexts that may restrict a teacher's ability to teach the curriculum.

However, what uplifts from this document is a contradiction between autonomy and control. The document gives the teacher (including leaders at this time) the obligation to make the educational decision but then controls those decisions with mitigating factors.

For the past 20 years, *The Ministerial Order (#016/97): Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta* (GOA,1997), *The Teaching Profession Act* (GOA, 2000a), the *School Act* (GOA, 2000 and 2011) and the *Education Act* (GOA, 2020b) defined what I could or couldn't do as a teacher or leader. Even as of this writing, English language arts teachers are still expected to teach the current curriculum which was published in

2003. This means that an English language arts teacher in Alberta is primarily governed by policies that were established over 15 years ago. Additionally, in Alberta, under the *Education Act* (GOA, 2020b), the teacher is mandated to follow all of the policies “pursuant to this Act” which also means that they are subject to “carry out those duties that are assigned to the teacher by the principal or the board” (GOA, 2010b). Principals are also mandated by the *Education Act* to “provide instructional leadership in the school” (GOA, 2020b).

In a sense, school principals are mandated to provide an instructional direction that teachers are subsequently mandated to follow. The possibilities of contradiction begin to arise by examining the various documents that a teachers and leaders must follow, in order to satisfy the requirements of the *Education Act* (GOA, 2020b). While the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning* (GOA, 2013) may be on the minds of policy receivers during this study, contradictions between these policies already exist with the *TQS* (GOA, 1997). In essence, new policies are not implemented in a fresh way. The policies enter teachers and leaders’ sense making activities as part of a larger landscape defined by existing policies.

For example, historically an English teacher may have had to navigate both the *TQS* (GOA, 1997) and the *English language arts Program of Study: Senior High* (GOA, 2003). The *English language arts Program of Study: Senior High* (GOA, 2003) is the approved curriculum for high school classes across the province and must therefore be taught by all teachers governed by the *School Act* (GOA, 2011). The curriculum states that “literature invites students to reflect on the significance of cultural values and the fundamentals of human existence” (GOA, 2003, p. 1). It also states that literature “invites students [...] to grapple with the intricacies of the human condition” (GOA, 2003, p. 1). The curriculum also states that “critical thinking, learning, and language are interrelated” (GOA, 2003, p. 2), that the development of language helps students to

“make sense of and bring order to their world and to play an active role in various communities of learners within and beyond the classroom” (GOA, 2003, p. 2). Through this process, the students are to “examine new experiences and knowledge in relation to their prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs” (GOA, 2003, p. 2). There are so many possible contradictions presented by these statements it can be overwhelming. However, it is clear that grappling “with the intricacies of the human condition” (GOA, 2003, p. 1) and examining “new experiences” (GOA, 2003, p. 2) could take a teacher into a problematic place with the TQS (GOA, 1997) and *School Act* (GOA, 2011). The teacher would have to consider whether or not the community wanted their children to have new experiences. The community would have to be willing to have their children read material that would expose them to new experiences. Leaders often have to navigate the contradictory tensions between teachers and the community in this case as ultimately, who would define new in this context?

The contradictions that have been illustrated so far have primarily been contradictions between documents. The ELA curriculum (GOA, 2003) created a contradiction with the TQS (GOA, 1997), potentially, and the TQS created a contradiction with the *School Act* (GOA, 2011), potentially. In 2013 the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning* was passed; it is considered a supporting document to the *School Act* and as such is expected to be implemented as policy by School Boards. The order states that:

education in Alberta will be shaped by a greater emphasis on education than on the school; on the learner than on the system; on competencies than on content; on inquiry, discovery and the application of knowledge than on the dissemination of information; and on technology to support the

creation and sharing of knowledge than on technology to support teaching.
(GOA, 2013)

This was a lofty goal. In some ways it raises question about whether education in Alberta was ever more focused on the school than on education. It also raises questions about whose focus was primarily directed towards the school, the system, or singularly on the dissemination of information. Once again, the *English language arts curriculum* (2003) is focused on inquiry, discovery, and the learner. However, Alberta is a large area; perhaps there are places where inquiry, discovery, and the learner contradict with local values.

The *Ministerial Order* (GOA, 2013) indicated that students will be “engaged thinkers, ethical citizens, and have an entrepreneurial spirit” (p. 1). The word that initially is the most problematic is the word spirit. The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology defines spirit as “the breath of life, vital principle, intelligent incorporeal being, immaterial element of a human being, vital power” (Onions, 1996, p. 854). The *Ministerial Order* (GOA, 2013) is creating a legislative mandate to impart an “entrepreneurial spirit” (p. 2) to students in the province. While doing this, the ministerial order also directs education to focus less on the school and the system. Similarly, the word spirit bears religious and supernatural elements for many people. In an orthodox or conservative community, the word spirit may be considered problematic as might the term entrepreneurial. As a leader, this presented me with a difficult proposition to mediate what might be problematic and what might not.

Under the section “Engaged Thinker” in the *Ministerial Order* (GOA, 2013) it is stated that students will “believ[e] that there is no limit to what knowledge may be gleaned, what skills may be accumulated” (GOA, 2013, p. 1). A “engaged thinker” might identify this as problematic, or even contradictory: that the nearly unlimited amount of knowledge that exists in

the whole of existence can actually be gleaned by each and every individual regardless of context. Likewise, students are also encouraged to “react to changes in society and the economy with an attitude of optimism and hope for the future” (GOA, 2013, p. 2). Once again, the overall tone of the *Ministerial Order* is hopeful and positive. However, the idea of legislating hope and optimism at the same time as critical thinking is potentially contradictory because critical thinking is often expressed through satire, negative critiques, or other pessimistic views. Leaders may have found themselves deciding which texts should be purchased after struggling with this contradiction.

Ultimately, legislation in Alberta provides for several levels of decision making from the provincial government down through school boards and stopping at the teacher. The *Ministerial Order* (GOA, 2013) established lofty goals but is itself a self-contradiction. Additionally, the *Education Act* states that “all programs of study and materials must [...] promote understanding and respect for others and honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans” (GOA, 2014, p. 10). Furthermore, it states that “a parent has the prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be provided to the parent’s child, and as a partner in education, has the responsibility to (a) act as the primary guide and decision-maker with respect to the child’s education” (GOA, 2014, p. 10). This is another contradiction embedded in policy. The entrenched “common values and beliefs of Albertans” (GOA, 2014, p. 10) which may not be common at all, mixed with a parent’s right to choose “the kind of education that shall be provided” (GOA, 2014, p. 10) means a parent could choose a type of education that denies the common values.

The *Education Act* (GOA, 2020b) served as an anticipatory contradiction waiting for enactment. However, the increased focus on parental choice means that leaders will be placed in

increasingly contradictory situations with policy. One of the key issues is that policy doesn't come and go. Teachers work with one curriculum for five, ten, or 20 years. The curriculum and the TQS have defined how teaching has been governed in Alberta since 1997. As the contradiction of autonomy and control has evolved in this time how do teachers interpret the specific statement: "quality teaching occurs when the teacher's ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher's decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply result in optimum learning by students" (GOA, 1997, p. 2) in light of the contextual variables.

Critique. Research on policy reforms during the 1990s presents a contested field of contradictions. Ranging from human rights legislation to provincial testing programs, these studies show the diversity and range of reforms and interventions that impact education. The studies that follow were selected by searching for studies that dealt specifically with issues of educational reform, autonomy, control, and the province of Alberta.

Gereluk et al. (2015) conducted a study in Alberta examining the impact of parental opt-out clauses (clause 11.1 in Bill 44) on teacher autonomy (p. 2). This study used Alberta human rights legislation with the inclusion of an opt-out clause as the policy basis for their study. As a result of changes to provincial legislation to incorporate human sexuality as an aspect of identity that a person must not be discriminated upon (Gereluk et al., 2015), the Alberta government created an opt-out clause to allow parents to remove their children from certain lessons that touched on sexuality or religion. The work of Gereluk et al. (2015) informs my work by revealing that a policy (such as Bill 44) is interpreted in different ways not only by different stakeholders but by teachers themselves. For indeed, in this study it was found that teachers "internalized the legislation" (p. 10), "respond differently and proactively" (p. 10), and have "heightened awareness" (p. 10) as a result of experiences with this policy. Their identified

experience revealed different interpretations of the intent of the policy. Some believed the policy was redundant but confirmed already existing practices allowing parents to opt out of certain lessons or activities, while others “interpreted it as indicative of a general trend towards greater control of teacher practice in a centralizing environment” (Gereluk et al., 2015). This study (2015) revealed an atmosphere of anxiety about the shift of power towards the parents and a centralized authority. This effect is described as a “chill” (Gereluk et al., 2015), making teachers more aware and cautious about their actions, primarily due to proactive assumptions about possible reactions. Overall, the Gereluk et al. (2015) study revealed that individual teachers expressed anxiety about a reduced level of autonomy.

Judah and Richardson (2006) also found tensions within experiences of policy in their study on the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS), a program that began in 1999. In their research, Judah and Richardson (2006) focused on a “central ethical dilemma” (p. 66). This ethical dilemma is between the intent of the program and external forces directing practice towards externally mandated goals. The authors of this study present the issues for teachers as they negotiate the “complex and ambiguous ground between external mandates versus internal aspirations for meaningful professional development” (p. 66). This study presents the experiences of teachers as navigating personal professional growth within a system of external control. The contradiction of collective autonomy versus individual autonomy emerges in this study. Judah and Richardson (2006) identified this as a tension between the goals of meaningful self-directed professional growth and organizationally mandated goals of systemic improvement. The internal aims of teachers to have autonomy over their professional growth is in contradiction with the external control or regulation of the government or district. Ultimately, the authors of this study concluded that there were gains achieved by the AIS project, but it wasn’t without

“ambiguity” (p. 78). This ambiguity opens up room for research into the differences between how individuals interpret policies designed to create professional growth or increase standards. Teachers in this study began with a sense of optimism, but expressed frustration with the “external mandates” (p. 66). There was a clear difference in the interpretation of the process and the goals of this initiative based on the different interpretations of the participants.

As in the Judah and Richardson (2006) study, the challenges of teacher autonomy are brought into question in the Faris-Berg (2014) study. Faris-Berg (2014) presented teacher empowerment as a suggestion for improving schools. This study saw teachers as being interested and ready to lead their schools. Faris-Berg (2014) wrote that “these teachers are ready. Right now. Not just to influence classrooms and curriculum, but to change their schools' entire approach to design and management” (p. 32). By giving teachers power to make change in the schools, teachers exhibited autonomy. While most of the examples given in the study are positive towards increased autonomy, the author identified that some teachers find themselves “constantly hav[ing] to justify why their unconventional ways of working and the unconventional learning models they create do not fit into conventional structures and expectations” (p. 35). In the Faris-Berg (2014) study, groups of teachers established autonomy and legitimacy through “collective autonomy” (p. 35). In addition, the study (Faris-Berg, 2014) also indicated that in order to shift the work of management from a central office to the broader teaching staff, there needs to be a school wide level of agreement.

A shift to broader teacher autonomy can come into conflict with the demands in our school system for standardization and accountability. McDonald’s study (2002) of 404 questionnaire respondents and 10 interviews, reveals teachers’ interpretations of policies regarding assessment. At least one of their data sets were found to show that “respondents knew

or believed” that provincial testing “had been instrumental in aligning curriculum but that it had also reduced teacher autonomy” (p. 28). Through this study, McDonald (2002) identified that teachers felt “stress” (p. 34) and “fear” (p. 34) in relation to demands for and uses of standardized testing. A need to address this is stated by McDonald (2002) who wrote that “improving the school-level communication between the administrators and all the teaching staff regarding use of student examination results in teacher evaluation, teaching assignments, and school marketing appeared to be a province-wide necessity” (p. 34).

Using standardized tests as a means to create accountability and evaluate teachers, as discussed in McDonald’s (2002) study, leads to questions about supervision and evaluation. The concept of supervision and evaluation has been examined by Clandinin, Kennedy, La Rocque and Pearce (1996) in a study of how teachers experience a school-based accountability policy. For this particular study, 15 participants were interviewed about their experiences of being evaluated. Clandinin et. al. (1996) wrote that “teachers seemed dismayed about the general lack of opportunity to demonstrate accountability” (p. 181). This desire suggests that teachers are not against showing that they are accountable for their practice. However, teachers expressed a frustration with the “disconnected” (p. 182) aspect of the top down evaluation process. This indicates that there is a lack of connection between what leaders or teacher leaders imagine to be an appropriate form of accountability. The participants in this study (Clandinin et al., 1996) felt at odds with the nature and purpose of this particular evaluation instrument.

These questions of autonomy and interpretation emerge in Fenwick’s (2003) work. Fenwick (2003) engaged in a Foucauldian analysis of *Teacher Professional Growth Plans* in Alberta. Fenwick (2003), in regards to the neo-liberal risk society, identifies that it can seem “both exciting and threatening” (p. 337). This study addresses the contradiction in Alberta of

where teachers, through the implementation of state mandated professional growth, are expected to “exercise autonomy, professional judgement and responsibility” (p. 338) and at the same time be “bureaucratically constrained” (p. 338). Additionally, this analysis examines the *TPGPs* that arrived as a consequence of the *Ministerial Order (#016/97): Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta*. The discovery of tension between control and autonomy is promising for the purpose of this study work. This opens up possible avenues to examine the role of interpretation in developing a sense of professional responsibility and autonomy.

Townsend (1998) conducted a broad research project on the educational reform efforts of the Alberta government in the 1990s. Townsend’s study focused on how individuals perceived the effect of a general program of reform—implemented by the Klein Progressive Conservative Government—to impact such outcomes as accountability, achievement, and improvement. Presenting several large-scale studies and conducting questionnaire research with a sample size of 541, Townsend’s (1998) data are shocking when reviewed nearly 20 years later. Townsend (1998)—in reference to data collected by Conley, 1997—writes that “decentralized decision making and increased demands for accountability, appear to be on a collision course” (p. 8). In response to the question “Alberta’s educational reforms have brought about significant improvements in student learning” (p. 18), 91% of teachers, 83.5% of principals, 65.5% of superintendents surveyed indicated disagreement or strong disagreement. With little perceived educational value—based on the above data—it is curious that Townsend’s “collision course” (p. 8) did not happen soon after the reforms and still hasn’t happened since then. This opens up questions of how people are experiencing contradictions as these policies have become part of their lived experience. While at the time of the study, Townsend (1998) presented a particularly

difficult scenario of the collision course, it seems that no collision has happened, but these shifts have contributed to the experiences of students, teachers, and leaders in Alberta.

Together, these studies present several conflicting relationships with control and autonomy. There is clearly not a definitive sense of control as completely a problem or of autonomy as absolute. There are several gaps in this literature that can be examined to further the debate and discussion. The first gap is the use of an interpretive approach as a conceptual framework, the second gap is the distance of time from these studies—how have teacher experiences changed in the 20 years since these reforms began—and the third gap is what new policies or experiences have shaped or changed teacher experiences.

Themes

A brief survey of these research studies presents a range of approaches to and perspectives on the contradictions innate to education and educational policy, but there seems to be several themes that uplift from these studies.

Fear and Anxiety

The work of Gereluk et al. (2015), McDonald (2002), Clandinin et al. (1996), Fenwick (2003) reveal that teachers in Alberta today live on a ground marked by shifting layers of sediment which positions them in a state of stress, anxiety, and fear.

Another aspect that has shifted for teachers in the past 30 years is the role of leaders in supervising staff. In the late 90s and early 00s, the schools I entered were marked by established teachers that were used to guiding their own practice and process (largely having directed their assessment without digital gradebooks, attendance programs, or school wide controls) with new teachers that were embracing the helpful (seemingly to individuals such as myself at the time)

assistance of both technology but also more systematic collaboration (which typically meant sameness). As such, I entered a career where the concept of the teacher leader or educational leader was already emerging. As principals and department heads began talking about school focus, best practices, and common assessment, anxiety about what leaders were looking at when evaluating professional practice felt on the rise. Early on, I had to be supervised to create evaluations that would contribute to possibly getting a more stable contract. Those days were filled with anxiety and stress as I wanted to please my supervisors and be the best teacher I could be. However, there was a sense that it would end once the contract was achieved. The idea of a standard of leadership becomes more complex in a contradiction filled environment of anxiety and stress.

What resonated for me when I read the Clandinin et al. (1996) article is that there is a lot of room for interpretation in both the purpose and nature of teacher evaluation. It is evident in this study that there is tension and anxiety in the participants around what is considered appropriate evaluation and how standards are established. Questions unfold about where the autonomy lies, in the form of evaluation, when one considers the importance of establishing what quality leadership might be.

Self-Protection

Perhaps as a result of—or in addition to—the fear and anxiety that exists in the experience of teachers in Alberta, the work of Gereluk et al. (2015) and Clandinin et al. (1996) reveal that teachers experience a need to self-protect from perceived threats. The ground on which these teachers stand is unsteady, shifting, and dangerous.

I am left to wonder about this unsteady ground and how it contributes to a “chill” like the one described by (Gereluk et al., 2015)—a chill that causes teachers to self-censor in anticipation of imagined resistance. In many ways, through my experience, the school community and local community creates a self-regulating system that is driven by a fear of upsetting people. It is important to better understand how these layers of experience contribute to the overall experience of teachers with contradictions.

It is, perhaps, not a surprise that leaders and teachers have sought out collaborative approaches to protect themselves. A selected text, specific assignment, units of study can be defended behind the curtain of departmental or group decision making. This idea of “collective autonomy”, resonates with me personally. The tension between empowering small groups or teams to make decisions assumes that there is a collective agreement around complex educational processes that are so often contested. My own experiences have indicated that these attempts at pseudo-autonomy are both embraced and despised. This tension raises interesting questions about the contradiction between individual autonomy and group autonomy and professional decision making. Empowerment of the group through commonality and collaboration implies that every participant is willing to work towards the same goal but also that the goal is sound. This raises interesting implications for how individual teachers may interpret increased autonomy through their own individual experiences.

Frustration

While my own experience doesn't speak to or reveal that I have been living in the “collision course” (p. 8) that Townsend (1998) described, I can admit to a strong level of frustration with the bureaucracy created to ensure layers of contested outcomes are achieved. As

the sediments of autonomy and control unearth themselves at different times, expectations have changed.

For example: TPGPs have always been a part of my professional practice. As in most of the above articles examined, TPGPs are an attempt to place the responsibility of professional autonomy in the hands of educators, followed by an accountability measure. What has happened over the years is a contradictory series of changes by school leaders as formats, reflections, and even goals have been at times more or less controlled. At times, I was pretty sure leaders weren't even reading my plans. Other times, I was told to make the plan reflect the school's goals. Both of these situations are extreme and are likely frowned upon by the Alberta Teachers' Association, but still happened and created layers of my experience.

In addition, I experienced similar frustration to that described in Judah and Richardson's (2006) study while I was working on the *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* project. When it was first presented to the staff I was working with at the time, it was delivered as teacher directed action research. The staff spent days coming up with research questions, projects, instructional method ideas, and data collection procedures. This individualized direction lasted for approximately a year. The next year, the project was directed by the administration (presumably directed from central office) to match the goals of the school and district. All of the projects had to focus on literacy and reading skills. The tension between individual professional decision making and group process had emerged again in my experience as the project became a top down process with a fairly controlled outcome.

Within a year or two, there was very little—if any—excitement for the project and it lost steam at the classroom level. Perhaps, the school kept on the process but, eventually, it was never spoken of again. Reading Judah and Richardson (2006) brought back those experiences in a

powerful way. The complex individuality of self-autonomous research seemed to threaten the legitimacy of external mandates of the district so the project was brought back under those mandates.

Further to the idea of external mandates directing teacher action research, I am drawn to my own experiences with large scale provincial exams. I found resonance in McDonald 's (2002) work on the challenges to teacher autonomy in a study of teachers' perception of the role of large-scale provincial examinations in Alberta. During my career, they have always been there. What has been different is how different schools have responded and created different experiences with the exams. In some instances, the exams have been mild annoyances or facts of life. Things that just happen. In other cases, they have been the *raison d'être* of the school or department. Results mattered in these instances.

My own experiences certainly resonate with McDonald's (2002) work. As my career has progressed, the idea that the school's success is predicated on standardized test results has shifted towards an increased sense that teachers are responsible for test results. This is evident in increased emphasis on data analysis, standardized assessments at the classroom level, and leadership meetings where results were discussed. It felt to me, at least to a certain extent, that in my early years how a student fared on an exam was evidence of student error, lack of studying, or perhaps a genetic flaw. Over the course of my career, it became more likely that poor results were thought of as a lack of teacher efficacy, buy-in with the team goals, or poor planning. This shift has contributed to the level of stress and fear present when reduced autonomy is felt by teachers. These experiences inform how I approach my own leadership because I'm aware of these frustrations with reduced autonomy.

Recapitulation

Ultimately, policy in Alberta reflects a geologic record of contradictions. At times, policy has demanded control; while at other times, policy has demanded autonomy. From time to time, multiple policies have existed at the same time, layered on top of each other in such a way that both autonomy and control are demanded to some extent at the same time. People experience these contradictions and layers as they interpret policy in their day-to-day lives in schools. This complex policy landscape both informs the experiences of people and exists within the historical consciousness of those in the education system.

I am drawn to wonder about how geologists stratigraphically examine sediment. Do they look at distinct layers, do they break down layers into smaller sediment, or do they do all of this? Gadamer (2013) would likely suggest breaking the whole process down into a hermeneutic spiral. That the interpreter should consider how the individual layers are part of the whole landscape. Additionally, Gadamer's work suggests we could also consider the particles that form that individual layer. The difficulties that present themselves are to consider the layers and particles as they are rather than to consider them as you want them to be. The layers exist and form the landscape that defines the horizon. This is a difficult challenge because we all have our own prejudices and fore-projections of what we prefer and dislike in terms of education. The challenge is to consider the soil as a geologist might, from a standpoint of wondering about what the soil is and how it was formed. The layer might look simple when considered from a distance or even very close, but when you move back and forth between the landscape and the layer or the layer and the particle you uncover the complexity and interconnectedness of the soil.

Gadamer (2013) would have us attempt to interpret the soil, the layers, and the landscape. On the surface it may look exactly like what we expect it to be, but underneath the surface it represents a complex range of geologic forces. To understand the soil is to interpret how the soil

exists, interacts, and transforms. This process is similar to how Gadamer would have us approach interpreting any text. To develop our own interpretations of how the text exists, interacts, and transforms through the process of interpretation. The layers of policy, teaching experience, and initiatives that form our landscape are part of how leaders exist, interact, and transform through their own interpretation of the layers and themselves.

Chapter IV. Gadamer's Concepts

The actual consequence of limitations of the expert is, it appears to me, that we recognize these limitations as our own. We need to acknowledge as our responsibility all that is entailed by our decisions.

(Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1992, p.192)

Rationale for Gadamer

In my career, I have watched concepts, trends, fads, philosophies, and methodologies succeed, fail, be implemented, and fade away. The experience of interpreting these changes and experiencing the ebb and flow of change has shaped the historical traditions of teachers, teacher leaders, students, and stakeholders throughout the system. Throughout this document, I have presented a series of narrative events that have motivated and informed my hermeneutic wonder about the interpretive nature of educational policy. Specifically, I have shown how educators—teachers and leaders—face particular interpretive moments through the various policies that they are governed by in the province of Alberta. Through my professional and academic career, I have become curious about the contradictions educators have to navigate in Alberta and educational policy. These contradictions and the experience of interpreting policy have brought me specifically to the work of Hans Georg Gadamer.

My interpretation of Gadamer (2013) presented here is largely based on *Truth and Method*. Gadamer (2013) resisted attempts to apply his philosophical work towards a singular structured methodology for research purposes. However, *Truth and Method* (2013) has had an impact on the human sciences, psychology, and education that far outstrips Gadamer's original stated intent. My approach to this framework acknowledges that this is my interpretation of Gadamer's work and not necessarily Gadamer's own. I also acknowledge that I do not speak

German so am unable to pass judgment on the quality of translation, which is itself a form of interpretation.

In trying to achieve a deeper understanding of Gadamer's work and of how teacher leaders experience the contradiction of personal professional autonomy and control, I have developed this interpretation of *Truth and Method* (2013) into a conceptual framework. The work of Gadamer speaks to me because it offers a rich description of the process of interpretation. His work reveals how and why multiple interpretations exist. As an approach to understanding interpretation, Gadamer's (2013) work does not dismiss or dehumanize the experiences of others, rather it embraces the varied experiences of individuals. As an approach to research, *Truth and Method* (2013) focuses on building solidarity rather than division, which is a particularly important goal for educational research because it does not shift the onus of responsibility onto any given experience or policy, but instead encourages thoughtful reflection, deeper understandings, and actions to build unity. These, I believe, are foundational goals of education. Solidarity is the solidarity of experience—while shared—is not sameness or difference. Gadamer (2013), purposefully, stays away from the specifics of identity that are used to bond or separate individuals in society. As such, for Gadamer (2013) solidarity is not a solidarity of identity but a solidarity of existing within the same situated context. For Gadamer, experiencing art, books, other texts, or a person brings together two horizons in the same place to share a context mediated by history. The mutuality of this allows us to find solidarity in the experience because the process is shared.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Gadamer was born in 1900 (Dostal, 2016; Gadamer, 1992) and died in 2002 (Dostal, 2016). He lived through World War I, World War II, the splitting of Germany into East and West, and witnessed the unfolding of the contemporary world before passing away in 2002 (Dostal, 2016). The nature of his experiences in places and times of extreme division and ideological conflict lead him to his focus on building understanding with the goal of solidarity. His academic experience included at least three different universities, including the Universities of Leipzig, Marburg, and Heidelberg. He became a noted translator of Heidegger (Dostal, 2016) in the later part of his career. His most important personal work is the text *Truth and Method* (2013) published originally in 1960. Gadamer (1992) described himself as “as a thinker who does not despise the scholarly life” (p. 7). In the 1970s, Gadamer retired from active university life but continued to lecture occasionally and respond to requests to guest lecture at various universities in Europe and North America (Gadamer, 1992; Dostal, 2016). Gadamer’s official retirement—due partly to public protests by students in West Germany— “was attempting for the third time in his lifetime to not submit the university and its teaching and research to ideology” (Dostal, 2016, p. 26). Gadamer (1992) wrote “it is a sufficient political act to be a thinker and to school others in thought, to practice free exercise of judgment and to awaken that exercise in others” (p. 153). It is in this spirit that Gadamer’s (2013) *Truth and Method* is presented as a conceptual framework for the interpretation of policy.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, as defined by Gadamer (2006) is a “practical art” (p. 29). While it is involved in numerous practical aspects of living and working—such as preaching, explaining texts, and interpreting languages and jargon (Gadamer, 2006)—it is, as Gadamer (2006) writes,

“the art of understanding, an art particularly required any time the meaning of something is not clear and unambiguous” (p. 29). A hermeneut is defined in hermeneutic work as interpreter (Gadamer, 2013). Gadamer (2006, 2013) makes it clear that all humans are hermeneuts because interpretation is an essential part of *Dasein* (being). Hermeneutics, as part of the human state of being, is an attempt to move closer to truth (Gadamer, 2006). For Gadamer (2013), the concept of truth is muddy because truth in the practical process of living and interpreting is also muddy. The truth of interpretation is the interplay between disclosure and concealment (Gadamer, 2006) that individuals encounter whenever they approach a new moment of interpretation. Hermeneutics is the process of uncovering a concealed truth and disclosing pre-understandings. A hermeneut’s pre-understanding is the operative condition that allows a reader to understand the assertions made by a text. The text for Gadamer (2006, 2013) is defined as *Sache* (matter), which is either a print text or a phenomenon being considered (Gadamer, 2006).

The moment of understanding is called the fusions of horizons (Gadamer 2006). Each hermeneut and *Sache* possess their own horizon. These horizons fuse when the horizon of the hermeneut and the horizon of the *Sache* arrive at a moment of understanding (Gadamer 2006, 2013). When a person communicates, they experience a *Sprachereignis* (language event), which is the process of emerging into language (Gadamer, 2006). As part of the fusion of horizons, this language event is considered part of the *Wirklich gelebten Redens zusammen* (real-lived collective speech), which is communication that exists in the lived world with the assumption that perceptions and judgments can’t be isolated (Gadamer, 2006). Part of the lived context of speaking is the presence of tradition (the word tradition is used interchangeably with “history” by Gadamer) which is variously defined as the pre-conditions, events, prejudices, knowledge, or preunderstandings that mediate in some way the process of understanding (Gadamer, 2013).

Gadamer and Educational Policy

If I were to consider policy from a Gadamerian perspective, then, policy becomes a *Sache* (matter) that uplifts out of a *Sprachereignis* (language event) but is experienced as part of *Wirklich gelebten Redens zusammen* (real-lived collective speech). The hermeneut's horizon fuses with the horizon of the policy to create an interpretation of the matter. Or in other words, in any educational event, there is always the text to be interpreted (a policy, the subject matter, the curriculum) and an interpreter (the person who engages with the text). Education is thus a shared experience. Education is a communicative event; it is predicated on language. In each communication situation, there can either be an effort to build solidarity between the speakers, or an effort to eliminate the other perspective. However, what Gadamer suggests is that to deny either the policy or the interpreter is to deny understanding and to dismiss possibilities. Gadamer thus offers a philosophical approach that is very much in line with my understanding of the purpose of education: to help individuals find and live their authentic selves even in the presence of systems of control. What Gadamer brings to us is an acknowledgement that the presence of contradictions isn't something that needs to be eliminated—only understood so that new horizons might be formed and new possibilities might unfold.

My interpretation of Gadamer's (2013) *Truth and Method* will illustrate the importance of understanding to educational policy. As already noted in this dissertation, there are numerous examples of studies outlining the contradictions inherent in various policy contexts, and some scholars go as far as to identify that contradiction is essential to the policy formation process (Kingdon, 2003; Stone, 2012). Understanding policy (particularly policy that uplifts contradictory layers of tradition) and how it exists in the experiences of educators is linked to understanding itself. My own experiences as an educator and teacher leader have drawn me to

this point in time with a sense of wonder about the possibilities for improved understanding. It is clear from my own experience that while acknowledging that these contradictions may be an inherent part of the educational process, more can be understood about the impact of these experiences on those who have the task of reconciling them.

A unified theoretical approach in this case means that the approach is unified with the intended methods and outcomes. A complete methodology section will follow the conceptual framework, but what follows is a description of how Gadamer's (2013) *Truth and Method* provides a description of the way that humans make sense of their experiences—a process of interpretation that is part of how humans make sense of the world. In essence, through communicating my own interpretation of Gadamer's work alongside new policy, I intend to come to a deeper understanding of how teachers experience teaching and interpret policy.

Truth. Lincoln and Guba (1985) write, “the concept of truth is an elusive one” (p. 14). In a sense, writing about “truth” could be a process unto itself. Though “truth” has been explored by many philosophers and researchers, this work will address the concept of truth as presented by Gadamer (2013), specifically. Within *Truth and Method* (2013) there are two key aspects to truth. The first aspect of truth is the use of language. The second aspect of truth is experience. Through the fusion of language and experience, a form of metaphysical truth is found. In hermeneutics, the use of language—in any of its communicative forms—and experience—in any of its forms—represents a truth of human experience. Not an absolute truth, but a shared truth—by all humans who communicate and experience—of communication and experience.

Gadamer (2013) addressed this type of truth when he writes: “through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way” (p. xxi). Looking at art is both communication and experience. A work of art resonates with us as we experience it because it

communicates with us. It stays with us and haunts our thoughts as we try and understand it. This is similar to my own attempts to rationalize my past experiences as a teacher. There are moments that haunt me years later; there are events that I can't rationalize away: amazing moments, funny moments, and damaging moments that never seem to fade. In many ways this dissertation is part of the rationalizing process of my professional life. The truth of my experience asserts itself no matter how hard I try to work through it, or in Gadamer's (2013) words: truth "asserts itself against all attempts to rationalize it away" (p. xxi).

It is perhaps important to remember Lincoln and Guba's (1985) thoughts on what it means to be "rational." These authors write "rationalizing, for instance, is nothing more than sense making in the face of chaos, subconscious behavior, tacit knowledge, and outright forgetfulness" (pp. 90-91). In education policy, this process of sense making can be very similar. Gadamer (2006, 2013) often focused on philosophy, art, and poetry, because the time and distance between creation and reading makes interpretation more complex for those subjects. There are more possible and discursive rationalized meanings present in philosophy, art, and poetry than in a stop sign. In hermeneutics, the need to interpret is often present when distance and time make it necessary: a stop sign is created with the express purpose of limiting the chance for mis-interpretation. Educational policy lives somewhere between, as time and distance still impact interpretation.

However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) warn: "rejecting rationalism (on the part of others) does not mean automatic acceptance of irrationalism" (p. 91). They write: "it may mean acceptance of multiple rationales, or conflicting value systems, or even separate realities" (p. 91). Educational policy, as illustrated through Alberta policy and the research of others, goes through

a series of interpretations and applications that create multiple spaces for teacher leaders to rationalize the text based on their own rationale, value system, or separate reality.

Opposing the rational with the irrational is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a “dangerous combination” (p. 91). The process of rationalizing your own experiences suggests a metaphysical truth that Gadamer (2013) explains “go[es] essentially beyond the range of methodological knowledge” (p. xxii). Lincoln and Guba (1985) write that these metaphysical truths “cannot be tested for truthfulness against some external norm such as correspondence with nature, logical deducibility, or professional standards of conduct” (p. 14). As a teacher leader, the truth of experience and the existence of multiple rationalities resonates with my own experiences dealing with policy. I have a tacit knowledge of and experience of a natural desire to be correct, professional, and competent; the existence of perceptions of correctness, professionalism, and competence, in the face of varying interpretations of these concepts creates a tendency to position different rationalities not as a *different* rationality but instead as *irrational*. This tendency is starkly different than what Gadamer (2013) proposes leads to understanding, for this tendency allows individuals to dismiss rationalities that they deem to be irrational.

This truth resonates no matter how hard we try to rationalize it away. In the face of empirical evidence, logic, and professional standards, certain truths uplift in our words and actions. This is why the notion of truth is problematic in educational policy. It isn’t immediately possible for a person to reject a truth that resonates with them. The communication of truth unfolds for an individual in the form of language, and in many ways what language is available to an individual shapes what truths can be possible (Gadamer, 2006, 2013). Language is, therefore, critical in hermeneutics and educational policy. Policy has to be shared with stakeholders whose experience of reading a text and communicating understanding is contingent

on shared language. The truth found in reading and communicating is both a process and a product. However, the cautionary element presented by the hermeneutic tradition is to avoid claiming objective truth as this is often beyond the possibility of the interpreter (Gadamer, 2013). The interpretation becomes true for the interpreter but may not be true for the text creator or other hermeneuts. The text may have determined a type of truth, but the process of communicating it develops into another.

In education, this doesn't mean that any type of rationality can be considered true in all cases or that irrationality doesn't exist. For something to resonate as truth, Gadamer (2013) explained that it "must not try to reflect itself out of the tradition whose binding force it has recognized" (p. xxiii). The complexity of educational policy or human sciences research is the existence of multiple overlapping traditions and experiences that may contribute to tensions when considering the rationality of any particular truth. The process of establishing truth cannot, in this way, be bracketed out of the tradition that it is part of; instead this truth is rational in light of the tradition that it is bracketed within. Different school districts, schools, and stakeholders may have shared and discursive traditions that lead to varying degrees of resonance when considering truth.

Gadamer (2013) wrote that "I believe that I have shown correctly that what is so understood is not the Thou but the truth of what the Thou says to us" (p. xxxii). In the context of educational policy, then, it is not possible to know the truth of the person who wrote the policy, but instead, it is possible to know the truth that emerges out of the interpretation of policy. In other words: Policy is written in a varied state negotiated process (Kingdon, 2003; Stone, 2012). The individuals who contribute to the process are never singular actors in policy; the policy is mediated and modified through the process of policy formation and implementation. In this

sense, the knowing of the “Thou” (Gadamer, 2013) is never complete or even possible. What is possible is to engage with the truth that the policy was likely drafted, wrote down, edited, modified due to stakeholder input, re-drafted, edited, modified and then interpreted at various sites from central governance to school to stakeholder. The expression of metaphysical truth that emerges through someone’s experience and is shared with the interpreter creates a shared space. The truth that uplifts is what the interpreter is willing to receive from the Thou (Gadamer, 2013).

In hermeneutics, this means we must be open to dialogue where the possibility of truth and rationality can emerge from shared communication. It means accepting that not all discursive rationalities are irrational but acknowledging that within certain dialogues some truths can’t be bracketed into the conversation. For illustrative purposes, I present the multiple rationalities of progressive education and back to basics education as both existing within the tradition of educational discourse. Neither discourse is inherently irrational within the tradition of education policy, but they are (to varying degrees) at odds. The capacity for humans to develop multiple relations and engage in multiple dialogues creates the ability of words and ideas to develop multiple truths that are no more or less real. However, there is a point at which the impact of tradition will make certain rationalities irrational or untrue regardless if some people hold them as true.

Understanding. Within this conceptual framework, the process of looking towards truth is to understand. The purpose of understanding is not to limit or define in absolute terms. Understanding is to build solidarity through experience with the interpreter—to allow for multiple truths to exist but to find a common truth of experience through interpretation. This common truth of experience is shared through language that needs to be understood. Different discourses have their own language. The language of hermeneutics involves words such as “hope,”

“beauty,” “resonance,” and “unity” (Gadamer, 2013). In this sense, hermeneutic work has its own language of discourse that encourages authentic communication. To my mind, authentic communication implies that the text (anything requiring interpretation) and the interpreter are genuinely open to uncover the matter at hand. The matter at hand is not pre-limited by or completely defined, before the moment of communication begins. Different discourses establish different truth claims based on the words that are used in each context. While Gadamer’s interest is in distinctions between the establishment of methods in history, art, and science, Gadamer makes it clear that these distinctions exist in all texts that require understanding. These texts are not just the written word but any form of authentic communication.

All disciplines have their own mode of communicating and language of discourse. As in the above paragraph, the different disciplines have their own languages that contribute to their truth claims. This means that a text “presents a specific problem of translation to the understanding” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 163). This implies that there is a need for some form of commonality or shared unity between the text and the reader. Different teachers, teacher leaders, and stakeholders emerge out of different disciplines that have evolved out of different traditions. For different individuals, they may bring different disciplines to the fore when attempting to understand educational policy. Within educational policy, the process of understanding is essential to the experience of the text. It is the interaction with that allows for the policy to be fully realized. The text needs to be presented; the situation or the context often presents the text to the interpreter (Gadamer, 2013).

As already noted, reading is the establishment of an “initial meaning” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 279) that only uplifts because the policy receiver is looking for a particular meaning (Gadamer, 2013). In educational policy, the interpreter (the reader of the policy) is presented the text by a

desire to reconcile an internal sense of wonder. The policy text can only be understood if it is read. In this sense, the policy brings meaning to teacher leader but teacher leader brings meaning to the text—that is the policy.

Text, Tradition, and Time. In hermeneutics, the event of sense making is part of the interpretive moment. Gadamer (2013) brings relevance to educational policy in his discussion of art because art transcends its moment of creation. The creation of art and the creation of policy are only initial steps in the development of meaning. The created text carries with it a meaning that goes past whatever initial purpose or intent was intended. However, Gadamer (2013) did note: “even though it is no mere object of historical consciousness, understanding art always includes historical mediation” (p. 165). In order to understand the policy, we need to understand the historical basis for its creation. Policy works similarly to art. The policy is created at a specific time in response to specific circumstances. After the policy is enacted, it is interpreted in different times and in different contexts. The way the policy came to be and how its interpretations shift and evolve over time. In this way, the understanding of art and policy is part of experiencing art in the present, mediated by contemporary context and your own historical consciousness and filtered through the tradition that brought it to the fore.

One example that Gadamer (2013) uses is biblical hermeneutics. The hermeneutic shift brought the emphasis of interpretation out of the dogma of the bible and onto the interpreter. There is still a powerful tradition that gives authority to religious texts, but the interpretation may attempt to honour the original intent, which is ultimately unverifiable, but remains rooted on the here and now. The hermeneutic shift moved the whole part dialectic out of the text and brought it to the whole part dialectic of time and place. As Latin ceased to be the language of the bible (Gadamer, 2013), different languages and different places made it obvious that various

interpretations existed. Furthermore, as society changed—as in the emergence of protestant reformation—the authority of a single interpretation began to lose sway (Gadamer, 2013). As a result, a single interpretation made at a place and time, begins to become a small part of a world of interpretations. In a similar way, the policy document can be seen not as an all-powerful singular force. The policy document is mediated through context, time, and practical application.

Context and Understanding. The presentation of various experiences and policy texts in the preceding chapters of this dissertation are meant to present and explore the sediments that have made up my own experience. This is important because the individual in educational policy is part of the whole, but each policy is part of the larger policy landscape. In a particular policy, the movement between the word and the text is also part of the “whole part” relation (Gadamer, 2013). In hermeneutics, all of these barriers between the education and the system, the individual policy and the policy landscape, and the word and the text are arbitrary (Gadamer, 2013). The word has initial meaning that changes once the whole text is read. One policy may have its meaning transformed in light of another policy in the landscape. But the same is relevant of the text and the policy landscape. New meanings are uplifted when the “whole” is broken down into its parts, and each movement from the part to the whole and back again can unearth new sediments and new meanings.

Gadamer (2013) used the concept of history to make this point. History can be understood as a series of distinct moments or objects, but history is itself a contextual meaning. This may draw the interpreter in the context of Gadamer to ask the question—what is history? In educational policy and probably in history the answer may well be everything. However, the individual has to anchor the interpretation with a particular context because the answer of everything is too large of a concept to attempt to understand. This raises questions for

educational policy, for at what point does the larger context become unwieldy for understanding? Teacher leaders may work at a single school with a particular context for an extended period of time. The particulars of that school context may be largely embedded in the individual history of the single school. Understanding may not spiral outwardly if it appears that all solutions are only internal. The alternate may also be true. A teacher leader in a school may not be ready for external knowledge because the singular context of that school hasn't made the person ready to fuse horizons with new meanings.

Purpose of Understanding. In a sense, the purpose of understanding in hermeneutics is to try and avoid the opposite: dismissal. Gadamer (1992, 2013) doesn't propose the word dismissal, but rather proposes that the task of human understanding is "to participate with the other and to be a part of the other" (Gadamer, 1992, p. 235). In essence, Gadamer (1992) suggests humans strive to hold their prejudices in check so that the "other is not made invisible or does not remain invisible" (p. 233). As such, the opposite of understanding isn't misunderstanding because even a misunderstanding implies an attempt to understand. In educational contexts, particularly in diverse localities, the need to understand is important because the consequences of dismissal can be devastating. In education, the primary units of work are human beings. If it is students, teachers, or parents the essential quality of education is the human element. Because of this, the need to avoid dismissal is of great urgency because the element being dismissed is likely a human. This road to understanding, for Gadamer (2013), is relevant for human sciences research, experiencing texts, and also—in the broadest sense—life.

Earlier in this dissertation, I introduced an etymological contradiction from the roots of the word education. In that discussion, I drew out a dual tendency in education to draw individuals out and to shape or mold them—educare/educere. This contradiction plays out in

educational policy research as well. While not explicitly addressing this contradiction, Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2013) is addressing his concerns that some human science research has a tendency to extend truth claims beyond what should be possible and to attempt to control the world through research rather than draw it out.

In this way, the tendency to want to control or direct meaning exists because clarity doesn't necessarily exist. If humans functioned and worked together in perfect harmony of meaning then understanding would always already exist. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. Hermeneutics guides the interpreter towards situations where meanings are particularly unfixed (Gadamer, 2013). The effort of understanding is needed when understanding is not immediate or that the lack of understanding needs to be addressed (Gadamer, 2013). There is no purpose to attempt understanding if one already has complete knowledge of that which is being studied or one has already determined internally that meaning is fixed. A framework for understanding educational policy, how participants experience and interpret, has by its very nature, a need for a methodology that allows for multiple unfixed meanings.

Gadamer (2013) wrote that "to come to understanding means to come to understanding with each other" (p. 186). To draw out meaning in an educational context, in a hermeneutic sense, is work towards understanding with the participant. It isn't a process of telling people who they are, or making someone become something for an extrinsic purpose. Gadamer (2013) doesn't mean to suggest that there isn't space for more directive experimental approaches to the human sciences. For Gadamer (2013), this is usually discussed as the issue of subjective and objective knowing. In hermeneutics, objectivity means claiming to know something completely or through a limited set of criteria. Describing what people are like turns them into objects that

define the broader group and closes the interpreter off from what possible meanings exist within each individual human.

Between the text and the interpreter or the interpreter and the subject there is some form of doubt, a temporary “barrier to reason” (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 196-197). Through language, generally “people usually understand each other immediately, or they make themselves understood with a view towards reaching agreement” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 187). This “agreement” is part of coming to an understanding in relation to something. As a result of this position, “understanding each other is always understanding each other with respect to something” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 187). This process directs the interpreter to understand that by the subject matter (Gadamer’s reference to “something” in the previous quotation), the interpreter is understanding in a relational way. To my mind, Gadamer (2013) was showing that there is a unity in the desire to understand a specific subject matter and share that subject matter with another. The subject matter is not an object to know but instead part of the process of understanding (Gadamer, 2013). In educational policy, there is a range of policy texts. While some of the policy texts may be obvious and explicit in their meanings, the contradictions present in some texts lead to a need to understand both the text and the interpreters. Thus, the purpose of my doctoral work is to help develop understanding of both the policy text itself and the interpreter (the teacher leader).

Hermeneutic Spiral. The hermeneutic spiral is a resonating concept that unfolds out of hermeneutics that is important to understanding how Gadamer (2013) is relevant to educational policy. From my first year of teaching to my current, I have heard discussions about how “the pendulum swings back and forth.” When teachers and leaders speak about the “swinging pendulum” it is often in the context of expressing frustration with the lack of new ideas in

education or past experiences with temporary change. A pendulum is a closed system, in a sense, because it can only move back and forth between two options. In many ways, this could seem similar to Gadamer's (2013) whole-part relation. Moving from the part to the whole and back again certainly seems to mirror the motion of a pendulum. However, Gadamer (2013) does not intend for this movement to exist within a closed system lacking expansion. Certainly, Gadamer (2013) intends for the movement back and forth to be an essential aspect of coming to understand the text, but the return to the part is never a return to the same part. As our understanding of the whole is changed by our examination of the parts, this casts the interpreter back into the parts with a new perspective. Gadamer (2013) continued this thought by explaining that "this circle is constantly expanding, since the concept of the whole is relative, and being integrated in even larger contexts always affects the understanding of the individual part" (p. 196). This takes the circle and makes it a spiral—a spiral that expands with each new movement from part to whole and vice versa. As a person moves outward, newer contexts and more information is gleaned through the process of interpretation.

In educational policy, this is why the return swing of the pendulum metaphor is never quite back to the same place, even though some might feel that way. The lived experiences of the participants, changed contexts, and new knowledge means that the open system of the spiral has expanded in directions that are no longer consistent with the previous position of the pendulum. Because of the impact of tradition and context, for some participants, the interpretation may be very similar but others may be widely divergent. Gadamer (2013) acknowledges a special place for individuality in interpretation. Educational policy, through its contradictory formation process, gets applied to group contexts but is inevitably interpreted by individuals. While—in my

experiences in educational contexts—there is much effort put into shaping messaging and crafting directions—the policy text is still applied by individuals within unique contexts.

In educational policy, the hermeneutic spiral helps describe how the educational pendulum doesn't swing back and forth between fixed points. The spiral expands as individual moments of experience bring new knowledge to the parts and the whole. The importance of the individual is paramount and not to be avoided because educational systems are made up of individual human experiences. In this way, the uniqueness of human individuality should not be seen as problematic, because there is a commonality in human experience through the process of understanding and shared context.

Objectivity. Ultimately, mass public education is a system. People will often say they work in the “public system” or the “school system.” This language is important, for the suggestion of a system implies a series of logical and ordered procedures and policies. A “system” seems to suggest individuality doesn't have much bearing on the management of the system or on the application of the procedures, instead the perception is created that objective and mechanical application of the procedures is important in all contexts. For example: a school may implement dress codes, technology policies, and tardiness rules and expect that all students, at all times, must follow them. And that teachers, at all times, will apply these same rules consistently and objectively. However, these rules inevitably run into the complications of the unique case. Still, understanding there is a desire for clear mechanisms, logic, and technical precision is important when considering how the system is understood by individuals.

However, hermeneutics reminds us that interpretation is present even when we are presuming or attempting to present objectivity. The interpreter always stands on their own sedimentary layers and embodies a geologic tradition that orients their position in relationship to

the matter (the *Sache*). For example, ideas of acceptable dress, technology use, and tardiness will inevitably be viewed by individuals from their own positionality and will, at times, abrade as their own sedimentary experiences come up against them. Individuals will therefore apply the policy through the unique lens of their own positionality. Thus, policies are never objective, nor can the system be objective; they are both products of human process and lived out in the experiences of humans.

Research is no different, according to Gadamer (2013). Interpretive research into policy should, therefore, avoid the suggestion that it must be objective, because objective suggests a fixed and complete knowing of the *Sache*. Furthermore, an objective stance turns the *Sache* into an object, which dehumanizes and dismisses the human context and human nature of all things—in this instance educational policy.

Inevitably in academic research, however, questions of relativism and bias will occur when one states a lack of objectivity in his research. Gadamer (2013) acknowledges there is always pre-judgment as the individual approaches the policy. The caution in hermeneutics isn't to dismiss this prejudgment or bias, because the fore-meaning is what brings the interpreter to the research. Because hermeneutics isn't attempting to fix meaning or pin it down or know it objectively, objectivity is not goal. Instead, the goal is understanding the ever-changing ways people come to know.

This is why it is important for interpreters to be clear and upfront about the sediments upon which they stand, because these are the positions from which they see the world. Instead of objectivity, hermeneutics demands we reflect upon and become aware of our own layered experiences we bring to our interpretations so we are not imposing our “arbitrary fancies” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 279) upon them; and yet, it does not demand we ignore ourselves or

presuppose we do not have our own experiences that uplift certain views of policy. By being clear and authentic about the position from which I see policy, I am acknowledging my humanity and my own fore-projections. Hermeneutics makes us stop, and consider, and think, and rethink as we research, so people can move towards understanding and solidarity.

If a person seeks out a policy document to establish the legitimacy of their fore-projection and they find the fore-projection, then most likely the process of interpretation is over or was completed without due diligence. This framework then requires a clear description of the process of self-reflection and clarity of fore-projection (as feasible). Gadamer (2013) wrote: “working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed “by the things” themselves, is the constant task of understanding” (p. 280). Feasibility becomes an important aspect of this process since the spiraling nature constantly brings around new questions and new fore-projections.

Tradition and Authority. Gadamer (2013) wrote: “the hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things and is always in part so defined” (p. 281). There is always a tendency to uncover in hermeneutic work. Uncovering new interpretations is, in many ways, a questioning of authority. As tradition moves along in time, many assumptions become taken for granted and subsequently open themselves up for re-interpretations. The Greek god Hermes was always playing tricks on the Gods, playfully challenging their authority. This is rooted in the work of hermeneutics, always acknowledging and questioning the authority of texts. This is part of a complex relationship with tradition and individuality essential to hermeneutic work. The hermeneutic shift (Gadamer 2013) meant that traditional interpretation of texts—particularly biblical ones—no longer had absolute authority for meaning. This did not mean all authority is lost, rather interpretations shift as contexts shift. However, there is still a tradition of

interpretation the interpreter experiences in their lives. This tradition orients the interpreter towards certain possibilities through pre-judgment.

Educational policy documents are written with a specific legal authority. The government, in the Alberta context, has a democratic mandate to develop and administer publicly funded education (*Education Act*, GOA, 2020b). When people approach a specific policy document, they are approaching a document with a tradition and authority. While a person may go to a policy document looking for confirmation of a particular bias to provide themselves with a particular legal legitimacy for actions, I may also go to the policy document to find guidance and comfort when faced with indecision or confusion. However, the idea that policy exists is already part of a “fore-conception of completeness” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 305). Yet, both interpretations may challenge the intended message of the “Gods.”

The specific nature of educational policy as authoritative text directs us to potential interpretations because of the “specific content” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 305). The policy document may provide a sense of completeness that is only experienced by the reader if the experience of completeness is found. If somebody is honestly attempting to interpret the document, then that person “will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text” (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 281-280).

Gadamer (2013), using a contemporary example, explains “we believe the news reported by a correspondent because he was present or is better informed, so too are we fundamentally open to the possibility that the writer of a transmitted text is better informed than we are” (p. 305). The audience for this kind of message is oriented to look for “answers” within the text. However, in the context of educational policy and administration, the authority of texts is

mandated by law. Even within this authority though, Gadamer (2013) explained, “it is only when the attempt to accept what is said as true fails that we try to ‘understand’ the text, psychologically or historically, as another’s opinion” (p. 305). The audience for policy looks to it from familiarity and finds questions or contradictions, which leads to a sense of confusion. This allows for “a polarity with familiarity and strangeness” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 306). Gadamer (2013) suggested “it is in the play between the traditional text’s strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition” (p. 306). What becomes difficult is how we then apply policy—something rooted in tradition and authority—into multiple contexts by multiple people each with their own fore-projection.

Application. Within legal and theological hermeneutics “there is an essential tension between the fixed text—the law or the gospel—on the one hand, on the other, the sense arrived at by applying it at the concrete moment of interpretation, either in judgement or in preaching” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 319). This indicates that the text “if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way” (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 319-320). To be sure, “we cannot avoid the conclusion that the suggested distinction between cognitive, normative, and reproductive interpretation has no fundamental validity, but all three constitute one unitary phenomenon” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 321). As a continuation of this line of discourse, there isn’t a division between the objective world and the subjective interpreter (Gadamer, 2013). The policy text gains its meaning because the individual fuses their horizon with it. The text emerges from the interpretation of the interpreter. Because the text can be interpreted differently in different concrete situations, the experience is, by definition, contradictory and, at times, filled with conflict. A person experiences doubt (hermeneutic wonder) and begins their own process of

interpretation, which then leads to a new application. In a different way, another application of hermeneutics is to bridge this gap—the gap between people. Gadamer (2013), in regards to historical hermeneutics, wrote: it “serves applicable meaning, in that it explicitly and consciously bridges the temporal distance that separates the interpreter from the text and overcomes the alienation of meaning the text has undergone” (p. 341). This distance is similar to the same distance between two different interpreters of policy.

Gadamer (2013) used an example of an order to make one further point about the application of interpretation. Imagine someone is receiving an order; Gadamer (2013) argues the order can only exist “where there is someone to obey it” (p. 342). Refusal of the order, playfully in the spirit of Hermes or not, implies the person understands the order (Gadamer, 2013). If you didn’t understand it, you didn’t consciously refuse to obey; your action is then a mistake. The example of orders can get ridiculous if you assume a person doesn’t engage in interpretation. Ordering a person to march becomes tragic if they walk themselves to death. There is always an application of interpretation to actions. While the amount of interpretation can vary, it is rare that someone can act completely without interpretation. While the locus of power may lie with the policy, the locus of understanding is in the person that applies the policy.

Thus, the process of application is important to understanding how policy can be understood and applied. Gadamer (2013) wrote “the comic situation in which orders are carried out literally but not according to their meaning is well known” (p. 343). Literal applications of policies have been shown clearly, but a key aspect of this understanding is that “experience is experience of human finitude” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 365). It is far too easy to increase the divides between people when research presents infinite possibilities of future success. To present solutions to problems, solutions created in a different context, is to continually place teachers in

untenable situations. In a sense, there is a burden upon the interpreter to not ignore the tacitly understood limitations of research and resources that exist in schools. The end result may be two-fold. Firstly, the solutions are implemented in a literal way that never truly meshes or takes hold because the solution fails to take into consideration the context of the school. Secondly, the solution is applied considering the finite ability of the staff, leaving the solution as a product of interpretation. Either way a unity of experience is shared by those that experienced the solution. This unity is further brought about by understanding that the “experienced man knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 365).

Conversation. Gadamer (2013) makes it clear this all takes place in the “life-world” as opposed to the “existent world” (p. 248). The “life world” is the “whole in which we live as historical creatures” (p. 248). This world is a “communal world that involves being with other people” (p. 248). The existent world is not denied existence because of the existence of the “life-world.” The existent world is always there. However, the “life-world” is the world we inhabit with other people. It is the world of language and tradition and authority.

A research framework based on the ideas presented by Gadamer (2013) in *Truth and Method* (2013) needs to acknowledge this and address the process of communication. In regards to conversation, Gadamer (2013) explains: “the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner” (p. 401). Gadamer (2013) continued this thought and describes how “we fall into conversation, or that we become involved in it” (p. 401). This is not an artificial or one-sided process. The genuine nature of a dialogue is one where both partners are open to understanding the other’s perspective and free to share their own.

Ultimately, according to Gadamer (2013), “coming to an understanding in conversation has a genuine application to hermeneutics, which is concerned with understanding texts” (p.

403). Hermeneutics allows for a conversation with a text, which becomes the researcher's interpretation of the text.

Application of Gadamer's Work to the Alberta Context

Polytruths

This conceptual framework began with an explication of truth as presented by Gadamer (2013). Hermeneutics suggests working towards understanding with a person is a fusion. It is not about placing my truth over their truth. Understanding how individuals experience policy is about accepting multiple truths. It is—in my experience—problematic to make people accept a singular policy interpretation. An attempt to understand how policy exists in the life world of teachers would have to start from the perspective of accepting multiple truths.

Change

The impact of tradition is also particularly salient to a conceptual framework for educational research. Educational policy exists as a historical development process. Policies are layered on top of policies, curricula are written at different times (see Kingdon, 2003 in regards to policy windows), and schools exist in different communities. Teachers enter the profession at different times, parents arrive from varied contexts, and students learn in a variety of ways. The interpretation of educational policy exists in a sphere of contested dogma (see Fenwick, 2003; Judah & Richardson, 2006; Yanow, 2000). Rather than approach the current educational policy framework as a success/failure approach, this framework approaches policy as existing in the experiences of the teacher leaders who read, interpret, apply, and live out the policy.

Fluidity

In the context of educational research, Gadamer (2013) directs us to an important aspect for this framework. The word on the page has to be implemented in some way in the practice of an administration or teaching of a teacher. The policy exists to be administered in some way by a professional who has interpreted the word on the page. The word on the page also exists in relation to larger policy document, but also in relation to multiple policy documents. The person who interprets the policy document has to continually move between multiple whole part relations in order to apply personal interpretations into practice.

The implementation of a personal interpretation into practice generates resonance or dissonance in the people impacted by the implementation. What draws the teacher leader back to the document, back to the part, to re-examine the original interpretation? What experiences have changed or modified the original interpretation in light of new experience? With this in mind, I will begin my interpretive work by exploring specific words used in the *Leadership Quality Standard*, examining the specific language and initial meanings, looking for possible contradictions or tensions.

Instrumental and Operational

While the *Leadership Quality Standard* will be examined in depth, as an illustrative example, consider the following word from the *LQS*: “quality” (p. 1). In education, where leaders are bound to create a safe environment, consider many different policy documents when managing the school, support the delivery of curricula, and consider multiple variables, how is one to define “quality?” While there are suggestions in this document that leaders should change and be innovative in their practices, schools continue to impose traditional expectations onto students such as “appropriate” forms of dress and “no running in the hallways”. Is there a simple answer to these contradictions? Probably not—which leads to multiple interpretations and

multiple possibilities for contradictions. In many ways, this struggle to address individuality is the key struggle for policy and interpretive researchers alike. In a democracy, leaders have to make policies to address the wishes (or perceived wishes) of the people (Kingdon, 2003; Stone, 2012), but the population is made up of individuals, each with their own interpretations and own wishes. Similarly, the contradictions inherent in policy structure mean there is ample room for different individuals to find or miss the “immediate, sympathetic, and congenial understanding” about which Gadamer (2013) speaks.

Solidarity

Individuality can confound policy makers and researchers alike. Differences don't take away from the possibility of creating unity. Unity in education, as I understand it, is a product of conscious shared experience. It draws people together, embraces their differences, and makes them visible. Dis-unity in education, as I understand it, creates separations, rejects difference, and renders individuals invisible. Understanding brings the researcher closer to the participant while dismissal of individuality is more likely to create strife. These understandings exist within an environment where policies give autonomy and control in different measures. The *Leadership Quality Standard* gives leaders the obligation to make choices and interpret the document, while at the same time, limits and directs those choices with a list of contextual variables.

Governmental legislation empowers students, parents, and educators while limiting their options and choices. Policy documents that have their foundation in the past, can take years to become enacted. They can also then continue to exist, sometimes unaltered for many years, while new policies are formed and implemented. Outside of an individual policy there is a context of more policy and tradition. When we consider these issues, the individuals build solidarity with others.

Tension

As Gadamer (2013) wrote, “the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between” (p. 306). The distance between people, between text and action, and ideal and real is the space where interpreters find their place. Policies uplift out of the complex and contradictory experiences of stakeholders. The need to control and direct through policy suggests a landscape where tension has made the policy seemingly necessary. While individuals may disagree with necessity, this disagreement is itself an example of why tension is natural in policy. Questions or doubts about quality lead to the unfolding of policies to address those questions and doubts. Contradictions and complexity further contribute layers of sediment on an uneven landscape of personal and public interest. This tension is natural to policy and should help inform attempts to understand it.

Recapitulation

Hans-Georg Gadamer (Dostal, 2010) provided an important foundation for interpretive research. He focused his research on the human experience of interpretation. The framework presented articulates the philosophical foundation for understanding how interpretation works and why it is essential to policy. This conceptual framework will be the interpretive lens that informed and shaped the direction of this research and writing.

Chapter V. Method and Truths

...is what we have to offer, what we control, scientific-technological perfection, really always a gift?

(Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1992, p. 200)

Research Layer

An essential element of *Truth and Method* (2013) is developing a respect for research participants, their traditions, and their lived realities. In order to understand Gadamer's position on method, one must understand that he doesn't propose a method or subscribe to one in the sense that contemporary researchers tend to. In his own words, "fundamentally, I am not proposing a method" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 534). The assumption, by Gadamer, is that a sound intellectual process is one that "embraces many meanings and inner relationships" (2013, p. 558). Perhaps the most difficult Gadamerian assumption for the reader to accept is that "we must concede that there is confusion" (p. 558). However, many researchers have taken up the challenge presented by this confusion, to engage in hermeneutic research and particularly one of the significant elements of hermeneutics as explicated by Gadamer: the understanding of the importance of tradition to interpretation. As such, it is important to explicate the research tradition that emerges and is emerging from Gadamer.

An important aspect to clarify is that of the horizon that emerges from Gadamer's work and why it is important to this work. In *Truth and Method* (2013), Gadamer (p.246) presents the idea of an experience that exists in a moment with a before and after that fuses with a "continuum of experiences" (p.246). This is not used to limit the idea of the horizon to time, but rather illustrates that multiple horizons exist for any single person at any given time, and particularly place. If the reader imagines that the horizon is a function of place, they are correct.

However, it is also correct that the horizon is a function of time. The place and time of our experiences is what defines our individuality and creates the opportunity for “many meanings and inner relationships” (*Truth and Method*, p. 246) to exist simultaneously. The idea of time and place should guide the reader of this work to understand that all of the choices made in this document are designed to accept this reality.

Hermeneutic Tradition

As a leader, a common reaction I would get from staff members as they heard about a new educational initiative was “where is this coming from?” In this section, I am hoping to answer the imagined question of my reader: Where does this come from? Secondly, I hope to reveal the importance of the “historically effected consciousness” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 307) to interpretive research.

Initially, formal hermeneutics was a response to biblical texts and later legal texts (Gadamer, 2013). These approaches to interpretation initially attempted to establish a certainty of interpretation which was seen as desirable to social scientists and philosophers attempting to develop methods appropriate for the human sciences. These varied hermeneutic approaches or traditions have led to certain research methods or orientations. For the purposes of this dissertation, I trace the hermeneutic tradition that unfolds out of Gadamer’s (2013) *Truth and Method*.

Hermeneutics is both a methodology and a philosophical exercise (Smith, 1991). According to Smith (1991), Gadamer was responding to the emphasis emerging from the 18th century on method. The emergence of these methods, primarily the scientific method, brought to the fore a sense that absolute truth could be accomplished. The goal of these methods was to

establish a form of certainty—and mathematical certainty was privileged in this process (Shapin, 1996). At this time, there was an optimism embedded into this methodological transformation that clear objective truth could be established. Part of this optimism was a sense of control over the physical world but also the human world (Shapin, 1996; Smith, 1991). At the very least, there was a motivation to have power over the natural world (Shapin, 1996). However, Shapin (1996) described how “explanations of the human body were, for Descartes, not the same thing as explanations of human beings” (p. 159). There was a gap between what was considered the human sciences and the natural sciences, but the motivation to achieve certainty and control motivated the emphasis on methodology. Hermeneutics emerged as a reaction to these claims of methodological certainty and control, particularly when applied to the human sciences (Gadamer, 2013; Smith, 1991).

Hermeneutics presents a challenge to the belief that truth is exclusively found in the methods of the natural sciences (Smith, 1991). This challenge isn’t designed to eliminate the value of the natural sciences but questions the ability of reducing life to mathematical formulas. Hermeneutics argues against the belief that truth and “life in general could be systematically brought under the control of correct logical procedure” (Smith, 1991, p. 189).

Husserl, writing at the latter half of the 19th century, brought focus to interpretation in the human sciences (Gadamer, 2013; Smith, 1991). Husserl’s theory of intentionality showed our thinking and interpreting is rooted to the world that surrounds us (Smith, 1991). This is important because the methodological goal emerging out of the scientific revolution was to establish objectivity (Gadamer, 2013; Shapin, 1996; Smith, 1991). Hermeneutics, through the work of Husserl, questions the ability to think objectively, or to ever be separated from the world, that any information can exist without interpretation or subjective thinking (Smith, 1991).

Heidegger presented interpretation as the essence of being human (Smith, 1991). Gadamer (2013) and Smith (1991), as hermeneutic scholars, argue method couldn't achieve universal transferability in the human sciences because the humans that apply the method to the human sciences have the same characteristics as the matter under study. The method is a mirror of the human that applies it to the phenomenon being studied. The draw to hermeneutics is to provide an alternative to the scientific research privileged in society (Smith, 1991).

There are spiritual connections between the scientific revolution and contemporary desires for stable and clean views of both the world and data collection (Smith, 1991). This connection isn't illogical as individuals to apply "paradigmatic reasoning" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 10) to conceive of their experience as "ordered and consistent" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 10). This rationality by appealing to a human reasoning process suggests that order doesn't actually exist. Rather, the world becomes ordered and consistent through the human process of interpretation. This process decontextualizes our knowledge of the world and makes it possible for individuals to manage new and diverse experiences as if they are not (Polkinghorne, 1995). Hermeneutics acknowledges that the objectivity of methods is part of a human interpretive process to create order rather than a process to capture the order of the world. Unique human experiences can't be replicated without losing some aspect of the original (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Hermeneutics embraces the unique complexity of human experiences. Problems of data collection, laboratories, and numbers shouldn't reduce the human out of the human experience (Boostrom, 1994; Smith 1991). Qualitative and interpretive researchers suggest research doesn't start from knowing before observing (Boostrom, 1994). Hermeneutics is about uncovering the unknown; there is no hermeneutic wonder if the answers are known before the process of interpretation. In the interpretive tradition, the interpreter approaches the situation with an

openness to complexity and human uniqueness. This complexity and human uniqueness is the very reason interpretation is necessary.

Hermeneutic research is about understanding the interplay between disclosure and concealment (Gadamer, 2006). The process of disclosure and concealment brings forth multiple possible paths to truth. This interplay is not found in research that actively attempts to uncover. This is why philosophical hermeneutics doesn't legitimize arbitrary or exclusively private subjectivity; in hermeneutics, the text still has to fuse with the interpreter (Gadamer, 2006). The interpreter has to draw out the interplay of disclosure and concealment in a way coherent with the matter, the time, and the text. The "matter" and the "time" provide, not a limitation of possibilities, but a more accurate understanding of what is actually being claimed by the interpretation of the hermeneut. The interpretation does or should not extend past the matter or the time (Gadamer, 2006, 2013).

By the late twentieth century, hermeneutics "moved beyond its concern with the written text and spoken word to a more universal conception" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 6). Gallagher (1992) identified that this, more modern hermeneutics, "deals with nontextual phenomena such as social process, human existence, and Being itself" (p. 6). As such, this development in hermeneutics brings to the fore a certain relevance towards activities that are complex human experiences inter-relating with texts. Education in Alberta and North America, generally, is a combination of many different elements: there are legal texts and policy documents that define different aspects of the educational process; universities have education classes on social theory, psychology, the law, particular teaching traditions, curriculum, and philosophy. This suggests education is particularly suited to hermeneutic process because it is layered and complex.

Interpretive researchers in Alberta—David Smith, David Jardine, Julia Ellis—have embraced, to various degrees, the work of all of these scholars as contributors to the world of interpretive research. These researchers have embraced the concept of bricolage as freeing them up to draw from the relevant tradition and apply them as needed to their research. These scholars establish a precedent for using hermeneutics to help understand the complexities of education as it exists in Alberta.

As I have interpreted the work of Gadamer (2013), two main debates unfolded around key issues in his work. The openness of hermeneutics and the existence of multiple truths motivate me to address these debates briefly. Through my work in schools, debate was often silenced and it would be antithetical to my basic research motivation to present Gadamer (2013) without discussing some opposing viewpoints. The first controversy, sometimes called the Gadamer-Betti debate, centers on textual authority (Gallagher, 1992). Betti argued for a textual objectivity found in the author's intent and through an objective methodology would arrive at an objective interpretation (Gallagher, 1992). The second controversy presented by Gallagher (1992) is often referred to as the Gadamer-Habermas debate. Of particular interest to educational research is the tension between "universality of human linguisticity" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 16) and "monological language systems of science" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 17). According to Gallagher (1992), Habermas would argue scientific language and natural language need some form of mediation in order to make clear. Gadamer would argue there is no "extralinguistic experience" (Gallagher, 1992).

There is a tendency to separation between the reader and the text creator in the two debates. However, Gadamer (2013) encourages us to see all interpretations as valid since the text creator can be very distant from the reader and the reader's context. If the text creator had an

interpretation in mind, the text creator still can't control the audience. In the second debate, the mediation of language might help a particular individual understand the intent of scientific language to a certain extent, but it doesn't stop the interpreter from engaging with the text. The text and the language used exists as real for the interpreter.

Associating Gadamer (2013) with moderate hermeneutics, Gallagher (1992) writes that individuals who take moderate approaches “will insist that structures of power and authority are inevitably embedded in educational experience” (p. 19). Gallagher (1992) is suggesting, in the moderate approach, teachers are both agents of power and subjected to power. The participants within the system are part of the system not against or for the system. Interpretive research in this tradition is effective for educational contexts because it is open to the multiple expressions of participants varied agency within the system rather than situating them in radical positions. However, research into policy does not necessarily find itself having to lay claim to Habermas or Gadamer. Rather, this tradition of debate in hermeneutics identifies how hermeneutics is relevant to examine policy as both an expression of power but could also be a force for emancipation. The characteristic that makes Gadamer's moderate hermeneutics more important to this dissertation is the acknowledgement the researcher can't be removed from humanity or subjectivity. Rather than Habermas's interpretive tradition, which would suggest an alternative to the experiences, the hermeneutic tradition of Gadamer brings the researcher to an attempt to understand the subjective existences of the participants. Understanding the sense-making activities of participants makes qualitative research the most common form of interpretive research.

Qualitative Research

Merriam (1998) writes “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the

experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). Merriam’s words help to form a sedimentary layer of purpose that guide my research questions with a foundational intent to better understand how teacher leaders experience and interpret policies. Merriam’s description of qualitative research interests resonates with my research questions and purpose. Of the various types of qualitative research, the most general approach is best for this framework because it allows for the ontological openness that Gadamer (2013) suggests. As such, this qualitative study will “seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11) by keeping as close to the spirit of the conceptual framework as possible. This would maintain coherence with the goal of hermeneutics and qualitative research to “discover and understand.”

This openness is further supported by the work of Denzin and Lincoln (1994), who explain: “the multiple methodologies of qualitative research may be viewed as bricolage, and the researcher as bricoleur” (p. 2). The bricoleur is a researcher who “understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting” (p. 3). The bricolage becomes “a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents the researcher’s images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis” (p. 3). This is consistent with the ontological openness of Gadamer’s (2013) *Truth and Method*.

The openness of the conceptual framework to the bricolage of qualitative research doesn’t mean there are no structures or coherence to the various forms of data collection employed. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) further the discussion and definition of qualitative research by giving five key characteristics of qualitative research. While these authors intend for these characteristics to give shape to our understanding of qualitative research the characteristics are

not meant to be exclusive but rather representational of elements we may see in various degrees of qualitative research. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) express that qualitative research or researchers are/is involved in “the natural setting as a direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument, is descriptive, concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products, analyze their data inductively, and meaning is of essential concern” (pp. 29-32). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) write: “qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (p. 4). In the analysis and interpretation section, I will go further into details; however, my approach is primarily of one of openness to allowing my data to guide my possible approaches.

Interpretive Inquiry

According to David Jardine (1998), “interpretive inquiry does not wish to literally and univocally say what this instance is. Rather, it wishes to playfully explore what understandings this instance makes possible” (p. 41). Indeed, Ellis et al. (2011), (following the work of Packer & Addison (1989) and Smith (2002)), write “hermeneutical research, or research that is self-consciously interpretive, is only taken up when something or someone that one cares about is genuinely mysterious or incomprehensible” (p. 491). In order to accomplish this type of research, it is important to approach it with a methodology consistent with the spirit of hermeneutics. Both Jardine (in specific reference to interpretive inquiry) and Ellis et al. (on hermeneutical research) address the philosophical foundation of my research.

According to Ellis (1998a), an interpretive methodology based on philosophical hermeneutics includes or involves four key themes. The first theme involves the

acknowledgement that interpretation is about embracing the creative character of interpretation (Ellis, 1998a). The second theme is the hermeneutic spiral: the part is understood through the whole and the whole is understood through the part (Ellis, 1998a). The third theme is understanding that “language arises from a community, reflects the influence of tradition, and marks a moment in history” (Ellis, 1998a, p. 16). Lastly, the fourth theme is the understanding that past events are connected through language as a condition of understanding (Ellis, 1998a). With these themes in mind, an interpretive researcher can move towards a ‘condition of understanding’.

Ellis (1998a) identifies four steps or stages researchers may follow when engaging in interpretive inquiry that applies the four themes of hermeneutics already discussed above. The four parts are identified (p. 18) as the entry question, the spiral, the first loop, uncovering. Ellis suggests starting with “openness, humility, and genuine engagement” (p. 18). She reminds us that in interpretive research it is also important to “begin by acknowledging that one does not know the answer or that one does not know what to do to be helpful in a situation one cares about” (p. 18). She speaks about the importance of the entry question as being a form of “genuine engagement” (p. 19) with a text.

The second stage is the spiral. Ellis (1998a) writes: “it is helpful to visualize the process as a series of loops in a spiral” (p. 19). Ellis (1998a) explains “each loop represents a different attempt to get closer to what one hopes to understand” (p. 20). This spiral is part of an ongoing process of inquiry activities within the study. According to Ellis (1998a), “each loop may represent a separate ‘data collection and analysis’ activity or it may represent a return to a constant set of data with, however, a different question” (p. 20). The first loop stage is obviously important as it identifies and establishes the first forward arc of the study. Often, Ellis (1998a)

writes, a researcher's understanding and intention "changes dramatically" (p. 22) in this loop and so too does "the character of subsequent inquiry" (p. 22).

The last step identified by Ellis as part of the initial hermeneutic circle is uncovering. Ellis (1998a) writes that these "unexpected dimensions" which "enable a researcher to understand the problem or question differently and so to reframe it usefully for planning the next step of inquiry" (p. 22). This is part of the benefit of interpretive inquiry, in a sense it allows the researcher to be open. The question of a "right" answer is irrelevant. The answer is part of a shared process of making meaning through the shared process of inquiry.

The primary focus in this section is to move from the hermeneutic wonderings presented in previous sections towards interpreting the *Leadership Quality Standard*. This document has been released, but it has had a short lifespan in the general public domain and interpretations are still emerging. There is a fairly immediate need to develop theoretically grounded interpretations as this policy becomes fully implemented in the Alberta context. I have been drawn to the complexities of navigating contradictory messages, the difficulties of managing autonomy and control, and feelings of frustration have emerged from my own experiences and my readings of policy theorists. Since my work is emerging at a time early in the implementation, I am focusing on myself and my own experiences as the interpreter of the *Leadership Quality Standard*.

As I indicated earlier, my research questions for this dissertation were:

- What can hermeneutics—specifically considering the contributions of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2013)—offer as insight into how people interpret policy?
- What are the layers of policy sediment the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) stands upon and does this new policy reflect a tradition of contradiction and complexity?

- How do I—as an individual teacher leader—interpret the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) in light of my layers of experience with policies and contradiction in Alberta?

All interpretive research is an attempt to grasp the whole-part components and relationships of their experiences. My research and my research questions are about the identification of whole-part components and relationships present in my interpretation of the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a). The following section of this paper outlines the specific research method that I have used to approach and interpret the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a), keeping in mind my conceptual framework and the recommendations for qualitative and interpretive research. This section provides academic support from the field of educational research for such a project.

Hermeneutic Document Interpretation

Annotation is a way of noticing and noting. Beginning with the attitude of “openness, humility, and genuine engagement” (p. 18) described by Ellis (1998a), my initial step was to read and annotate the *Leadership Quality Standard* (GOA, 2018a) and highlight any words, phrases, or ideas that gave me pause. The idea was to stop and think any time a novel thought, shocking revelation, or new idea grasped me. This formed an initial entry point into the text I was going to interpret. At this entry point, the themes of control and autonomy (which had emerged through my reading of Starr (2015) and Alberta policy represented in chapter 2 of this dissertation). In many ways, the words that tended to give me pause were related to controlling the practice or values of leaders while also giving them professional autonomy. Further to this, it was pointed out after the study was complete that there were words that resonated with my audience that I didn’t write about or reflect on. There are likely two reasons for this. The first is that I had to find an end point to the hermeneutic process and more words would make this an unwieldy document. The second is that I felt that some words were best left to other scholars to discuss.

For example, the word reconciliation might require a study all to itself and deserves a respectful approach, perhaps best left to a more authentic voice than my own.

I moved from the annotation process to one of questioning. I re-read the text and the annotations I made, then re-phrased my initial reactions into questions, in an effort “to get closer to what one hopes to understand” (Ellis, 1998a, p. 20). I asked: How does this word resonate with my experience? What are some reactions I might expect from my colleagues? I would continue reading the text, asking questions of it. Out of these questions, I found more and more possible entry points for interpretation as I continued to reflect and wonder about the text.

Chase (2003) wrote about life stories that they are “about some life experience that is of deep and abiding interest” (p. 274). Interpretive work tends to draw out resonating anecdotes. As part of this process of reflection and analysis, I began uncovering moments of experience that came to bear upon my interpretation.

After my initial reflections were complete, I spiraled back and began a further process of interpretation and reflection. This process was less structured and involved many spirals of wonder and reflection. I lived with the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a), as part of this process, for the better part of a year. Following the suggestions made by Yanow (2000) and Hay (2011), I remained open to any experiences, meanings, and processes that resonated with my initial annotation, adding and building upon my interpretations as I spiraled back and forth between the words and the whole text.

Research Site

I engaged in reflections, interpretations, and analysis at my place of work and at my home. My current work involves report writing, supporting schools with population increases

and decreases, and ensuring equitable access to programming. I visit schools to conduct audits on space usage to support schools as they attempt to house more or less students in their physical plants. Another portion of my work is taking phone calls from the public in regards to school selection or distribution of programming. I meet with principals at their work sites and consider how they interpret school board policy and apply provincial policy to their unique contexts. During my data collection process, I engaged with school leaders in a variety of contexts around the consultative nature of my work. During these visits, I naturally reflected on the contradictory and complex nature of leadership in Alberta schools. My reflections were written after work in a quiet office or at home as I wanted, as the primary instrument of this research, to feel comfortable and safe when writing my reflections. The atmosphere was conducive to quiet reflection.

Sampling

In this work, there is a small sample size: one. While this means that this work is inherently biased and not generalizable in a post-positivistic way, it also points to what David Jardine calls the “Fecundity of the Individual Case” (1992)— the power of the experience of the unique individual to draw out important aspects of human experience.

This research sits on a sedimentary layer that is a tradition of interpretive research in Alberta (Ellis, 1998a; Jardine, 1992; Seidel, 2007; Smith, 1991). While there are nuances within the individual works of each of these researchers, within all of them there is a strong emphasis on human experience as a key focus of research. Much as in Gadamer (2013), whom all of these researchers quote extensively, human experience exists in the life world rather than in numerical representation. Again, this is not to dismiss numerical representation as an important and valid form or representation, just that numerical representation isn’t necessarily the best way for all

situations. There are two key elements to interpretive research relevant to sampling that uplift from all of these researchers. The first is the variability of human experience as a benefit to the research not a hindrance, therefore uniqueness contributes to understanding rather than becoming an outlier. The second is all research is interpretive in different ways. The difference is not one of validity but of coherence of purpose.

As such, the sample should be chosen as the best fit for the research. The sample is not representative of a larger group since this is not a goal of interpretive research. Instead, the sample offers insight into the individual case, the text being studied, and the histories that are layered within. In this way, this work is much like Seidel's (2007), who's work uses writing as a way to uncover experiences and understanding on a journey to knowing—not a journey to knowing absolutely, but a journey towards improved understanding.

The single participant or single case research exists in a variety of traditions. Kratochwill (2010) notes single case design is “used in applied and clinical disciplines in psychology and education” (p. 2). Morgan (2001) describes the work of Ebbinghaus, who was the only participant in his own study, as the “first systematic and thorough analysis of human memory” (p. 120). Autoethnography is another example of single participant self-conducted research. Autoethnography is appropriate when research attempts to “connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Chang, 2008, p. 1). There are many aspects of autoethnography, as presented by Chang (2008), consistent with the aims and practices of interpretive research. Anderson (2006) presents “analytic autoethnography” (p. 373) as a form of autoethnography where:

the researcher is a full member of the research group of setting, visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and committed to an analytic research

agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (p. 378).

Anderson (2006) proposes analytic autoethnography is appropriate when there are the following features present: complete member researcher status, analytic reflexivity, narrative visibility of the researcher's self, dialogue with informants beyond the self, and commitment to theoretical analysis (p. 378). In this way, analytical autoethnography contributes to a “spiraling refinement, elaboration, extension, and revision of theoretical understanding” (p. 388).

In this way, this research is borne out of my own experience and academic studies. As such I have begun this process by establishing myself as a working professional in an Alberta school authority. I have worked in numerous contexts which have given me varied and complex contexts to reflect on as I examine the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a). My perspective as a leader is also informed by a range of leadership roles from informal to formal, school based to school authority based. This range of experiences have also allowed me to bring a broad perspective to the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a). Through this process I have engaged my fellow colleagues to informally member check my analysis and drawn upon the expertise of working teachers for the purposes of editing to test my reflections in a process of dialogue beyond the self.

This research is primarily interpretive document analysis. I chose to engage in a hermeneutic approach which required me to make evident my own experiences and layers of interpretation as part of the process. I choose to read and interact with policy. My experiences with curricula, other policies (such as the *TQS* (GOA, 1997) and Ministerial Orders (GOA, 2013)) provide a depth of policy experience to help illustrate the layers of sediment that I bring to this document analysis. Additionally, my experiences hover between typical and atypical in terms of

being a teacher leader. My positionality, often being both a teacher and a leader, means that my observations are based on those of an observer embedded but not singular in my identity.

Analysis

In my initial annotation activity, I annotated the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) text noticing and noting resonating ideas. This was similar in some ways to Saldana's (2013) simultaneous coding which works well "when the data's content suggests multiple meanings" (p. 80). Initially, this method, as part of my hermeneutic circle, assisted a process of seeing the parts that represent the whole. After the initial simultaneous coding round, I went back and considered the data as a questioning and reflecting process.

I have included Saldana (2013) above because there is resonance between it and the work of people more closely associated with interpretive work. David Jardine (1998), a noted scholar on the work of Gadamer, writes "rather than beginning with an ideal of clarity, distinctness, and methodological controllability and then rendering the given into the image of this ideal, it [interpretive inquiry] begins in the place where we actually start in being granted or given this incident in the first place" (pp. 39-40). While Saldana (2013) and Jardine (1998) are using different diction to describe flexible coding methods, the need for flexible coding methods is necessary in analysis of qualitative data. From there, the researcher starts the messy business of making sense from the moment the question is raised or wonder emerges for him, a form of analysis has begun. Rather than ignore this relationship of time, place, and words, it is significant to be aware of the continuous process that human understanding is part of. Jardine (1998) explains the task of interpretation is "to bring out this evocative given in all its tangled ambiguity, to follow its evocations and the entrails of sense and significance that are wound up with it" (p. 40). In a spiritual sense, this directs the researcher towards an unfolding path of

understanding rather than a focused photo realistic concrete truth. The researcher is engaged in a process of analysis from the start to the end of the process.

Boostrom (1994) writes “the novice investigator of classroom life can discover what to pay attention to without having to choose from among methodological theories and frameworks” (p. 64). Boostrom reminds me to be open to all possibilities and observations while collecting data, and therefore be open to all possibilities in analyzing data. Boostrom continues: “theoretical sophistication is undoubtedly helpful for reflecting on observation notes, but as a guide to observing, it tends to make all places look alike” (p. 63). Boostrom’s charge for openness echoes with Jardine (1998) who likens this openness to the movement between knowledge and uncertainty/covering and uncovering that is part of the hermeneutic cycle:

...turning it over and over, telling and retelling it, finding traces of it over and over again in what you read, seeing the nod of heads and faint smiles when it is used as an example in a class, scouring the references colleagues suggest, searching my own lived-experience for analogues of experience, asking friends if they have experienced anything like this before, testing and retesting different ways of speaking and writing about it to see if these different ways help engage and address possible readers of work to follow. (p. 45)

This long quotation shows the exciting and engaging possibilities of analysis as an ongoing and recursive process. Jardine (1998) continues by reminding us “the process of interpretation is not the simple accumulation of new objective information. It is, rather, the transformation of self-understanding” (p. 49). It is this sort of transformation that I ultimately hope to achieve through this work.

Brenner (2006) presents this phase of analysis and interpretation, in a more direct and perhaps less complex way. She explains: “this phase is the heart of the process in which a researcher looks for the relations in the data” (p. 367). It is through this process “...the researcher has begun to identify the abstractions or theoretical dimensions of the data” (p. 367). While her words are not as poetic or lofty as Jardine’s, they are helpful to consider that theoretical dimensions will unfold from the data rather than looking for an already established one.

(De)limitations

Research on policy transformation has been done in the past often through simplistic or technical approaches; however, these have not yet led to an amelioration of educational contexts. Though this study will not ameliorate all of the contradictions that exist in educational contexts, it will help to provide understanding of why those contradictions exist and how they shape the day to day experiences of a particular learner. This study is intended to uncover the complexity contributing to experiences. Therefore, the audience for this study is other researchers, teachers, and policy makers looking to develop a fuller understanding of the many layers involved in policy change. Taken together with other policy analyses, this study will help to provide a more complete understanding of what it means to live and breathe educational policy in Alberta.

In this study, I used annotation and text analysis as an initial step in my interpretation, as a first experience if you will. Some might argue that this might limit the depth of data acquired. Rather than attempt to artificially separate elements or pretend to use laboratory language, I have approached this project from the premise human experience is necessarily complex, interconnected, and rich. This initial premise creates certain difficulties in a sense that the number of participants (1) and scope will be limited in terms of human participants. I have to acknowledge certain readers of this study may be dismissive of this approach considering these

factors. However, it should be relatively clear from the philosophical assumptions and methodological approach that these concerns are valid for them to have. This approach is designed to be philosophically coherent from start to finish. That coherence means building solidarity and understanding with the participants by presenting the complexity of their experience with the utmost respect.

Ultimately, I also didn't want to appropriate the voices of others. I didn't want to create an artificial moment where specific people were asked to interpret a document. The document exists for people when they encounter it, new leaders were introduced to the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) in 2018, while other leaders and academics may have had other experiences, this dissertation is my experience with the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a). One of the most important delimitations of this work is that it draws the reader to question what is missing. One of those missing things is other voices and particular experiences with the *PQPG* (GOA, 2009). I encourage other researchers to take up these tasks. My audience for this research is tied to this encouragement to take up this research and add to my voice with their own and others. This audience includes teachers (in formal or informal settings, teacher leaders (in schools and school administration), and or leaders in other contexts (this could include nursing practitioners or health administrators). In a sense, anyone interested in policy and how policy is interpreted, but particularly emerging leaders. I hope to disseminate this work through publication, presentations, and professional development sessions.

Trustworthiness

I am addressing this issue because it is a typical issue for researchers to address in qualitative research. Trustworthiness (making my assumption explicit here) is not something that I am attempting to achieve nor is it necessarily appropriate for this type of research. I have, as

much as possible, attempted to diminish my own authority and the authority of my voice in this work. I do not want my interpretations to emerge as a truth or a fact, I am not asking my reader to trust me as a researcher. This is part of an interpretive dialogue with my reader where I am hoping hermeneutic wonder is sparked in the reader.

In the process of crafting this dissertation, I did ask three particular colleagues to read and react to my work. A principal that I consider a mentor (who earned a masters' degree around the same time as I), an English teacher colleague (someone I consider a friend who also has a masters' degree), and a science teacher (whom I consider to have different experiences and world views from the other two). For the most part, I looked to them to see if this document resonated with them. Did this dissertation speak to their own wonders and experience? Their feedback indicated that it did. For the most part, I was encouraged by their encouragement that it spoke to their varied experiences in schools.

Packer and Addison (1989) have written about evaluating interpretive accounts. Initially, they present a sense of entering the "fore-structure" (p. 277) – the initial moment of hermeneutic wonder -- with an approach that "embodies a particular concern, a kind of caring" (p. 277). This initial stance presents a genuine engagement "guided by a sense of complexity for the human relationship between the researcher and research participant" (p. 277). According to Packer and Addison (1989), a caring researcher, one who hopes to build understanding and solidarity (Smith, 1991), rather than confirm a bias or a hypothesis, helps to build trust with research participants and readers. Brenner (2006) suggests three additional approaches for furthering trustworthiness in interpretive research: "describing the role of the interviewer [in this case interpreter] ... and peer debriefing" (p. 368). Additionally, the data and analysis were peer debriefed (as noted above in this subsection) to ensure all interpretations are coherent, consistent,

and mindful of the evidence. These steps allowed for a secondar level of analysis but also served as a way of confirming/challenging the researcher's interpretations. Finally, in later stages of the hermeneutic spiral, additional research to confirm, challenge, and/or supplement analyses were required. This step was taken to acknowledge the need for coherence and to further the research.

In the end, I was a full time working professional undertaking a Phd dissertation with limited financial resources as a part time student. This meant that accessing further voices and extending the time frame to examine more and more hermeneutic spirals of inquiry required that I limit the scope of this work.

Recapitulation

Hermeneutics stands on a long tradition of interpretive research. The spirit of this research draws individuals to possibilities and a range of approaches. Ultimately, the work is intended to engage the reader as an equal in a dialogue of possibilities. The outcome of this research is not as absolute answers, but rather a part of what I hope is an enduring conversation around what it means to be a leader in a contradictory environment.

Chapter VI. Alberta *Leadership Quality Standard*

Yet also it is not a kind of writing that seeks to solve a problem or to arrive at a solution or objectify life into an easily comprehensible or describable form, but rather a method of picking away at a concern, worrying around its edges, following through on thoughts, waiting for insight.

(Jackie Seidel, 2007, p.5)

Observations and Reflections on the Alberta *Leadership Quality Standard*

The *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) is 8 pages long and has five distinct parts and four numbered sections. The first section is a series of whereas statements. These whereas statements, in my opinion, give the document an official tone similar to the opening of documents such as the Education Act (GOA, 2020). The first numbered section of the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a, p. 3) lists several definitions for such terms as “school” (p. 3) and “local community” (p. 3). While these sections create a sense of tone it is the numbered section 2 (p. 3) that feels like the start of the standard. As such, my presented interpretation begins with section 2 included with the heading and text below. What follows section 2 is a short clarification of the enduring nature and scope of the standard (p. 4) numbered section 4 (the fifth part of the *LQS* document) presents the indicators and competencies that leaders are expected to meet. The bulk of my interpretation focuses on the section 4 of the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a). My own experiences and interactions with the text are presented here as the data. This initial section of the data follows the general structure of the *LQS*. I have presented it in order and maintained the structure of the document. This dissertation represents many loops of the hermeneutic spiral. I have engaged with the *LQS*, my own historically effected consciousness, and this dissertation numerous times. Gadamer (2013) does not suggest a prescribed number of times to engage in this process, however; Ellis

(1998a) does suggest four. I have identified going through the spiral twice in a structured way, to ensure the audience that I have reflected and considered the *LQS* in a thoughtful way.

The idea of thoughtful reflection finds its roots in the definition “throw back, turn one’s thoughts upon” (Onion, 1966, p. 750). Gadamer’s whole part relational (Gadamer, 2013) as part of the hermeneutic spiral, involves moving back and forth between the whole and the part, to better understand both. To reflect then, is part of this process as you throw back and turn one’s thoughts upon the part or the whole. The past, a moment in time, draws you back to consider what your life has meant. The word, draws you back to consider what you have just completed reading. In this sense you reflect, throwback to or turn one’s thoughts upon, on how the parts help you understand the whole.

Analysis is the process to “ascertain the elements of, examine minutely” (Onions, 1966, p. 34) and “the detailed examination or study of something so as to determine its nature, structure, or essential features” (OED, 2020). While the return to the parts, as part of the hermeneutic spiral supports the reflection on individual elements of the whole, interpretation, which is what I am presenting represents the movement between the whole and the part and the part and the whole. What I am presenting is one of my spirals of interpretation followed by a second spiral of interpretation as I examine the initial data through the lens of the framework suggested in Chapter V of this dissertation. As interpretation is situated in time and place, the second spiral is not evident as such. This is presented as a further ahead arc of the spiral as earlier and previous interpretations were transformed by moving back and forwards between the whole and parts of the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a). At times, I was drawn to initially ask questions while at others, I was more reflective in my interpretations. I wanted to capture the messiness of interpretation rather than attempt to force a format or structure on the process. However, I did

endeavor to keep as much of the *LQS* text (GOA, 2018a) as presented to allow the reader to move between this document and that document easily. Another tendency to emerge was the use of root forms of verbs. At times I discuss the use of the root rather than the present participle. This I found an interesting habit of my interpretation which upon reflection, could lead to further study. As I have noted, the standard seems to start with numbered section 2 (p. 3) and as such I include it here directly from the *LQS* and begin my interpretive sifting.

2. The *Leadership Quality Standard*:

Quality leadership occurs when the leader's ongoing analysis of the context, and decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality teaching and optimum learning for all school students. (GOA 2018a, p. 3)

Section 1 of the *LQS* is definitions. The text expresses that the definitions are relevant to the context of the document. The first definition is “competency.” Here is the definition:

an interrelated set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed over time and drawn upon and applied to a particular leadership context in order to support quality leadership, teaching and optimum learning as required by the Leadership Quality Standard; (GOA, 2018a, p. 3)

The *LQS* indicates a “competency” is made up of knowledge, skills and attitudes. This competency is demonstrated by indicators also defined in the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) given varying degrees of measurability based on the key verb. Some statements have verbs like “demonstrating” while others have verbs like “supporting” and “engaging.”

Reflections

When I consider the implications of using words such as *knowledge*, *skills*, *attitudes*, and *competencies*, I wonder about the way these words will naturally be absorbed into the interpretive frame of the individual. When we consider *leadership*, there isn't a global consensus on what quality leadership is. Leaders of countries must be good enough leaders to become heads of state, but then the whole world watches these individuals make mistakes, blunder, or not. Either way, their leadership becomes criticized either in process or in product. Most likely, as I reflect on my own practice, there is a tendency to identify poor leadership events and then consider somebody is a bad leader.

The size of the team, to use a problematic metaphor, really begins to shake the foundations of what it means to be a quality leader. Small teams may have narrow mandates requiring a narrow mandate to establish quality of leadership. The ultimate win condition for sports teams, where the problematic of team metaphor emerges from, is winning. There are many potential negative attitudes and competencies that may contribute to winning. This could be spying on another team, ignoring concussions, only playing the best players. While certain aspects of society may frown on these attributes, the final assessment of professional sports will ultimately be the win/loss column.

In education, if teachers and leaders narrow the win conditions to particularly narrow criteria then they open themselves up to the negative aspects of the team metaphor. In some ways, I imagine financial success drives most individual anxiety around education. In this sense, teachers and leaders have already failed society by allowing education to be reduced to such narrow criteria that their behaviors can also be seen as narrow and limited in scope.

What leaders will struggle towards, then, is attempting to develop the criteria to justify narrow criteria for success with broad mandates. Some of these criteria/mandate pairings are contradictory both in the system and in the public we serve. The navigation of individual and group success becomes an essential dynamic of how we perceive individuals and systems as successful. I am drawn to reflect on an anecdote from one of my times in a school: A group of students went on a trip to Europe as part of an academic enrichment program. Some of the students (or it could have been just one) expressed a high level of frustration with the organizers of the trip. When queried about this anger, the student indicated they went all the way to Europe and didn't get anything from the trip. This seemed problematic, so I asked a few further questions and the student expressed they hadn't been allowed to go shopping enough. This meant the student hadn't been able to buy a luxury item or two from European stores. Hence, they came home with nothing.

I expressed they came home with the experience of traveling to Europe. They had been enriched through experiencing different cultures and seeing historical landmarks. This particular student did not seem impressed with these as potential gains from the trip. The first moral of this reflective anecdote is that you can never be sure people share your values or criteria for success. The second moral is whatever you think of as reasonable expectation or reasonable perspective, there is a shocking amount of unreasonable expectation and unreasonable perspective present in the world.

I might have gone on the same trip. I might have been disappointed by the lack of ability to purchase a specific object. Ultimately though, I would have reasoned a group trip isn't the place to advocate for my own goals or my own comfort. The decision to participate in the group activity made my own situation secondary to the goal. However, in public policy and educational

discourse, the contradictions present in the system are actually the navigation of the personal and the private. The desire for solid group performance and individual needs are both equally demanded. I do wonder how these types of experiences are played out in leadership. There is a tendency to both increase expectation and downplay possibilities in equal measure throughout this *LQS* document. The claims to meeting standards and vague language around KSAs and competency seems to be on the side of increasing demand and making technical measurement of competency part of the leadership process.

It seems nearly every word in the document could become a study in its own right. For example: The idea that “skills develop over time” could be a study on career trajectory and learning; “quality leadership” could be a study on leadership philosophies. It is daunting and overwhelming to imagine how somebody might approach this document, at the same time—this openness is full of possibilities allowing for a range of interpretations.

The language in this document at times seems to be very open to possibility while at the same time is quite clear—even closed to interpretation. While the old *TQS* was much more broad and obviously contradictory, the language here creates a sense of completeness that is either actual (meaning all leaders are this standard currently and agree with it), cynical (the policy makers assume no one is doing the right thing and therefore need a policy) or hopeful (mostly all the individuals are doing the right thing and this policy is just the right thing to change the small numbers that are not). My experience leads me to wonder about the actual versus the reported. Will there be statements of success in a cynical way as people document indicators but actually do very little; is this an acknowledgement of the hard work and accomplishment actually happening, or is this a mediation of both possibilities? My own experiences inform a sense that it is perhaps all three at times.

I am drawn to the use of “optimum learning,” which can be defined as “The most conducive for a favorable outcome”—or in some cases, the *best* outcome. It is explicit in this statement that the leader of the school (the principal) will create and support an environment where all students will arrive at their optimum learning within their amount of time in the leader’s school. Obviously, the theoretical counterfactual is any democratic citizen in a Western society can achieve optimum learning—there are no societal or biological factors that could possibly limit optimum learning. I understand the importance of school and the importance of education; however, in my experience the concept of optimum learning is clouded by a variety of factors.

For example: provincial funding plays a large role in adding or limiting the resources in the school. I wonder what the consequences will be, if any, when funding drops and classes get bigger and the physical plant starts to deteriorate. It hardly seems fair the school leader be held responsible for a potential drop in optimum learning. I assume the understanding here is the idea of optimum learning is absolutely linked to context, but then I wonder if it should be. One of my myths growing up was school should be the great equalizer, but ultimately it seems generally the truth is that it isn’t an equalizer. It is a path to potential improvement. However, the language of “path to potential improvement” doesn’t sound as optimistic as “optimum learning.” In addition, school leaders don’t follow students from start to finish, at least not in large urban school contexts. Multiple entry and exit points on the journey to education mean it is difficult to establish if “optimum learning” has occurred.

Another issue to consider in light of the demand on leaders to create an “optimal learning” environment is academic dishonesty. Having worked in school offices and dealt with numerous parents over issues of academic dishonesty, I can say, with clarity: parents are against

cheating in principle but less so in practice. Ultimately, the personal consequence for some is more unbearable than the public interest of being a good citizen. It seems people support these ideas in theory: if the only measure of optimum learning is a mechanical dehumanized measure, some individuals will do all they can to maximize their own personal interest. This is not to say all citizens would lack the ethical strength to avoid cheating, but my experience informs my own perception that the numbers of individuals seeking personal gain in spite of ethics may be staggering. The public interest in fairness is often outweighed by the need to avoid social status collapse or personal failure. In light of such concerns, it may be impossible to ensure optimum learning is happening. It seems this is definitely something that will have to be addressed in preparing leaders for new curricula, teaching trends, and the personal interests of parents.

Ultimately, I worry questions of optimum learning will become code for: “why did the system fail my child?” I worry that once it is clear optimum learning is a difficult thing to measure, learning and teaching will naturally be reduced to the simplest possible measure. There is already a healthy dose of simplification in the system, which tends to serve the needs and interests of various stakeholders to varying degrees. My fear emerges out of experiences with a general desire to have things be concrete and known with contradictory forces asking for the opposite; for example, while curricula ask for creative critical thinkers, the general direction of process brings us to a system requiring sameness and concrete objectives. The world of standardized accountability to answer for, seems to create a world where the quality of the human is secondary to the numerical success of the human on the exam. The heart, the soul, the spirit become contested playgrounds filled with landmines—landmines leaders may have to avoid in order to prevent school and local communities from exploding.

I wonder about the desire to create a document seemingly informed by scientific management language but involves messy human processes. I am not interested in a straight linguistic approach establishing the explicit denotative meaning in words, but rather how different people will interpret words, such as “measurable,” in different ways. I think the fetishizing of data and measurable quantities is omni-present in this document. The desire to transform all human process into a mathematical equation is interesting but it both frees this document and weakens the language. Measurement is an interesting quandary for quality.

3. The Leadership Quality Standard applies to all leaders employed in a school authority. All leaders are expected to meet the Leadership Quality Standard throughout their careers. Principals as defined under the School Act are accountable for the demonstration of all the competencies. Other leaders are responsible for the demonstration of competencies directly related to their assigned role. In any given context, reasoned professional judgment must be used to determine whether the Leadership Quality Standard is being met. (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

This standard applies to all leaders, and all leaders are those people identified as leaders. However, not all leaders are certified teachers. I think this implies all individuals—identified as leaders—are covered by the standard. The document does identify a leader must be a member of the Alberta Teachers Association to be covered by this standard.

Questions

In Alberta (based on my calculations and Government of Alberta data (2019), there is a wide variance between size of school authorities and schools. Some major boards can average 450 students per school and have 90 to 100 thousand students. Other authorities can range from

1400 to 14000 students and average between 147 to 247 students per school respectively. In larger school authorities, there are more working professionals that do not work with students directly or have to meet the standard presented by the *LQS*. I wonder about how this standard, which is attempting to cover the whole province and include all people may be problematic in its scope. The variance in population, size of authorities, and even number of leaders means different individuals will be responsible for a range of pressures to meet the standard.

In some ways, the perception of educational professionals is made evident through the need for a standards document. There is a type of anonymity to provincial bureaucrats outside of their own areas. The average citizen can't put a name or a face to the thousands of government workers directing the process of governance. Teaching professionals have a very personal and direct interaction as front-line service providers with particularly complex work. As I reflect on this document, I am drawn to wonder about professional standards in the other bureaucracies existing in government. Are all members of the Alberta government expected to take extra classes to educate themselves on the important and devastating legacy of residential schools? This isn't widely advertised through public channels if it is. It does seem these standards would have more weight if they applied equally to all provincial service providers. Another aspect of this portion of the *LQS* that gives me pause is that the word *leader* is simply defined by its own word in the context of a school or administrative unit. If leader is so vaguely defined in this document, it implies there is no clear or simple definition of who the leader is; doesn't this imply, as the later sections of the document suggest, all individuals are leaders? Teaching professionals are often burdened with complex and increasing expectations. We have already gone from teaching of knowledge to training the leaders of tomorrow. There is little

definitive weight to the word leader in a document directing the individual to train all individuals as leaders. Is a leader just a person with the title?

Reflections

There is quite a difference between the experience of teaching all day, teaching and leading, and leading. There is even more difference between being a front-line teacher and a central office administrator. The umbrella suggestion of this document is it applies to a broad definition of leaders as separate from teachers. While this is responding to stakeholder feedback, the world of teacher leaders means a significant portion of leaders covered by the *LQS* are also teaching. There may need to be some thought about how this will be navigated in implementation.

The second issue here is the system in Alberta has had relatively little labour stress as all Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA) members were held to the same standard: *Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers* (2018b) of the ATA and the *TQS* (GOA, 2018b). This *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) now adds as a third standards document but creates a separation between leaders and teachers. I wonder what this will do to labour relations over time.

4. Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.

- a. *acting with fairness, respect and integrity;* (GOA, 2018a, p. 3)

While fairness, respect, integrity (GOA, 2018a, p. 3) are tacitly accepted as positive characteristics or values, the complex reality of the community means agreement on what this

looks like is problematic. I find it difficult to question these values publicly; they are terms that draw critique into the realm of character judgment, slander, or rebellion.

Questions

As a result, I was drawn to reflect on times when my own sense of what was fair came into direct conflict with someone else's. One of those moments emerged from a process of meeting a student arriving from a new context. This moment stood out for me and reflects some of my curiosity about how this standard or any standard will be interpreted through the lens of a person's own historically-effected consciousness and traditions.

During a phase of seemingly endless new registrations at a school I was working at, one of the strangest individuals I have dealt with in this context came from Ontario. I know "strange" in this context is probably an odd word to use for somebody living in the same country, but there was a distinct sense of culture shock emerging from our intake meeting. The element making this moment strange in this context, was the person was shocked that the city didn't shovel their sidewalks.

Now I imagine (I don't actually know) but it seems strange to me that there is a municipal grouping anywhere in the world actually shoveling snow off your sidewalks for you. In the Alberta context, you are more likely to get a bylaw violation ticket than have the city shovel your snow for you. It was a small moment, but the idea somebody felt it wasn't fair the city didn't shovel your snow came into conflict with my own Albertan sensibilities that it seems unfair anybody else should get their snow shoveled.

I was shocked by the whole exchange because in my whole life I have only ever seen snow shoveling as a personal burden of property ownership, similar in scope to taking care of a

lawn. But this experience made it clear to me fair dealings with government services are not universally understood, with something I take as a well understood truth—such as snow shoveling—or with less well understood truths. Then I told the group from Ontario they were going to have to pay for their own transportation. They quickly forgot about the snow issue and got angry they were financially responsible for getting their own high school aged children to school. All of a sudden, moving across the country didn't seem like an opportunity; it felt like a burden.

In the preceding anecdote, I attempted to focus the reader on my own shock. However, as I re-read it, I would like to consider how individuals arrive at some very different ideas of fairness. From the same country, a person can arrive in a different part and have experienced a range of services provided by taxes. These services become the norm in their life and as a result, they are shocked when they have to pay for things provided by the state. Imagine this was—presumably—a person from the same country. Alternatively, a range of perceptions of fairness, respect, and integrity—rooted in varying historical milieus and particular community traditions bring nearly unlimited possible interpretations of these ideas. The take away from this experience is that tacitly understood conceptions of fairness have varying degrees of transferability, as seen through my own experiences. Fairness does not seem to travel very well. I reflected on this experience because it caught me unaware. It was a moment where I did not expect for my fairness—or the fair distribution of tax dollars—to be at issue while registering their children for high school courses. The family struggled quite badly with the transition to Alberta. One of the family members wouldn't put the children on the public transit system, and so the students did not arrive at school and truancy became a problem. It probably all seemed quite unfair.

The key element of this indicator is that the leader act with fairness, respect, and integrity. However, perceptions of these ideas as experienced will largely be shaped hermeneutically. The leader may build positive working relationships in light of the dominant or typical school and local community from their experience. The leader's current context may be expecting that people take public transit or shovel their own snow. The experience to understand with this policy is that school and local communities are not shaped by ongoing universal sameness. The power of that context means that some aspects seem unchanging and other aspects may seem to change slowly, but our school and local communities can change with the addition of new people. The suggestion here is be open to your own wrongness as suggested by Gadamer (2001). Building positive relationships will mean being open and ready for a new range of experiences that will shock leaders. My anecdote is meant to serve as a reflective warning of how innocuous and subtle differences can be. New members of a school or local community may shock leaders, but they are tasked with building relationships as a leader not as a choice but as the standard.

Another way these words—fairness, integrity, and respect—entered my reflections were how I paused to think about raising my children. It seems like most parents attempt to instill these values in their children, but the living world doesn't seem to reflect these outcomes. The gap between what I feel is a common goal and what unfolds in practice is probably why there seems to be a need to make this a policy. As I reflect on this, though, I feel embedding concepts easily asked for but difficult to define in practice is a messy policy. I imagine everybody feels like they act with fairness, respect, and integrity. But it often feels like people don't seem to be pleased with the amount of these values reciprocated.

Reflections

Out of all of the words in the main indicator, the idea of positive working relationships is the least well-defined. The all-encompassing nature of school and local communities makes one wonder how they will measure positive working relationships with all people. The idea of building positive working relationships with communities or community members who hold hatred or discriminatory values isn't addressed in an explicit way. Doesn't simply engaging with these groups put me in a situation of violating the standard? Does the process of building positive working relationships with all members of a community (even members who may hold discriminatory values) prevent me from acting with fairness, integrity, and respect?

I'm speaking here specifically about groups that might feel left out because they are blind to their white male privilege. Economically, they may perceive themselves to be struggling and "losing" in society which makes them feel like white male privilege is a myth or an agenda designed to further entrench their perceived lack of status or accomplishment. I am also speaking to intolerant people who may actively attack different sexual orientations or identities. These identities are in our communities and this document does not expressly address them. It seems so obvious on the surface that you can't actually engage overtly unethical groups as a school leader, but does this document give you the room to actually make certain calls? That is, can a leader build positive relationships with people who hold antithetical values? If it does give you the wiggle room to make that call, then the document is by definition contradictory. Alternately, I wonder if this document is tasking the leader with transforming racists through excellent relationship building skills.

The clearer possibility is the document is somewhat blind to complexity, assuming only traditionally marginalized groups have felt left out by the system. Perhaps, building relationships

with traditionally marginalized groups will be sufficient to meet the standard; however, I wonder how this will play out.

Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.

b. *demonstrating empathy and a genuine concern for others;* (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

“Demonstrating” (GOA, 2018a, p. 4) and “acting” (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)—acting from the previous standard—seem like words are chosen to make difficult measurables measurable.

Questions

Sharing and feeling the feelings of another is a particularly personal experience. I wonder how many times in my career, someone felt as if I wasn’t being particularly empathetic to their situation. Leading in schools is fraught with emotional peril. The personal crisis of students, staff, and the broader communities are felt throughout the school. I’m not sure genuine concern is something you demonstrate—so much as feel. The demonstration of empathy and concern often become manufactured or artificial. There is also a sense of expectation that comes with demonstrating that creates an atmosphere of falsehood around expressions of these feelings.

In many ways, I wonder about if we should create policies around the internal feelings of individuals. I’m not conflicted about the need for empathy; I’m conflicted about legislating empathy and the “demonstration of” empathy. Ironically, in my experiences, bureaucratic regulations are usually the barriers to creating a sense of empathy or concern. I imagine someone telling you they are really sad and genuinely concerned you didn’t graduate from high school, but still telling you didn’t. This doesn’t make the lack of graduation less powerful for you. The

actions of the person explaining your lack of graduation will be more damaging if the person is acting with empathy because a standards document is making them rather than genuine concern.

The actual need to be empathetic uplifts out of a human understanding of the powerfully emotional human experiences are part of the educational enterprise. The process of not being able to act in a human way at all times is what transforms the experience into an uncaring process.

Reflections

Measurement isn't something inherently wrong. I am not against it or for it. I think the issue for myself is the fetishizing of measurement outside of scientific method fills me with dread. It implies, in my mind, a kind of guarantee of scientific specificity that hardly seems possible in the value laden chaotic world of day to day schooling.

The process of attempting to make many complex elements measurable does seem to privilege a certain way of knowing something. The idea of measuring empathy, while possible, may be too complex of an idea to measure in the context of a busy education system. The movement away from measuring empathy to measuring the demonstration of empathy seems as if there are some odd bedfellows in this document. The idea of a holistic leader that is both an ideal technical manager while still displaying empathy and genuine concern does not take us away from super human leaders-as-saviour conceptions.

There is a feeling of scientific management through the use of indicators and measurable, ideas I imagine probably having a currency with various stakeholders. The tricky part is the bearer of these scientific management skills is expected to also apply much more difficult to

measure variables. For a discussion of positivism and scientific management in education, see Greenfield (1979, 1986).

In my experience leaders can demonstrate empathy and genuine concern for some students but perhaps not all: Leaders can give out holiday cards to a staff because it is the correct display of kindness; people can pull in different staff members once a week to ask about their home lives, just so they can document it on a calendar they demonstrated concern. I am not trying to be glib, but in my experience the pressure to appear successful is sometimes more important than the pressure to be successful.

Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.

c. creating a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment; (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

This indicator tasks the leader and community members with creating an environment that is safe and caring. However, it does not task the leader (or the community) with maintaining the environment. With the use of the verb “creating,” this indicator assumes a deficit position on the current environment; when we speak about “creating,” we assume that what is being created did not exist before.

Reflections

Not to be too critical of the indicator, but the statement discusses *creating* an environment—not ensuring the students, staff, and community members feel the way the environment is supposed to make them feel. This is obviously splitting hairs, but the tension

between creating the environment and ensuring a particular student feels a certain way may be untenable. People can feel unsafe even though the environment is designed to be safe. Outliers are likely to always exist; this document seems to state we are equally responsible for the outliers as we are the bulk of the norm.

School is a foreign environment for many children: being lumped together in industrial model desks and rows; using gender segregated bathrooms for the first time; learning about authority and paying attention to a singular voice; learning a government authorized curriculum. This is a complex environment to learn how to navigate.

However, this environment also brings students into contact with different world views and values that can be divergent from those of their parents. I imagine a range of examples of how this could threaten a parent or a child. In my own context, I do worry about sending my children to school and having them come into contact with what I might deem to be an extremist viewpoint. I have to prepare my children, but I am worried they may make friends with racists or individuals that hate. This threatens my own world view and causes me concern.

In many ways, I am fairly hopeful a public education system based on policies such as this are directed away from bigotry and extremism, but where extremism is a value of the community, I'm torn between contradictory expectations in this document. I imagine parents who—maybe ten years ago—attempted to bring up their children without gender identification may have found the education system particularly harmful. I feel gender identification is resonating powerfully in these reflections because the gap between cisgender fundamentalist religious individuals and gender-fluid atheists is quite large. Not only is it a large gap, but in both cases the individuals are citizens needing to be made to feel safe, respected, and welcome in schools.

Alternately, most of this reflection to this point has assumed parent and child will have similar views. It is entirely possible that parent—leader—child could all be in a position of contradictory values that may challenge the idea of what it means to feel safe and welcome in the school.

Ultimately, the complexity of these situations presents real challenges for leaders to manage creating such environments, particularly in a world where the gaps between stakeholders can seem to be quite a large divide. I imagine some leaders choose to separate themselves from issues they can't reconcile within environments welcoming to others. Perhaps there is room to research how leaders navigate their own perception of acceptably normal versus unacceptable. Certainly, this document suggests there isn't any room for individuals to enter an environment where they feel unsafe, which seems to imply there is a directive quality to this document. There is certainly a normative suggestion of openness and acceptance - where all students feel safe.

Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school

community and local community.

d. creating opportunities for parents/guardians, as partners in education, to take an active role in their children's education; (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

This indicator focuses on the creating of opportunities. There are follow-up statements around partners in education which seem to echo the current Ministerial Order (GOA, 2013) on education. There is also a directive quality to ensure parents take an active role.

Reflections

In 20 years in schools, I probably came into contact with a small fraction of parents. In general, a small group of very involved parents came to parent teacher interviews. I would make efforts to get the parents of struggling students to come in, but this was generally met with limited success. There was a smaller fraction of parents that would contact me with a problem about one thing or another. On some level, I wonder about what the point is of sending your children away for six hours a day to be educated if you wish to direct the process in an active way. While the idea of curriculum seems to assume a generalized holistic approach to society deciding what the common skills and knowledge of record should be, parents, students and society can react in varying ways about what those common skills and knowledge of record should be.

As a result, I have reflected extensively on the idea of leading a school with a complex range of values. It is becoming more difficult to manage each student as a fully realized human empowered to make decisions about his/her own education. To apply this same level of engagement to each and every parent seems overwhelming. Additionally, you have split families; parents that don't agree with each other; you have parents that may espouse racist viewpoints; you have parents that are poorly or not educated themselves; you have parents that ultimately just want high marks regardless of the actual level of their child. The self-interest of a parent will easily dominate the public interest of standards, curriculum, and values.

Making decisions and drawing the lines, as a leader, may be problematic. The boundaries of legitimacy, boundaries, and standards leaders are expected to maintain, while still involving parents as partners, can be very contentious. I reflect in this way, not because I believe the experience is defined by the massive core of participants but it is more likely defined by the

significant cases: the parent mad over a scholarship; the parent who complains about assessment to put pressure on the school to change a mark; the parent who won't let their child read about witchcraft so can't read Shakespeare; the parent who won't let their child do anything but homework at home, forcing the teacher to create hours of extra work.

I am not suggesting any of these parents are incorrect, but leaders may have to confront the issue of self interest in parents as an ongoing source of conflict. It doesn't matter how perfect you feel a system is, if it doesn't fuel the individual interest of parents and students, the system will get challenged. It has seemed over the last 20 years that some parents have more say than others, that some children can shift policies, and that some adults know how to work a system.

It seems the silent ones are probably the ones we need to spend more time engaging—the quiet majority doesn't express their happiness or anger. These parents are at least not already being engaged in the process. It would bring new voices to the table.

Leaders will probably have to approach this from a hopeful lens—that parents can articulate the holistic and specific needs of their children are important and the education system is for both their own and all children's needs.

I'm reminded of times when parents were angry because a mark a child received in a course was lower than some of the others. The parents storming into the office because a scholarship was lost due to the low mark in a subject. The tension between when is a scholarship earned and what is a right create conflict in schools. The chance at a lower cost education, future academic resume building, and prestige all conflict with my own conceptions of how scholarships are earned. This doesn't mean I am correct and I'm empathetic to the struggles to

pay for higher education, but the process of manipulation shines a light on the contradictory relationship parents have with public and private interest.

Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school

community and local community.

- e. *establishing relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents/guardians, Elders/knowledge keepers, local leaders and community members (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)*

The word “establishing” seems vague. The other verbs are more active: Demonstrating, acting, and engaging. In this statement, the leader must “establishing.”

Reflections

A relationship is potentially a complex element to define. I’m reminded of people I have met in my life who felt like my friendship was greater than it was—there were expectations of longevity or collaboration, when I felt there wasn’t or vice versa. Even between individuals with very similar experiences or cultural understandings, relationships can be complex and full of conflict. Assuming an individual doesn’t identify as a First Nations, Metis, or Inuit person, then reaching out to an elder may mean having to learn what relationship means for this person. Even the identification of an elder may mean a gap in understanding based on age. Considering these complications, there is also the complex work of genuine care and empathy in the relationship. Asking someone to your school seems like a beginning of sorts, but it doesn’t really feel like a relationship to me.

In many ways, I feel like this is attempting to suggest something more and more important. The honouring of individuals and establishing value for the experiences and knowledge of elders has a grander purpose than establishing a relationship. The support mechanisms for establishing certification under this new standard will have to involve a lot of education around the importance and purpose of these indicators. There needs to be a depth of knowledge extending beyond simple process. The process is necessary, but addressing the historical legacy of poor treatment of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit individuals in a meaningful way is extremely important and I am filled with dread for half-measures, tokenism, and paternalistic approaches.

Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.

f. demonstrating a commitment to the health and well-being of all teachers, staff and students; (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

This indicator includes the words “demonstrate” and “commitment.” There is a sense here that the importance health and wellbeing is particularly strong through this indicator. There is also the word “all” used when including teachers, staff and students.

Reflections

Once again, I worry about the idea of “demonstrating.” I can demonstrate something I don’t actually act on. I can put on a show, and then do something else. Workload, volunteering, supervising, marking, teaching, and being successful may put a burden on the staff and students.

I could then host a wellness clinic and change nothing about the actual process of the school, but feel satisfied I demonstrated it!

While there is much sarcasm bleeding into the above statement, it does speak to a sense of frustration I've had with leaders. I started my career with a leader who genuinely demonstrated a care and concern for the wellbeing of all staff. I have no doubt about that. I was still teaching three subjects, coaching every sport in the school, and running a series of clubs. I easily worked 60 hours a week on average for the first two years. I am even resentful now when I see new teachers advocating for balance in their lives—those who start out by saying “the job is just a job”. Perhaps what I mean is there are different definitions of healthy existing in the system. When I started, I bought into the idea of a healthy sense of purpose beyond myself, a sense of wellbeing fulfilled by being all in. It seems there has been a shift towards personally oriented definitions of happiness. Anecdotally, in my interactions with new teachers and in conversation with human resources staff, new teachers are more willing to define themselves via personal happiness and fulfilment rather than through a systemic identity as a teacher. I am not advocating for long hours and constant teacher mode, just expressing the contradictory values towards health and well-being that have to be navigated in the space.

Schools are busy places and it will be interesting to see how this commitment to wellbeing is demonstrated for all teachers, staff and students. In regards to students, it should be self-evident there be a commitment to health and wellbeing. The issue that may arise is the varying definitions of what it means to be healthy. There is also a potentially intrusive quality to this statement. The statement isn't limited to the school. Does this open the door to leaders needing to be aware of the habits of all listed individuals outside of school?

I reflect on the experiences of attempting to demonstrate a commitment of to the health of students. Schools started having healthy snacks in vending machines. The healthiness of these snacks—I mean anything staying in a vending machine for weeks on end—seems dubious. There was a loss of sponsorship money, vending machines were shifted to different snacks, and generally it seems like schools got out of the unhealthy snack business. It was a great step in many ways.

However, when I have been the staff member attending wellness PD, I do get a little offended by the whole process. I wonder about how my time in a building is controlled and directed to a great extent by bells and courses and schedules. Now my professional development is to sit on a couch and read, something painful for me to do in a public space. At home, on a couch, I love to spend afternoon reading all manner of things. In a school, I want to work. If they decide to have a fitness session, I have to have an even more annoying experience of exercising with my colleagues in public. Nothing like the shame of being middle aged and out of shape to help my wellness at work! Either way, I think these things need to be handled with care. I think the complex negotiation between workload and work expectations and wellness need closer consideration.

Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.

g. acting consistently in the best interests of students; (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

Consistency implies commonality of experience—that treatment of individuals should always be the same; all individuals need a commonality of experience.

Reflections

When I read this statement, I wonder: Is the emphasis in this statement the “best interests” or is it on “consistency?” That is, are we to act always (i.e. consistently) in the best interest of students OR are we to act consistently (i.e. in the same way) which is, therefore, in the best interest of students. It is difficult to imagine educators or leaders would ever consciously act against the best interests of students; therefore, I assume the emphasis is on consistency. In the messy world of contradictions though, the experiences of students and parents may not have felt as if I was acting in their best interests; however, I may have been acting consistently by following a policy. I think there is a childlike quality to this document at times: the idea sameness is best. I am drawn to thoughts of my son with autism. His procedures, applied with empathy, are different than other students—what he needs, what is in his best interest, is different than for other students. I understand the individual doesn’t need to do the same things all the time—it is the intentional purpose of the actions that matter, but this isn’t clearly articulated within this document.

There is no explanation of how consistency makes its way into this document. It presents the concept as universally agreed upon with no background. While it feels self-evident organizations are expected to act consistently by the public, this seems about comfort rather than quality.

Whenever I am told to consider the importance of consistency, I am drawn to thoughts of fast food restaurants: the most successful food sellers on the planet have the most consistent approach, but they aren’t usually the finest makers of food. I can walk into a fast food franchise and know exactly what I will get. In order to accomplish this, they take anything special or unique out of the process and leave the customer with a predictable product.

The word consistent originates from the word consistere (Onions, 1966, p. 206) meaning “to have a certain existence; be composed of or comprised of” (Onions, 1966, p.206). It can also originate from the definition “stand still, remain firm, exist” (Onions, 1966, p.206). To act consistently then has roots in the ideas of the composition of the action but also in the stillness or standing firm quality of actions. If the initial state of the leader’s actions are misled or incorrect then to act consistently would mean to keep the nature of those actions still or to stand firm.

Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.

- h. *engaging in collegial relationships while modeling and promoting open, collaborative dialogue;* (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

This statement involves engaging in collegial relationships. There is little in the way of definition of “collegial” in this document, but the prefix “co” implies together and mutual. There is a second aspect of modeling and promoting collaborative dialogue. This also implies leaders should be demonstrating an ability to engage in open and collaborative dialogue.

Reflections

There are a few statements in this document that fill me with a sense of simple hope. I have a lot of hope for many statements but they are complicated by my own experience. I have to remind myself this is a new start, but there will be a majority of leaders automatically certified with this standard already embedded in the system.

The open dialogue feels like a rare situation. In some ways, I wonder if this is because conversations happen over a period of time and not all participants are part of them from the

beginning. Since much of the initial dialogue happens separately from the whole group, there is always a sense of direction before the secondary conversation happens.

Leaders will need to get into the practice of beginning conversations from openness. They must start without an idea of correctness if there is going to be open dialogue. It might be my jaded self, but openness in dialogue has felt, in many situations, like a loaded act in schools. Are leaders actually ready for open dialogue, or do people learn to survive by hiding the true extent of their feelings? I can think of numerous times when individuals were silenced because open dialogue was not reciprocal. While I acknowledge this may be the purpose of this indicator—to address an environment where collegial relationships are sometimes lacking—the complex nature of relationships and self-interest may make this problematic.

Another aspect of this is the concept of personal success. Leaders, in my experience, advance projects to prove they have been successful. I find the dialogue around these projects to be insincere at times and even dismissive of critique. The importance of personal success is something that may need to be considered in leader preparation.

One of the moments I will always remember is a staff meeting at a large high school. A person stood up and asked a pointed question of the leader. The leader diplomatically answered the question, but there was a sense of chill impacting the whole meeting. While some things are connected and some things are not, and I don't want to suggest people are spiteful, but the next year, the teacher had to move rooms and stopped getting certain classes to teach. I can't say if the teacher was doing something unpopular, but I don't think people started asking more questions at staff meetings. Resistance, through the obligation of raising concerns, is mandated in our professional associations' *Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers* (Alberta

Teachers' Association, 2018b) document. And yet, it seems consistent experiences with the negative consequences of asking questions has caused many teachers to stop asking questions.

I feel any leader, arriving in Alberta, will be shocked by how silently agreeable teachers will seem on the surface. New leaders will have to work hard to create environments if staff and parents have been silenced by the cult of buy in and fear of reprisals some of my colleagues have experienced.

Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.

i. communicating, facilitating and solving problems effectively; and (GOA 2018a, p. 4)

This indicator includes three aspects and flows into the next indicator. There seems to be an acknowledgement the two statements together are complex and are related. My initial observation is this initial half of the dual statement itself should be two statements. Perhaps the first statement could read: articulate and communicate the nature of problems effectively. The second statement could be: facilitate challenging conversations and solve problems effectively.

Reflections

The concept of communicating problems is well laid out by the professional association. For example, in regards to teachers and their co-workers the ATA Code of Professional Conduct states (Alberta Teachers Association, 2018a):

12 The teacher does not undermine the confidence of pupils in other teachers. 13 The teacher criticizes the professional competence or professional reputation of another

teacher only in confidence to proper officials and after the other teacher has been informed of the criticism, subject only to section 24 of the Teaching Profession Act.

14 The teacher, when making a report on the professional performance of another teacher, does so in good faith and, prior to submitting the report, provides the teacher with a copy of the report, subject only to section 24 of the Teaching Profession Act.

15 The teacher does not take, because of animosity or for personal advantage, any steps to secure the dismissal of another teacher. 16 The teacher recognizes the duty to protest through proper channels administrative policies and practices which the teacher cannot in conscience accept; and further recognizes that if administration by consent fails, the administrator must adopt a position of authority. 17 The teacher as an administrator provides opportunities for staff members to express their opinions and to bring forth suggestions regarding the administration of the school. (p. 1)

Perhaps this indicator should reference the above material. Part of the complexity here is the ongoing importance of local and school communities as part of the larger scope of this standard. The idea of problems is an interesting one because it makes the assumption all problems have solutions. There is no cure for being human; the human element brings with it contested interests generating conflict and problems. How these problems are addressed is perhaps the main thrust of this statement, but some of these problems are much larger than a single individual's ability to solve.

As I reflect on this document, the word that keeps coming to my mind is "fear." The leader meeting this standard will have to ease a lot of fears when it comes to issues of silence and unprofessional conversations. Many staff will attempt to hide problems and pretend like everything is fine. The importance of understanding there is a normal quality to problems, they

are embedded in educational experience, means new leaders will have to start from square one with some staffs—start at dialogue and culture building, to get staffs to a place of healthy dialogue.

Fostering Effective Relationships:

1. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.

j. implementing processes for improving working relationships and dealing with conflict within the school community. (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

This indicator emphasizes a process. Somehow, this document gives me the sense that the first part of statements are the positive foci of the statement and then the secondary foci is negative or second in the list statements. I am not sure this is fact or truth, but it gives me the sense that “improving working relationships” (GOA, 2018a, p. 4) is the focus of the statement, implying that the goal is to avoid conflict, but once it exists, then you have to deal with it.

The *LQS* (GOA, 2018a) identifies the difference between local and school communities by defining them on page three of the document. The school community is “the staff of the school authority, along with students, parents/guardians and school council members” (GOA, 2018a, p. 3). The local community are the “community members who have an interest in education and the school community, including neighbouring Métis settlements, First Nations and other members of the public” (GOA, 2018a, p. 3). I am struck by the separation between local and school, since my impression is that leaders are responsible to respond to both school and local as the school community is likely made up of the local. However, the local may not seem particularly salient or immediate in the school community, depending on the school.

Reflections

Leaders are tasked here with managing conflict from a human resources perspective. This feels as if the role of the leader is to implement a process but also accept conflict is inherent to education. The school community includes parents and children; and as result, the nature of schools draws upon family and community metaphors. However, this is a very difficult scope to manage. The closeness and time of contact means personal opinions and comfort are bound to make their way into the working relationship. Consequently, I have had numerous times when it was difficult to establish why a person felt positively or negatively towards me other than a personal preference of the other person. It could be difficult to establish at times why some students, teachers, and parents appreciated my approach and effort while others did not.

A part of this is also reflecting on how many people avoid conflict. I wonder about stakeholders choosing to keep quiet about their feelings in order to manage conflict. The power of the need for consensus and buy-in means it becomes harder to voice dissent. The other part is only some stakeholders feel empowered to voice dissent. The balance of who gets to speak versus who is afraid to speak out, is perhaps poorly understood.

I find it overwhelming to consider how to manage all of the varying different opinions and values in a school without expecting conflict. The management of this and the emphasis on consensus does put a difficult emphasis on harmony placing difficult pressure on leaders.

Further to these thoughts, I am also curious about how this document acknowledges conflict but doesn't address why conflict exists. There is a sense that we need to deal with it, but the bigger questions are not answered. More than once, I have reflected on the idea schools don't

make society; they reflect society or they are society. The conflicts of the world are the same conflicts as are in schools. I'm not sure anyone is doing a great job of solving global conflicts; therefore, it seems unlikely it will happen easily in schools. Leaders will need to be trained and supported in the ways conflict can be addressed in a meaningful way; hopefully this allows a school to address the silence that is embedded in many dissatisfied educators. Some teacher leaders and teachers have, in my experience, developed a deep and silent frustration with constant shifts in mandates, constant changes in leadership, and constant questioning of their professional practice. A clear process may allow for the silent and angry educators to come forward and participate. This may be more desirable than dealing with a small number of vocal educators.

Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning:

- 2. A leader engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to identify opportunities for improving leadership, teaching, and learning.***

(GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

Continuous improvement was part of the old *TQS*. The old document stated that “teachers are career-long learners” (GOA, 1997, p. 4). As previously in this document, I have included moments of my sediment with policy as I have experienced them. This is why I quote the old *TQS* at this time. Additionally, the old *TQS* applied to teachers and leaders, but the new documents apply differently. On some level, I suggest that there are sediments that continue to apply and therefore are more deeply rooted in the historically effected consciousness of Alberta’s policy landscape. In both documents, these requirements speak to a need for leaders to develop professionally and link development to improving leadership, teaching, and learning. It also

seems to speak to the need for the leader to identify and provide opportunities to teachers to do the same.

Reflections

I have continued my education over the last 20 years. I find learning to be essential to my own growth and engagement, and yet, I find professional development can sometimes be fairly thin and unhelpful. The most common experience of my PD journey has been treating educators as if they aren't smart or academic, that they need simple messages for improvement. I wonder how—if ever—this kind of indicator can address this issue. Identifying opportunities to develop professionally, has in my experience, been mostly the leaving of pamphlets on a staff room table or regular professional development days. Due to poor past experiences, staff attend PD days where, to varying degrees, they learn or they don't. Most of the younger staff have already heard the new messages in university, while the middle career staff has already heard the message if they are lifelong learners (as policy dictates), and at the same time, the late career staff have already heard the message numerous times in varying iterations at other PD days.

In larger staffs, the idea learning needs are common is a challenge. In smaller staffs, the group cohesion means one negative resistor can ruin the experience for everybody. The additional problem is there is no challenging of the professional development process. The research bases tend to be dated and there is a tendency to repeat the message over and over again as if it is a novel idea. I reflect on being on a middle-sized staff for 20 years and hearing the same names of researchers in the area of assessment. Now when I listen to PD presenters, I say to myself: *please don't quote that same study, please don't quote that same study*. They almost always quote the same study. The presentation of PD becomes quite repetitive as the same study becomes quoted over and over again. It is a fine study, but it has lost resonance as they bring it

back repeatedly. The process leaves me with a sense of wonder about the slow pace of change, or if change is even the goal at times. The specific study is not relevant to my discussion here, as I am not concerned with assessment practices specifically, but it is always one researcher, and always based off of one study, creates a never changing PD experience.

I think then, leaders will need to understand the discourse of these PD gurus, but also be able to bring something novel to the discussion. This is an area where new leaders from other places may be able to bring different research to the table. I also think there needs to be improvement in the area of critical reflection on learning. In my experience, leaders have stood up and announced loudly they don't like to read—they are glad they don't need to certify under the new standard. This diminishes the strength of this indicator in regards to advancing professional learning.

Embodying Visionary Leadership:

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

a. communicating a philosophy of education that is student-centred and based on sound principles of effective teaching and leadership; (GOA, 2018a, p. 5)

I'm drawn to the use of the word "sound" in the indicator. Sub-definitions of "sound" can be: without injury, decay, or defect; strong, safe, secure; correct, right, reasonable, reliable; orthodox or conventional ideas (Oxford English Dictionary).

Reflections

This philosophy seems very directive. It projects a form of contradictory pressure to be student-centred (which may or may not be “orthodox”) and “conventional” (which doesn’t create images of student-centred learning).

One of my first hermeneutic reactions to the *LQS* was the use of the word “sound.” The *LQS* uses the term “sound principles” to emphasize the need to be *sure, right, and correct*. The sense of soundness is a sense of comfort, stability, and orthodoxy.

Out of an environment emphasizing consistency, we have the emergence of a need to make things the same. The ultimate contradiction between autonomy and control is as the world gets more and more diverse the policies enforce more standardization. “Sound practices” imply sameness and consistency. It seems nearly impossible for leaders to support difference and uniqueness while always acting in the same way. It also seems school systems can’t change if the actions of the leader are always “sound.” I’m filled with hermeneutic wonder about the experience of acting in a sound and consistent way that acknowledges the need for individuality in a growing era of individuality and cult of self.

These questions unfold in light of a general perception leaders lead by being on the forefront of change. Leaders are considered successful when they transform a situation. Transformation is an interesting concept when one considers that sound practices are embedded in the language of the policy. Often transformation can be seen as an illusion or a ruse. The system asks for a visible sense of change and keeping with the times, but ultimately wants the school experience of children to be sound.

Leaders have to navigate a perception of impact while not actually changing anything in a significant way. This draws one to wonder at times about who does a successful leader focus

on? In much the same way as a politician, abrupt or sudden change is as likely to upset more people than it is to make them happy. As a result, often the leader creates an illusion of impact while actually changing very little.

I feel I am asking a lot of questions because there aren't a lot of questions being asked by this document, even though it has inspired a lot of questions. If everything in this document is contextual, then what is the purpose of having a standard? The purpose seems to be to say a standard exists. The relationship between change and sameness, pervasive in this document, doesn't seem to be addressed. Societal conflict around values are not addressed. The standard is the standard.

School districts in Alberta offer programs developed to be teacher-centered and/or more “traditional.” Parents have been given the choice or have advocated to have the choice of enrolling their children into these programs. Leaders may find themselves administering a school whose purpose and function is to not change or follow what is the directive of the *LQS* in reference to having a student-centered teaching philosophy. As leaders, it, therefore, may require a particular contextual focus when interpreting “student-centered.”

Embodying Visionary Leadership:

3. A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.

b. recognizing the school community's values and aspirations and demonstrating an appreciation for diversity; (GOA, 2018a, p. 4)

I am drawn to the idea that there is a way to recognize the school community's values and aspirations. That the school community is so cohesive that a leader will recognize these

values and aspirations. Alternately, much of my reading on policy drew me to contradictions and the idea that people, as the foundational unit of the community, have contradictory values (particularly, Stone, 2012). So, I wonder about the ability of leaders' ability to recognize something that may be difficult to identify or is actually contradictory.

Reflections

My interpretation of this document doesn't cause me to ask questions about success; it causes me to ask questions about the times when the document will be contradictory. There is an implicit understanding that "diversity" in this context means traditionally marginalized groups in society. It is very obvious that inclusive schools are a part of the current context in large urban boards. This kind of diversity should be seen as a strength and appreciated.

I wonder about what respecting diversity means. There are "diverse" groups in the community that do not hold the same values as the community at large or as the school itself. There are "diverse" community groups that don't value diversity—for example, groups that deny the existence of other value systems, groups that challenge LGBTQ2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Two Spirit) rights, and groups formed to challenge the existence of certain cultural or racial groups. It will be a challenge for leaders to reconcile these conflicts in complex environments. I can imagine leaders having to understand complex and—sometimes even—racist or bigoted communities in order to lead them. Early in my career, a student used a racist term which I corrected. The student informed me his parents said it all the time and it wasn't a bad word at home. To be sure, this was nearly 20 years ago and it was quite likely communities didn't think racist terms were as problematic as they are today. Yet, as a leader now, I have to say I wouldn't have a lot of patience for this type of local community. There is a broader context

needing to be considered. However, does this standard document place me in the position of not following the standard if I don't demonstrate an appreciation for this form of diverse opinion? The answer is I wouldn't probably get in real trouble because of society at large, but I would be failing to meet the standard as written.

Leaders will need to be particularly sensitive to these forms of values in small communities where the larger Albertan and Canadian context have very little bearing on day to day lives. Leaders from other contexts will have invest some personal time learning what the norms and values of the community may be—particularly, if they are from a very different place in terms of diversity.

Leading a Learning Community:

4. A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning. (GOA, 2018a, p. 5)

This indicator has different language from others. It uses the words “nurtures” and “sustains.” Sustains is a word implying learning communities are already in existence. As an indicator, it is different than some of the others which imply creation or establishment through words like “builds” (GOA, 2018a, p. 4) as in “A leader builds positive working relationships” (GOA, 2018a, p. 4). Sustains’ etymology comes from the middle English meaning “uphold the course of, keep in being, endure without failing, bear the weight of” (Onions, 1966, p. 891). Which is quite different that to “construct” (Onioins, 1966, p. 128) which is the etymology of build. The second part of this indicator uses the word “supported” (GOA, 2018a, p. 5) which again implies that the evidence informed teaching and learning already exists.

Reflections

Initially, this indicator didn't prompt a lot of reflection as I read and re-read it. It seemed fairly straightforward. However, as I thought more and more about it, there seemed to be an embedded mistrust of teacher practice in this statement—that teachers should use *evidence* to replace the “witchcraft” they call teaching. It feels as if there is a movement afoot to base every decision on data, though the concept of data and the nature of data are poorly understood or actually only used in narrow ways. Experience is easily dismissed by individuals lacking trust in teachers or who question all things seemingly subjective. These are moments that frustrate me, because the ability to establish objective data in education is often problematic. Therefore, there are significant questions needing to be asked about what isn't trustworthy or what isn't considered valid when asking professionals to use evidence-based teaching practices.

Further to this, pre-service teachers in Alberta are all university educated. It seems this education is all based on the apparatus of research into education defining post-secondary education. It could be argued it is impossible not to teach in a way uninformed by evidence because all teachers went to a university. In this context, I assume they are using evidence in some way to represent numerical data-based researched practice. Evidence is an interesting word to use. Any amount of evidence could be evidence-informed practice in this context. The evidence could be thin but still be supported by this indicator.

Perhaps there is still room here for the line between teacher and leader. This allows the leader to nurture the environment without having to ensure all teachers are scientists running lab experiments on students to ensure the evidence is strong.

Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit:

5. A leader supports the school community in acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students.

(GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

This indicator points to the role of leaders as educators. The school community means parents are also intended to be given access to this foundational knowledge.

Reflections

A few years before this writing, I was at the University of Alberta working as a teaching assistant in an introductory education course. The course focus was technically general, but the instructor brought a depth of knowledge from First Nations, Métis and Inuit ways of knowing to the course. Initially, I assumed the class would have a lot of foundational knowledge on these topics but it emerged that many students were not informed even though current curricula include outcomes supporting this knowledge. It was then I realized *saying* people learn something is different than making sure they learn it.

I worry about the use of the word “applying” (GOA, 2018, p. 6). Historical, social, economic, and political implications of the listed bullets is at least a university degree’s worth of knowledge. The attempt for the privileged to apply these topics can easily come across as sloganizing or patronizing. To know something, to understand something, and to apply something can be very different. I believe bringing this indicator to a school community will have to be handled with care and sensitivity—to engage in this authentically will truly involve the whole community in a transformative process.

Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit:

5. A leader supports the school community in acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students.

a. understanding the historical, social, economic, and political implications of:

- *treaties and agreements with First Nations;*
- *legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis; and*
- *residential schools and their legacy; (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)*

Residential schools are fairly well understood as negative in conjunction with their legacies. The initial list of historical, social, economic, and political implications will require extensive education.

Reflections

In 2016, I was a teaching assistant for two classes with a heavy emphasis on First Nations knowledge systems. Through this process I was exposed to a variety of national complexities, treaties, and historical legacies. It was a shock that individuals didn't know about residential schools—they didn't know about treaties. I had been educated in these subjects in both the public K-12 system in Alberta and my undergraduate education. I was floored by the lack of knowledge expressed in the university students around these issues.

The small incremental steps taken between 2000 to 2016 and subsequently 2018, seem to have indicated, at the very least, an official movement from ignored institutional racism to acknowledgement. In schools, we now have Treaty acknowledgements at ceremonies; I have seen the Treaty 6 flag hung next to the Alberta flag and the Canadian Flag. However, I still wonder what the responses will be to these changes: when you get students in a gym and you

raise a Canadian flag, you get varying degrees of acknowledgement and nationalism. I worry about how students will connect—or not—to adding treaty flags to schools. Will they resist the addition? Will they appreciate the addition? Will they understand it? Will they even notice? I hope that the treaty flags won't simply become window dressing. However, I do see the hope in this: for at the very least, there is an official acknowledgement that elevates the issue to a legitimized status in the North American political tradition.

I feel this issue is so important it doesn't live in the same contradictory realm as progressive vs conservative. It has some of its own embedded contradictions, contradictions that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit writers are better suited to address. From my perspective, this is one of those elements of leadership needing to be embraced as pivotal and essential.

Leaders will need to be prepared to embrace this work in an authentic way. I think the authentic aspect here is about being an authentic human caring to learn and to attempt to understand. There can be a dismissiveness in communities with low numbers of self-identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit community members. There can be a sense this process is unnecessary because of the lack of impact on the students; however, those may be the communities needing this work the most. Leaders may have to tough authentic conversations with their communities around this important work.

Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit:

5. A leader supports the school community in acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students.

b. aligning resources and building the capacity of the school community to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit student achievement; (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

I find the statement “aligning resources” (GOA, 2018a, p. 6) ambiguous. It seems to me that this ambiguous statement, from my perspective, leave the indicator open to a wide variance of interpretation.

Reflections

I imagine a meeting with community members—and by “imagine” I mean replaying similar meetings I have attended where tough questions were asked: Someone leans across a table and says “what are you doing to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit student achievement?” The answer given is “we are aligning resources and building capacity.” It plays out like a satire of bureaucratic group think where it is completely unclear what is actually happening. Leaders will need to have concrete understandings of what this means.

I am drawn to the novel, *Indian Horse* (Wagamese, 2012). This novel is excellent and powerful read that helps one to understand the violation of trust and the subsequent consequences on First Nations peoples. This novel is an effective resource for upper high school aged children to read—perhaps as a grade 12 novel study. The subject matter is powerful but also upsetting. This resource would easily align with both old and new curricula and build capacity within the school community. However, the issues of subject matter and language use may come into conflict with the same school community that would benefit from reading this novel the most. While this is just one example of many, there are numerous resources but they will of course have to be vetted for grade level and appropriateness. The issue is how do you help someone understand something—particularly something traumatic—if it is sanitized? The availability of resources that may allow for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students to see

themselves legitimized through the process of English teachers picking resources reflecting their heritage and experience may allow for them to write more authentically on standardized exams, as this does for most students.

Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and

Inuit:

5. A leader supports the school community in acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students.

- c. enabling all school staff and students to gain a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit; (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)*

This indicator is re-emphasizing the main indicator that includes school staff and students by using “school community.” The indicator is very broad in its scope.

Reflections

Tokenism is a significant consequence of this if handled improperly. The road ahead can't stop with tokens. Or maybe the tokens have to transform into currency. A product of real transferable material value, not just a temporary measure. *Indian Horse* (2012) could easily be used with all students to help them develop a sense of understanding and empathy for past experiences.

Of course, this will have to go further if it is going to accomplish the goals fully, but at least there are more resources out there than perhaps existed in the past. Even if there aren't more resources, even though I suspect there are, at least they are more accessible and it is now a requirement these resources be brought to all students. The issue will be the sensitivity and authenticity of the process.

Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit:

5. A leader supports the school community in acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students.

d. pursuing opportunities and engaging in practices to facilitate reconciliation within the school community (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

As I read this statement, I worry about having a negative impact through poor attempts or half measures at reconciliation. A half measure or poor attempt may be more damaging. I think it is all important to attempt, but the resources and complexity of the situation may hinder the movement of this forward with real authenticity.

Reflections

In 2000, I was working at a junior high. I was asked to liaise with the person given the job of Aboriginal Liaison. I had the opportunity to facilitate the organization of a Cree club, smudges, and sharing circles with an elder. I definitely feel at odds with my impact on this process. I was wondering if I was the right person and whether I supported it well enough. I'm not sure to this day if I moved the process forward or set it back.

The Liaison came on for a Cree club meeting and I cajoled two of three willing participants to attend the club meeting. The Liaison wrote the Cree word *tansi* (hello) on the board. One of the students, a student that would miss school for trapping and the Sundance season, got up and walked out. I asked her why she was leaving and she said “this dumb bitch doesn’t know what she is talking about.” Here was a person of First Nations identification attempting to relate and support another person of First Nations heritage and the situation broke down. It seemed to be over a spelling situation I did not understand.

Attempts to improve situations are important because there has to be a significant attempt to reconcile the past legacies, but the attempts are not guaranteed to meet the needs of individual members of the school and local community. Not all members of a school community have the same needs or histories, every attempt to facilitate may lead to greater problems.

I think in this context, the approach has to be from a place of possibilities. I taught an Indigenous student in the late 1990s who had significant issues and lived in foster care. He had good foster care, from what I understood, and I worked diligently with him to get him to a place where he could behave reasonably well. I recently looked up this student’s educational path after grade 7. Following his experiences in my class, he ended up being incarcerated or at least attending the school intended as an alternative to jail for youth offenders. No graduation record, no path I can see indicating a successful journey through education.

My heart broke for that child in the 1990s, and it broke again in 2019. This was a child with significant challenges who ended up in “the system,” so to speak. I do not know at this point where this individual is now, but the systems did not help him overcome his challenges. His path, at least as documented in a file, was not a product of reconciliation but an example of why reconciliation is necessary.

As in 2000 and in 1998, the process of reconciliation is necessary and I really do think each of these children are significant and important. In both cases, I failed. Both of these failures stay with me. I know I had positive impact in some of these situations but ultimately it isn't enough. I think there needs to be more done to create a relationship with school where the first thought is fear or mistrust. Where it makes logical sense to choose education freely and receive the same rewards from participation.

Providing Instructional Leadership:

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

a. building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students;

(GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

The word “building” seems to convey the sense of *constructing* a capacity. As noted earlier, the idea of constructing implies that something needs to be built rather than sustained.

Reflections

In the emerging world of complex classrooms, does meeting the needs of all students become more and more difficult? In my autobiographical statement, much of my personal narratives revolved around different perceptions of quality programming or teaching. Leaders have to navigate the needs of students but also the perceived needs of students. This can be a challenge when there are deep divisions between differing perceptions of need. I've never had a problem with diverse learners in a class; it isn't hard to modify activities or support a moderate range of learners within a classroom setting. The teachers and leaders expressing frustration to

me seem to be more upset about the extreme cases (biting, hitting, potential death in classroom due to medical fragility) combined with pressures to achieve high results for the school.

Ultimately, it is easier to suggest these comments imply there is just a need to build more capacity in the work force than it is to actually build a capacity around a moving target of optimal learning. The risk is that this kind of indicator becomes another one of those apply to all comments that can always be true and maybe isn't at the same time. While optimal learning may be different for a chronic biter, an arsonist, a person dealing with trauma, it may also be different in the minds of the people assessing or judging from an external place. As a result, these complex learning situations will require a particularly interpretive approach to the word of optimum.

The other potentially problematic aspect of this indicator is the idea of always building. Constant improvement and constant building, through my experience, can lead to a constant state of insecurity. Building capacity doesn't clarify if you are building from scratch, building on, or replacing. As a result, the process of building can be insulting when the attempt to build capacity is layered on top of an already existing capacity. I have written about professional development bringing the same message I have already received. Sometimes perceptions of lack-of capacity are actually informed dissent. Leaders will need to be judicious in their analysis of need. Ultimately, what this reflection is drawing out is a need for leaders to be conscious of the impact or suggested expectation uplifting from words such as optimum. There is a tendency to shift seamlessly between the child and the class. Questions about results and analyzing data to ensure all students are learning at an optimum rate, will likely create anxiety for a teacher with a particularly complex and diverse classroom.

Providing Instructional Leadership:

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

b. implementing professional growth, supervision and evaluation processes to ensure that all teachers meet the Teaching Quality Standard; (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

This process of supervision and evaluation is stronger than in the 1997 *TQS*. I read this as saying all teachers are and will be evaluated. This is not expressly stated in other formats, but the use of ‘all teachers’ seems pretty clear. This means principals in schools have a greater level of responsibility over this experience. I’m not sure growth plans were intended to create this experience, or at least evaluation was resisted in the old *TQS*.

Reflections

The processes leaders implement will be interesting to study as they emerge with this new standard. The processes developed will likely direct the positive or negative experiences of those evaluated within the context of schools. Many leaders don’t teach in the same context they lead. Often, they have been out of the classroom for some time and the differences within the classroom are not clearly understood. For many reasons, the supervision of teachers is a complex and contentious issue. Teachers have bad days, complex class breakdowns, and are impacted by the work of others. Leaders have to meet this standard in order for teachers to be able to work at the highest quality. With varying skill sets, the same leader responsible for managing the school environment may not be the best person for evaluating teachers in the school. Of course, they need to; they are the leaders most responsible for the consequences of the success or failure of the teachers, but they also have their own complicated relationship with success. Additionally, the same issues with meeting this standard will arise with meeting the teaching quality standard. The process of evaluating teachers and leaders exist in a complex world of contradictory

demands. I continue to struggle with the thought that individuals can't be fairly evaluated when there are varying definitions and interpretations of quality. This will happen, but I feel there needs to be a strong level of empathy for leaders and teachers when approaching vague or conflicting definitions.

Providing Instructional Leadership:

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

c. ensuring that student instruction addresses learning outcomes outlined in programs of study; (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

Ensuring is a strong verb, but weaker language is used for addressing learning outcomes. This doesn't state *all* learning outcomes; this might imply only *some* of the outcomes is okay.

Reflections

I'm not sure how this will look in regards to an already overwhelming leadership standard. In the context of smaller schools with fewer teachers and courses, leaders may be more likely to "ensure" this. In a larger school with an extremely large course catalogue with over a hundred teachers, the concept of "ensuring" may be a difficult one.

I am drawn to reflect on conversations I have had with teachers where they have expressed, they don't even acknowledge the curriculum or with leaders that have said the curriculum has too many outcomes and can't be taught in its entirety.

Certainly, there are ways to ensure individuals are attempting to address the curriculum on paper through course outlines and plans, but to ensure the day to day practice of covering all outcomes may be impossible. The design of curricula and the application of it may be a complex

dance of contextual decision making. As in society, there will be orthodox literalists approaching the curriculum as a must do everything document and there will be non-orthodox interpreters approaching the curriculum as a series of choices to be made.

As a result, this range of possible interpretation suggests there is room to teach some or part of the curriculum but no room to teach something not in the curriculum. Teaching has to address the curriculum, which is what the leader will ensure. While addressed in other documents, this does throw a bit of chill over the off the cuff conversations, the important in the moment needs of students, and the broader purpose of schools. I think about pep-rallies during instructional time or of a confused student needing some knowledge about a personal issue. These moments are often important to individual's lives.

Other relevant issues are curricula in Math, English, and Health are increasingly becoming contested areas. As I have noted in the lead up to this, there is a certain amount of parental backlash to curriculum change or instructional policies. The complex negotiation between ensuring curricula is taught and ensuring the community isn't upset with that same curriculum will be part of the challenge of being a leader.

Providing Instructional Leadership:

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

d. facilitating mentorship and induction supports for teachers and principals, as required; (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

Facilitating feels like a weaker verb than ensuring, particularly in light of the use of, particularly in light of the use of “as required.” Weaker verbs—less certain or absolute--and qualifying language might imply this is less required or important.

Reflections

For whatever reason, in my experience, some of the strongest students academically in university would arrive to teaching and have the hardest time managing the chaos and disruption that is working in a busy school environment. Leading and teaching isn't about what you do when things go perfectly; it is about managing the flexibility and adaptability of situations. There are constant disruptions to plans: fire drills, students in and out of classes to manage and adapt to. Perfectionists, people with high expectations, and idealists often struggle in the beginning of their careers because so much of this work is messy human work. Perfect itself, as a concept, is an idealized personal opinion applied to a work world full of other individual with different ideas of what it means to be perfect. Many new professionals, leaders and teachers are successful because of perfectionism, high standards, and idealism. These individuals often need the most mentoring to keep high performing individuals in the profession. It can be a hard reality check. This is such an important aspect of leadership. It is certainly a task I took to heart as an educator and teacher leader over the past 20 years. Sharing expertise, experience and pedagogy with new teachers and showing them how to survive the workload has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career. I would like this to be a key leadership indicator because it goes beyond just developing leaders but leading all of the teachers and leaders in the school.

Providing Instructional Leadership:

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

e. demonstrating a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and curriculum;

(GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

Demonstrating is a strong verb; however effective pedagogy is contentious ground. This may become interesting as a new curriculum—with potentially new concepts or approaches—is released but it may also become more difficult.

Reflections

Leaders may have arrived at their positions in schools with very little education in contemporary pedagogy. Pedagogy or effective pedagogy are complex areas of study with their own contested landscapes; and as a result, there are varying ranges of opinions on how to capture effectiveness, what is effectiveness, and what is pedagogy. Effectiveness is easiest to establish when you limit the measurable data. It is much easier to base your definition of “effective” on limited data sets, but how does this play into the front matter of curriculum and critical pedagogies?

In my experience, many of my leaders have emerged from very specific curricular backgrounds as subject specialists as teachers often are. Usually, because their experience has made them excellent organizers and planners. The skill set to manage people effectively and get individuals in and out of building allows them to shine as leaders. In some of these cases, there has been a distinct lack of curricular knowledge which leads to a gap between what is expected from a leader in terms of curricular knowledge and what they may actually possess. If this is suggesting leaders are primarily instructional leaders, then systems will need to consider how leaders are prepared to lead and who becomes leaders.

Primary grades (1-6) require a breadth of knowledge of many subjects, and secondary (7-12) tends to require deeper knowledge of specific subject matters. When considering a leader will be expected to have a strong understanding of curriculum, I'm drawn to wonder if heroic conceptions of leaders will continue as the norm.

Providing Instructional Leadership:

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

f. facilitating the use of a variety of technologies to support learning for all students;

(GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

This indicator illustrates the importance of technology to our schools and our world. There is an emphasis on *all students* which implies a positive emphasis on assisting differently abled students and improving socio economic gaps.

Reflections

I have worked through the implementation of mandatory computer use in schools. I started as a forward-thinking teacher having to take classes on computer use. I started in schools with teachers never having entered marks into a computer program; marks books were still largely paper affairs. I saw some excellent examples of how technology could be used to assist students express their learning. I have since seen technology become omnipresent in many aspects of the profession. This will continue to be the way, because technology is omnipresent in society.

However, the main important thrust of this statement is the supporting of learning for all students. At times, I am not sure technology is used to always *facilitate learning*. In broader

society, technology is used most commonly when it easily helps people accomplish tasks cheaper, easier, and faster. Technology in this way is usually adapted and defined by the user. Most of the technology I have seen brought into schools really just replaces existing technology to do the same things. Marks programs, presentation, call and response are all examples of this. Generally, it has seemed the actually process of supporting and advancing learning is never realized. Students type assignments and digitally hand them in. Students do math questions on a program, rather than on paper. Teachers read assignments on computer, rather than on paper. These are all nice things to have but there is something still missing in the promise of technology. Perhaps this will be part of the next wave of technology.

Providing Instructional Leadership:

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

g. ensuring that student assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate, and evidence informed; (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

This indicator uses a strong verb: ensuring. The secondary emphasis on fair, appropriate, and evidence informed open up a body of discourse around assessment worthy of investigation in the Alberta context.

Reflections

Much of past 20 years have revolved around changes to assessment practices. One of the key drivers of this transformation has been the application of mathematical principles to evaluation as opposed to professional judgment. Conversations between teachers and parents, students and teachers, and administrators and teachers have shifted from quality of student work

to questioning the math used to calculate marks. Teachers used to be the gatekeepers of final marks to a much greater extent. This statement increases the role of principal as the gatekeeper for assessment.

The language of this indicator is infused with a public sense of lack of confidence in professional practice. I worry this will diminish a complicated process to a simplistic and potentially childish argument around right or wrong. It is a complex area of professional practice that should be handled with care because evidence is as problematic of a concept as research. The time and effort involved in establishing and creating “better” assessments to gather data and evidence, in a quality way, comes into contradiction of altering and adjusting all assessment to meet the in-the-moment needs of children.

As I reflect on this further, I am drawn to a shift in schools from an older parental model of “life isn’t fair” to one of “let’s be sure we act with fairness.” I’m not sure people get into education to decide to act in an unfair way. People get upset when they don’t achieve at a certain level. Once that happens, some of them decide something was unfair. Leaders will need to spend a lot of time working with teachers and school community to express the process of assessment, the purpose of assessment, and the products of evaluation. I also think leaders will need to work with teachers to express the need to document all of a student’s actions taken towards completing assessment. As evidence-based system is an insecure system that will always come back to documentation, so this will be something school communities will have to work on together.

Providing Instructional Leadership:

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

h. interpreting a wide range of data to inform school practice and enable success for all students; and (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

Reflections

In my experience, data are not a problem. The problem is that, generally, some kinds of data are privileged over others. Is it really acceptable to have a range of data informed by observation or will observation have to be translated into a numerical data set? It is interesting success is “enabled” not “ensured.” School practice enables success but there is room here to suggest not all students can accomplish this success. I wonder if this is in contradiction to some of the other promises in this standard.

It seems to me Alberta is the adopter of all things accountability. I am not sure if all places have as much bureaucratic mistrust as Alberta, but I sure do feel Alberta is leading the way. There are provincial surveys, district surveys, and standardized exams. These measures generate a series of data sets shared with various stakeholders. The issue with this data, much like technology, is there is no guarantee of how the data are used. In Alberta, school rankings are published in newspapers, by special interest groups not the government, and every year parents can read to see what the top school is. This data set is the most accessible and least informative data set available—often primarily based on exam scores.

The government asks questions around feelings of safety, engagement, school completion, and availability of technology. All of these questions provide a larger data set to inform decision making in the future. However, the primary emphasis continues to be on exam scores. The one element we enable—but not *ensure*—is the one element most emphasized publically. Success by some over the lack of success by others, feeds into public insecurity.

Providing Instructional Leadership:

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

i. facilitating access to resources, agencies and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development. (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)

Leaders in this indicator are directed to facilitate access. This seems to walk a fine line between providing access and directing the nature of professional development.

Reflections

Alberta school districts can be quite diverse in their composition and size. They could range from 14 schools with an average school population of 170 to over 200 schools with an average school population of 450 (GOA, 2019). The ability to access resources outside of instructional costs within the school vary quite widely based on the distribution of student-based funding. Alberta government funding models do allocate extra money based on disparity of resources, but the economy of scale within larger school boards means money for outside agencies is more accessible in metropolitan areas.

My first thought was of private professional development agencies having a form of conflict of interest relationship with the school systems. Making money by presenting different approaches to change or improvement and then using this improvement to sell themselves to other school districts, often grooming local leaders to be gurus or converts to become “experts” is the system.

However, there are ways agencies and organizations can be brought in to facilitate learning in other ways than private businesses. In Alberta, leaders can access the universities, the

professional association, and health organizations which tend to have nominal fees if any and provide services generally from a more altruistic lens. This could reduce the expense costly professional development and also build local relationships and community.

Some of my PD experiences have been negative because the presenters presented the material as if the audience had never heard of the material or didn't want to engage academically. I think it is hopeful, to imagine PD developed through this indicator can engage teachers and leaders pragmatically and intellectually, but sometimes it seems school authority staff live in a world separate from the day-to-day lives of teachers; the professional development they suggest is largely based on a district perspective sometimes lacks the nuance of local school factors. The lack of nuance means one-size-fits-all solutions that travel well are often the focus of some of these experiences. Leaders will have to think carefully about bringing in speakers selling solutions not out in practice. I have previously written about the idea that local interpretation is often a key factor deciding the success or failure of an idea, but there is also the experience of hearing of a great idea that doesn't work over and over again pervades teacher experience.

Reasoned, educated, and intelligent conversation around improvement or potential solutions is something I crave in my professional development. Perhaps other leaders do as well.

Developing Leadership Capacity:

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

(GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

The school community involves a series of individuals including parents, students, and staff. The idea of creating opportunities feels open to existence but there are no boundaries suggested for how these opportunities should exist. A school government for students, a school council, or a fundraiser are all examples of opportunities for leadership to develop.

Reflections

There always feels like a mix of well-intentioned public service and self-motivated protective interest when individuals participate in leadership opportunities at school. I'm always impressed by the passion and motivation parents bring to school councils, but there are also those individuals who want advantageous relationships with the school to benefit themselves.

However, I do wonder if entrenching this kind of leadership development in a policy standard best serves the goals of leadership development of socially mobile individuals. The hopeful quality of this document seems to be asking leaders to develop capacity beyond traditionally beneficial stakeholders. My reflection, here, isn't to suggest marginalized individuals or groups haven't taken advantage of opportunities, just it seems as if the percentages are sometimes lower for less economically advantaged individuals (in my experience). The hope, I feel, is to shift this balance.

Another issue I am drawn to reflect on is that leaders tend to develop leadership opportunities in similarly minded people. The language in this indicator isn't inclusive or suggestive of changing this process. In many ways, as perhaps it isn't an issue, I guess leaders know best who to provide leadership opportunities to. As noted above though, accessing the ability to develop leadership capacity isn't equally available to all stakeholders.

Developing Leadership Capacity:

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

a. demonstrating consultative and collaborative decision-making that is informed by open dialogue and multiple perspectives; (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

Demonstrating is a strong verb. The ability to show the process is informed by open dialogue and multiple perspectives increases the possibility this is collaborative.

Reflections

This is a hopeful statement—difficult to demonstrate at all times, perhaps; sometimes people just want a leader to lead. There is so much silence and restrained resistance in schools, the concept of open dialogue is interesting, as is the concept of multiple perspectives. However, when taken together with earlier statements identifying “sound” practices, this statement seems to suggest openness and multiple perspectives can only exist within a certain framework of orthodox practices.

As I previously reflected on, school can be very silent places at time. Leaders will have to be prepared to confront tendencies in staffs developed over years of experience. Speaking openly will mean a high level of trust will have to be developed and this may take time and sensitivity. The omnipresent perception of the importance of buy-in means schools struggle with silent dissent or mock-buy-in at times. Failure to ensure success could have reflected negatively on a principal; therefore, individuals may have been badgered into compliance without the values of this indicator. Leaders will need to model these values from the get go.

Developing Leadership Capacity:

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

b. identifying, mentoring and empowering teachers in educational leadership roles;

(GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

Leaders, in this indicator, are tasked with identifying and developing teachers into leaders.

Reflections

Here it seems like distributive leadership is transformed into policy. This doesn't bother me, but is distributive leadership an example of current orthodox practices now entrenched in policy by this document? I think there are some issues with only certain types of people becoming leaders and promoting similar people to be leaders. There are significant indicators in this standard expressing the importance of multiple perspectives and diversity. I wonder if leaders will be tasked with spreading out the opportunities to diverse individuals.

At times I wonder about the redundancy of some of these statements. Teachers, school community, and local community are all ideas that could include teachers. Likewise, local community and school community also includes parents. As I imagine a perfectionist attempting to address all of these indicators fully, I worry leaders will attempt to accomplish this task and end up over burdening a staff. The development of leadership will have to be a thoughtful process. Leading can be seen as co-essential with the work or it can be seen as an add-on to the work. If individuals are identified to be leaders then are they already leading, meaning they don't need to be identified. This doesn't necessarily build or diversify leadership capacity.

Developing Leadership Capacity:

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

c. promoting the engagement of parents in school council(s) and facilitating the constructive involvement of school council(s) in school life; (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

My observations of this indicator are primarily covered in my reflections. However, it is important to note this indicator uses the word “constructive” implies there is already a type of suspicion or fear around parental involvement in school councils and school life.

Reflections

Who participates and why is the essence of this indicator. The limiter of constructive participation suggests not all involvement is constructive. Having participated in school council meetings it seems the function of self-advancement versus public service can be quite different. I can remember wondering how useful it is to help boost resumes and social mobility for individuals with strong resumes and social mobility. However, individuals with busy work lives and complex situations can't make their hours work with many school council meetings. Ultimately, there will be a tension between creating problems and creating opportunities for different individuals.

As I've attended school council meetings both as a parent, a teacher, and an administrator, I've experienced them through several different lenses. While, some school councils are packed with parents others have nearly zero participation. Leaders will have to do some work to determine what the historical nature of the school council is and how it participates. As a reflective note, most school council meetings I have attended function exactly

like not-for profit board meetings following the typical rules of order. Leaders can probably have an impact by actually sharing some decision making with the school council and having it do more than sell chocolates.

Developing Leadership Capacity:

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

d. creating opportunities for students to participate in leadership activities and to exercise their voice in school leadership and decision making; (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

This indicator asks leaders to create opportunities. The emphasis is on increasing or establishing opportunities for students to participate and have a voice in school leadership. The last part is a non-limited aspect of decision making.

Reflections

As an honest reflection, I am drawn to the work of Freire (1972) when I think about student leadership activities. The replication of a small number of invested students modeling the broader democratic and bureaucratic processes of society within a school context makes me wonder about the depth of learning in these situations. Organizing a dunk tank or a potato sack race (activities often part of student leadership programs) don't seem to encourage legitimate dialogic leadership in students. The process of voting for an elected representative going on to change nothing or have no power feels too close to the problems of modern Western democracies. Low voter turn-out, apathy, anger, and frustration are born out of the gap between those who are engaged and those who are not.

The lingering doubt in my mind is a small fraction of students seem to access these leadership opportunities, so the seemingly endless model of successful socially capable individuals getting the most out of a system continues to exist. Empowering children is fascinating. There is very little sense of this having a negative impact of consequence; however, I wonder if creating early experiences with token governments just contribute to future apathy in voters?

I wonder about the negative impact on social participation if non-participating students observe ineffective or token government. The difficulties of including students in actual decision making is trusting them to make good decisions. It is also about engaging them in meaningful decisions.

Leaders will need to develop authentic and purposeful leadership opportunities beyond celebrations. The decision-making aspect of this indicator may be the most important one to focus on. Involving students in decision making rather than management activities will be something contributing to actual leadership development.

Developing Leadership Capacity:

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

e. promoting team building and shared leadership among members of the school community. (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

I think this indicator is drawing attention to parents not on school council or staff members not already identified by other indicators. It adds the element of team building but continues the aspect of distributed leadership.

Reflections

Team building can be very taxing if you are an introvert. The necessity of “team” involves the assumption team metaphors are always positive. There has been, often in my career, references to teams and positive examples from professional sports. While there is much to learn from successful organizations, there is also an ability in these teams to limit participation to the best available team members and to dismiss underperformers. Perhaps in a business, these options seem appealing. I wonder if our metaphors can apply to parts of our organizations and not all.

Or alternatively, can we only apply the best aspects of the team metaphor—which typically means collaboration and shared accomplishment—to the necessary aspect? I wonder if it isn’t possible to shift the language from “team” to shared accomplishment or some such more specific term.

Managing School Operations and Resources:

8. A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources. (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

Manage is rooted in the definition “training of a horse, action and paces of a horse, riding school” (Onions, 1966, p. 550). This transforms over time to come to also mean “train, (a horse), conduct (an affair), control (a person), do successfully” (Onions 1966, p. 550). The use of the word “effectively” (GOA, 2018a, p. 7) and “manages” emphasizes a sense of successful accomplishment combining the roots of manages, identified above, and effect meaning “accomplishment” (Onions, 1966, p. 302).

This indicator is very direct. It has two distinct parts, “operations” and “resources” (GOA, 2018a, p. 7). These words aren’t explicitly defined in the *LQS* (GOA, 2018a). I wonder

about how words such as lead, manage, facilitate, and direct-taken together from other indicators are not expressly defined. However, as noted above, there is a strong sense that a leader is someone that manages successfully the operations and resources.

Reflections

A large part of leadership is taken up with directing operations and managing resources. Budgets are over or under, sometimes perfect. The money is allocated and resources are purchased. The direction of operations in an effective way is perhaps a harder aspect to measure. My own experiences lead me to wonder about how much time is spend on this indicator versus the other indicators. Leaders are often advanced because they are good organizers and planners. While everyone will applaud an improvement to low achievement scores there is a definite sense that a deficit budget is a major problem.

I have worked in schools where a large portion of money was spent on athletics facilities while teachers were teaching in classrooms with 40 students. The new athletics facilities are celebrated and quickly forgotten but the teachers continue to manage large class sizes. There is no sense of the problem because the budget is balanced. In smaller schools, in the Alberta context, there are often very few discretionary dollars to spend. Discretionary spending is very small and most of the decisions are taken up by allocating staffing budgets and then supplies. The gap between the allocation of resources to large plants versus smaller plants means managing resources can look very differently in different contexts. Leaders will have to understand the relationship between need and want in these different contexts.

Managing School Operations and Resources:

8. A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources.

a. identifying and planning for areas of need; (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

This area of leadership has the most matter-of-fact language and is the most direct. Identifying and planning (GOA, 2018a, p. 7) feel very straightforward and don't suggest involving others, as in the example of visionary leadership where the leader is expected to "collaborate with the school community" (GOA, 2018a, p. 6). Perhaps this is explicitly understood to operate alongside the other indicator but it generates a more singular focus on the leader as manager.

Reflections

The visual aspects of maintenance and the fairly straightforward relationship with elements such as paint or supplies makes this a potential slam dunk for organized leaders. In my own experience, most people see paper stacks and feel calmer in supply rooms. Parents see banners and beautiful signs, and experience a sense of wellness towards the school. Tax payers seem to be getting value out of their dollars because their environment is maintained. Teachers relax and feel supported when their equipment works and supplies are maintained. Teachers like feeling like they can focus on teaching and not saving resources or money. It is easy to identify newly painted walls and stacks of books. But resource allocation can cause friction internally in a school, while not being apparent to external observation. My worry is this managerial-type work becomes or will become the primary work of educational leaders rather than the work of leading educators. Purchasing and allocating resources seems simpler and more directly observable than the messier work of educating and leading.

Managing School Operations and Resources:

8. A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources.

b. applying principles of effective teaching and learning, child development, and ethical leadership to all decisions; (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

There is a shift in tone as more complex aspects of the field of education are now applied to all decisions. Apply means to “bring into contact, devote, direct” (Onions, 1966, p. 44). The word principle finds its etymology in words such as “source, fundamental source, quality, truth, general rule, law” (Onions, 1966, p. 710). This seems to mean that leaders should direct/devote the fundamental source/truth/law of effective teaching and learning, child development, and ethical leadership to all decisions.

Reflections

My own sense and experiences are that there are widely variant opinions around what is effective teaching. The desire to make this measurable actually limits definitions of what is considered effective. I’m not sure how applying the principles of a concept without a global or local consensus around it is going to be measured. Child development is another area having problematic variances of agreement.

A knowledge of contemporary child psychology may be absent in current leaders. A basic understanding of Piaget and Vygotsky might have been imparted but actual developmental knowledge may be completely lacking. This may be an area requiring a serious investment in professional development.

In some of my work, I have been exposed to the importance of the quality of the learning environment as a factor in learning. A high-quality environment is held to have a positive impact on achievement. I do feel there is a correlation between crumbling and unhealthy buildings and

poor achievement, to say the least. The decisions around how this money is spent thought may not always be based on child development or even evidence-based decisions.

I also wonder: What is ethical leadership? An online business dictionary definition is laughable in its lack of coherence by adding in “pragmatically open to.” Open to what? Open to being ethical in a pragmatic way. This definition implies business ethics is about public perception rather than actually practice. As education becomes more and more driven by business models, is this the ethical leadership individuals are seeking to measure? At the base of the issue, making people happy by catering decisions to their own personal needs is unethical. However, the idea of consensus building and fear embedded in this document, means ethical leadership—in a business context—directs the leader to consider ethics in a fluid way.

It has always been, in my experience, that some voices get heard more than others. The impact of social class and agency, the ability to focus on self-interest—without a hint of irony—allows upwardly mobile individuals to increase their agency.

Managing School Operations and Resources:

8. A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources.

c. aligning practices, procedures, policies, decisions, and resources with school and school authority visions, goals and priorities; (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

Practices, procedures, policies, decisions, and resources is a long list of elements to include in one indicator. It includes school level and school authority level elements.

Reflections

Also, this is making business practice law. The idea of a vision is part of a business trend ebbing and flowing with new trends. I wonder about putting business management trends into a legally mandated document. This statement should be more general at most, to direct the leader to follow school authority mandates or policies or frameworks. When somebody comes out mocking the pointlessness of vision statements, this document will look antiquated.

Also, vision statements are particularly vague and hopeful. “Refresh the world”- (The Coca-Cola Company, 2020). I don’t feel like childhood obesity and global drought are particularly refreshing. Statements will change more frequently than this document. Sometimes goals and priorities are unachievable, hence the Coke example; the public are holding leaders and organizations accountable to hopeful wishing. In an honest and holistic way, this would make all leaders a failure.

Further to this reflection, I recently attended professional development and was struck by a sense of wonder about how public education is organized in Alberta. There is provincial governance, school board governance, and professional association governance. The province dictates school boards have to be aligned with provincial policies in order to get funding. The *LQS* mandates, through this indicator, that school policies must be aligned with school board policies which are aligned with provincial policies. I assume—unlike some educational jurisdictions—our professional association is somewhat unique in that it only partially operates as a union, seeing itself more in line with medical associations. The professional association seems to advocate more for itself as a larger advocate of public education and governance than say specific union functions. This seems to imply there are three different levels of governance all professing to perform similar tasks and all aligning policies.

Managing School Operations and Resources:

8. A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources.

d. following through on decisions made by allocating resources (human, physical, technological and financial) to provide the learning environments and supports needed to enable and/or improve learning for all students; (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

The term “follow through” originates from the game of golf and means “to continue the stroke, after the ball has been struck, to the full extent of the swing” (OED, 2020). This suggests that a leader should stay with a decision to the “full extent” of the process. Considering this is a long indicator with many aspects included the emphasis on follow through could seem overwhelming considering the extent of the indicator.

Reflections

I guess it seems decisions are made and then there isn't the follow through to ensure the decision is made actual in practice. Perhaps this is the frustration of individuals who are told change is going to happen but then the change doesn't happen. Sometimes the issue for leaders is time. Schools can move slowly when purchasing items through bureaucratic channels or following appropriate policies. At times this can mean the necessary object or change is only available for a limited amount of time for a student. These can lead to expressions of frustration. Ultimately, leaders will need to be conscious of the fact some decisions need to be acted up quickly in order for them to effective or have an impact.

The focus here is not on making decisions, but following-through on decisions. The issue though is education systems are risk adverse by nature and necessity. You can't waste money, or at least you're not supposed to, and you're not supposed to make mistakes. This may also add to

the public perception that nothing happens as a result of decision making, because they aren't around to see the changes. I overheard local grade 7 students complaining about the school getting new paint after they had moved on from their primary school. It takes time to make and implement these improvements which contributed to a perception they missed the improvement of new paint. Perhaps leaders will need to communicate timelines to school and local community so once students have moved on they will be aware they were considered in the experience. This may also improve a sense of progress and follow through in the broader community.

I wonder if all leaders are held to the same level of accountability. Democratic process doesn't necessarily hold all members of the bureaucracy to the same standard as politicians. The level of follow-through on decisions is often mitigated through contextual factors shifting decisions; will this create a negative perception of flexible leaders?

Managing School Operations and Resources:

8. A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources.

e. facilitating access to appropriate technology and digital learning environments;
and (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

The etymology of facilitate means to “render easy” (Onions, 1966, p. 341). This suggests that it is the leader's role to render it easy for individuals to access “technology and digital learning environments” (GOA, 2018a, p. 7). The tone of facilitating access does not create the same impact, in my experience, as ensuring access or creating digital environments.

Reflections

The cult of technology is a daunting thing. The inclusion of digital learning environments in this is an interesting indicator to make policy. I would prefer to see this term defined more

appropriately. There is a certain level of anxiety about the promises of online learning and the lack of ability to follow through on those promises. I am not discussing the validity of digital learning or online distance learning, I am referencing the promise of classroom-less instruction—the elimination of school hours. It seems to work really well for a certain percentage of the population and not so well for some.

Alberta, as noted already, has a wide variance of school board authority and geographic density of schools. The importance of digital learning environments may be more important to isolated communities where resources do not allow for a full complement of teacher directed courses. There is significant and important sense to the Alberta education system that living anywhere in the province shouldn't be a detriment to your educational attainment. In some regards, technology and digital learning environments are more important in these contexts.

Managing School Operations and Resources:

8. A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources.

f. ensuring operations align with provincial legislation, regulations and policies, and the policies and processes of the school authority. (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

As commented on in the indicator immediately above this, ensuring feels like a stronger word than facilitate when used in an indicator. Ensure means “make sure or safe, assure, pledge, guarantee” (Onions, 1966, p. 316). Using a word that includes concepts such as assure and guarantee gives this a stronger tone than making something easy, to my mind.

Reflections

I am not sure school authorities are allowed to not align with provincial policies. The amount of space given in policy to ensure practice and policy are all aligned with varying levels

of each other does give me a sense of wonder. The anxiety and mistrust present in this document creates a sense of wild variance in practice needing to be addressed. I wonder about the need to have policies, which already exist, and then a standards document holding people accountable for not following policies. An alternate possibility is there is a governance gap between the traditional school board structure and provincial regulation. School boards are elected democratically to govern the operation of schools. The provincial government is also elected democratically to govern the operation of schools. The legitimacy of these decision-making entities is potentially open to debate, in a sense of prerogative. Either way, my experience has indicated that generally the operation of the school is fairly standard and expected. The process conjures up images of bells and paper supply orders which must function to prevent chaos and can easily overwhelm the focus of a leader if problems emerge.

It is important for leaders to understand these operational processes, but they will likely find there is a fairly smooth process already in place and running smoothly. New leaders will have to ensure these processes will align meaning they will have to be aware of the processes. The concept of sameness and alignment is strongly emphasized in the culture of administration. Much of my experience has indicated there is generally a strong push to align all aspects of operations with the school authority and the province.

Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context:

9. A leader understands and appropriately responds to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting schools and the school authority. (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

There are many layers and complex issues to understand in this indicator. The use of the word “appropriately” (GOA, 2018a, p. 7) in this context is interesting to me. The OED defines

appropriately as “in a manner properly suited; fittingly” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020). This emerges from root words meaning to “make one’s own, take to oneself” (Onions, 1966, p. 45). This implies responding in a way that is fitting to yourself as a leader. Which has a different connotation than say acting properly. To my mind when people here a word such as appropriately or properly, they are drawn to the definitions of proper such as “strictly pertaining, thorough, complete, excellent, fine” (Onions, 1966, p. 716).

Reflections

As I reflect on my life in Alberta, 1970s to now, it seems in the past, the Alberta government was particularly good at not antagonizing its far right/ultra conservative base. Policies were generally supportive of resource-based engines of the economy, and policies tended to avoid controversial social issues. This was easy during the Ralph Klein years because the agenda was fiscal management and reduction of taxes. While this was a successful tactic for many years, the socially conservative base was becoming more and more distant from emerging openness to libertarian values and shifting focus to urban voters.

This success by the provincial conservatives hid the differences in the party that was leading to the emerging conflict causing the emergence of the Wild Rose party. The splitting of the conservative base, and growing unhappiness with the seeming arrogance of the ruling Tories lead to the shocking win by the NDP.

Since then, the NDP government increased the profile of policies antagonizing the far right/ultra conservatives in the province. For example, the party increased the profile of policies geared towards supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Two Spirit (LGBTQ2S), and other identities and creating policies around Gay Straight Alliance groups (which support

students who are LGBTQ2S in schools), which have further stoked the fires of and blow back from religious fundamentalists and social conservatives.

Leaders in Alberta schools are forced to navigate a complex social world where any issue can end up being talked about as a global issue. In many ways, leaders are expected to be both conservative and liberal at the same time, because the environment is both. The traditional structure and expectation of safety makes schools fairly conservative environments in many ways. Educators are held to a higher standard for public behavior and are supposed to keep their private lives private. In some ways, it has always felt like teachers are supposed to be in a social fabric time machine where they are living nuclear family existences in public. Even if the local community advocates for a more liberal approach to social issues, they often feel comfortable knowing the school leader lives a conservative (safe) lifestyle.

The experience of navigating these complex social and professional negotiations is part of the process of leading in a 21st century school. The gaps between conservative and liberal policies and practices are continuing to widen. Schools are at the forefront of change and miles behind at the same time. This is part of the complex relationship policies reinforce.

Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context:

9. A leader understands and appropriately responds to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting schools and the school authority.

- a. *supporting the school community in understanding the legal frameworks and policies that provide the foundations for the Alberta education system (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)*

At first the verb “supporting” (GOA, 2018a, p. 7) seems to be less direct than ensuring, as used in other indicators. The word support derives its meaning from definitions such as “endure, tolerate, strengthen the position of, furnish sustenance, keep from failing” (Onions, 1966, p. 888). In this context, the idea of strengthening the position of the school community feels like the intent of the indicator.

Reflections

My opinion is that on some levels, new leaders in Alberta will probably focus on understanding the basic legal frameworks as they exist. This would include provincial, school board, and professional association governance, most of which is aligned and, in many ways, redundant (see ATA code of professional conduct quote above). Individuals, new to Alberta, will probably be shocked by the generally friendly relationship between all of these levels of governance, if they start their journey in a location traditionally aligned to the governance models. The historical context of each school authority may unfold a different story depending on the context.

I think the strange and somewhat unique relationship Alberta has with taxes, sameness, and freedom all play into a somewhat unique relationship with conflict and context. In the Alberta context, because of school choice movements and strong religious conservatism, there has been a lot of freedom for individual communities and schools to personalize the individual nature of the learning environment. Religious schools, private schools, charter schools were given a lot of room to self-define and self-segregate their stakeholders from the broader population of “regular” students. Parents not wanting to struggle with inclusion, multiculturalism, challenging behaviours, poverty, or anything else they felt uncomfortable with had pathways, and largely still do, to avoid them.

As funding models have become more centralized and provincial legislation has become more inclusive of all Albertans; potential conflict between specific mandates and provincial, national, and international contexts has arisen. Particularly as human rights legislation and funding accountability have become more of an issue as the NDP took office. Traditional rural conservatives, either in the old Progressive Conservative Party or the new United Conservative Party, would not kick the hornet's nest of transgender washrooms in Evangelical Private schools largely attended by their base. Separate board Catholic schools have now been brought to task for the same issue. The conflict between separate school board mandate, human rights legislation, and provincial policy becomes more complex when distributing public money. Particularly when your own tax base is not large enough to fund your school or board.

Therefore, leaders will have to be aware appropriate responses may be varying and contradictory. The correct answer on washrooms will be different depending on which board you work for and what their stance is on fighting with the current provincial government. Many authorities will likely be waiting for the next election to see if a new party will get in. While the legislation may or may not overtly change, the desire to hold groups accountable may change. As of this writing, there seems to be an increase in the expression of nationalist right wing sentiment in Europe and the United states, these trends may continue and may need to be addressed. The centralized funding of education has ensured all areas of the province have similar rates of funding and aren't hurt by having low tax bases. However, centralized funding means centralized rules. The consequences of not following the governance of the province or legal frameworks is funding can be taken away. Additionally, if all the tax dollars were directed to public schools—rather than public, separate, and private—the separate boards and private schools would suffer.

Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context:

9. A leader understands and appropriately responds to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting schools and the school authority.

b. representing the needs of students at the community, school authority, and provincial levels (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

The use of the word “representing” is interesting. The word means to variably “bring into one’s presence, bring before the mind, symbolize, stand in the place of” (Onions, 1966, p. 757). This doesn’t limit the use of the word needs to educational, but implies any need of a student. To represent those needs at the community, school authority, and provincial levels could be a daunting task. It is also interesting that it doesn’t ensure that those needs are met.

Reflections

In many regards, this indicator feels like it tasks leaders to report to varying levels of accountability. The process of reporting often limits needs to charts and numbers. I hope the “needs of students” is broad enough to include a larger definition of needs beyond desks and improved accomplishment. The broadening of list of needs that can be represented further complicates the depth of work for leaders. As this document shifts the focus to student-centered learning, does this mean the individual needs of all students?

I attended an emergency meeting in the 2000s with a principal. As a teacher leader in English language arts, it was part of my job to attend the meeting because the area of concern was the subject matter. Many individuals packed into a conference room where they were presented with accountability pillar data from the province. This is a colorful document presenting a school or school authority on a table. The specific colors are not important to this reflection other than to say the English arts was the wrong color. What struck me about this

meeting was the emphasis on changing the color. The general direction given at the meeting was that the bad color had to become the good color and that if you moved weaker students out of English 30-1 into 30-2 the color would change quickly.

In the province of Alberta, a key difference between one grade 12 subject and another is generally the ability of this course to get you into University. The one course all students have to take is English 30-1. English 30-2 won't get you into University. Therefore, English Language Learners (ELL) with aspirations of becoming professionals can work hard to have a good average in four other courses and still end up getting a 60 percent in English 30-1. However, in a large district with a large ELL population, this causes the wrong color to show up on the chart. You may find it a difficult challenge to move students out of English 30-1 because their mark is 60 percent if the rest of their courses average to 90 percent. I would even suggest it is unethical to do so based on a color on a chart.

However, at the district level, this means school authorities are still forced to address the issue of low performing ELL students because their job is to ensure high levels of achievement. I do not want to diminish the stress this creates. There is a high expectation to make all the colors on the chart the right color. People can and will lose their jobs if the district doesn't perform. It can be a difficult negotiation but a necessary one. Leaders have to be able to advocate for the needs of all students. In this case particularly when the best interest of a child may be at odds of the best interest of accountability pillar. In my experience though, the need of a child is rarely ignored if advocated appropriately. The need may be too grand or the situation too complex to resolve efficiently or sufficiently, but resources will be mobilized if you advocate.

Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context:

9. A leader understands and appropriately responds to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting schools and the school authority.

c. engaging local community partners to understand local contexts (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

This is a relatively new concept in terms of my career awareness. Engaging local community partners has emerged as a bigger emphasis alongside calls for mental health supports, nutrition education, and general wellness. Understanding local contexts is also emerging as newer concept.

Reflections

As I moved from the classroom to more leadership roles, the relationship with schools and outside agencies or community partners became more evident. I am not absolutely clear when I read this what is meant by community partners, but social services and policing come to mind. There are also local organizations with a depth of knowledge on local histories that can help new leaders understand better the impact of these local histories on the functioning of the school. Leaders engage in the broader community because the lives of students go beyond the walls of the school. Community partners can help leaders to understand what is a major issue and what isn't a major issue. There are things in communities difficult to change and sometimes they are necessary and shouldn't be changed. Other elements of community are toxic and problematic, working with local community agencies will allow leaders to build understanding but also important relationships.

There are also important charitable aspects around special events and holidays community agencies help coordinate or contribute resources to. These moments can help

illuminate the wealth or lack of wealth of students, which students may need support, and other aspects of need. This is only a small sample of possible times or situations, but there is always a story underneath the surface that can help leaders understand the context of their community.

Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context:

9. A leader understands and appropriately responds to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting schools and the school authority.

d. *demonstrating an understanding of local, provincial, national, and international issues and trends and their implications for education (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)*

The demonstrating of an understanding is a fairly open statement. The use of “an” as opposed to a “solid” or “good” understanding suggests a wide latitude of understanding is acceptable. The approach here is to avoid loading the statement with much of a measurable nature or anything too specific.

Reflections

I feel it is important to understand the varying contexts suggested by the *LQS*. Some leaders have a rich understanding of the local context but may not have a sense of global issues. Other leaders may be very conscious of the global trends but have a poor understanding of the local context. Leaders move from school to school in large urban centres. The leaders in these contexts bring a school board perspective (which is helpful to support the school district) but they may be insulated from the provincial or school contexts.

As I reflect on the document as a whole, I also keep coming back to the emphasis here on trends and issues. Trends have seemed to come and go quite quickly at a local level. Things are tried, leaders change, the idea dies on the vine. The issues seem to be more of a slow process of

transformation and resistance. I can easily change the perception of my understanding by shifting my language to use the latest trendy language in my professional conversations. It is much harder to transform my understanding about societal issues.

I can remember, nearly ten years ago, the first time a student walked past my office to use the staff washroom. This student was transitioning from male to female and felt uncomfortable in the gender separate and specific washrooms. At the time I thought it was an amazing world that could shift its patterns to allow a student into a staff washroom. I was pretty sure this wouldn't have happened at my own high school of my youth.

This use of the staff washroom has moved from a surprisingly open step of a closed society, to be now seen as an unfortunate situation where a student was made to feel uncomfortable in the washroom of their choice. The current movement of the gender issue is now to include gender neutral washrooms, and to build an atmosphere where all students are comfortable using the washroom of their choice.

In the gender binary homophobic environment of my youth, this new world is a fascinatingly open and caring place. While I feel for the individuals who had to pioneer this journey, who had to fight to get identity on the political agenda, who had to live with bullying along the way, I still feel the Alberta context has moved so far towards a world where bullying is unacceptable in policy and for the most part practice.

I don't want to come across as glib. I understand I am more open than many people in society. I know there is still discrimination and bullying and risk for many individuals in the Alberta context. I use this example to highlight how the issue of gender doesn't come and go like a trend. The issue of gender identity in Alberta schools can't be something you implement for

three years and then abandon for a new trend. There is a distinct difference between shifting suddenly between numeracy and literacy and putting students at risk for bullying or worse.

At the same time, Alberta is also a particularly conservative place. Leaders have to navigate a delicate balance of understanding social conservatism is also a local, provincial, and global trend. The issue of which trends to legitimize, in the above example, doesn't seem particularly problematic, but which trends are legitimized or not can change quite quickly. The changing, or unchanging, landscape of local contexts can place leaders in contradictory positions. An aspect of this is also the right to not understand something. This document suggests to me leaders are supposed to understand the trends, there are trends; however, there are trends antithetical to my understanding of the world. It may be impossible for me to fully understand certain elements. I also worry understanding is sometimes taken to be agreement. I could say I understand something as a statement and disagree with everything. There is a bit of semantic wiggle room here for leaders, I suspect.

Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context:

9. A leader understands and appropriately responds to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting schools and the school authority.

- e. *facilitating school community members' understanding of local, provincial, national, and international issues and trends related to education.* (GOA, 2018a, p. 7)

The *LQS* directs leaders to facilitate school community member understandings. This includes local, provincial, national, and international issues and trends. It also specifically directs this facilitation towards education. The school community in this context uses the words

“includes staff” fairly strongly but then also states this is “along with students, parents/guardians and school council members.”

Reflections

While attempting to be largely devoid of value-laden language, it feels like this indicator involves making it easier for a community to understand trends. I imagine a leader’s values unfold as the trends and issues selected for facilitation are expressed. I keep coming back to a few different issues with regards to trends, but it seems as if there are equal measures of progressive and conservative educational trends. Leaders may have to understand tax structures and funding policies to engage the school community on trends relating to support for public education. I wonder about the impact of the community on filtering out trends widely held in some regions but poorly accepted by the specific community. Jim Keegstra—who lost his teaching certificate for being a holocaust denier—was then voted in as mayor of his community. The standard of behavior for teachers in the province was different than the standard for his community, so much so, they elected him as a leader. If a new principal had arrived to this community, I can imagine the range of contradictory values supporting this leadership standard might bring to the fore.

I also wonder how technology trends and loosening the definitions of classroom and time will be understood by the varying stakeholders of a school community. Breaking down the primacy of a teacher to define the shape and boundaries of a classroom might be a difficult understanding to facilitate. Removing knowledge from the curriculum as knowledge becomes easily accessible but also increasingly contested, and may challenge many school community members’ understandings.

In this way the *LQS* document seems to shy away from suggesting a process of changing understanding but facilitating does imply a sort of paternalistic disregard. Resistance may be seen as resulting from a lack of understanding. School community members may be disregarded as not understanding the trend, rather than being accepted into the dialogue as a fully understanding resistor. This causes me to reflect back on the concept of consensus building. Achieving agreement is seen as a key indicator for leaders.

A Return to the Preamble

As I return to the beginning of this dissertation, I am drawn to reflect on the preamble and opening of this standard. I feel the use of “whereas” in the beginning contributes to a sense of a government act, a proclamation, or—ultimately—authority. This is a further sense of contradiction has stayed with me through my interpretation of the standard. There is an omnipresent tension between “must meet” and professional judgement that leaves me equally conflicted. On the one hand I am encouraged by the opportunities to embrace professionalism and choice, while on the other, I am somewhat apprehensive of authoritative legislative language which suggests musts. Ultimately, Gadamer draws me back to consider the document will be interpreted and exist in the interpretations of the individuals guided by their own historically effected consciousness, prejudices, and traditions.

Chapter VII. Interpretive Sediments

We should have no illusions, bureaucratized teaching and learning systems dominate the scene, but nevertheless it is everyone's task to find [their] free space

(Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1992, p. 59)

Stratigraphy

My research questions have been a guide and a burden from the very beginning of this process. Hermeneutics (in various modes) can offer many insights into how people interpret leadership policy. The first problematic of this approach—the merging of hermeneutics with an audience's desire to see questions and answers—is that I am loathe to provide answers to direct the reader. However, there are expectations when writing a dissertation that you have a problem or a question(s). The consequence of this expectation is that the audience will then expect an answer. This problematic has haunted me and this research from the beginning. My purpose in taking a hermeneutic stance was to spark hermeneutic interest and merge my horizons with my audience. To give them the experience of reading my experience, adding a layer of sediment to their own sediments. Providing insight into policy that might spark their own thoughts and that they may engage in a conversation with the work and with me. At every step of this process though, readers have asked me to answer questions or act like an expert. As loathe as I am to direct and answer questions, it seems inevitable that I will have to face this fact, so here I go with some answer.

What can hermeneutics—specifically considering the contributions of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2013)—offer as insight into how people interpret leadership policy? Was my first question and in many ways represents the hermeneutic wonder that kept me going in my graduate work. While knowing that this answer will change over time and in different places I

provide a crisp answer as follows. Hermeneutics provides us insight into policy because it supports the conception of people as historic beings. That is, that people are the product of experience and the world around them. In order to understand policy better, we should approach it from the understanding that humans are all hermeneuts (interpreters) in the life world. Further to this, my research has led me to understand that policy is part of a human endeavour not a technical process. There is a natural desire to make it an industry or a scientific experiment, but ultimately humans interpret and implement policy in the lifeworld and this is what we can and should gain from this dissertation and Gadamer's hermeneutics.

I presented—at several points in this dissertation—answers to question two: What are the layers of policy sediment that the *LQS* stands upon? The answer to this is that it stands on many layers but the sediments of language do give us some hints and I present some of the answers as follows.

The *Leadership Quality Standard* (GOA, 2018a) is where my hermeneutic wonder has taken me. As part of my findings, it seems appropriate to examine what the words Leadership, Quality, and Standard uncover for me, as I reflect on the document and this process. I will begin with “leadership” and “standards,” and perhaps these two words will then allow me to address “quality.”

My own journey with leadership in schools begins with being a student in public schools during the late 1970s and 1980s. During this time period, I would characterize my relationship with leaders as largely non-existent. I think, from my recollection, once in grade 9 and once in grade 12, principals spoke to me directly. Other than these largely odd, seemingly out-of-context social interactions, the presence of leadership in schools was defined by the myths spread by my peers surrounding corporal punishment.

During this time, it seems my administrators were products of the scientific management era of leadership training (Greenfield, 1979, 1986). Within this movement, the focus on what was defined as worthy of attention by administrators was particularly narrow in scope (Greenfield, 1986). My experiences with leadership could have also been impacted by lingering metaphors of organization established during the post-World War I and Depression era as a response to the emergence of factory models of organizations (Beck, 1999; Morgan, 2006). It seems likely the growth of factories, the possibilities of efficiency, and the allure of scientific certainty were more of a happy synthesis rather than competing ideas.

Leaders, at this time, were likely managers of a factory, moving children along as efficiently as possible. Budgets, student counts, and human resources were largely the focus of the work. As a student, with administrators educated with these principles, it seemed leaders were practically unseen. We dreaded doing something or getting caught doing something that might lead us to interact with the school administration. The focus of leadership, as suggested by Beck (1999), Greenfield (1979, 1986), and Morgan (2006), was on leading the building and the staff. The experiences of children were not at the forefront of the work-- perhaps this was exclusively the work of teachers at this time.

As leadership processes began to change, leadership theory and practice started to shift from managing the school and the staff towards educational leadership (Tosas, 2015). Some discourse began to unfold around the importance of beliefs, values, and ideologies in education. Some of these discourses focused on moral purpose (Starratt, 2003), social justice (Noddings, 2005), inclusion (Ryan, 2006), and gender (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). While these discourses were emerging in leadership studies, the discussion of what it meant to be a leader shifted away from exclusively managing a space or staff.

The shifting discourses are important, because Gadamer (2013) provides us a sense our ways of understanding uplifts out of the layers of sediment those understandings stand on. Scientific management and its adherents didn't disappear or fade away; they continued, but alongside new voices added to the complexity of leadership discussions. Effective schools research (see Sammons et al, 1995, for a summary), standards movements (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Louis et al., 2005), and Total Quality Management—and responses to it (Mercer et al., 2010)—all emerged or continued alongside, against, or in conjunction with values-based leadership discourses.

These were the layers of sediment I stood upon as I began to enter the educational field around the mid-1990s. Education classes were a complex mix of legal cases, social critiques, human psychology, sociology, pedagogy, and instructional methods. Each of these courses was rooted in one (or more) of the many educational discourses that were emerging, developing, or established at the time. The leadership course, I think I was only aware of one required for undergraduate students, largely focused on legal aspects: who was responsible for what. The values-based leadership of the day was present as a chapter in a survey text but most of the dialogue and work in the class circulated around examples of poor teacher behavior. At that time, this introduction to leadership didn't do much to inflame a passion for becoming a leader.

What did uplift in me, though, was a sense of discontinuity within the process of understanding leadership. There was discourse informed by this field and that field, but they largely were held in separate regard. The legal cases studies didn't address issues of human psychology. The social critiques didn't consider the complications of bureaucratic expectation. While I quickly became a leader and a mentor once I entered the profession, I was often—and

still am—shocked by the expectation of navigating all of these different discourses surrounding leaders.

As I began to see myself as an established educational leader there were shifts again in the discourses emerging around leadership. While none of the other discourses ever seemed to go away, the emphasis on particular discourses did shift. The new emphasis unfolding in the 2000s was of broader organizational systems theory through distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005), cognitive models (Lakomski, 2008), and learning communities (Dufour, 2004)

In my earlier reflections, largely based on my perspective as a teacher, I drew upon my own experiences of confusion and wonder. The leadership trends continued to surround my work as a teacher, but I was drawn to policy to find legitimacy or explanations for actions. As I have illustrated, the policies provide both guidance and confusion. Opportunistically as the *LQS* happened to become policy as I began this uncovering, I am eager to find how these trends of leadership are situated within the larger context of a standards document for educational leaders in Alberta.

As I approached the document, it became clear a leader is the product of numerous traditions—what it means to be a leader and how leadership is defined likely stands on these layers of sediment rather than be a simple or straight-forward idea. Leadership is, instead, a product of decades of leadership traditions all cohabitating within the tradition of public schooling in Alberta.

Upon reflection, I have become particularly interested in the concept of “standards” as it seems there is a conflicted understanding of what people mean when they use the word. As

hermeneutics is about understanding and experience, it is important to take some time to unpack what the word may mean to me and to others.

During my early years and through K to 12 education, the word was rarely used—or at least had little effect on me. When I entered university, the concept began to filter into my experience. Now initially, I encountered the statement when people would suggest classes or programs needed to up their standards. Or somebody might say they have “high standards” for something. During my part time work at various jobs, store managers might say they had high standards for tidying or hard work. The connection between these claims at university undergrad or in the work world seemed a little weak in terms of claim and reality.

I believe this tenuous claim between claim and reality is something I carried into my initial uncovering of the word standard. At a certain point, probably over the course of the 1900s, mass public education shifted from a minimum level of necessary education for all towards a high skill standard (Lee & Wong, 2004) for all. As schools shifted towards increasing the level of education for all students, (in theory) it does follow that calls for higher standards for teachers and administrators would likely follow.

As I interpret the *LQS*, I’m drawn to two initial interpretations of the word “standard.” The first way I have come to understand the word is as “sameness.” Sometimes I have interpreted this as “standard procedure.” Each person will follow the same actions, which makes those actions standardized. The other way I have come to understand this word is as “a level of quality,” as in individuals can expect a high standard of service. As noted by Lee and Wong (2004), there is a sense of shifting expectations in education giving credence to the second interpretation of increasing standard. However, my uncovering of the word standard also gives credence to the trend towards standards as a common expectation of procedure.

This “standards movement” is another discourse adding layers of sediment to the experience of leading in schools, brings calls for increased quality of teachers and leaders (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002). These calls bring urgency to not only increasing the knowledge of teachers in subject areas but also of educational methods (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002). While Carnoy and Loeb (2002), at this point, aren’t calling for particularly complex demands for leaders, they do call for increased capacity for managing schools.

As I began to uncover work on standards, I was curious about how these movements have migrated across public service sectors but also how educational leaders often cite medical or clinical services as the model to emulate. Medical examples are often used to express how you wouldn’t go to a doctor basing their practice on old methods or non-scientific practice. These moments are usually used to express how standards are so self-evident. I found this list in an article on the emerging necessity for standards in the medical field (Chassin et al., 1988): 1) growing concerns over quality of care, 2) increasing evidence of wide spread differences in the way physicians practice medicine, 3) an increasing realization that much of medical practice lacks rigorous scientific underpinning, and 4) a growing perception that as a society we are not receiving sufficient value for the resources we spend on health care. It seems likely these four elements could be reframed with education or educational leadership to illuminate the different uses implied by standard in the discourses around standards in education.

There seems to be an endless feeling of unease around the quality of education. For the most part, this emerges from the standards movement itself. The idea of this need for improvement has been adopted by many (Louis et al., 2005). The new standard is one of continuous improvement (Louis et al., 2005). In many ways, the need for constant improvement

is contradictory with the constant celebration of the accomplishments of public education, but it is part of the discourse circulating around education.

The second point in Chassin et al. (1988) list also unfolds to support calls for standardization. It is perhaps clearer in clinical settings, but still questionable, that standard procedures should be followed. Dealing with hazardous biological waste seems to call for a standard operating procedure. However, bedside manner may not be the best experience to standardize. The underpinning of this interpretation of standard is sameness is better than difference. While this may be the case in many situations, it remains unconvincing that calls for sameness in educational settings are warranted, in light of the complex range of human interactions.

The third point in the list is shocking from a clinical perspective, even in 1988. However, the privileging of science in medicine makes sense as it purports itself to be certain. The nature of education lacks consensus and certainty, in my experience, and therefore opens up the field to more interpretive and situational approaches. The argument for standardized procedures, standardized assessment, and standardized teaching methods only suggest one solution: more of itself.

The last point is probably the most problematic and troubling argument for standards, the perception the taxpayer is not getting enough in return for the investment. As I have already noted, the policy environment is contradictory due to the competing demands of personal and public interest (Stone, 2012). The concept of return on investment also runs counter to the concept of holding a person to an academic standard. The idea taxpayers should get an equivalent amount of service to tax contribution seems to be inequitable considering the more money you pay in taxes, the higher in socio-economic standing, and thus advantage, you enjoy.

Almost ten years after Chassin et al. (1988) article, Sutherland and Leatherman (2006) identified similar concerns with standards and the medical field. It seemed through their research that focusing on standards and certification improved medical care and a reduction in disciplinary actions. In education, the determinant of performance is a bit more contested than mortality rates. What uplifts for me in this uncovering is the emphasis on standards in all aspects of leadership means the word standards can be interpreted to mean all types of standard.

In medical articles, there tends to be a delineation between process standards and quality standards of care (Chassin et al., 1988; Sutherland & Leatherman, 1996). In my experience, calls for educational standards tend to lump together process sameness/consistency and increases in quality under the same umbrella of standards. Furthermore, in variance from some of the medical articles, educational standards emphasize individual needs of a student with equal emphasis to those of systemic sameness.

Discussions of standards for educational leadership are varied and fraught with tensions. Finn and Kanstoroom (2000) note educational standards advocates often express different foci when discussing educational standards. Some advocates wanted school systems to emphasize subject matter knowledge as the primary route to increasing educational standards (Finn & Kanstoroom, 2000). Others expressed a strong need for certification for teachers. Finn and Kanstoroom (2000), ultimately—regardless of emphasis—speak to the importance of leaders when implementing or creating a culture focused on standards. While Carnoy and Loeb (2008) emphasize managing schools as the important standard of leadership, Spillane et al. (2008) present discourses on the importance of shared leadership. It is perhaps, the synthesis of all of these dialogues have been embodied by increasing calls for standards which Louis et al. (2005) call “the standards movement”. They found the standards movement evolved to include

curriculum frameworks, standardized assessments, increasing qualification standards for teachers, and benchmarks for student outcomes based on continuous improvement (Louis et al., 2005).

As a teacher and leader during this period, I have experienced all of these discourses around leadership and standards to various degrees. I have felt the various pressures to consider standardizing (sameness) all process while still having room for difference (professional standard). Yet, when I am in the doctor's office, I want the doctor to consider the unique qualities making me human. If the doctor treats me the same as everybody else, then unique issues will not get addressed. In this way, the issue of quality becomes the most problematic of the three words comprising the title *Leadership Quality Standard*.

As noted by Louis et al. (2005), standards have morphed into a broader range of concerns as have leadership discourses. The conceptualization of quality in these frames can range depending on the emphasis of discourse and the nature of the word of standard used. In some regards, sameness will equal quality at the highest level. In other circumstances, the presence of difference will be seen as the highest quality. Overall, in my experience, contradictory interpretations of quality have brought out some of my most resonating experiences. The ones rushing to the surface of my own sediment usually have been the ones where the interpretation of right or wrong, good or bad, high quality or low quality have resulted in disagreement. In this sense, I look forward to examining how the presence of commonality and difference play out in the interpretation and implementation of the *Leadership Quality Standard* (GOA, 2018a).

I've reflected a lot on the idea of commonality—its ties to the word “community”—and what people mean when they say “community.” I wonder if they are suggesting a “conjoint and cooperative” way of doing things as Dewey (in Fischer, 2017) might have suggested – wherein a

group of people comes together to accomplish a unified task or a singular goal. Alternately, I wonder if they mean something closer to Senge's (1990) "learning organizations" which implies a sort of systems-oriented approach to individuals working to transform organizations together. In any case, what isn't implied or discussed in the *LQS* is a conscious unpacking of the negative consequences or connotations of the word community. I am loathe to bring this example up, but Salem was a community. It was a Puritanical community that ultimately turned on itself and destroyed itself, but it was a *community*. Communities that segregate and turn on themselves are also *communities*. Crosses can be burned in communities, people die because they don't fit in in communities, and people escape or are shunned from communities because they are not accepted. I don't think leaders should blindly accept the positive notions of communities without sifting through the layers making up people's understandings of the word. It is important, therefore, for leaders to understand this word, like all words, is layered—it has historical sediments, it has negative connotations, but it also has positive ones.

As I reflected on my first two school experiences, my early emphasis was on contradictions of autonomy and control. This was a difficult contradiction for myself to navigate and I feel it has continued in the experiences of my colleagues. As I arrive near the end of this dissertation, I feel my identity as a teacher has largely been informed by attempting to mentor and support co-workers struggling with the contradictory expectations of professional autonomy and control. In many ways my focus was on the experiences of students in the classroom and of teachers in the work. Because I hadn't started my graduate work or had as many experiences, my interpretations were based on my own historical consciousness up to that point. I had not begun to broaden my perspective to experiences of students and teachers and parents and leaders outside of the scope of the physical building.

I was developing a strong sense that empathy was needed as I entered university for graduate work. My reflections on that time drew me towards work supporting building unity and solidarity but also of emancipation. As I reflect on the work of Gadamer, I'm drawn to how he navigated and worked during some of the most oppressive bureaucracies but still managed to be an individual. Human understanding applied to humans in a deep and rich way, for the sole purpose of advancing understanding. In many ways, this is the essence of true investigation, to uncover without agenda. While it is probably clear the underlying agenda of this is understanding, I presume this amount of agenda is acceptable for hermeneutic purposes.

My wonder led me to questions how policy, which I interacted with as part of my experiences as a teacher and leader, was formed and implemented. I needed to develop an understanding of policy if I were to interpret it or speak to it. It presented me with a process of uncovering theories and ideas about policy formation. In this work, I found policies were indeed contradictory by nature. That the contested space of democratic institutions meant multiple voices, often speaking with different interests, managed in various ways to influence the development of policies. Through this work on policy, I found policy formation and interpretation to be hermeneutic by nature. I found policies were products of traditions and contexts as well as individual interpretive forces. The contradictory nature of these policies was not problematic in itself but when considered as a standard they do raise questions. The idea a teacher is supposed to meet a standard putting them in contradictory situations is not well understood, and I hope this work contributes to furthering the dialogue for educators.

What I'm seeing uplifted in the *LQS* and my own reflections is the emergence of the metaphors of "community," "commonality," and/or "sameness." However, what I have found is these standards are not ever applied to the *community* (the school community or the local

community), but actually applied to individuals themselves. The *LQS* suggests decision-making is a group process; however, the standard doesn't actually hold the group accountable. It can only hold an individual accountable. Many times in my career, I have been left to justify or defend a decision made by a group, but I was the one held accountable to the consequences of the group decision by administrators, parents, or students. As much as these standards are meant to help maintain a code or standard of professional conduct, I have found they have left me often without the personal agency to be professional.

The themes uplifted out of my data were obviously infused with my interest in Gadamer's hermeneutics. I was shocked at first at how varied and wide ranging I had to travel in my analysis and reflections, but this seems to be an inherent feature of the document. The *Leadership Quality Standard* is a wide ranging and overwhelming standard and this led to a wide-ranging overwhelming data set. However, Gadamer's hermeneutics allowed me to construct themes giving shape to my findings.

This contradiction resonates with my understanding of hermeneutics and my own experiences. In my teacher preparation there were discussions of the hidden curriculum: the broad and often unstated intent of education that shaped the key messages and function of schooling. The front matter of curricula addresses the grander purposes of education beyond the technical skills.

Beyond these grand promises or sinister subtext (depending on your perspective) there are the very specific sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes all individuals are supposed to develop over time. In the context of the students these are expressed as outcomes or competencies. For leaders, leadership knowledge and abilities are now embedded into the *LQS* as key indicators of meeting the standard.

The document doesn't identify specifically what is knowledge, skill, or attitude necessarily, but verbs—such as demonstrating, developing, creating, and supporting—are the key skills leaders are supposed to express through the *LQS*. The knowledge ranges from the major indicator to sub-indicators but includes (for example) knowing the basics of managing resources, teaching methodologies, educational trends, and issues. The attitudes are perhaps harder to identify at first, but there is a sense of reserved control but also openness—the idea of stability and safety, embedded in a forward-thinking openness to new practice.

From the standpoint of hermeneutics, all of these tensions are natural. There are clearly attempts to address what are a varying range of stakeholder demands for leaders. Some speak to the desire for fiscal responsibility, while others speak to safe spaces for all students. Educational leaders, though, spend very little time preparing to understand the finances of education and often have little power over the budget beyond discretionary spending. The safe spaces for students, something leaders are responsible for creating, bring varying degrees or definitions in terms of parental standard.

I identified in my conceptual framework that change may work more as a spiral than a pendulum (an oft quoted metaphor in my experience). There are specific professional development trends embedded in this document. The cycle of learning communities or organizations initiated by DuFour (2004) is entrenched in the language of this document. This professional development movement was initially designed as a way to create change in organizations, but is now the legislated model of how schools should organize their assessment, instruction, and professional development. This makes it the established standard, which may mean rejecting possibilities that don't fit the model. Change, then, is actually the entrenchment of a dominant discourse as opposed to a transformation. This isn't a pendulum swing; it is the

cycle of similarity with mild variation being attempted over and over again. So long have they been revisiting the learning community model, revisited in a 2008 publication. It is now 2021.

My reflections drew out an event from my teaching career where the school brought in an expert to address the needs of our First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. That was at the start of the millennium. Placing the emphasis in this document is an important step towards addressing the need for reconciliation, but it isn't a swing back of a pendulum—it is a step forward. There is a change here, but there is also continuation. While there are many writers documenting these ideas better than I (Antone, 2003; Battiste, 2002; Dion, 2009), there is an ironic comfort in the European democratic model of nationhood by using flags, reading statements, and establishing holidays. I am not against any of these events. I am just identifying how the standard brings us forward but in largely comfortable ways.

Ultimately, all of traditions reflected on in this document represent the sedimentary foundations of many educational discourses. The individuals standing on that sediment will have varying experiences of layering which will create different horizons. It is the work of others to argue and debate the impacts or successes of all these sediments in accomplishing outcomes. I would suggest they are the culmination of normal human processes which invariably lead to a landscape full of contradictions, tensions, and complexity. This represents a sort of geologic norm for all human endeavours where personal and private interests shape a landscape.

Nature of Policy Interpretation

A Varied Topography

How do I—as an individual teacher leader—interpret the LQS in light of my layers of previous experiences with policies and contradiction in Alberta? My last question. A question

that is inevitably woven into all of my answers. In fact, this question is—in retrospect—a culminating wonder of the first two questions and perhaps I should have just focused on it. However, that is not how my journey took me so I'll just have to reflect on it for future research possibilities or processes. I imagine that my easy answer to this is that I see the *LQS* as a document of varied topographies. While I haven't worked in many different parts of Alberta, I do remember travelling across the province as a child. I have always been struck by the contrast in the landscape and the topography. I remember leaving the flat plains and entering the towering Rockies and being filled with a sense of awe. I remember noticing the difference between the lush sub boreal forest of Northern Alberta and the semiarid badlands of the south. I remember leaving the densely populated urban centres and driving to places where space seemed endless.

In the same way, I have been struck by the differences in the people and the experiences of the people who live on and teach in this varied landscape. In some ways, my own journey through the education system mirrors my awe and wonder at the varied topography existing in nature. Education itself is a contested landscape—filled with ridges, valleys, detritus, sediments, and fractures.

Something uplifting in my data supporting this notion are the reflections on the contradictions in the purposes and goals of education to begin with. The etymological roots of the word education speak to and highlight the different perspectives on and purposes of education—so too do my own personal experiences growing up in a home with two teachers as parents. The foundations upon which our beliefs about education stand are rocky and varied.

As I consider the varied topography, I am drawn back to my reflections on the contradictory nature of Alberta society in regards to gender and faith. I have had numerous experiences with school community members expressing a discomfort with the broadening

acceptance of diverse gender identities. The goal of making school community members feel safe and welcome will face challenges as questions of religious freedom, religious instruction, and parental rights continue to conflict with the general societal trend to become more individual and accepting. The concept of personal identity and gender—sometimes through the lens of religious freedom—has featured prominently in a variety of policies informing the *LQS*.

My reflections point me to the media as being part of and contributing to this contested landscape. The media both celebrates successes and highlights failures. In an effort to report findings and engage audiences, the media forum has become as much about bringing us together as it is about stirring our attentions up. The Keegstra case (Fenwick, 2003) highlights the ways media can draw attention to the conflict between provincial and local community values.

What strikes me most is in education all of these different experiences, perspectives, and interpretations that emerge out of and uplift from the diverse landscape are all pulled together under policy. Even the *LQS* itself emerges out of these different aims: the instrumental aspect of the policy is the response of the government to the Inspiring Education Report (2010); out of that report came the commitment to develop standards for leaders. In addition, the government made a commitment to honour the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation committee in policy. A push from the standards movements demanded higher quality and more accountability. The government can point to policies like the *LQS* and say they have taken action to address these concerns in a way “standard” across the province. The document speaks to and reveals a multiplicity of voices, while also providing direction for actions to be taken across a varied and diverse landscape.

It seems appropriate then that a key aspect of the *LQS* given a lot of focus in conversations is “quality leadership occurs when the leader’s ongoing analysis of the context”

(GOA, 2018a, p. 3) guides decision making. There is a sense in this document and in my interpretation that the varying contexts of school authorities allow for varying interpretations to emerge and uplift out of the historical consciousness each authority stands upon. The edict in the document speaks to the need for “professional judgement” depending on the circumstance speaks to the importance of the individual in interpreting the document.

In a hermeneutic sense, then, the document becomes a *living document* because individuals bring themselves and their own historical consciousness to the *LQS* as they interpret it and also apply it. The document is therefore not fixed or finite, but instead open and infinite. It is for this reason the document will come to life in multiple and varied ways. A Gadamerian understanding of this suggests this living nature is neither good nor bad, but simply as innate to policy as sediment is to earth.

Geologic Drift, Slow and Steady

I remember as a child walking to the neighbourhood hill, sled in tow, to climb—what seemed like then to be—an enormous mountain. I came to know that mountain quite well overtime as an unchanging constant in my life. But now, years later, I see that same mountain differently: what was once a majestic incline is now simply a bump in the ground.

I think about this anecdote for two reasons: I know now the hill was not an unchanging constant—it changed with every sled down, it eroded with the wind, and it physically became smaller as I grew. The landscape changed, as it always does. Still, it changed slowly and imperceptibly to my young mind. And yet, on the other hand, as I grew, I developed new perspectives, saw new lands, and experienced different possibilities of what mountains and hills could be. My understanding of the wider topography altered and thus altered how I saw my hill.

The hill was perhaps slightly smaller than it was when I was a child due to weathering and natural process, but seemed tiny because of perspective.

As I analyze the layers of sediment present in educational discourse, I am drawn to the notion that change is both slow and constant but also filled with dramatic events that shock and transform the system and our understanding of it. While the overall educational landscape changes very slowly, there are sudden landslides and sinkholes dramatically altering the topography on which we stand as educators and interpreters of policy.

In 20 years, I have seen a shift from zero identified transgender students, to transgender students using staff washrooms, to public policy on gender neutral washrooms. While this felt like a slow process, probably slower for the transgender community, it has arrived as a shock for religious private schools and separate boards. These changes have arrived at a time when individual traditions have led to different perceptions of what is acceptable or normal. I do not want to suggest gender neutral washrooms represent a difference from the norm, they may seem as outside the norm in an orthodox private school. The existence of orthodox private schools is a product of tradition and policy. They could not exist if there wasn't a history of allowing them to and policies to empower them. This tradition is both a part of their journey but also of the Alberta Governments. The process of transformation, in small measures and in large, is a slow accumulation of sediment.

The past 40 years of policy and leadership discourse has revolved around attempts to initiate change (Fullan, 1994) or improvement (Lee, & Wong, 2004). These attempts are stuck, in many ways, within the boundaries of complexity and human nature. While it is equally human to want efficient and quick transformations, it is also human to resist sudden transformations and antithetical ideas. Policy, as already expressed, is instrumental—meaning to serve as a

purposeful agent for action—and operational—to transfer the values of the organization through the policy into actions. The *LQS* is both of these things and also represents the sedimentary accumulation of the past 40 years of slow and steady transformation of education and educational leadership.

The standards movement, values leadership, scientific management, and community metaphors all find operationalization in this policy. This may seem like a sudden change, but it also unfolds from long process of curriculum development to the first *TQS* (GOA, 1997), to ministerial orders, professional association governance, human rights legislation, and now the *LQS*. It is important to acknowledge that struggles and developments have happened in an ongoing way, particularly in light of the particular emphasis on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ways of knowing and reconciliation. The long road of struggle and acknowledgement is layered upon the experiences and work of many. The presence of data and technology has also grown and now found a place in the use of measurement and data throughout the *LQS*. These ideas, emerging from growing bureaucratization and demands for better results will likely continue to populate policy and discourse. The community metaphors and distributive literature are also represented as the values of collaboration and consensus find their way into this document.

At the same time, post 2000 and into the second decade of the millennium, values-based leadership trends continued—particularly in the area of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education. Educational models of learning and educating gained prominence in a more respected way, Battiste (2002), Antone (2003), and Cajete (1999) for example. These writers and many others began shifting the focus towards honouring, reconciling, and transforming educational attitudes towards First Nations, Métis, and Inuit [FNMI] students in schools. At this same time, Alberta

curriculum was going through a transformation with new curricular implementations increasing the emphasis on understanding and addressing the historical legacies of contact and colonization.

I've come to realize the idea that this document reflects a "new standard" is not accurate; rather the document is a reflection of the layers of sedimentary change in the educational topography of Alberta. We can see this in the Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis, Inuit indicators (GOA, 2018a, p. 6)—indicators having their own separate section in the *LQS*. While these indicators are necessary, important, and profound, they are actually not *integrated* within the standards. The fact we desire an integrated and wholistic approach to including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ways of knowing but have physically separated the indicators from the rest of document seems to reflect an authentic desire to include indigenous perspectives, but at the same time reflects the fact this will likely be an awkward and artificial process of integration for some leaders. This likely reflects, in the standard—and in society—a reality leaders need to prepare for.

Ultimately, because of our experiences, our perspectives, and our historical consciousness, how we experience the *LQS* will differ tremendously. Leaders who will have to both follow and supervise the implementation of this document will be confronted with the reality that people will respond to the changing topography in multiple and varied ways. To some, these changes will be imperceptible; to others, they will be shocking. From a hermeneutic perspective, these realities are not problems to solve, not things that can be fixed; instead, they are natural human occurrences opening up possibilities for understanding, dialogue, and the fusion of new horizons.

Forces of Nature: Resistance and Tension

Not long ago, I drove across the prairies to see the homesteads of my family with my uncles. My oldest uncle told me stories of being called in by farmers to consult with them about excessive erosion on their farmsteads. These farmers were concerned about losing their topsoil because of the high winds on the prairies. As a horticulturalist, my uncle was asked to provide advice about how to reduce the erosion of the land. Upon inspection, it became clear to my uncle and the farmers that the human process of clearing trees from the land for farms had contributed to the erosion. With this knowledge, farmers began to—instead of clearing the land of trees—replant the trees to provide a barrier from the wind in order to protect the soil. In order to harvest the most land possible, the farmers had to give up some prime space to create a tree line to maintain the optimal conditions for the soil. It became clear to me as it did to them that a farmer is constantly caught between the tension of maintaining, destroying, and creating life on the land.

This draws to my mind the natural tendency to both want change and want to prevent changes in the topography. The same is true in education. Educators naturally want to make a better world and bring forth change; and yet, the idea of what it means to improve is a contested field. At the same time, educators are constantly caught between the tension of maintaining tradition, destroying ignorance, and transforming society.

There was a strong sense of frustration unfolded in my interpretations of the *Leadership Quality Standard*. This frustration unfolded from how complex and difficult each of these indicators can be. Describing them as indicators doesn't acknowledge the contested spaces of a contradictory and contested society. Indicating schools should be a certain way doesn't acknowledge that school communities and local communities can be widely variant in their views of what is appropriate. I think professional literature oriented to leaders suggests there is a demand for simplistic approaches or strategies to get buy in. Titles such as these don't create a

sense of simple agreement: *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (Fisher & Ury, 1983), *Conversational Intelligence: How great leaders build trust and get extraordinary results* (Glaser, 2016), *Words that change minds: Mastering the language of influence* (Charvet, 1997). These titles, to my mind, suggest a need of simple paths to personal success while acknowledging there is complex disagreement. I'm not sure the *Leadership Quality Standard* is asking to change people so much as it seems to be wanting to include them. This inclusion means accepting complexity into decision making, a complexity needing more understanding than trying to change people.

My own experiences and reflections suggest that there are many hurdles ahead for leaders as they bring contradictory beliefs together with a mandate of building consensus and commonality. These differences may look different across the province, which also makes this standard an interesting issue for commonality and local communities. These challenges are further complicated by the overlapping, but not necessarily similar, differences of opinion around teaching methodologies and assessment. My experiences brought forward concerns about a system valuing harmony and agreement but has evolved to suggest maximum parental input and participation.

It was through experiences and reflections like this that I began with general hermeneutic questions about the contradictory nature of policy. I found in my research other writers researching and documenting the existence of contradictions in policy, and some (Stone 2012, for example) presenting policy as inherently contradictory. Through my research on policy formation, it emerged that policy is a human experience defined by human interests. These interests are both personal and public. This key contradiction (Stone, 2012) is an important one to navigate. The uniqueness of human experience (Gadamer, 2013) means these interests have a

tendency to have varying expressions. These varying expressions also tend to vary due to individual expressions of private vs. public interests. The *LQS* has instrumental aims but also operationalizes values of individuality and personalization. These elements of freedom are placed in contradiction with values of commonality and harmony. Leaders will be now evaluated on how well they manage and navigate these contradictions.

One choice I made in this document was to use contradiction over the much pithier and alliterative phrase “policy paradox.” I wanted to use contradiction because it evoked a sense of two voices speaking against each other without denying the existence of the other. Paradox seems to create a sense of something that can’t exist, a nearly impossible situation. The contradictions in education are very real and impact the experiences of teachers, leaders, and the broader community. These contradictions also speak to why tensions are naturally part of policy. As noted, the formation of policy encapsulates varied voices as part of a democratic process.

I think what unfolded in my reflection was a sense of tension between wanting to create consensus and still maintain difference. This alone is likely to cause tension for leaders looking to honour the spirit of the *LQS*. The sense of consensus here is at best poorly expressed in the *LQS* but agreement and buy-in have consistently been situations in my experience leading to conflict. Leaders will have to consider these concepts carefully. I think the problems will emerge when tension is seen as a bad thing. Tension can uplift out of need, values, agendas, and other important aspects of human experience. Approaching consensus means actually accepting some aspects of a process may not be acceptable. A rigorous process of authentic dialogue may mean less selling of ideas and more consideration of dissent and difference. This should be approached as natural and not as toxic.

Therefore, the challenge will be honoring the voices of individuals with particularly disparate or unfortunate values or positions. On the surface, the *LQS* values all individuals to the same degree. However, it is clear government policy in Alberta can't tolerate hatred. The policy leaves leaders in the position to navigate the more difficult aspects of Alberta social and economic conflict. The other risk is silence resulting from enforcing fake consensus or mandated buy-in. This is particularly important when dealing with values or agendas because understanding is essential to co-existing with difference. One rationality doesn't deny the existence of another (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In my experiences as a mentor of students, teachers, and other leaders, one of the hardest things to manage is that the truths we hold are not always true. The world will be fair, things won't be political, the best interests of the individual child will always come first—all are truths educators and leaders may hold as they enter schools. People are constantly shocked by how the actions of leaders or teachers run counter to what they accept as rational.

As a result, new versions of the truths are different than the one they accept. In many cases teachers that survive the first five years accept that multiple truths exist or become more rigid in their own truth. From my experience, this is a constant negotiation for many educators. The alternative is a singular truth, one agreed upon or enforced. No matter how much enforced bureaucratic sameness is expected absolute sameness will always be impossible. The problem of individuality continues to stymie these efforts. As noted throughout this work, there are too many voices contributing to policy formation and implementation, for a singular truth to unfold. The *LQS*, as a policy document, allows for individual contextual interpretation and places the individual as the forefront of this process.

While the *LQS* emphasizes the importance of building consensus, a Gadamerian perspective would have us reconsider what that word means. On the surface, we read the word as “agreement”; however, it might be important to consider the different sedimentary layers of the word. Etymologically, the word *consensus* comes from the two Latin parts: *con*, meaning *with*; and *sentire*, meaning *to feel*. This emphasizes the importance of feeling together. This notion might bring leaders towards a process of working together and building understanding together without ignoring or eliminating the feelings of the other.

I am drawn to the work of Martin Buber (1937) *I and Thou* when I think about the importance of understanding through solidarity. It is very easy to dismiss the other, to dehumanize resistance as rejection rather than attempting to understand the source of the resistance. The *LQS* seems to want to create a sense of community and equity, but leaves leaders to cope with the abstraction of difference and conflict existing in society, which then naturally exists in schools. The process of building consensus means considering the other in a fully and rich way.

From a hermeneutic understanding then, it is not a matter of creating agreement with me or eliminating all forces of resistance. Instead, it is a matter of engaging resistance and embracing tension. Solidarity requires maintaining the human essence of the environment: eliminating resistance dehumanizes the space; eliminating the trees makes the farm fallow.

Horizons

Gadamer (2013) is perhaps open to critique from a variety of sources, largely due to the appropriation of his work to suggest epistemological possibilities and methodological fixes for a variety of human sciences, particularly psychology (Applebaum, 2011). In many ways, these

criticisms emerge out of the work of individuals adapting to or working from Gadamer's (2013) *Truth and Method*, much as I am. Unfortunately, Gadamer is not here to address all of the interpretive research following the publication of *Truth and Method* in 1960. However, he has already commented that the purpose of university—and thus education—is “to learn to discover the possibilities and thereby possible ways of shaping our own lives” (Gadamer, 1992, p. 59). Gadamer's work draws us to those possibilities without prescribing which of those possibilities is correct.

The criticisms are perhaps best expressed in discussions of the Habermas-Gadamer debate. This debate raised several issues around both philosophers' works (Mendelson, 1979); however, one issue is of particular importance for our understanding of Gadamer and how it informs or doesn't inform our understanding of policy. The main or initial issue is that Habermas is largely concerned with epistemological applications (Mendelson, 1979) and Gadamer is concerned with ontology. The second issue with this debate is that, as is often the criticism of Gadamer, is the philosopher's resistance to wade into the specifics of what should be done. Mendelson (1979) wrote—in reference to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics—that “hermeneutics correctly criticizes the objectivistic self-understanding of the human sciences, it is not consequently freed from the concern with methodology in general” (p. 57). The crux of this statement, and the frustration with the abstraction of Gadamer, is that Gadamer was concerned with method, just not with establishing a perfect method because these questions are epistemological and limiting in their approach to ideas. On one hand, perfection and absolute objectivity have been shown to be impossible (Gadamer, 2013). On the other hand, Gadamer (2013) intends to return the human aspect of interpretation to the discussion of science, not deny

that scientific method has any value at all. For Gadamer (2013), it is about drawing our attention to the importance of the human to all process.

The crux of philosophical hermeneutics is that, in an ontological way, all of this critique and discussion is part of a hermeneutic process. For interpretive policy analysis, the interpreter will have to decide what is unethical for themselves. I'm not sure Gadamer wasn't in favour of critique. Gadamer was attempting to describe how people arrive at critique based on their own experiences and traditions. Gadamer wasn't suggesting people couldn't change, just that change happens in a slower way than people sometimes like (2013). Having lived through many examples of terrible ideological struggles and extreme bureaucratic controls (2001), Gadamer made the decision to remove himself from political works to avoid being used as a tool for the state. His ideological stance was the emancipation of ideas, human experience, and ultimately interpretation. This position will present a struggle for policy interpreters attempting to transform—from their own perspectives—complex ideological differences in a fast or decisive way.

Throughout this dissertation, I have examined experiences impacting my interpretations of new policies. What Gadamer allowed me to see was this tension between how I felt things should go and how they went, between what I thought was good practice and what others thought, and ultimately what I felt was an actual change what was just a slow recapitulation of the same ideas was a natural tension embedded in human experience.

Gadamer won't free you up to fix what you see as problematic in society. Gadamer may help you understand that the desire to fix things, to be free from control, to re-create or create types of environments is part of your natural human reaction to the world around you. If you are drawn to hermeneutics, then you will also be freed to understand the world is made complex

because of the varying interpretations of how to fix things, what is acceptable control, and what type of environments should be created. Ontologically, this allows the interpretive policy analyst to step back from and attempt to build solidarity with the subjects of policy rather than attempt to fix the human problem.

I think what is beautiful—with trepidation I may say essential—to interpretive policy analysis through the lens of Gadamer (2013), is to understand that human complexity is both frustrating and freeing.

Having already acknowledged why Gadamer may be frustrating for some scholars or administrators looking for quick fixes or solutions to problems, I would like to express the beautiful possibilities Gadamer's ideas can bring to interpretive policy analysts' work. The first opportunity is to consider Gadamer is an ontological first step encouraging the policy analyst or educational leader to step back from the idea of a problem and consider instead how individuals are interpreting the policy. Policy analysts or educational leaders may go further and examine how individuals are experiencing the policy or bringing the policy to life. I think part of this is considering that policy targets, policy objects, and policy receivers are likely humans. Our relationship with these humans—when they are cast as policy targets, policy objects, policy receivers—can be as technical objects imagined and othered. However, the need for technical correctness, to win, to always be right—which infuses so much of public discourse in the new millennium—requires us to cast the other as wrong. Gadamer (2001) expresses that it is “a tremendous task which faces every human” (p. 233). The human, co-existing with other humans, “saturated with wishes, drives, hopes, and interests” must “be held under control to such an extent that the other is not made invisible” (p. 233). The individuals—who interpret the policy and ultimately apply their interpretations based on their own horizons—need to be made visible

if we are to understand better. Gadamer (2001) reminds us the other shouldn't be made invisible through the use of technical language or control. Ultimately, there requires an openness to acknowledge that "the other could be right, that oneself and one's own interests could be wrong" (p. 233). Gadamer (2001) suggests we need to "learn how to lose the game" (2001).

For Gadamer, working in his own sedimented language, there is an attempt to return the human sciences to the larger umbrella of the humanities (sometimes described as the Arts). Because there is a growing movement towards increasing contradiction and complexity (Gadamer, 2001) requiring a more human response to address. Gadamer (2001) expresses there are two tendencies in the world to address these contradictions. The first tendency is to a "levelling" (p. 205) of world views and experiences represented by the growing mobility of society. The second is a tendency towards "a new articulation of previously hidden distinctions" (p. 205). These tensions are why individuals need to "learn how to lose the game" (2001): the reconciliation of the large rifts and valleys between individual landscapes will require that individuals are willing to acknowledge their own fallibility or incorrectness, in order to allow for otherness to also be correct.

In many ways, the ontological stance of Gadamer allows us to consider how individuals interpret and experience policy initiatives around the idea of quality. However, Gadamer—and myself—are unlikely to wade into specific discussions of what quality looks like. The idea is to open up possibilities and dialogue around how people conceive of and experience quality rather than limit or dismiss ideas. The tension is in acknowledging the need for process and routine and sameness while attempting to maintain the uniqueness, variability, and temporality that defines the varied landscapes of human interaction. I'm drawn to a metaphor used in a professional development discussion: a leader used the example of a coffee chain and how you don't want

your coffee to be different from one location to another. The experience of the coffee is expected to be the same. That was used as the ultimate expression of quality. However, the participants in the professional development discussion left with varying degrees of agreement with the metaphor. Some left with strong agreement while others left with a desire to reject the metaphor completely. I might suggest many felt sameness was actually seen as one of the lowest forms of quality by the participants in the conversation. However, there is no denying the success and desirability of creating sameness of experience for loyal customers.

I suggest, and believe Gadamer (2001, 2013) would likely concur, that this example is a better way to conceive of quality for people interested in quality and standards. That different people, with their own personal and public interests, will approach when and how they experience quality in varying ways. The context of the past, the present, and the future will, for the interpreter, shape what they what they come to rationalize as a quality experience. The ultimate bureaucratic sameness, particularly when dealing with contested, contradictory, and complex fields, silences the otherness present in all individuals to some extent. The possibility opened up by Gadamer is to encourage us to examine how individuals interpret the concept of quality with no aim but the generation of ideas.

From our varied topographies and sedimentary layers, our horizons can fuse when we are open to the otherness of individuals distinct from ourselves. This isn't a process of agreement but a process of dialogue where we move our horizons closer together through understanding. It is a process we engage in together; we fuse with people. We don't fuse people and they don't fuse us. People can dismiss, deny, and coerce but what I learn and how my perspective changes is actually not in the way they intend. I resist and learn that dismissal, denial, and coercion is dangerous. I suspect their motives, their actions, and their promises. If our bureaucratic systems

have created atmospheres of dismissal, denial, and coercion then it is unlikely policy will create outcomes as intended. What Gadamer (2001, 2013) can bring to our policy work, is the understanding that all of these experiences and varied horizons exist and impact the way policy is experienced. This opens up the beautiful possibility of understanding through interpretation. A beautiful possibility that doesn't attempt to transform the landscape, but rather attempts to understand how the landscape has been shaped and how experience will require that change and resistance to change will be part of the journey.

Humans change landscapes. They cut into mountains, they till the soil, and they build on and in the earth. Humans also attempt to conserve and preserve the landscape in a constant tension between what is best for the individual and what is best for all individuals. Your perspective on a landscape changes based on where you are standing and why. On top of a mountain, you might be awestruck by the seemingly timeless quality of the mountain. You might hope to preserve the pristine majesty of the view and the environmental beauty. As it is clear that landscapes change humans. In subtle ways, we—as human beings—are shaped by the air, proximity to waterways, and the presence—or lack thereof—of mountains. Our human relationship with those around us, shaped by our landscapes, form the foundation of how we see the world, and shift our perspectives. On your own land—assuming you have some—you might build a retaining wall, remove the natural vegetation, and dig up an area for a water feature. The same human can have different perspectives on the landscape and topography of the earth depending on where they are standing, these perspectives do not cancel each other out or cease to exist because of each other. Gadamer guides us to contemplate that our interpretive process is part of being shaped and shaping the world around us. Reminds us that our perspectives are

unique to the context, the historically effected consciousness of the individual, and the traditions guiding them.

The same contradictory tensions infuse our relationship with education. From the etymological roots, from our desire for unique quality fair and equal treatment, to our desire feel free, to our urges to control those around us, and to our desire to maximize personal benefit—education, much like our landscapes, reflect our contradictory tensions and complex relationships. Gadamer—suggesting we should be cautious of claims of certainty or technical authority—would have us embrace the opportunity to understand how all of these messy human complexities co-exist. This is particularly important in the context of education and policy. Policy can only exist with humans to create it and interpret it. Education—as opposed to learning which is a biological process—exists because people want something for themselves and for society. However, once the system exists the illusion you can perfect or control that system completely, is a uniquely human conundrum. You can make promises, you can develop more controls, and you can attempt to bracket out the human element. I would suggest this tendency moves us away from understanding.

Ultimately, Gadamer (2001, 2013) brings our attention back to two important steps for understanding. The first is an openness to hermeneutic wonder. That we approach people and texts—anything we can interpret—with a genuine openness to let our horizons fuse be ready for our own transformations. If we are mired in right or wrong, correct or incorrect, good or bad then we will only encounter what ourselves and our anti-theses. Policy makers are humans responding to human demands for policy. The policy is interpreted and applied by humans in human contexts. This is a fascinating interaction of diverse topographies. The second step is resisting the tendency to cast the other as technical objects—suggesting mechanical simplicity—in our

conceptualizing of them. Responding, as we often do, to our pre-conceptualizing of what parents want, what students need, how teachers will react often leaves us confused by the mess resulting from our simplistic fore-projections. The issue isn't that we do this, the issue is we can pause and remind ourselves to be open and prepared for the inevitable emergence of humanity.

If you are standing on a landscape wondering if you are at a low or high elevation, with the exception of very specific spots, that answer to your question should invariably be both. The same can be said for education and leadership and standards. Understanding and interpretation are processes drawing us towards understanding that our conceptions of education, leaderships and standards will be based on the sedimentary layers we stand upon and our positions will be unique to us. I suggest the ethic of caring about human complexity and solidarity, at the minimum, draw us to experiences that we can at least be open to embracing diversity, sudden changes, and resistance as essential to human endeavours.

Dostal (2016) writes "the basic posture of anyone in the hermeneutical situation has profound implications for ethics and politics, inasmuch as this posture requires that one always be prepared that the other may be right" (p. 34). This basic position presents the necessary significance of interpretive research in educational policy that the attempt to understand policy will not provide a sense of knowing absolutely. However, there is ample material presented in this paper to suggest confusion, tension, and conflict exist amongst the sediments of clarity, agreement, and calm in the field of educational policy. In a sense, many of the policy interventions described and agendas followed for the past 20 years have not reduced the presence of confusion, tension, or conflict. The contradictory sediments of policy authors and policy readers contribute to a landscape not shaped by congruent and shared goals. However, Dostal (2016) writes that hermeneutics based on Gadamer's philosophy represents an "ethic of respect

and trust that calls for solidarity” (p. 34). This is process of trusting and respecting individual interpretations which helps build solidarity through human process.

The symbolic icon of hermeneutics is the Greek god Hermes, a messenger that brings forth surprising news and possibilities. This iconic childlike figure represents a youthful hope for the future possible through authentic engagement and interpretation (Jardine, 1998; Smith, 1991). This study attempts to shift the discourse on policy away from dystopic or technical claims towards one of possibilities, surprises, and hope. Through the literature consulted, it is evident materialistic or technocratic solutions have been limited in their ability to improve the educational experiences of many or to understand the contradictions of policy implementations. Using Gadamer’s (2013) *Truth and Method* as a base may allow us to uncover novel possibilities for future research and/or policy implementation.

My data presented an overwhelmingly complex range of observations, questions, and reflections. I have tried as much as possible to retain the original essence of these thoughts without including incomplete thoughts and overly emotional responses. In the raw data, there are certainly raw emotions that crept into my reflections as I moved back and forth between personal anecdotes and philosophic musings. I tried to focus on personal anecdotes, as this is emphasized in the methods I was most familiar with (Ellis, 1998a). However, and perhaps because of Gadamer’s influence, I found myself allowing analysis and reporting to be unearthed as freely as story. This suggests policy analysis and experience are closely related.

Indeed, Gadamer (Gadamer et al., 1997) has cautioned hermeneutic scholars from exploiting methods for varying purposes. Ultimately, I had to allow the data to guide my analysis. I followed Gadamer’s (Gadamer et al., 1997) suggestion to approach the text with the right attitude. This attitude is the attitude of “a person who wants to understand someone else, or

who wants to understand a linguistic expression as a reader or listener” (Gadamer et al., 1997, p. 161). In this way, the *Leadership Quality Standard* (GOA, 2018) presented a text I approached as a reader, a reader drawn to multiple forms of cognition to develop my understandings.

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