

University of Alberta

Leadership: *Being* in Rooms

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Secondary Education

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 2007



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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-29641-7
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-29641-7

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Seek the wisdom of all ages, but look at the
world through the eyes of children.

Anonymous

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine the pedagogical leadership practices of three junior high school principals in a large urban school district in response to a new and explicit district expectation that principals work towards spending fifty per cent of their time in classrooms supporting teaching and learning.

Each case study portrayed the principal's construction and enactment of pedagogical leadership practice and how information and understandings from time spent in classrooms informed other leadership practices. Data, collected through unstructured interviews, allowed principals to focus on aspects of pedagogical leadership that were most pertinent to the individual principal in their school context.

The case studies illustrated how principals worked to promote transformative change in their schools; the challenges, *aporias*, that surfaced in the process; and how principals understood and addressed these challenges. The findings indicated that district direction can act as a catalyst in promoting, developing, and supporting pedagogical leadership at the school level. However, in all three cases, the junior high school principals relied on their professional judgment to interpret and enact this district requirement in their local school context. They were supportive of this expectation and used information from their direct and regular presence in classrooms to inform other aspects of leadership practice. Furthermore, in the process of addressing *aporias*, principals gained insight that informed future decisions and practices.

The study has policy and practice implications for school districts and suggests that future research focused on understanding challenges to transformative principal leadership should look beyond individual principals to examine the interaction between

principals and their district context. In addition, further study of principal practice in classrooms that takes into account perspectives of teachers, students and parents is also warranted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1: CONCEIVING THE PRINCIPALSHIP | 3 |
| Autobiographical Orientation | 3 |
| <i>Aporias</i> of Practice..... | 3 |
| An Emerging Literature Review | 7 |
| Tales From the Inside - The Lifeworld of Authored Principals..... | 7 |
| Tales From the Outside -Larger Context of Education Leadership..... | 9 |
| The Meaning of the Principalship – Tales From the Outside | 9 |
| The Evolution of the Role of the Principal as Told Through Metaphor..... | 10 |
| The Explanatory Power of Metaphor..... | 10 |
| Metaphors, Leadership and Learning | 11 |
| Metaphors: Potential Dark Sides and Limitations | 14 |
| Principal as Pedagogue | 15 |
| Beyond Technical Thinking..... | 16 |
| The Need for Practical Wisdom..... | 20 |
| Educational Administration as Pedagogic Practice | 22 |
| CHAPTER 2: THE LOCAL CONTEXT: THE DISTRICT TALE | 25 |
| The Launch | 25 |
| A District Initiative for Supporting Teaching and Learning..... | 25 |
| Enacting ‘Principals in Rooms’ | 27 |
| District Actions to Support a Shift in Principal Practice | 28 |
| Responses of Principals | 29 |
| Questions of Principal Practice..... | 30 |
| CHAPTER 3: INQUIRY FRAME..... | 32 |
| Focus of the Study | 32 |
| Research Questions..... | 33 |
| Researching a Design..... | 33 |
| Making a Case for Case Study..... | 34 |
| Aspects of Case Study | 34 |
| Types of Case Studies..... | 35 |
| Selection of Cases for Study..... | 36 |
| Inquiry Process..... | 37 |
| Data Collection | 38 |
| Interviews..... | 38 |
| Direct Observation..... | 41 |
| Interpretation of Data..... | 41 |
| Questions of Quality in Qualitative Research..... | 42 |
| Analysis of Across Cases..... | 43 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Ethics and Issues of Power | 44 |
| Closing | 45 |
| CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY ONE | 47 |
| Background | 47 |
| Lived Curriculum of Leadership..... | 47 |
| Principal Stories | 48 |
| Story One: My Greatest Fear - Responding Appropriately to School Culture | 48 |
| Story Two: All of a Sudden Something Happens - The Place of Hopefulness | 51 |
| Story Three: We Give Monthly Interims Here-Determining a Direction for Change.. | 54 |
| Establishing a Need for Change..... | 56 |
| Contextual Considerations | 56 |
| Constructing Personal Meaning..... | 58 |
| Constructing Meaning with Others..... | 59 |
| Story Four: Red Circle-Building on Strong Practice | 61 |
| Story Five: Rigour-Leading From a Deep Understanding of Pedagogy..... | 62 |
| Story Six: Invitation with a Bit of a Nudge-Supporting Change..... | 63 |
| Monitoring and Supporting Progress Through Classroom Visits..... | 65 |
| Supporting Change in Practice Through Classroom Visits | 66 |
| Story Seven: The Best Bang for Your Buck-Using Professional Judgment in the Development of Leadership Practice..... | 67 |
| Visiting Classrooms with a Colleague..... | 69 |
| Impact of Classroom Visits on Principal Practice | 70 |
| Providing Feedback to Staff..... | 70 |
| Impact of Principal Visits on Teacher Practice..... | 71 |
| Reflecting Back/Moving Forward | 71 |
| Being in Classrooms as a First Step..... | 72 |
| Summary | 75 |
| Janelle's Interpretation, Construction and Enactment of Pedagogical Leadership... | 75 |
| Pedagogical Practice in Classrooms | 77 |
| <i>Aporias</i> | 78 |
| Addressing <i>Aporias</i> | 79 |
| Discoveries..... | 80 |
| CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY TWO..... | 82 |
| Background | 82 |
| Concern for Students..... | 82 |
| David's Stories..... | 83 |
| Story One: Commitment – Aligning Leadership Direction..... | 83 |
| Importance of a Common Language..... | 84 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Building Commitment Through Conversation | 85 |
| Assessing Readiness for Change | 86 |
| Building Commitment with all Affected Stakeholders..... | 87 |
| Story Two: Reluctant Leader – Encouraging Leadership..... | 89 |
| Encouraging Open Discussion..... | 90 |
| Inviting Teacher Leadership | 91 |
| Story Three: Like Hearts Falling – Teaching Leadership..... | 92 |
| Encouraging Reflective Leadership Practice | 94 |
| Facilitating Leadership Learning by Holding Back..... | 94 |
| Story Four: My Struggling Learner – Seeing Reality in Classrooms | 95 |
| Being in Classrooms as a Strategy to Support Pedagogical Leadership..... | 96 |
| Monitoring Progress by Regular Classroom Visits | 96 |
| Opening Teacher Practice to Colleagues | 97 |
| Addressing the Discrepancy Between Words and Deed..... | 99 |
| Seeking Understanding | 99 |
| Difficult Conversations..... | 100 |
| Promoting Growth Through Professional Development | 102 |
| Monitoring Impact | 102 |
| Building a Theory of Practice | 103 |
| Theory and Metaphor..... | 104 |
| Enacting a Theory of Practice..... | 104 |
| Confronting the Limits of our Metaphors..... | 105 |
| Learning from Failure | 106 |
| Adjusting Plans | 106 |
| Seeking Input | 107 |
| Anticipating Potential Roadblocks | 109 |
| Summary | 111 |
| David’s Interpretation, Construction and Enactment of Pedagogical Leadership.. | 111 |
| Pedagogical Practice in Classrooms | 112 |
| <i>Aporias</i> | 112 |
| Addressing <i>Aporias</i> | 113 |
| Discoveries..... | 114 |
| CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY THREE..... | 117 |
| Background..... | 117 |
| Orienting to a New Leadership Context | 117 |
| Christina’s Stories..... | 118 |
| Story One: Putting It on the Table- The Value of Honesty | 118 |
| Building From Where You Are. | 119 |
| Being Clear and Setting Direction | 120 |
| Story Two: Out on the Proverbial Limb - The Importance of Fairness and Purpose in Decision Making..... | 121 |
| Providing Rationale for Decisions | 122 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Committing Support..... | 123 |
| Monitoring Impact | 125 |
| Story Three: Going Slow - The Importance of Being Sensitive..... | 125 |
| Professional Judgment | 126 |
| Addressing Concerns Appropriately..... | 127 |
| Responding Appropriately to Feedback..... | 128 |
| Monitoring Through Collegial Reflection and Conversation | 129 |
| Demonstrating Appreciation of the Complexity of Teaching..... | 130 |
| Story Four: A Different Leader-Sharing Leadership | 130 |
| Anticipating Needs Beyond the School Level | 131 |
| Surfacing Fundamental Dilemmas..... | 132 |
| Principal Conversation to Support Leadership and Develop Professional Practice | 133 |
| Summary | 134 |
| Christina's Interpretation and Enactment of Pedagogical Practice..... | 135 |
| Pedagogical Practice in Classrooms | 136 |
| <i>Aporias</i> | 136 |
| Addressing <i>Aporias</i> | 137 |
| Discoveries..... | 137 |
| CHAPTER 7: PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICE..... | 139 |
| Introduction..... | 139 |
| Secondary Principals' Interpretation, Construction and Enactment of Their Role as Pedagogical Leaders | 140 |
| Principals' Enactment of an Expectation That They Spend Time in Classrooms Supporting Teaching and Learning..... | 142 |
| Impact of 'Being in rooms' on Pedagogical Practice | 143 |
| <i>Aporias</i> | 145 |
| Addressing <i>Aporias</i> | 148 |
| Discoveries..... | 149 |
| District Direction Matters | 149 |
| Professional Judgment | 149 |
| Support for Principal Learning | 150 |
| A New Role for District Leaders | 151 |
| Sensitivity to Student Experience | 151 |
| <i>Aporias</i> and Growth..... | 152 |
| <i>Aporias</i> of the Research Process..... | 155 |
| APPENDIX 1 | 157 |
| APPENDIX 2..... | 160 |
| REFERENCES | 167 |

INTRODUCTION

Begin at the Beginning (Schwartz, 2005) is a children's story about a young girl who is asked by her teacher to paint a picture. The child attempts again and again without success to paint all the wonder that she sees in the world around her, the stars, the sky, her whole universe. Overwhelmed by the task she turns to her mother who consoles her and guides her to paint what she can. She fills her page with a painting of a single tree.

This young girl's struggle very much parallels my own as I tried to find a starting point, an anchor, around which to construct this research project. Ironically, the notion to which I returned again and again is uncertainty. In my nine years as a practicing principal and three years as a principal staff developer, I was an avid and urgent consumer of professional journals, books and staff development opportunities with the ongoing goal of improving my practice to become the leader that I wanted to be. From the beginning of my teaching career, my years as a consultant, assistant principal, principal, staff developer and now as a senior district administrator, I have been asking essentially the same questions. How should I practice- here, here and in the here and now? What is required of me? What do I require of myself? What is my obligation in each particular instance? My answers to these questions were and are often partial, limited by time, skill, understanding and the immediacy of the requirement for action. What I found to be the most intriguing and constant facet of educational leadership is the profound ambiguity that inhabited and still inhabits my practice when I attempt to act on matters of importance.

What has changed over time is my response to this facet of my leadership experience? For many years, I saw this situation as a reflection of a personal/professional

failing - a flaw that I needed to address where possible and cover up when necessary. My own experience of uncertainty, questioning the appropriateness of my own practices and my lack of answers was in direct contrast to what I believed was required of me as a leader. Barth (1990) notes that principals “find themselves forbidden not to know.” (p. 70) Principals “suffer under the burden of presumed competence. Everyone supposes we know how to do it. We get trapped into pretending we know how to do it.” (ibid.) Principals occupy positions of authority and with this comes the expectation, both from others and themselves that they will act with a transcendent sense of knowing.

What my experience and study have helped me to understand is that being an educational leader means that one is frequently confronted by and required to act in situations for which one feels less than adequately prepared. Earthquakes and the “uncertainty principle” in physics suggest that even in the physical world there is no absolutely solid ground. As Aoki (1998, in conversation) suggests, our lived experience is a “quakey” place where multiple worldviews and understandings co-mingle and often collide. While this may cause confusion and sometimes fear, it is in these places of uncertainty that hope and possibility reside. Those who can greet these challenges with open, compassionate hearts and minds are in the best position to cultivate the learning opportunities in which leadership invites us to partake.

CHAPTER 1: CONCEIVING THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Autobiographical Orientation

Aporias of Practice.

In the act of reflecting, we create and recreate the story of our own lives.

Reflection is a way to give meaning at a moment in time to our experiences - a pause, a taking stock. Reflection's intent is forward moving; we look back with a question of the future in mind. Our reflection is coloured by a sense, however vague, of where we might be headed. I came to the doctoral program looking for answers to help me address the questions and dilemmas I faced in my practice as a principal. Value issues were the most troubling to me. At that time I was the principal of a school that had two programs that I had difficulty supporting pedagogically.

The first was a large segregated program for students with special needs. For years as a special education teacher, consultant and as a parent of a child who had special needs, I had developed a firm belief that the notion of segregating students on the basis of disability both reflected and contributed significantly to their ongoing marginalization. The artificial environment of the special education classroom, while it may have achieved some skill gains for students, also often resulted in an otherworldly type of practice because it did not provide normative opportunities for all students to learn with similar age peers in a natural context. As a result, teachers needed to create artificial circumstances for these to occur.

My commitment to inclusion was a thread that has guided my career as an educator. As I moved from being a special education teacher in a segregated school to teaching special education classes in a regular school, and on to being a consultant to

teachers, an assistant principal and then a principal, I hoped I could influence more support for inclusion of these students. Special education and inclusion were my areas of expertise and passion. I felt I knew much about what was right and what was wrong with the current system and in what direction we should be moving. I was then, and am still, aware that inclusion of students with special education needs remains a contentious issue. Over time I have come to understand that possibilities for inclusion were limited by attitudes and beliefs about students with special needs and by the current state of pedagogy, curriculum and understandings about knowledge which support the existing structure of schooling. I looked for and still seek opportunities to move forward in this area.

The second circumstance has been more troubling. My school had been given the option of becoming a site for a traditional 'back to the basics' alternative academic program. This program espoused the antithesis of where I believed we should be heading in public education - teacher directed learning, strong focus on grammar, drill and practice, memorization and rote learning. It was a program that took a stance that was gaining popularity in our conservative climate and had the appeal of possibly increasing the student population in our small junior high program.

There is an expectation that principals champion the programs that exist in their schools. Given my own beliefs and concerns about both of these programs, I felt I was compromising my integrity by doing so in these circumstances. My intent here is not to go into the specifics of these dilemmas. My focus is rather to explore the impact that these experiences had and continue to have on my understanding of the context in which I/we practice. There seem to be powerful forces at work in and on education which we

must navigate in our practice. It is the desire to do the right thing and the challenges that surface in these attempts that I have come to understand as *aporias*. Smits (1997) refers to an *aporia* as “a perplexing difficulty (from the Greek: a state of *being at a loss*, something that is impassible).¹¹ . . . An *aporia* is something that engages our thought, and compels conversation.” (p. 285)

As I proceeded through my doctoral course work, I became conscious of the *aporias* I faced as a principal, educational leader and graduate student. My research focus grew out of these *aporias* and I became interested in the notion of integrity in practice. More specifically, how do principals act in a way that is consistent with their beliefs? How can they practice with honesty and survive as leaders? Over time other questions began to emerge: Is the notion of integrity of beliefs and practice a self-serving one? As a principal, do I have the right to make my beliefs the center of practice in the school? By what authority would I do that? My views on inclusion had frequently placed me in situations in which I had disagreed with the principals and teachers about the educational programming for my own son. Should I attempt to do the same thing based on my concern with the programming choices of others? Did I have the power to “right” this even if I chose to? My answer to the last question was clearly no. Despite the presumed power of my position as principal, in both instances I was faced with situations in which I was not powerful or perhaps courageous¹ enough to change. So my choices were to stay or to go. I chose to stay on as principal, to attempt to make change and

¹ According to the New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language, the root word of courage is heart. Courage is about “the quality of mind which enables men [and women] to encounter danger and difficulties with firmness or without fear.” (p. 352)

influence where I could. Yet I continued to be troubled: Was this the right decision? Was it made in strength? weakness? or both? Was it a wise decision? How could I know?

It is hard to look deeply into the reflecting pool for fear of re-cognizing the shimmering face of evil, weakness or more charitably our frailties and limitations below the surface. My intent here is not to bleed unnecessarily on the page. Jardine (1997) points to the obligation of the researcher to do justice to the phenomenon studied and this means dealing with the “messy secrets” (p. 161) that emerge in the process of inquiry. He notes, that “dealing with this phenomenon well, understanding it deeply and generously and speaking its truth, might also be a problem of character, of wisdom, of patience, of becoming someone who can hear and tell the truth of the tales that their own lives tell, unafraid, willing not to blunt the intractability of living one’s life with trouble.” (p. 165)

In my work supporting principals in central services, I came to see that my experience was not unique and that others experienced similar challenges. In fact, my department was created to provide collegial assistance to principals to help them work through such challenges. It was and is still one of the most valued support services offered to our principals.

My own experience and my work with other school and district leaders led me to see that *aporias* of practice are a natural part of the work of principals; we are constantly faced with perplexing dilemmas. I am not suggesting that either I or my colleagues are short of knowledge to do our jobs. Often I am confronted by what appear to be unique situations and I know exactly what is called for or know how to inquire into a situation to understand it in a way that points to the direction for action. Often, however, there is a

gap, a space of uncertainty, between what is known and understood and what one believes is required to be confident of one's actions.

An Emerging Literature Review

Green (1999), a researcher examining her own practices as a supervisor of action research, makes the case for 'emergence' in a review of the literature. My experience seems to be similar to hers. The development of this study has been anything but systematic. My experience of gathering information and developing understanding to support, clarify and shape my direction has been like that of an 'embodied common place book.' Green (1999) suggests that in the process of doing research new insights emerge which may point to the need for further investigation into the literature.

The works that I have cited are those that have helped me to make sense of my own dilemmas as a principal and educational leader. These experiences have called for a deepening of understanding, knowledge and skill to enable me to enact what is called for in a particular situation. I understand this now as a call to hermeneutic or interpretive practice (Gallagher, 1992). What is required in response to these *aporias* is not aimed at seeking final answers to problems but is more akin to an act of exploration: a searching and re-searching for an ever deepening understanding of the forces at play that create the conditions in which these *aporias* live.

Tales From the Inside - The Lifeworld of Authored Principals

Sergiovanni (1995) notes that

educational administration resembles a craft-like science within which practice is characterized by interacting reflection and action episodes. Theory and research are only one source of knowledge, which is subordinate to the principal and which is designed to inform but not prescribe practice. (p. 30)

Fullan (1997) holds a similar perspective noting that

the best of the new [management books] contain powerful new concepts and ideas. Once understood they can form the basis for action. However their value is deceptive. They sound great but they don't translate into practical action. They are necessary but not sufficient for practical action. (p. 7)

My experiences and those of my colleagues led me to seek text knowledge to confirm, understand and address school life. Fortunately, recent literature has started to give voice to the lived experiences of principals. In her autobiographical text, *Are You Sure You're the PRINCIPAL? On Being an Authentic Leader*, Vilanni (1999) shares through stories, lessons that she has learned over 20 years as a principal. I found much in this work that resonated with my own experience and was particularly pleased to find that while her reflections illuminated understanding, she did not prescribe easy answers. Loader (1997) has also extensively storied² and reflected on his experiences as a principal. In this sensitive work, he makes explicit uses of metaphor as an interpretive tool.

Dunklee (1999) addresses the pedagogical value of authentic stories of practice in *You Sound Taller on the Telephone- A Practitioner's View of the Principalship*. This text uses real episodes of a practicing principal as a teaching text. Dunklee notes,

Because in real practice school leadership problems seldom have a definitive "right answer," the episodes presented for study and analysis are designed to evoke not a clear right but rather a perceived effective answer for the problem at hand. Education leaders often act in the face of disparate dilemmas, ambivalence and paradoxes. Dilemmas of practice are rarely if ever solved; rather, they are carefully managed. Managing in the complex, ever changing education environment requires both recognition of and an ability to analyze each situation based on multiple and often conflicting influences. (ibid., p. viii)

² Ultimately to truly know something, one needs to experience it in a way that goes deep into the core of one's being. The power of sharing stories is that they enable us to understand the experiences of others in a different way than theoretical knowledge. Telling, writing, and sharing our stories solidifies our own understanding of the experience as we tell it.

The works identified above speak to the perplexing difficulties (*aporias*) that arise in different aspects of educational leadership. They also speak to the teaching potential of real stories of practice. What these writings do not address in any significant way are the leadership experiences of principals as they relate to supporting the teaching and learning that emerge from direct experience in classrooms. This is precisely the intended focus of this research study.

Tales From the Outside -Larger Context of Education Leadership

As a principal, a supporter of principals and a researcher, I have found it both necessary and helpful to understand the forces at play in the larger social context in which schools operate. While this understanding is never sufficient to remove the ambiguity of practice, it does impact how principals interpret their environment, orient themselves to action, and enact their leadership roles. Similarly, this knowledge provides a framework for those who work with and conduct research into the principalship as a way to enhance their ability to understand and reflect on principal practice. The next sections of this chapter address some key elements of the grand narrative in which my story and the stories of the principals in this study are situated.

The Meaning of the Principalship – Tales From the Outside

Beck and Murphy (1993) suggest that forces outside pedagogy have had a great impact on shaping the role of the principal. In the context of an interview, Larry Cuban (O'Neil, 2000) states that

[s]chools reflect cultural, political, social, and economic changes of the larger society. The school is not an institution apart – if anything, schools tend not to be at the forefront of change in society. [He sees] [s]chools as democratic institutions . . . continually adapting to these external pressures and, in doing so, maintain old practices as they invent new ones. (p. 9)

Fullan (1997) expressed a similar sentiment. “The reality is that educational policies get generated through a mixture of educational and political considerations.”

(Fullan, 1997, p. 6) As a result,

. . . conceptions of the principalship have evolved over time, resulting in dramatically different role expectations in each of the last seven decades. As we explored these changing expectations against the overlay of educational and political history, we concluded that many of the changes grew not out of a proactive response to the needs of children and teachers in this country’s schools, but rather out of a reactive response to political and historical events, to trends emanating from universities and research centers, to ideologies of organizing, and to public opinion (Beck and Murphy, 1993 p. 6).

The Evolution of the Role of the Principal as Told Through Metaphor

The Explanatory Power of Metaphor

Maxine Green (1997) suggests that metaphor plays an important role in helping build an understanding of a phenomenon by enabling us

to understand one thing better by likening it to what it is not. . . . A metaphor not only involves a reorientation of consciousness; it also enables us to cross divides, to make connections between ourselves and others, and to look through other eyes. For Hannah Arndt, metaphor [is a way of] . . . ‘bridging the abyss between inward and invisible mental activities and the world of appearances’. (p. 105)

Metaphors have been used extensively as a means to explain the work of principals both to others and themselves. Beck and Murphy (1993) completed a decade by decade analysis of metaphorical themes as a way of understanding the principalship and identified the following dominant metaphors for principal for each decade:

| | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|
| The 1920s | Values broker |
| The 1930s | Scientific Manager |
| The 1940s | Democratic Leader |
| The 1950s | Theory - Guided Administrator |
| The 1960s | Bureaucratic Executive |

| | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|
| The 1970s | Humanistic Facilitator |
| The 1980s | Instructional Leader (p. 202) |

Fullan (1997) alludes to the use of metaphor as a signifier of the changes in the way the role of the principal has been conceptualized. “We have gone through the phases of principal ‘as administrator’ and principal as ‘instructional leader’.” (Fullan, 1997 p. 6).

Bredeson (1988) indicates that the metaphors that one uses can function to “broaden perspectives, enhance understanding, and provide insight into the organization, operation, and administration of schools” (p. 293). The metaphors highlight a dominant or important facet of the work of principals. Bredeson (1988) and Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs and Thurston, (1980) also suggest that at a practical level these metaphors create a framework that influences how principals and others understand their roles and shape the activities they perform. The linkage between metaphors and action is also noted by Barell (1991) who suggests that “[m]etaphors help us frame dilemmas in such a way that solutions appear” (p. 177).

Metaphors, Leadership and Learning

Metaphors arise out of, reflect and reveal beliefs about how the world works or should work. Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner, and Ford Slack (1995) highlight the “parallel development” (p. 4) of theories of learning and leading.

In the “traditional” view of learning, “knowledge is viewed as true and unchanging.” (Lambert et al, 1995, p. 4). The role of schools is to prepare students for participation in the adult world by ensuring that they acquire the appropriate knowledge. What is deemed appropriate is the knowledge and beliefs that are held to be true by the dominant members of society. These norms and values are both explicitly and implicitly

embedded in the formal and informal curriculum of schooling. The leader's role is to "maintain tradition. . . . Leadership does not reflect democratic processes and is autocratic in nature." (ibid., p. 6)

In the "behavioral" view "[l]earning takes place when knowledge is broken down into little bits" (Lambert et al., 1995, p. 6,) and students are moved on the basis of rewards and punishments to acquire predetermined goals. Similarly, the role of the leader is to "shape human behavior to match organizational goals." (ibid.) The literature on effective schools builds on the behavioral theory as if "a combination of teaching behaviors or school factors can predict learning." (ibid., p. 7) Instructional leadership by the principal is seen as one of the critical factors in school success. Research examines the traits of effective principals in a manner similar to the business literature's identification of "traits of effective leaders who achieve organizational goals." (ibid.) Leadership is seen as developing a progressive mastery of essential skills.

The "Community of Learners" model emphasizes the interrelationship of "the educational environment or 'ecology'" and student learning. (Lambert et al, 1995, p. 9) It represents an attempt to align classroom practices with the goals of democratic participation. "Leadership is viewed as a shared process among educators – principal and teachers. The principal is seen as a 'leader among leaders' who facilitates the growth of others." (ibid.)

The constructivist model of learning and leading builds "on assumptions from the community of learners/leaders theory." (ibid.)

Leadership is viewed as a reciprocal process among the adults in the school. Purposes and goals develop from among the participants, based on values, beliefs, individual and shared experiences. The school functions as a community that is self-motivating and that views the growth of its members as fundamental. There is

an emphasis on language as a means for shaping school culture, conveying the commonality of experience and articulating a joint vision. Shared inquiry is an important activity in problem identification and resolution; participants conduct action research and share findings as a way of improving practice. (ibid.)

Spillane (2006) suggests that leadership in a school is distributed phenomenon and that principal practice influences and is influenced by others in and outside of the school, formally and informally. As such meaning and purpose within the group are constructed in a collaborative manner. Those in designated positions of leadership are charged with using their skills, power and authority to help to create, sustain and if necessary protect a culture in which this kind of being together can flourish. While it may seem paradoxical to use power and authority as part of sustaining a collaborative and shared culture, in practice, that seems to be exactly what can happen. In her study of one principal's attempt to create a caring culture in her school, Sernak (1998) found that "[c]aring on a collective level is not separate from power, but an integral part of it. Power of position, of authority, provides the space in which to establish a milieu where there is room for moral debate." (p. 155)

These considerations suggest that the role of the principal is an "extremely malleable one." (Beck and Murphy, 1993 p. 197) While the dominant metaphor for the principalship may have changed over the decades it has done so in an additive and responsive fashion. As new conceptualizations of the role of the principal emerge, the older ones may fade but do not disappear completely. These variations in understanding the role of the principal exist in unique combinations within the principals themselves. Evans (1999) demonstrated that principals' interpretation of situations and their actions are influenced by how they and others understand their role. Principals' beliefs about the

nature of knowledge and leading impact how they position themselves, how they interpret their experiences, and reflect on their actions.

The situation is made more complex in the current context because as Fullan (1998) points out, “[s]chools can no longer pretend that their walls will keep the outside world at bay”. (p. 7). Principals find themselves answerable to students, parents, staff, community members and superiors who each may hold any combination of the beliefs about knowledge, learning and leading suggested by Lambert et al. (1995). These groups and the individuals within them may see the dominant role of the principal in relation to any one or combination of the metaphors mentioned previously. The emphasis may shift from time to time and situation to situation. The practice of principalling has become more and more of a mixed metaphor with individual situations calling for particular ways of understanding and hence acting. Principals need to correctly read the context of each situation and respond appropriately to, at times, competing demands of the various individuals and groups with whom they interact in order to resolve the many issues that come to their door. While some school leaders may view themselves as embodying or striving to become an example of a particular model, for the most part principals exemplify various combinations of these models with each having its own unique blend.

Metaphors: Potential Dark Sides and Limitations

The metaphors reflect a perspective that can limit as well as enhance understanding. As such, metaphors have a dark side. It is possible that dominant metaphors that have shaped principal practice at times shifted our attention from the original notion of principal teacher. (Pierce, 1934). Murphy and Beck (1995) highlight a serious concern that principals themselves have: when “passive partners, [allow] others to

define what school leadership is.” (p. 4) It is important that principals be actively encouraged to share and contribute to the growing body of understanding on school leadership. One way of doing this is to give voice to their experience. This thesis is an attempt to add to this growing body of knowledge.

Principal as Pedagogue

Evans (1999) has highlighted the need for principals to act pedagogically in their practice. “If educational administration, in both its practical and academic aspects, is to become a strong practice, with the capacity to contribute seriously to the work of educators it needs to be reconstituted from the ground up as pedagogic practice.” (Evans, 1999, p. 129) He suggests that the competencies leaders need are “less behavioral than ontological” (p. 113). Principals need “action insights” (p. 113). They need to be “sensitive to situations”, to know what is called for, to be “in touch” (p. 114). Principals need to embody what Van Manen (1991) refers to as pedagogical tact, “those types of actions and interactions intentionally . . . engaged in by an adult and a child directed towards the child’s being and becoming.” (p. 18). Because of the nature of their work in schools, principals must extend their pedagogical actions to their relations with staff, parents and other community members. Principals have and need the responsibility (response-ability) to guide pedagogical practice in their schools.

Fullan (1997) notes that a moral dimension has been added to our understanding of the principal’s responsibility. This is different from the earlier notion of the principal as upholder of traditional moral values. “We have begun to entertain the concept of principal as transformative leader . . . as moral change agent.” (Fullan, 1997 p. 6) “New conceptions of the principalship combine the moral purpose of leadership with the

dispositions and skills of effective change agents.” (Fullan, 1997 p. xiii) The notion of the principal as a moral change agent and the evidence that often the changes that impact schools are implemented for political rather than pedagogical reasons creates a very serious challenge for principals. This may account for some of the dilemmas (*aporias*) that principals face.

Beyond Technical Thinking

Flyvbjerg (1993) suggests that “[t]hinkers as different as Weber, Foucault, and Habermas have pointed out that for more than two centuries instrumental rationality has increasingly dominated value rationality, leading to what has been called the civilization of means without ends.” (p. 12). Referring to the theories of German philosopher and sociologist, Jurgen Habermas, Sergiovanni (2000) suggests that schools are made up of a lifeworld and a systemworld. He notes that “Habermas uses the language ‘*systemworld* and *lifeworld*’ to describe two mutually exclusive yet ideally interdependent domains of all society’s enterprises from the family to the complex formal organization.” (p. 5) Sergiovanni (2000) suggests that “[w]hen we talk about the stuff of culture, the essence of values and beliefs, the expression of needs, purposes and desires of people and about the sources of deep satisfaction in the form of meaning and significance, we are talking about the *lifeworld* of parents, teachers and students.” (ibid.) The term, *systemworld*, refers to “a world of instrumentalities usually experienced in schools as management systems.” (p. 4) Sergiovanni notes that a key to Habermas’ theory is that the “teleological and strategic actions of the *systemworld* should be determined by and should serve the expression and normative actions of the *lifeworld*.” (p. 7) Is this the path that principals should seek in their pedagogic practice?

Sergiovanni (2000) also suggests that schools across the globe are facing the problem that Habermas identifies as “colonization” which occurs when the *systemsworld* begins to dominate the *lifeworld*. Sergiovanni (2000) suggests that one of the major challenges for leaders is to establish an appropriate relationship between the *lifeworld* and the *systemsworld* in schools. He indicates the need for leadership that links “directly to the construction of meaning, the facilitation of learning, and the development of collective responsibility”. (Sergiovanni, 2000. p. 171) Principals have the moral obligation to lead a forward movement in the school. In order to accomplish this; however, school leaders must “get better . . . in being positively political” to make “improvements in organizations in a way that maintains and enhances those above and below” (Fullan, 1997 p. 10). What is being suggested here is that in order to accomplish real positive change school leaders need to understand and navigate the lifeworld and systemsworld of which they are a part. This means that they require a deep understanding of the system, a sense of direction for movement, and the skills required to enact this complex work.

Looked at from this perspective the challenge of the principal’s job is extremely complex. A recent simulated ad identifies what is being sought in school leadership.

WANTED: EXCEPTIONAL SCHOOL LEADERS – Must know how to implement change that helps ensure the academic success of all students. Must be an instructional leader and have the ability to promote teacher growth. Must be dedicated to creating a shared vision of an outstanding school through collaboration with faculty, parents and community members. Must have strong interpersonal skills, excellent communication skills. (Checkley, 2000. p. 2)

To complicate matters further, however, it must be acknowledged that the principal is not the sole source of functional leadership in a school. Lambert (1995) defines *leadership* “as a concept transcending individuals, roles and behaviors . . .

[involving] reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose about schooling” (p. 29).

Leadership is something that happens in the relationship between and among people; as a result “anyone in the educational community –teachers, administrators, parents- can engage in leadership actions (p. 29). Fullan (1997) suggests the need to move away from the notion of how the principal can become lead implementer of multiple policies and programs. Spillane (2006) suggests that leadership needs to be thought of within the context of “the collective interactions among leaders, followers, and their situation.” (p.

4) This notion places the principal as an important actor within a complex ever evolving web of individuals and contexts. Lambert (1999) suggests that the work of principals is to build the leadership capacity of all members of the school community. For Checkley (2000), “the ironic twist of leadership [is that the] principal is ultimately accountable but not solely responsible, for success” (p. 5). With this new understanding of leadership, comes the necessity of developing a new skill set. Principals need to learn “how to bring people together and . . . then to harness that collective energy, . . . to identify the natural leaders, . . . to build within teachers a desire to become empowered.” (ibid.)

Acherman, Donaldson and Van Der Bogert (1996) conceptualize school leadership as

a quest to shape a complex, dynamic, exciting, entity called a school into a place not only where all children acquire valuable knowledge and skills, but also where children and adults alike are valued, respected, and challenged to do their best. Like schools themselves, leadership is dynamic; it bubbles with uncertainty and requires immense discretion and attentiveness. (p. xv)

They suggest that “true leadership has no formula” (p. 1) but is “the product of chemistry between person, staff, students and the community. It requires constant thought, observation, people skills, judgment, trust and humour. . . . [T]hese qualities are

neither finite or quantifiable. You cannot acquire them once and for all. Even good principals never have enough of them.” (p. 2) The preceding descriptions highlight the responsibilities and obligations of the principalship. Indeed, being a principal today requires a level of understanding about the complexity of the role; however, understanding alone does not give principals the ability to enact these complex roles in the face of each unique situation that presents itself. Without this action there is no leadership. From my own experience, it is this ability to act appropriately that principals most need to develop in order to survive and thrive. It is in this action that *aporias* will surface as a call to hermeneutic practice which Smits (1997) reminds us is “not about the recovery of existing or previously inscribed meanings, but the creation of meaning.” that informs future action. (p. 286)

The experience of practicing in the principalship may be likened metaphorically to trekking out on a glacier. The solid surface conceals the powerful and unpredictable forces that are continually at play. Principals can prepare by having the right equipment (techniques). They can enhance their understanding of the underlying conditions (theory) and use that knowledge to guide practice, connecting themselves to others through ropes as lifelines and slowly probing the surface with each step. Yet the wise trekker proceeds in humble acknowledgement of the limits of his or her personal understanding and power. Success, though never guaranteed, is possible only by navigating the environment in such a way that one is fully mindful of every step while at the same time one is listening to the far off cracking and watching the changing weather conditions which foretell the shape of things to come. To practice wisely, principals must attend to both the big and the small

picture; to see the universal in the particular in a manner that each shapes the understanding of the other. What underwrites or informs this practice?

The Need for Practical Wisdom

The importance of wisdom to the practice of educational leadership was noted by Bennington. He stated, in describing the requirements for a new director of the National College for School Leadership, that “he or she will need an outstanding track record in leadership, and . . . ‘will know that there are no textbook answers in leading schools. The would-be director will need the less fashionable virtues described by Aristotle as ‘practical wisdom’ and more recently by Seamus Heaney as ‘earned wisdom’”.³ Aristotle (Dunne, 1993) distinguished between practical wisdom, *phronesis*, and philosophical wisdom, *sophia*. He believed that *sophia* was “the most comprehensive and exact form of knowledge” (p. 239), an ultimate truth, whereas *phronesis*, was a practical or enacted wisdom.

Coulter and Orme (2000) refer to Aristotle in their attempt to describe the types of knowledge that lead to good teaching. They note that “the coupling between *episteme* [theoretical knowledge] and practice that is so tight in professions like medicine and engineering is much looser in teaching” (p. 5). Thus while theoretical knowledge can contribute to good teaching, excellent practice requires knowing how to teach, the methodology of teaching. Aristotle’s term for this type of knowing was *techne*: a type of knowledge that is “most often visible by its absence” (p. 6). Coulter and Orme suggest that the goal of many professional development workshops is to translate the latest scientific discoveries (*episteme*) into classroom practice (*techne*). However they note that

³ These quotes are from an article in the London Times Educational Supplement (1999).

techne is “generally acquired in action, or practice itself: we learn how to teach by actually teaching”. (p. 5)

However, “[t]he mastery of *episteme* or *techne* separately or in combination is not enough because the essence of good teaching is missing. (p. 5) The missing element is the moral obligation of teaching. Teaching “is centrally about the relationships between students and teachers in which teachers agree to share responsibility with parents and the community generally to help children learn the knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions that will help them lead good and worthwhile lives now and in the future” (p. 5).

“Teaching is fundamentally and critically (in all senses of that word) a moral activity.”

(p. 6). In fulfilling this moral commitment good teachers and leaders have need of the ability to “demonstrate good judgment which is not the kind of expertise that can be captured by either *episteme* or *techne*” (p. 6). Aristotle’s term for this kind of practical wisdom or understanding is *phronesis*. Coulter and Orme (1999) note that “fostering *phronesis* in contemporary democratic multicultural Canadian society is far more complex than it was in an ancient Greek city state, yet the need for good judgment is even greater.” (p. 7)

Dunne (1993) also emphasized the importance of *phronesis* in relation to pedagogy. He suggests that teaching (and I would add school leadership) is a form of what Aristotle called *praxis*. *Praxis* is

conduct in a public space with others in which a person, without ulterior purpose and with a view to no object detachable from himself, acts in such a way as to realize excellences that he has come to appreciate in his community as constitutive of a worthwhile way of life. (p. 10)

Aristotle called the knowledge that informs *praxis*, *phronesis*. In doing so he “bequeathed to the tradition a way of viewing the regulation of practice as something non technical but

not, however, irrational.” (Dunne, 1993 p. 10). Van Manen (1997) suggests that “‘being experienced’ is a practical wisdom which results from having lived life deeply. . . . [T]his practical wisdom is sought in the understanding of the nature of the experience (p. 32)”. How does one live life deeply as a principal in order to develop practical wisdom that is both seen in and informs pedagogical practice?

Educational Administration as Pedagogic Practice

Readings (1995) suggests that standing in a pedagogical relation requires that one avoid assuming a position of “absolute authority” which places others in the position of “receptacles for the transmission of a preconstituted and unquestionable knowledge” (p. 104). However Van Manen (1991) notes that the pedagogical relationship is an asymmetrical one. What is the nature of the asymmetry when principals stand in a pedagogical relationship with others (children, staff, parents and community members)? Principals hold a position in which they are held responsible (response able) for all aspects of a particular school. The principal is the one person in the school environment whose core work is centered on the betterment of the whole school as a primary focus. This point of view and responsibility are unique to the principalship and create the basis for the asymmetry relative to the interests of others in the school community. It is very much a role that calls for the ability to help others to mediate a variety of perspectives in an ongoing tension between individual and collective good. How do principals demonstrate an attention to others in their work? The heart of the pedagogical principal’s practice is the creation of a school community that is educational in the sense of “[e]ducation, as *educare*, . . . a drawing out of the otherness of thought . . . that always demands further study”.(Readings, 1995, p. 198) The pedagogical principal’s acts are

normative in the sense of knowing what is called for to assist others to develop individually and also to grow in their ability to contribute to a community that enables children to grow and develop.

In practical terms then, how does one, as Evans (1999) suggests, reconstitute educational administration as fundamentally a pedagogic practice? In order to do this one needs to move past thinking in terms of a management leadership dichotomy. As Glasser (2000) suggests we need “lead-management”. This orientation in schools puts learning at the centre, as the core purpose of schooling. The principal then becomes, the lead follower (Sergiovanni, 2000) who ministers to (ad/ministers) all aspects of the school in support of and service to the core mission. As Grupton (2003) notes “No one dimension of school leadership is more paramount than a principal’s skill and commitment to focusing the school’s work on the learner.” (p. 120) Strong instructional leadership is at the centre of this work. McEwan (1998; 2003) and Grupton (2003) provide a broad based general direction that school principals can use as a starting point for this work. However, while these texts touch on virtually all aspects related to instructional leadership they do not prioritize any of these areas as being more critical than others in terms of their impact on improving teaching and learning.

Critical to this work however, is an in-depth understanding of teaching and learning. Marsh (2000) reflecting back from a fictionalized vantage point ten years into the future provides a vision of the attributes of the kind of principal he believes we will view as successful.

Successful principals knew the attributes of good teaching/learning and the pragmatics of what teaching and learning ought to look like in various subjects and for various levels. The value of this understanding was not to have the principal serve as an expert who demanded or monitored improvement for

individual teachers. Instead this understanding led to collaboration with team leaders of high performance work teams able to carry out powerful instruction and instructional improvement efforts- the principal's role was more strategic than clinical and very different from the previous instructional leadership paradigm. Successful principals also focused teaching and learning on the success for all students through moral persuasion, use of data, structuring of work teams to accommodate varieties of students and a culture that promoted student success whatever it took. (Marsh, 2000. p. 141)

So I end this section having come full circle to issues of principal practice. This study, my doctoral research, provides an opportunity to record the experiences and practices of principals. The next section will provide a brief overview of an initiative in a large urban school district. The framework of this initiative and its specific expectations for principals form the local environmental context for this doctoral study.

CHAPTER 2: THE LOCAL CONTEXT: THE DISTRICT TALE

The following section is intended to provide contextual district information relative to this proposed study.

The Launch

In August 2001, the acting superintendent of a large urban school district enthusiastically welcomed one hundred and seventy district principals and an equal number of lead teachers who had volunteered to participate in a series of professional development activities called 'Blueprints for Supporting Teaching and Learning'. It was at that time that he unveiled the expectation that principals would work toward spending fifty percent of their day in classrooms or involved in activities that directly supported teaching and learning in classrooms. In that room on that day eyes widened, but there was little overt response. Like any group, some principals embrace change; others reject it; still others represent varying degrees in between. My guess is that my principal colleagues heard little of the rationale and support for this expectation; what resonated clearly in their minds was the number fifty – 50 per cent!

Principals and lead teachers spent the next three days learning about the other components of the framework and made plans to bring this information back to their schools. On the last day, a principal who was immovable on changes he didn't support was overheard saying with his usual firm emphasis, "I won't get to fifty percent, but I will move from zero to ten." The impact had been felt and we were on our way.

A District Initiative for Supporting Teaching and Learning

Having principals spend half of their day in classrooms supporting teaching and learning was an important component of a district initiative aimed at improving student

achievement. The initiative involved an ongoing district wide professional development program for principals and lead teaching staff in schools related to improving instruction as a vehicle to improving achievement. In my position as assistant to the superintendent, I was a member of a design team that planned and set direction for this district wide initiative. Our team was comprised of the superintendent, two assistants to the superintendent, three principals from a newly created central department called Student Achievement Services and a group of four external consultants. Beginning with an initial pilot involving twenty –six schools, this group worked over a period of approximately sixteen months to gain support for and design the details of the first year of this long term initiative.

The leadership of the principal has been found in numerous studies to be a critical factor in the success of school improvement initiatives (Fullan, 2001). Murphy and Datnow's (2003) review of comprehensive school reforms strongly reinforces the notion that the leadership, and particularly that provided by the principal, is critical to successful school reform. They note that there is "a strong connection between the proactive work of the principal and the acceptance of a reform amongst staff . . . [Principals] furnish support in a tangible way by helping build the planks of an effective organization, foundations that are beyond the power of individual teachers to construct." (p. 266) The principal was also critical to the development of "leadership density or distributed leadership" (p. 267) within the school through the promotion, nurturing and guidance of teacher leadership at the school level.

While it is clear that the principals play a crucial role in determining the success of comprehensive school reform, Murphy and Datnow (2003) suggest that "the

profession would be advantaged if we had a better sense of how whole school reforms shape the role of school leaders, especially principals.” (p. 273). This is the issue on which this proposed research inquiry turns. The district initiative set expectations for principal practice. The district expects that principals be actively involved in leading these initiatives with their teacher leaders and other key school staff who comprise the school’s instructional leadership team.

For most of the principals in this district, particularly at the secondary level, the requirement that they spend 50 percent of their time in classrooms and in activities directly related to supporting teaching and learning was a radical departure from their previous practice. This study examines how principals interpret and enact their role as school leaders in this new context. A particular focus is to illuminate if, and how, being in classrooms close to the scene of teaching and learning supports and informs the pedagogical practice of principals.

Enacting ‘Principals in Rooms’

Having principals spend time in classrooms is not a new concept. There has always been an implicit expectation that principals would do this work as part of being knowledgeable about what was happening in their schools and as a means of fulfilling their role as instructional leaders. What was new and different about this initiative was that the expectation was now explicit. From the district perspective the rationale for this change was based on the belief that student achievement improved in schools in which principals spent a significant amount of time in classrooms modeling, coaching and supporting teaching and learning.

There has been general support from principals for the idea that they should spend time in classrooms. Even principals who in the past had spent little time in classrooms felt that it was the right direction in which to move. At the same time there was a level of incredulity about whether the fifty per cent goal was attainable given the many other demands on principals' time. There was a sentiment among a number of principals that it would have been better if the district had set a graduated numerical target over a set time period for the implementation of this initiative. The question of attainability of this goal was an open one in the minds of many principals.

Initial actions both on the part of the district and principals themselves dealt with the management challenges involved in shifting how principals allocated time to address their various work responsibilities to enable them to make the time to be in classrooms. Addressing the issue of principal practice in classrooms and how to connect that practice to school leadership activities would only later become a priority. These are the areas that are the focus of this investigation.

District Actions to Support a Shift in Principal Practice

It was clear from the outset that having principals focus fifty percent of their time supporting teaching and learning would entail a drastic reorganization and reprioritization of the work life of principals. Principals already had demanding time-intensive workloads without this requirement. Initial actions were taken to communicate to principals that the district was serious about reaching this goal and to create a sense of urgency and momentum amongst all staff to change the current operation of the system both centrally and in schools to enable this to occur.

There was a belief on the part of some of the senior central administration, some principals and some teachers that principals were too frequently called to attend meetings or conduct other business outside their schools. To address this issue central services staff were not permitted to ask principals to leave their schools without the permission of the superintendent except on Wednesdays (principal meeting day). To further reduce interruptions for principals, central service staff were told not to contact schools before ten thirty in the morning. The underlying message here was that this was prime instructional time. It was the time when, at least in elementary schools, literacy instruction generally took place and this was an important time for principals to be in classrooms. Principals were told explicitly that even if they were contacted by the superintendent, they were not expected to leave their work in classrooms at this or any other time. Principals were encouraged to ensure that their office staff understood this and to request that parents make appointments to see principals rather than expect that he or she be available on a drop in basis. These messages were communicated to principals directly by the superintendent, through the media and at district events for parents in an effort to support principals in making the change.

Staff in central services were also asked to review all the requests made of schools in an attempt to take “off the plate” of the principal any activity that might distract them from their central work of supporting teaching and learning. Many of these actions were symbolic. Their primary impact was to signal a change in culture.

Responses of Principals

It was clear very early in this process that decisions at the district level, even if they were aimed at creating more time for principals to work with teachers, were not

greeted with unilateral support by principals. The district has had a long history of allowing principals final decision-making power in virtually all aspects of school operation and has also provided them with considerable opportunity for input into district level decisions. While all agreed that it was important to set priorities centered on teaching and learning, it was evident that principals wanted a say in how this would occur.

Principals also worked individually and in groups to develop and share time management strategies that would move them closer to meeting this requirement. Strategies such as regularly blocking in time in the day and week to visit classrooms and delegating management work to other staff became more common. Principals began to exert pressure on some areas of the district organization to make their services available in a manner that took less direct time and interaction from principals. While the challenges of finding time remain, principals are spending more time in classrooms sometimes at some cost to themselves because they believe that it is the right thing for them to be doing.

Questions of Principal Practice

As principals began to spend more time in classrooms other questions surfaced related to the purpose of their classroom observations and walk throughs. Traditionally, principals spent time in rooms primarily for the purpose of supervision and evaluation of teachers. Part of the staff development program that supported this initiative was structured to provide opportunities for dialogue about the purpose and practice of principals in rooms. In staff development sessions, principals reviewed research literature on the impact classroom visits and principal feedback had on teacher

performance. Principals were provided with information on the purposes for different types of classroom visits such as brief classroom walkthroughs to assess climate to more intensive visits which might involve modeling, support and feedback related to a specific instructional practice. Principals also shared how they provided feedback to teachers and talked about how they had addressed situations where they felt challenged in providing feedback to teachers. Lead teachers participated in these sessions and shared their experience of being visited and receiving feedback. The role of principals in classrooms continued to command the attention of principals. A number of principal groups made this the focus of their yearly professional development retreats.

Many in the district conceptualized this change as a return to the former role of principal as instructional leader. While there is a strong connection to this role, I also believe that we may be dealing with a significant paradigm shift, giving birth to something new. Principals and the district are in the midst of making sense of what may turn out to be a new lens through which principals view their work as suggested previously by Marsh (2000). How principals enact this role is likely very much shaped by, and reveals underlying beliefs and thinking about, teaching and learning. I anticipated that the experience of being in classrooms has the potential to bring principals face to face with the “messy secrets” (Jardine, 1997. p 161), the *aporias* of practice and the complexity of classroom life, in a way that would cause the principal to question and reflect as part of an ongoing inquiry into both teaching and leadership practice. The intent of this study is to document the process of enacting this new role in the evolution of the practice of three principals.

CHAPTER 3: INQUIRY FRAME

Focus of the Study

The three principals in this study were leading their schools at a time when this large urban school district had introduced a framework for school improvement which contained an expectation that principals work towards spending fifty percent of their time in instructional leadership activities that supported teaching and learning. The intent was to make teaching and learning a priority focus of principal practice. An explicit part of this work for principals included a direct presence in classrooms. Principals were expected to use this time to support, model and coach teachers. It was also expected that the knowledge principals gained from their visits to classrooms would inform school level leadership activities throughout the system.

I have titled the research “Being in Rooms”. In this study the notion of ‘*being*’ in rooms operated on a physical and metaphorical level. The direct experience of being present in classrooms had the potential to bring principals into close and intimate contact with the lived experiences of students and teachers. Van Manen (1991) notes that “reflective awareness of our pedagogical intent enables us to make our pedagogical lives conversationally available: debatable, accountable and evaluable.” (p. 19).

Metaphorically, being in rooms, referred to an orientation to school leadership that was pedagogical in the sense that it centered on the lives of children such that ultimately the impact on children becomes the cornerstone of reference for all action, reflection and evaluation.

The primary purpose of the study was to inquire into the pedagogic practice of three junior high school principals as they interpreted and enacted this new district

expectation. I anticipated this process would be a hermeneutic one and that principal practice would reflect each principal's understanding of teaching and learning, but I needed to know more.

Research Questions

The following research question guided this study:

How do principals enact a district expectation that they spend 50 per cent of their time in classrooms supporting teaching and learning?

Other subsidiary questions were:

1. How does the experience of *being* in rooms on both a physical and metaphoric level inform and support pedagogical practice in principals?
2. What *aporias* surface for principals as they engage in pedagogical leadership?
3. How do principals understand and address *aporias*?
4. What can be learned from the experience of the principals in this study?

Researching a Design

Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.” (p. 15) This type of inquiry was aligned with my research questions which are open-ended and interpretive in nature. I hoped through this inquiry to do justice to the complexity of pedagogical leadership as it emerged in its natural context. My challenge as researcher was to bring this story to life in a manner that enabled it to speak its truth clearly and powerfully.

Making a Case for Case Study

Creswell (1998) indicates that a qualitative study starts with “a single idea or problem that the researcher seeks to understand, not a causal relationship of variables or a comparison of groups. Although these might evolve or comparisons might be made, these emerge late in the study after we describe a single idea.” (p. 21)

Merriam (1998) suggests that

case study is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved. The interest is in process, rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights from case studies can directly influence policy practice and future research.” (p. 19)

This study was very much directed at discovering and uncovering the experience of principals in

their attempts to lead from a pedagogical frame. I was also interested in what could be learned from this study that would be of value in supporting pedagogical practice. Yin (1993) suggests that case study is “the method of choice when the phenomenon is not readily distinguishable from its context [such that] complex interactions abound.” (p. 3)

This is exactly the challenge of the principalship. The actual practice and experience of the principal exists in a complicated inter-relational context with other individuals, groups, situations and traditions. (Spillane, 2006) The artistry of principal practice is informed by background knowledge, training and experience which is always in service to the demand of the emergent context.

Aspects of Case Study

Creswell (1998) defines a case as a “bounded system” focusing on “a program, an event, an activity or individuals” (p. 61) in which parameters of time and place are clearly

delineated. Merriam (1998) suggests that if the phenomenon that you are studying is “not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case” and recommends examining “how finite the data collection would be” as a means of determining case boundaries (p. 27). Each case study in this research project was limited to giving voice to the experience, perspective and practice of the principal. The reason for holding to the perspective of each principal was because in the reality of practice this was the only experience to which the principal has direct access. This study centered itself clearly in the experience of the principal.

Merriam (1998) identified several aspects of case studies to which the current research project has addressed itself. Case studies are ‘particularistic’ in that they focus on “a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon” (p. 29). Case study, by its very nature, turns us away from the typical to the unique.” (Shank, 2002. p. 53) The case study should provide “thick”, rich description of the phenomenon being studied using “complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated.” (Merriam 1998 p. 30) The intent of case studies is also ‘heuristic’ attempting to “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study.” (ibid.) This case study portrays the experience of each individual principal.

Types of Case Studies

Merriam (1998) suggests that in designing a case study it is important to reference the overall intent of the study. Stake (2000) suggests that a case study is “both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 436). He also distinguishes three types of case studies: an *intrinsic* case study focuses on the particularities of the individual case itself as the primary interest; an *instrumental* case study is one in which

the “particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization.” (p. 437); and a *collective* case study is an

instrumental study extended to several cases. Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases. (ibid.)

Stake (2000) also suggests that some studies may represent aspects of all types of case studies. This study has a strong interpretive dimension which involved gathering information about the principal’s experience of being in rooms with the intent of “analyzing, interpreting” and to some extent “theorizing about this phenomenon.” (Merriam, 1998 p. 38) In order to do this I utilized a “multicase” (ibid., p. 40) design. This design enabled me to look at each of three cases in depth as a separate entity, but it also provided an opportunity to examine themes across the cases.

Selection of Cases for Study

In this study I chose to look at pedagogic practice of three junior high school principals. Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) suggest that the most important criterion to be considered in case selection is the opportunity to maximize what can be learned from the study of the particular case. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that [one] wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from [whom] the most can be learned.” (Merriam, 1998 p. 61) I chose to work with principals at the junior high school level because traditionally it is at this stage that the focus of work tends to transition from students to curriculum. I was interested to see if and how principals were able to support teachers to maintain a pedagogic focus with young adolescents.

The principals whom I asked and who agreed to participate in this study are all well known to me as colleagues. They are thoughtful reflective, practitioners who have an interest in deepening their understanding of their own practice as principals. They all have an interest in building shared leadership in their schools, an orientation consistent with my own. All were enthusiastic about participating in the research. The number of cases was limited by the practicalities of doing the research and my knowledge of individual leaders whose orientation and skills matched the intent of this study.

My primary interest in this study was to portray the experiences of principals who are committed to and see the potential of a school culture that is collegial and inquiry based. The principals involved were selected for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons. However, I intended that their texts would speak to each other as their narratives were shared. I was also interested in cross-referencing their experiences to explore interrelationships that might surface among their individual experiences.

Inquiry Process

Each case study involved three sessions comprised of a conversation with the principal prior to visiting classrooms to understand the purpose of their visits, direct classroom observation with the principal and follow up debriefing conversations. Each session lasted two to three hours.

The interviews took place over the period of the 2003-04 school year. In each case, the first interview took place in the fall, the second during the second semester of the school year and the third close to the end of the school year. School life and thus principal practice have a natural rhythm that follows the traditional school calendar. Spacing out the interviews provided an opportunity to reflect the natural rhythms. In

addition, complex and substantial change in practice takes time. The year long time frame provided principals with opportunities for significant action, the results of which formed the basis for our conversations.

Data Collection

Data was collected from two primary sources: individual taped interviews with principals and direct observation of classrooms with principals.

Interviews

The primary source of data was gathered through interviews with individual principals. Merriam (1998) indicates that interviewing is the technique of choice when “we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them.” (p. 72) Dorr-Bremme (2001) suggests that interviews should be used as both a guide to significant interactions and a means to invite the participant’s “descriptions and explanations for routine interactions in which they routinely engage.” (p. 19)

The interviews in this study were for the most part open-ended and unstructured. I shared with participants in the opening interview that I was interested in understanding their school context and learning about how their leadership related to the district framework. I indicated that I was particularly interested in their practice in support of the district expectation that principals spend time in classrooms supporting teaching and learning. I utilized an open ended process because I wanted principals to talk about areas that were most pertinent to their unique context. I also wanted to provide ample opportunity for sharing and reflection. In each case, I also inquired directly about how they enacted the expectation that principals work towards spending 50 per cent of their time in activities that supported teaching and learning.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that “an interview is not a neutral tool, at least for the people who create the reality of the interview situation”. (p. 633) Fontana and Frey (2000) highlight the complexity of the interviewing process and urge those undertaking this form of data collection to be sensitive to the social dynamics at play in any conversation. They note that “[i]nterviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in interaction with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place.” (p. 663) Because I conducted this research within my own district my position as assistant superintendent needed to be carefully considered as part of the social and ethical dynamic. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Merriam (1998) highlights the importance of asking “good” questions and sensitive use of probing as critical in this process. In this manner interviews can be used to collect data relative to each of the research questions from the most factual to the most interpretive and analytical. She suggests that quality of the data collected is very much a reflection of the skill of the researcher and that this kind of *praxis* develops through a combination of training and practice. The principals involved in this study and I had previously participated in staff development to support us to provide collegial coaching to other principals. We all had considerable experience in this process both as collegial coaches and as individuals being coached. Learning to ask good questions is one of the most important aspects of professional development around coaching. Familiarity, understanding and comfort with this approach, as well as the fact that the principals and I

already had established relationships allowed us in each case to quickly establish rapport and become involved in rich discussions about their work.

Merriam (1998) recommends field-testing questions through pilot interviews. Some initial work was done prior to the actual interviews as part of meeting with a group of principals prior to conducting the interviews. Principals were asked to respond to questions aimed at gathering information about their leadership practice to support teaching and learning related to the expectation that they work toward spending fifty per cent of their time in classrooms and in other instructional leadership work to support teaching and learning. This process surfaced differences in principals' interpretation, practice and some common *aporias*. The results of this meeting led me to utilize an open dialogic process with principals during the study.

In this study, the intent of the interviews was to hear as authentically as possible the principal's perspectives, learning, questions and dilemmas. My stance was an attempt to be supportive to contribute to their growth and understanding through this reflective process. At the first session, I explained my interest in learning about their current work as instructional leaders within the district school improvement framework. I also indicated that within that context, my inquiry focused on the relationship between their direct work in classrooms and other leadership activities. Throughout the interviews, I asked a variety of questions for clarification and to probe to deepen my understanding of their perspective on issues that had surfaced. At times in the process my questioning was also aimed to assist the principal to clarify their own thoughts, to enable them to reflect deeply on their own practice in order to assist them to discover next steps in their own work. This process was intended to enable me to observe their emerging understandings.

Throughout the process, I attempted to follow the principals' lead and to remain attentive to their needs without abandoning the general intent of the project.

Direct Observation

Direct observation provides a lens to observe classroom practice with principals. During most sessions, the principal and I spent a portion of our time making brief visits to a number of classrooms. The principals chose which classrooms we would visit. The focus of our observation was selected by the principal and usually emanated from the content of our conversations that day. During the classroom visits I engaged in conversations with the principal, school staff and students as appropriate. In all of the school settings in this study these types of visits were considered normal practice by staff and students. No notes were taken during the visits. Following the classroom visits we would debrief. These discussions formed a part of the interview. This portion of our conversation enabled us to ground conversation in direct and shared observation of teaching and learning *in vivo*.

Interpretation of Data

In the 1970's, feminist researchers introduced and acted on a different [new] metaphor: "Theory is story." . . . [meaning that] the personal is grounding for theory. With the new metaphor for their work, many feminists altered their research and writing practices . . . telling individual and collective stories became understood as women theorizing about their lives. The boundary between "narrative" and "analysis" dissolved. (Richardson, 2000. p. 927)

Charmez (2000) suggests that data analysis strategies need not be rigid or prescriptive. She states that a "focus on meaning . . . furthers rather than limits interpretive understanding". (p. 510) Data from each of the case studies seemed, in my mind, best understood and organized around incidents or stories of significance either identified by

the principals or myself. These stories provided a lens or perspective for understanding and interpreting the actions of the principals.

Schon (1979) suggests

essential difficulties in social policy have more to do with problem setting than problem solving, more to do with ways in which we frame the purposes to be achieved than with the selection of optimal means for achieving them.(p. 255)

Problems are mediated, I believe by the “stories” about troublesome situations- stories in which they describe what is wrong and what needs fixing. (ibid.) Schon indicates that stories of challenge (*Aporias*) are framed around “generative metaphors.” (ibid.) This term suggests that the metaphor itself generates policy or action. In these case studies, the stories shared by principals reveal the generative metaphors that appear to underwrite their work. The findings in response to each of the research questions are illustrated through the “stories”. Each case study will close with a summary of key findings.

Questions of Quality in Qualitative Research

Creswell (1998) addresses issues of quality through a discussion of verification and standards setting “verification as a *process* that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study and standards as *criteria* imposed by the researcher and others after a study is completed.” (p. 194)

Merriam (1998) indicates that an underlying assumption of qualitative research is that “reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever changing.” (p. 203) She suggests that the question of internal validity then addresses how well the research captures the perspectives of those involved, and captures and interprets the complexity of behavior in its contextual framework. Lincoln and Guba (2000) refer to the “trustworthiness and

authenticity” (p. 166) of the research findings as the extent to which they are an accurate portrayal of reality.

“Member checking” is an important verification procedure in the conduct of case study research (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998 and Stake, 1995). It is a process in which participants in the research have regular opportunities to “provide critical observations and interpretations sometimes making suggestions as to sources of data.” (Stake, 1995 p. 95) As well, participants should regularly review data to provide feedback on its “accuracy and palatability.” (ibid.) The process for addressing this issue included regular “member checks” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204) which involved having principals on an ongoing basis review summary data after each visit. On the subsequent visit principals had an opportunity to reflect on the accuracy of the data and the plausibility of the interpretation.

Analysis of Across Cases

In multiple case design, Merriam (1998) suggests two stages of analysis of the research data: within-case analysis will treat the texts of each principal’s experiences as “a comprehensive case in and of itself.” (p. 194); cross-case analysis occurs following the completion of the within-case data. Merriam (1998) indicates that

(u)ltimately, cross-case analysis differs little from analysis of data in a single case study. The level of analysis can result in little more than a unified description across cases; it can lead to categories, themes or typologies that conceptualize the data from all the cases; or it can result in building a substantive theory offering an integrated framework covering multiple cases. (p. 195)

The design of this study provided an opportunity for the powerful illumination of each case. The quality of the study very much rests on these rich portrayals. Multiple case design created space to surface common themes or elements. The artistry of

leadership is very much related to the unique manner in which the leaders address common issues across schools. Examining several cases permitted variation in leadership practice to become apparent. The relationship between the within case and cross case analysis is best represented through the metaphor of Indra's net.

Indra's Net is a classic Buddhist metaphor . . . A net of infinite proportions is hung with a jewel at each of the connecting points. Each jewel reflects and is reflected in all the other jewels, creating a metaphor for interconnectedness. No jewel exists on its own: each is connected to and reflected in all the others."
(Glass, 1998)

Stake (2001) suggests that the utility and power of case studies is that they are "down to earth and attention-holding". (p. 131) He goes on to make the argument that these same characteristics often make case study the "preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization." (ibid.) Bringing three leadership tales together in the proximity of one larger study provides an opportunity to allow them to resonate with each other and should enable the reader to develop a richer picture of pedagogical leadership practice in the context of "being in rooms".

Ethics and Issues of Power

One ethical issue within the context of this research concerns my relationship to the participants in terms of our relative positions within the school district. According to the school district organizational chart our positions were parallel; I was not in a direct supervisory position relative to the principals who participated in this study. However, my responsibilities as a senior district level administrator involved with close access to the superintendent and influence relative to district activities that impacted principals. As such, this situation of power could impact what participants would be willing to share

with me. I tried to mitigate against this bias by selecting principals who I believed were confident and secure in their leadership roles and with whom I believed I had over time (at least a decade) established a trusting and mutually respectful relationship. I was also very aware of this relationship of power throughout the research process and made every effort to conduct myself appropriately.

The potential for conflict arising from the dual roles as researcher/participant and assistant to the superintendent/principal was discussed with the three principals who indicated an interest in participating. Because we worked as peers in the past the principals were in a position to determine their level of comfort with participation in the study. Participants were asked specifically to consider this prior to formally indicating consent. In addition, participants had the right to withdraw at any point in the study. This was made explicit in the consent letter. (See Appendix 1)

Closing

The focus of this research project was consistent with the orientation of the thesis in this EDD program. An excerpt from the Harvard Educational doctorate program (www.gse.harvard.edu/academics_edd#research) suggests that these programs direct themselves to

- [t]eaching and learning as the core of the school program and the relationship of leadership to that core.
- [l]eadership skills in practice and how they are developed

The research questions which guided this study directly addressed these two critical issues in relation to a new initiative in a large urban school district. This initiative, which required principals to work toward spending fifty per cent of their time in classrooms or

directly supporting teaching and learning in classrooms, opened the door for me to explore how principals interpret and enact their role as school leaders in a new context. In this study three experienced junior high school principals, Janelle, David, and Christina, shared their insights about pedagogical leadership in this new context.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY ONE

Background

Having taught at elementary, junior and senior high levels, Janelle has a broad background in education. She has worked as a district consultant and high school department head. At the time of the study Janelle was in her second school as principal. Her first was in a small, but complex junior high school with many programs in a less affluent area of the city. Currently, Janelle was in her fourth year in her current assignment as principal of a large elementary junior high school in a middle class urban area.

Lived Curriculum of Leadership

Janelle described herself as a “race horse”⁴, a risk taker, someone who was keen to try new things and learn in the process. She saw herself as a committed change agent, who loved the excitement of doing new things. Janelle’s self description immediately brought to mind Pinar’s notion of “curriculum as *currere*”. *Currere* is derived from the Latin infinitive verb that means ‘to run the race course’. Curriculum is a verb, an activity, or for Pinar, an inward journey.” (Slattery, 1995 p. 56) This study examines the curriculum of school leadership in Janelle’s school context. It is an attempt to portray the inward journey of school leadership through the eyes and the heart of a “race horse”. It is the story of Janelle’s running, told from the track. In this case study, I attempt to do justice to her experience of the race and identify key themes that surface in the lived curriculum of school leadership through a pedagogical lens.

⁴ The words of the principals have been cited throughout each case study. While my field notes and data coding indicate precisely when each quotation was made, in an attempt to keep the eye focused on the narratives, I have chosen not to indicate that information in the current text.

Principal Stories

This case study is organized around seven experiential stories which I have titled, My Greatest Fear, All of a Sudden Something Happens, We Give Monthly Interims Here, The Red Circle, Rigour, Invitation with a Bit of a Nudge, and Finding the Meaning. The stories appeared to have a touchstone quality to them, resonating as points of reference for Janelle as she reflected on her leadership and what she was trying to accomplish in her school.

Story One: My Greatest Fear - Responding Appropriately to School Culture

As the literature reveals, school culture has a significant impact on leadership practice and is the backdrop for which all activities and actions take place. (Deal, 1987). Successful principals read the culture accurately and make wise decisions about how they will address various school practices that reflect the culture of the school. The following two exemplars reveal the significance of responding appropriately to the school culture and how doing what is right can create risk for the leader.

Inheriting a school culture requires principals to reflect on their values and beliefs. When they arrive at a school, principals may find the school culture includes practices and beliefs that both align with and jar against the principal's beliefs and preferred practices. For example, prior to her arrival, Janelle's school had established a dress code for students. While this is something that Janelle would not have considered doing in the past, she knew "there was no fighting that battle." Over time, however, Janelle came to see the value of the dress standard "I will never be in a school without a dress code again."

Janelle was aware of the importance of deeply understanding the school culture and took this into account when she decided to act on her beliefs in a manner that challenged the status quo.

What would have helped me coming into this school would have been to have somebody talk me through what the real culture of the school was. Not just the culture of the teachers, not just the culture of the kids, but what was the perceived culture of the school from a parent perspective. The perceived culture of this school is that it's 'elite'. Only certain kids come here. . . . The notion of 'elite', gives teachers certain license to do some things, gives parents certain license, and makes kids perform in a certain way.

Janelle acknowledged that "a feeling of being 'elite' . . . has paid off for the school." The school had a reputation of high achievement. Janelle noted that while this may be perceived as a positive, there was "a real double edge".

What you get in these schools is a critical mass of kids who will do well regardless . . . despite what's happening in the building . . . because of their parents, because of socioeconomics and so that's what makes these schools attractive.

This situation was compounded by a belief that only certain students belong in the school. The students who were successful belonged and those who weren't did not belong. This resulted in a situation in which "teachers believe they're making a difference, but their teaching practice hasn't changed in years." There was no urgency to examine practice because in this elite setting most students are successful. Janelle's challenge was "to get them [teachers] to change their teaching practice and move these kids even further."

A central *aporia* underpinning Janelle's narrative began to surface.

The biggest fear coming in was how was I going to play by Janelle Knight's rules? I'm a district player, I really believe in, in equity, believe in being fair . . . and not lose the reputation [of the school], because [it has] an amazing reputation.

I was really scared that . . . one would go.

That was my greatest fear, to come in here and really play by district rules and not lose ground [in terms of achievement] because I knew the community wouldn't understand."

Jaworski (1996) suggests

The capacity to discover and participate in our unfolding future has more to do with our being—our total orientation of character and consciousness—than what we do. Leadership is about creating day by day, a domain in which we and those around us continually deepen our understanding of reality and are able to participate in shaping the future. This, then, is the deeper territory of leadership—collectively 'listening' to what is wanting to emerge in the world, and then having the courage to do what is required." (p. 182).

Janelle's strategy to shift the school culture

was to create a crisis. And the crisis I created was that I let all kids that should be here into the school.

And the first year they[teachers] said, 'We've never seen kids like this.'

I said, 'That's right, you're going to have to learn to teach a diverse group [of students]. We'll support you from our end, but you better know that you're going to have them' . . . So their practice had to start to change. But their belief was that they didn't need to change.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) suggest that leadership is dangerous. It requires courage and is not for the faint of heart. Despite her fears, Janelle insisted that teachers provide solid instruction for a range of students. She noted that "teachers have had to really move over the last four years to . . . deal with all of these kinds of kids. . . . They [the teachers] have . . . grown from that as well." At the same time the culture held teachers accountable "to keep pushing the envelope" to maintain high achievement results. These demands created a "sense of urgency" and need for teachers to reflect on practice.

As Janelle reflected back on this experience one can understand the depth of feeling behind the following statement: "So when I now look at my school doing as well as . . . [another high achieving junior high] . . . I'm beside myself."

Janelle believed that the school needed to accept all students who lived in the area regardless of their academic history. She was aware that this had the potential to lower the provincial achievement results which in turn might negatively impact the image of the school in the eyes of the community. She also acknowledged that her actions created a “crisis” for teachers who would be required to teach these students. All of these factors had the potential to erode support for her leadership. Despite the risk, Janelle did what she believed was right for the students and the school. She also set an expectation that teachers would meet the needs of these students and indicated that support would be provided to help them be successful. The changing student demographic created awareness in teachers of the need to change their practice.

Deal (1987) states that culture can be an impediment to change. In spite of this, this story suggests that while it takes courage, it is possible to do what is right for students and that challenging the culture can act as a catalyst for positive change when the rationale for change is a strong one, and in this case a moral one, and when teachers have clear expectations and support.

Story Two: All of a Sudden Something Happens - The Place of Hopefulness

In an effort to improve achievement results, some schools in this district worked with students who had the potential to achieve honours, but were not doing so. Janelle’s school was one of these. In fact, in the school year before the study, Janelle took it upon herself to teach this group of students whom she referred to as students “at promise”. The results surprised her as the following free verse poem of Janelle’s words reveals.

Oh! I got this letter from a kid.
All my crazy ideas that I tried last year with all these class groups.
At the end of the day, I get the results and I’m looking at the ‘at-promise’ class,
The group of kids I put together.

If they were just in this group
 If they were just grouped this way,
 I know
 They would get 80,
 Right?!
 Well, I'm sitting looking at the results,
 I've got my highlighter
 I've got my class list
 I'm going through them all.
 And I'm literally . . .
 By the end of it, I just want to put my head on the ground.
 Nothing changed, right.
 Nothing changed.
 Such a small [number] got over 80 percent
 Nothing changed!
 I get this email from this kid who was in this class

It was unbelievable.
 She said, "First of all, I couldn't believe you were picking me to be in this class."
 She said, . . . "I want you to check the class results at high school right now."
 She said, "Because my average right now is 88 per cent." . . .
 She said, "You chose us to be there. You took a chance. . ."
 So we started to pull some of the marks, she's right.
 I would never have thought to do it.
 All of a sudden something happens to you and you go, "Oh!"

This story highlights a challenge that principals face as they seek to do the right thing for students. It speaks to the *aporia* of knowing the impact that one's leadership actions can have over time. Sometimes evidence of impact is not immediately apparent. In this case, Janelle did not initially see positive results in the year end provincial achievement tests. The e-mail from her former students affirmed Janelle's actions. The student's comments highlighted the impact of Janelle's actions from the perspective of the student. By choosing and taking a chance on this student Janelle demonstrated her confidence and belief in the student's potential. The student's comments suggest that she attributes her subsequent success to Janelle's belief in her. Perhaps inherent in the notion

of pedagogical leadership is this sense of hopefulness and belief in the potential of the other that is displayed in practice.

The current school, district, and provincial cultures emphasize the importance of high stakes tests to determine the efficacy of practice. In the framework of continuous improvement the goal is to get students over a higher bar as measured by the provincial achievement tests. Operating within this framework, Janelle took action to increase achievement of students who she believed could achieve at the honours level on provincial achievement tests. There has been a tendency to use these tests as measures to demonstrate the impact of an intervention. However, as this story reveals, this practice may not be sensitive or aligned closely enough to be an appropriate indicator of impact, yet it is used as a primary indicator of success.

Janelle was very clearly surprised by the response of the student. Experiences such as this can cause leaders to think in different ways about their actions and impact. Such experiences trigger self-reflection and self-evaluation that can deepen understanding and inform future action. A key learning from this story is that while leaders identify indicators by which they and others will assess their actions, there may be unanticipated consequences of a positive or negative nature that may turn out to be significant for students. This suggests the need for leaders to create feedback loops to learn about the impact of their actions. In this case, the feedback came unsolicited, perhaps because Janelle had established a relationship that invited feedback from a former student. In asymmetrical relationships such as those between the principal, teachers, students and parents honest feedback is more likely to occur in situations where

there are positive, open, supportive and trusting relationships between the principal and others.

This story suggests that building an environment in which it is safe for others to provide open and honest feedback can assist leaders to more clearly understand the full impact of their leadership practices. This story also suggests that leaders need to be thoughtful in determining what information they will use to assess the impact of their work.

Story Three: We Give Monthly Interims Here-Determining a Direction for Change

The previous story suggests the need for leaders to attend to student's experiences of teaching and learning. Being in classrooms provides principals with an opportunity to both observe and talk to individual students about their learning experiences. A regular presence in classrooms also allows principals to go beyond individual experience to start to surface patterns across students, time, and or classrooms that can inform future leadership practice. Janelle suggested that being in classrooms "forced [her] to see emerging patterns [as] evidence . . . [of] what to push next." This story exemplifies the complicated connections between classroom observation and subsequent leadership practice. The following story shows how Janelle interprets what she observes in her classrooms, how her observations refocus her direction, and how she prepares herself to lead change in her school.

I've made lots of observations being in and out of classes. What I started to observe was a pattern in this school. At the beginning of the month kids were in groups and talking and doing good, good work in classrooms. And by the end of the month, they were all being slaughtered with tests and assignments to be handed in. And I started to get calls from parents.

So it's a really nice cycle to watch. By the end of October, I started to say 'why is this happening?' . . . for the last three days of the month you know exactly what is happening [here]. I know my phone will be ringing . . .

Parents will say 'my kid is stressed out.'

[Students say] 'I can't believe they make us do so much homework.' So, that's that picture. You go through classrooms; kids are literally being slaughtered out there because teachers need marks for interim reports.

We give monthly interims here.

The practice of giving monthly interim report cards was intended to inform both students and parents of the student's current performance in a timely manner in order to enable the students to address concerns before the issuing of term report cards at which time the student's mark for the term had been traditionally fixed. Being in classrooms gave Janelle a closer reading of the actual impact of this practice on the learning environment. She discovered that what was initiated as a supportive practice appeared to be having the opposite impact. Students were being hurt by the school's current assessment practices.

Janelle's interpretation of the information gathered from classroom visits helped her understand what was called for in her school. Janelle felt the situation was a reflection of teacher beliefs and practices around assessment. "[Teachers] need to have an adequate number of marks to prove that what [they] did with the kids is a valid mark that parents will see as something worthwhile." Janelle believed that staff "didn't understand enough about the whole notion of assessment." Janelle's understanding of the situation informed her subsequent direction as a leader. "One of the big issues that I wanted to push in this school, and have pushed at various points in the four years that I have been here is the whole notion of assessment . . . good authentic assessment." Janelle's awareness of the

negative impact of current assessment practices set the stage and provided evidence of the need to strengthen assessment practices in the school. This initiative was to become a major focus for Janelle's leadership during the course of the year.

Establishing a Need for Change

While the need to focus on assessment was clear to Janelle, she believed that "staff here would have no indication whatsoever that they needed to look at assessment at all." Van Manen (1990) refers to the asymmetrical nature of the pedagogical relationship. In this case the asymmetry is reflected in relationship between the knowledge of the principal and that of the teachers. Janelle understood that one of her first tasks was to develop in her staff an awareness of the need to move away from the status quo and risk a change in assessment practices.

Contextual Considerations

In making this shift in staff practice and understanding, one source of support for Janelle was that other schools were also beginning to address assessment. Assessment was also a focus of district professional development. Janelle acknowledged "that district professional development has done a fabulous job of pushing the envelope . . . I used some of the district [direction] to move my agenda forward faster." The link between the information that was shared at district professional development events and the need that she had observed in her school may have influenced Janelle to pursue assessment as a primary initiative at that time. She noted, "it's almost like it was handed to me . . . assessment is exactly where we need to go."

Janelle knew she needed to account for the perspective of various stakeholders as she provided leadership that would shift assessment practices at the school. Janelle

believed that for many of her staff “assessment means a test. They used assessment as a punishment and . . . a management tool.” She felt that her staff did not understand the relationship between assessment and instruction. Teachers needed to develop new understandings about assessment but that alone would not be enough to ensure that the changes were accepted. Parents had a keen interest in the impact of assessment practices on their children. Janelle noted that in the past “we, as a practice, assessed to keep the parents happy.”

Janelle recognized that she needed to work with her staff to shift the direction from “my agenda” to a need recognized and supported by the school staff. Janelle realized that to do this she would need the support of staff to change the school plan that she and her staff had already committed to the previous spring as the direction for the year.

The interesting thing is that the plan is never one that I’m totally married to. And I think that is probably . . . something that people find frustrating about me . . . I see the plan move and shape as you go. I really thought I had come up with a plan . . . that’s open enough that I can live with it. I’ve got the longevity to go along with it because . . . my other[staff] keep me on . . . the straight and narrow, on those things right . . . because I can see the big picture. . .

In any staff there will be some staff members whose preference is to stick with the plan and carry it through while others adapt to change more readily. Janelle was again caught between what she believed she should do in her pedagogical view and how her actions would be interpreted by her staff. There was a sense of being on trial here. While Janelle clearly saw the willingness to take the risk to try something new as positive, she also felt uneasiness. She seemed to realize that she would need to work with staff skillfully to gain their support for changing the school plan in mid year.

Constructing Personal Meaning

Leaders who are able to make a compelling case for a particular course of action have more potential to engender strong followership from others. However, before Janelle could do this she had to make connections for herself. Janelle highlighted her personal need to make sense of what she had been learning in order to develop a plan to move her staff forward.

I said yesterday, I need a day to kind of get my head wrapped around how do I meld all of this [together] . . . I need to . . . figure out what it was that was really, really working well, and how do I then, build in this new stuff, but I need time to do that synthesis. . . .

Fullan (2001) talks about the importance of coherence making when dealing with change. Janelle knew that she needed to be able to articulate connections and provide a strong rationale for change in order to engage others. She was aware that her natural inclination to eagerly embrace new ideas could be a vulnerability. "I have . . . to remember, you still have to bring everybody along." Janelle was concerned about her credibility with staff and its impact on the work of improving assessment practices particularly with staff who were less enthusiastic about the direction of change.

The tension for me is that those nay-sayers [will think] that we've just switched boats, . . . they look at me as a leader. . . . You know me, I'm the first one to jump, right. I love the new stuff. Get me out there I'm happy to try it. These [staff members] could easily, easily, easily be saying, . . . see all that [other] stuff's gone.

Before she could lead her staff, Janelle needed to be able to articulate new understandings, knowledge and language clearly for herself. She needed to be able to explain and provide a rationale and connections to staff, particularly those who embraced change less enthusiastically than she or her lead teachers. Her leadership and the initiative were vulnerable unless she could do this.

If I don't, if I don't find a way before the end of the year to link it back in.
 They[the staff] could easily not make those connections.
 And I don't know, to be real frank . . .
 [I]f I've made real good connections for my staff.
 I need . . . to make the connections [for them].

Because Janelle had made her need to make connections explicit, I asked her if she would like to spend time exploring this theme. As she talked, Janelle reflected on strategies that had been effective when she had worked with her staff on previous initiatives. "We had built a beautiful [common] language . . . this is probably where the crux of it is. . . . There was a knowledge base there. . . . I now need to do the same thing with assessment." It was clear in our conversation that she had already started this process. To support her staff, Janelle brought in consultants to build the knowledge base and that would give teachers confidence "to make some moves." Through this process staff was developing a "deeper understanding of assessment . . . [that] helped them not to react to parent's ideas of assessment, but to do what they think professionally is right."

Constructing Meaning with Others

By reflecting and talking about her work Janelle seemed to become more confident that she could make links for the staff between work that they had agreed to undertake and a focus, which Janelle clearly wanted, on assessment. "I'm glad we've had this conversation it makes me think, of course, I can link [past and current work] together, and the sooner the better."

I then asked Janelle to think about the future to help her develop a clearer picture of where she was going. My question was intended to help Janelle think and articulate as clearly as she could her expectations related to the change process. I felt this would help

Janelle understand where she was clear and where her expectations were fuzzy. Janelle, without hesitation described what she hoped to see.

When I've arrived, teachers will feel confident that they've got a body of evidence that might not all be all paper and pencil to describe what a student can do and has learned. Kids will be able to articulate their own learning, articulate how they learned it and what they've learned. And parents, . . . will accept that body of evidence and will understand also that their child has successfully articulated a set of things they have learned and they [parents] will be able to understand that there was a demonstration that went along with that. They might have even been a part of that . . . Those . . . are the three pieces I'm kind of moving on the same front. And every time I take a step I realize how many barriers and roadblocks there are to those three pieces.

Janelle went on to make links between the school's focus on critical thinking skills and her vision for what she wanted to see with students. The best indicator . . . [is that] "the kids are critical thinkers." By the end of the interview she had made several important connections about the relationship between assessment and the school's instructional focus on critical thinking and was developing the ability to articulate them.

This story suggests that leaders need to understand that what they are seeing reflects not only student experience, but also teaching knowledge. Classroom observations may help the leader identify a need for change, but the leader's decision to proceed will be based on the leader's assessment of staff awareness of this need and other environmental conditions that might support or inhibit change. This story also illustrates that prior to taking action, leaders need to deeply understand and be able to articulate for others a rationale for change in order to engender fellowship. The need to develop plans to support staff in the change process. This story also suggests that collegial conversations with other leaders, in this case myself, can assist in the reflection process.

Story Four: Red Circle-Building on Strong Practice

As Janelle articulated a vision of a preferred future, she simultaneously surfaced a recognition of “barriers and roadblocks”, *aporias*, that needed to be overcome to arrive at this vision.

However, having a clear vision may also help principals to focus and make it more likely that they will identify positive practices as they search for a way to overcome the “barriers and roadblocks”. Janelle shared the story that follows immediately after our discussion about her vision. I felt in it Janelle sensed the beginnings of a way forward.

I have the best teacher in my school. She gets the best results. She spends two months with grade eight math students . . . at the beginning of the year, teaching them to stop her when they don't understand. She said, 'How can you teach, if you don't have an indicator of whether they get it or they don't.' She has a process when [students] do homework. [If] they don't understand something, they red circle it. And when they come back the next day, the first thing she says is, '[Has] everybody got a red circle? I hope you all have a red circle.' That's her indicator of whether they have done their homework or not. . . . And then they have a good discussion about why they didn't understand [and] what they need to do . . .

She's got a billion different strategies for how they might get that information.

This story exemplified that often the answers are among us. It is a powerful example of skillful teaching that makes a clear link between assessment for learning and critical thinking. Students must critically reflect on or self assess their own knowledge as they complete their homework. This practical and very doable example of exemplary practice has great potential as a change story. The fact that it is a real practice by a respected teacher in the school adds to its credibility.

This story suggests another way in which observation of classroom practice can provide a context that sparks awareness of pedagogical practice, in this case by the teacher herself. Janelle and the teacher who shared this practice had this discussion

following classroom visits at another school. It seems that during the visit the teacher saw the link in her own practice between assessment for learning and critical thinking. This example suggests that teachers often have practical examples of exemplary practice. Janelle, however, saw the potential of this practice for work beyond the teacher's classroom. It was powerful in part because the teacher was well respected. "She [the teacher] would be perfect for it" and "the example gets to the gist of it right away."

This story highlights how being in classrooms and involvement in professional conversations with teachers about practice surfaces important examples of exemplary practice that, when shared, can facilitate and promote change in practice across the school.

Story Five: Rigour-Leading From a Deep Understanding of Pedagogy

Visiting classrooms allows principals access to information that they can use to coach both individual teachers and also to inform their practice with the whole staff as they lead and support improvement. However, this process is only as powerful as the skills and understanding of the principal who is doing the observations. As Janelle thought about her work with staff, she began to reflect on her previous successes as a teacher, and the strategies she had employed to engage students. The next story clarifies how Janelle's leadership is grounded in her own pedagogical understanding and experience.

Janelle noted that the "whole notion of rigour is crucial. But what it really means is the rigorous, exciting curriculum for kids, 'good teaching' where "kids were involved . . . [and] were engaged . . . [in] critical thinking." Here Janelle was clarifying a standard by which she assessed what was happening in classrooms. The next story provides a

picture of the kind of pedagogical knowledge and understanding that informs Janelle's leadership practice.

I had just finished a year [working in the area] of assessment and had done all this work with Wiggins and Stiggins [recognized authorities in this area] and knew all about portfolio assessment.

[Students felt that CALM (Career and Lifeskills Management) was a] joke . . . I had to find some way to change that perception. . . I can remember going to my CALM class [and saying]

“The job's going to be that you prove to me what you learn in the class.

We are going to do a variety of things

At the end of the day you will give yourself a mark but you will have to demonstrate that you have learned things in this class. “

So I gave them this little list

They could present to me in whatever way they wanted . . . a scrapbook, . . . a piece of art . . . a song

They gave themselves a mark and they had to [have] a one on one conversation with me to justify that mark . . . I could either agree with them, or through that discussion we could come to some kind of consensus.

I've never seen projects like that in my life.

For Janelle, her teaching experience served as a successful example of appropriate

assessment practices. Janelle noted that over time she had become “confident about my belief system.” Her challenge was to think about how she could build on what she knew to facilitate a change in assessment practices amongst her staff. She noted explicitly “what I'm trying to do is to transfer that to the learning with staff.”

Story Six: Invitation with a Bit of a Nudge-Supporting Change

The following story focuses on how Janelle through her actions both inside and outside the classroom invited, supported and acknowledged change in teacher practice.

Janelle felt that in order to affect change teachers “need to feel supported. . . .

There needs to be some collaboration . . . to get them to that place.” Janelle understood that the journey toward improved practice was one that she took with her staff. She

believed that to be able to focus on changing their teaching practice, teachers needed a stable environment. At the junior high level this involved administrative support related to student conduct. “[T]here needs to be a building that’s safe and [in which appropriate] conduct is really, really enforced. . . . Teachers have expectations about kid’s behaviour [and need to so that] they [can] provide a curriculum that’s rigorous to keep kids motivated.” Janelle saw this as part of a bargain with everyone fulfilling their role.

Janelle viewed herself as “a teacher not only for students, but [also] for staff .” She talked about how she had modeled assessment for learning strategies and invited staff to try them.

I modeled, but in doing so I didn’t say you must, you shall, you will. I allowed, right now, for it to be open and people are feeling safe enough within that environment to try it. But [they] also want to demonstrate their learning; just like those kids did.

Janelle believed that because it was invitational, she avoided resistance. “They are not going around [frustrated, overwhelmed or pressured] saying . . . one more thing.” Janelle talked about her strategy of having her teacher share her red circle process and letting her colleagues know how successful this had been for her. Once teachers had this information and the endorsement of a respected teacher “they can adopt or not.”

But Janelle indicated that she has come to understand that while an invitation worked for some people, as a leader, she needed to find ways to work with “those people that aren’t going to adopt.” Fullan (2004 handout) suggests that “lack of implementation” can be rooted in many causes and that leaders need to understand why change is not occurring in order to determine how to respond appropriately. Janelle indicated that it was her belief that sometimes teachers did not change because they “didn’t know how [and that] it’s not comfortable to say that . . . because [they] are also a

professional.” She provided an example of one such incident “when I got through a year of doing critical thinking and I had three [staff] members come to me and say could you explain . . . [critical thinking.]” This experience taught her that after almost a whole year “there was no realization, no understanding of, maybe not what critical thinking was but how to get kids to do it, [a]nd about giving up power in the classroom and about allowing students to have different experiences.”

I think there needed to be a learning piece . . . they didn’t get critical thinking, we had to show them what critical thinking was . . . they didn’t get assessment, the more we talked about assessment . . . it was the realization that they needed these strategies. They needed the learning piece so they could get better before they started to analyze [student work again].

Janelle built on this understanding and took steps to develop a solid knowledge base about assessment in order to assist teachers to change their practice.

Monitoring and Supporting Progress Through Classroom Visits

Janelle intentionally utilized classroom visits to monitor and support changes to teacher practice. During our visit to classrooms on our last interview, we specifically looked for examples of strong assessment practices. We observed open ended assessments where students were able to provide “a lot of different answers”. Janelle was pleased that the teacher was “fine with that.” She commented “That’s a good assessment . . . Kids are thinking critically there.” She also indicated that this was a change in practice for this teacher. Before he would have students “on a regular basis” simply “list all of the traits” and now the assessment required students to “contrast similarities and differences.”

Visiting a number of classrooms allowed Janelle and I to get a sense of the extent to which change in assessment was occurring across the school. As Janelle noted,

Every piece of assessment I saw today, out there today was an end assessment, it was an assessment for learning. So they're feeling permission to do different things. And it's near the end of the month . . . you need to know that at ---- [school] the last week of every month is test week . . . All of a sudden I'm seeing [a change in the monthly cycle] . . . [She noted that teachers were finding other ways to] see what kids know and to talk about what things they didn't understand.

Supporting Change in Practice Through Classroom Visits

Janelle also demonstrated her support for change by responding positively to invitations from staff to visit their classrooms.

My science department has given themselves permission to do things with the kids that are hands on . . . And I was invited in by every science teacher. They were so excited over what came in from students. And [they] said, "we're not even marking it but everybody knows it, it's amazing" . . . I'll never forget that.

. . . They were blown away by how much students learned. Every student knew every part of that cell.

By modeling and inviting change Janelle gave staff "permission" to take the risk to try a new practice. Teachers then had the opportunity to validate the impact of practices for themselves. This likely engenders further positive momentum. Seeking acknowledgement the science teachers "invited" Janelle to witness their progress. "Based on their initial success, the teachers then created another project." It is critical that leaders support early implementers by paying attention to them and their work. These are the individuals who will generate new success stories and do the hard learning that will be a support to other teachers who may be less confident. This is another important reason for principals to have a regular presence in classrooms.

Janelle's observations in classrooms and what she heard directly from students allowed her to understand the extent to which changes were happening in her school. Being in the classroom is the only place in which the principals can come face to face

with the impact of teaching, learning and school policies. If they are to make sound judgments for the benefit of students, principals require this experience.

Being in classrooms provided Janelle with an opportunity to promote change by dialoguing with teachers to promote reflection. “I know that [my] asking . . . these essential questions . . . really forces teachers to think in a way that they maybe haven’t for a long time”

Janelle summarized by stating “there are a variety of reasons that I’m in rooms.”

Story Seven: The Best Bang for Your Buck-Using Professional Judgment in the Development of Leadership Practice.

Janelle understood the rationale for the district level expectation that principals spend 50 per cent of their time in classrooms. She believed that in the past principals “got stuck in their offices.” However, as a confident administrator, Janelle claimed the right to use her professional judgment to determine how to enact this expectation. She clearly believed she was in the best position to determine the processes by which she would gather evidence on important issues in her school. “We can’t put it down to a policy . . . you can’t say that 50 per cent of your time . . . in classrooms will be the best bang for your buck.” The next story highlights some aspects of Janelle’s understanding and intentional construction of her practice in classrooms and other actions in support of teaching and learning in classrooms.

Janelle believed being in classrooms on a regular basis provided her with up to date information in a variety of areas. For example, a regular presence in classrooms allowed her to gather information about the school and classroom climate. “We’re working on . . . school spirit- staff school spirit, kid’s school spirit- just the whole level of

happiness in the building.” A regular presence in all classrooms also ensured that teachers did not feel singled out. “Staff knows it’s coming. Those people that are a bit nervous about things, you know, the ones that may not be doing everything they need to be doing, (whisper) they’re saying . . . ‘why is she in here all the time? Is she in your class all the time?’ And . . . she is . . .” By being in all classrooms on a routine basis, Janelle acted on her responsibility to know what is going on in her school and demonstrated that her presence was not an indication of a performance concern, but rather part of the normal process of supervision. Janelle’s comments align with the findings of Blasé and Blasé (1998) who indicate that regular visits from the principal have the impact of encouraging teachers to perform at the best of their ability – the sort of ‘company is coming’ notion.

While Janelle understood the importance of being in classrooms on a regular basis, she acknowledged that doing this was challenging. The rhythm of the school year impacted the time that Janelle spent in rooms. “You get pulled out of classrooms at funny times of the year. . . . It’s almost impossible to free yourself up in a school like this during those two weeks previous to report cards because there is so much that lands in the office.” Janelle built in “some constants [such as a] consistent Friday morning meeting” to safeguard against the impact of the “natural ebbs” to classroom visits created by school demands so that these interruptions “didn’t change the learning” of staff. However, she felt that, “you can’t wait too long after that to get back out there.” If she had to be out of the school, she “made a point of being in all classrooms the next day . . . It doesn’t matter if I’m there for two minutes or five minutes or ten minutes, I’m in every class”.

Janelle suggested that there were other ways of being on the ground in a school. For example, she and her assistant principal ran the school store. “This has really given

us a great opportunity to see kids in a different light.” She also emphasized the importance of direct contact with teachers. “Even just talking to teachers at recess time is really a great way to touch base with what’s going on in the school and do that kind of ongoing talking.”

Her work appeared to have an organic quality that she was clearly defining for herself.

My role right now is one hundred per cent support for teaching and learning in the building on all fronts. And that can take you sometimes into the classrooms quite a bit, and sometimes out of the classroom. [Last year, work] with parents was so big to get them to understand and become supportive that it took me out of the classroom more than people would have thought I should have been.

So to me it’s not to say its 50 per cent . . . maybe 30 per cent of it will be in classrooms, and sometimes . . . maybe 80 per cent of it will be in classrooms and sometimes it will be done through an assembly, maybe it will be through a walk-through, maybe it will be through ongoing staff development. It takes a variety.”

Visiting Classrooms with a Colleague

Janelle had also learned that visiting classrooms with a colleague enriched her learning. Following our classroom visits on one of my visits Janelle noted that:

. . . every time I [visit classrooms] . . . with somebody else it’s richer . . . having someone to walk with or talk with . . . forces my thinking to be deeper . . . it’s the dialogue . . . the discussion . . . the back and forth conversation . . . [having to] articulate things in your practice. . . . I’ve had to look at . . . what’s going on and why, and tell the story.

Janelle’s comments pointed to the need for collegial support. The chance to walk through classrooms and then reflect with a colleague about what was observed, and perhaps what course of action one might take as a result, is one way to help principals think deeply about their work.

Impact of Classroom Visits on Principal Practice

Being in classrooms provides principals with real information, data, evidence that can serve as the basis for further action in their work with individual teachers. Janelle indicated that being in classrooms revealed the truth about practice.

. . . It really forced me to flush out what's going on . . . [Teacher] personalities can sometimes get you. [A teacher] can do all the glitzy stuff and maybe not be doing the best job in the classrooms. There have been some real eye openers. [The teachers] can be running [extra curricular activities], be the greatest guy on staff and all these things, but things are kind of lax in class.

What the principal does with the information that he or she is gathering is critical to the change process and is a major part of the principal's pedagogical role. Janelle indicated that her conversations with individual teachers were changing as a result of what she observed in classrooms. "We talk about what's working, what isn't, how well their department is running."

And when I do one on ones now, it's a real different discussion. I can say to staff, some of the things . . . that I'm seeing are . . . It has been a real eye opener for staff. There's no more hiding, so it's been a good monitoring piece.

We're having real conversations about what needs to change. The practices that we really need to get at, that teachers don't know.

Her presence in classrooms had helped her to coach teachers through "professional conversations. . . . about their practice" that was informed by detailed information about what was happening in these classrooms.

Providing Feedback to Staff

One of the district expectations for principals related to being in classrooms was that they provide written feedback to individual teachers based on their observations in classrooms. The research of Blasé and Blasé (1998) suggests the manner in which a principal provides feedback to staff has a very strong impact - positive or negative - on a

teacher's subsequent performance. Janelle indicated that she was working to develop her own processes in order to support positive teacher growth.

I've found . . . the process that is effective for me . . . [I] draw conclusions that I bring to the whole staff around what I've seen. And it seems to move the work faster by making those big generalizations.

She felt her process gave teachers who were less far along time "to get it together" in a way that she was not "right on them" pressuring for immediate improvement. "I think that if I would have been giving them . . . [individual written feedback], I would have had a lot more resistance. There's really no resistance to me being in classes."

Impact of Principal Visits on Teacher Practice

Janelle believed that her regular presence in classrooms and the processes she was using with staff were having a positive impact on the practice of some teachers. "A couple of people who weren't on task, say all the time . . . they got caught out a few times. . . . And I've seen a huge turnaround in those [teachers]. Janelle reiterated that

the fact that it's consistent that I'm in everybody's class, not just certain people's classes has been important. [It] has also been really a mover and shaker for those people that were . . . maybe substandard in some areas.

Perhaps the reason that this was effective was as Janelle suggested.

I'm not dealing with huge, huge performance issues either. Now there's only been a couple of people that I've had to sit down and say, you know performance wise, [there is an issue] the critical mass of people here are . . . moving in the right direction.

Reflecting Back/Moving Forward

In May, at the time of our final interview Janelle had been reassigned to a principalship in another school. Our final walk-through of classrooms served as a way for Janelle to reflect on the impact of the plans that she had put in place over the course of

the year. Janelle used evidence from our observation that day in classrooms to support her comments about how teachers have changed their practice.

The fact that [a teacher who historically had] photocopies done a year in advance . . . the fact that he said [students] could have four different responses is a miracle to me. . . . Because he was Mr. Black and White. . .

Janelle believed that she was right to have made the decision to move forward in the area of assessment even though it meant changing direction mid year. Janelle reflected back on our earlier conversation. “[I]n the long run it’s taken us to a better place . . . [What]I really do believe . . . [is that] these plans . . . should be shaped. My frustration was around [feeling I had to] . . . stick [with the plan] for a full year so staff would see me as being consistent about something.” In the end Janelle appears to be at peace with her actions in this leadership dilemma.

I probably will never be the type of person who can stick it out for the whole year with one [plan] . . . because plans do change . . . and evolve and change, and that’s okay, maybe I just need to give myself permission to do that . . . and realize, you know, I’ve got these people that will keep me on the plan as much as possible and make people feel comfortable about that, that’s good. The other part of it is that really, where does growth happen?

In looking back Janelle felt she had made the right decision for her school and staff, but there were no easy rules to follow to determine when to stay with the plan and when to change. In the end it came down to the principal’s reading of what was called for in the particular instance and then working with others to find a way to move forward.

Being in Classrooms as a First Step

Janelle was already mentally transitioning to her new school. She indicated that the district expectation that principals spend a significant portion of their time in classrooms gave her “permission” to spend considerable time in classrooms getting to

know her new school. “[T]hat’s exactly where I’ll start . . . I wouldn’t have known [the importance of] that . . . [without] going through the last three years.”

Districts and superintendents need to understand the supportive power of setting expectations, particularly those that run up against the status quo and are very likely met with some resistance. However, giving permission doesn’t guarantee success. Janelle’s welcome will still depend on how she enacts this practice. She notes “from what I’ve heard and what I hear from kids and teachers they haven’t seen that piece.” Janelle’s comments point to the variability across schools about the extent to which principals are in classrooms. Setting expectations at the district level does not guarantee that practice will change. Because this is a district expectation, understood but perhaps not experienced by all teaching staff, Janelle will not have to spend time establishing this as an appropriate practice for principals. In fact, it may be in part how she will establish herself as a credible district leader. Receptivity of staff to her presence in rooms no doubt would vary depending on the perceptions and experiences of the staff. However, in a very real sense the doors to the classrooms in her newly assigned school had been opened for her. The quality of her practice there would determine how welcomed her visits would be.

Reflecting on her work with staff she surfaced an ongoing challenge. “How do I as a leader find the strategies that will have [a] powerful and transforming effect on staff?” As a leader she structured opportunities for shared learning amongst staff. She labeled these as being “quite invitational with a bit of a nudge” and noted that “there’s no science to it.” She had come to realize that sometimes when teachers do not change it is because “they didn’t know how” and that this is not “comfortable” to admit because they

are “professionals.” She thought that it was interesting that “you want kids to [risk and admit they don’t know] . . . , but the teachers aren’t doing it.” So the question is how do you make it safe for teachers to risk and learn?

As a leader and a risk taker herself, Janelle was keenly aware of the need for a safety net. She knew that if she wanted her staff to take risks then she needed to make it safe to do so.

I think that’s where my skill comes. . . . I don’t mind messy; . . . I just want to get started. . . . I know how to build in safety. . . . I don’t follow the letter of the law, but then I understand it maybe in a different way.”

She made space for her staff to do this as well. She tried to create an environment where it was safe for them to take risks to learn and she gave them the space they needed to affect change in practice in meaningful ways.

As we closed our final interview, I asked Janelle to comment on a statement that she had made about needing to go deeper than the district framework. She responded that depth is about “finding the meaning of it.” She indicated that “for me the framework has forced the issue of [what it takes to create] a real live learning community . . . from a kid’s point, from a staff’s point, and from a parent’s point [of view].” She continued, “It’s easy to say, I’m a life long learner, but its very difficult to do.” Reflecting on what this change meant Janelle noted,

We’ve asked teachers to hugely step out of their comfort zone where they were the givers of knowledge, they were the person with the answers, and say I might not have all the answers, I need to take some risks. I want to be somebody that’s a learner. . . . We’ve asked kids to become a different kind of learner, and say you know I’m not going to be given all the answers . . . I’m going to have to figure that out for myself and become a true learner . . . And we’re asking parents to become learners . . . [to understand that what their child experiences may] not be what [they] experienced in school and . . . to learn to accept that [their] kid might learn more and better in a way that [they weren’t] taught.

Janelle believed that “this doesn’t happen without huge crisis points that push us . . . and the framework has pushed us there.” Janelle indicated the strength of the framework is “its crisis creating potential. It has required us to talk about teaching and learning . . . But what’s come of it is this community where there’s safety in learning . . . and isn’t that what the ultimate will be.” Janelle noted this is what she was after. “I would hate to feel that I was just on the six step process because that’s not why I bought . . . into it. I bought into it for the whole global notion of talking about teaching and learning.”

Suddenly in the midst of our conversation Janelle articulated a personally powerful connection. “Holy smokes, this has huge ramifications. It’s really about the whole notion of change. It’s really about the whole notion of . . . reform!”

Certainly what Janelle described is not just school reform – it is schooling transformed. Janelle has envisioned a huge cultural/societal shift in schooling. This shift is a risky one for leaders, teachers, students and parents. If we are to move in this direction we will need principals, like Janelle who see and help others to see new possibilities for schooling. We need leaders who have the courage, commitment and skills to help others work together to realize this vision.

Summary

Janelle’s Interpretation, Construction and Enactment of Pedagogical Leadership

Janelle viewed herself as a committed change agent whose leadership was directed toward the creation of an inclusive school community in which learning was authentic for students and staff. Her values and her knowledge base shaped her practice. Her strong belief in equity led her to ensure that all students were welcome in her school

and created an impetus for teachers to reflect on their practice. She embraced change as a teacher, and was quick to utilize her knowledge of assessment to change her own assessment practices to engage students. Part of her strength as a leader was her openness and willingness to learn from her experiences and from others. She was responsive to feedback from students and parents and used this information in conjunction with her own observations of teaching and assessment practices to diagnose a need for change in teacher assessment practices in her school.

As a leader, Janelle was eager to make positive change and was brave in the face of her awareness of the very real challenges that existed in the school culture. Janelle enacted her leadership as a teacher of adults focused primarily on teachers but she was also intensely aware that she also needed to work with parents to bring about successful change. She engaged in reflective practice both individually and with colleagues to think carefully about her ideas in order to maximize the impact of her energy and knowledge. She looked for and responded to opportunities that would shift the teaching and learning environment in her school to one that involved students and adults in authentic learning experiences. Janelle's practice was aimed at facilitating change through knowledge creation. She modeled, used outside experts and the expertise of other teachers to share examples of doable authentic assessment practices. She attempted to avoid resistance on the part of her staff by initially inviting teachers to try new assessment practices. She recognized and tried to support teachers who tried new practices through her presence in classrooms.

Pedagogical Practice in Classrooms

While Janelle understood the need for and the importance of a district expectation for principals to spend a significant proportion of their time in classrooms, she was very clear that she would meet this requirement in a manner that was meaningful in her school context. Janelle tried to ensure an equitable presence in classrooms so that teachers would not feel singled out for supervision. She believes that being in classrooms on a regular basis sharpened teacher practice. By asking questions, Janelle encouraged teachers to reflect on their practice.

She highlighted the professional benefits of visiting classrooms with a colleague because it required and provided opportunity to articulate what she was observing. She felt this deepened her reflection and enriched her learning. However, she was emphatic that she had other ways of knowing what was really happening in her school.

Janelle developed her own feedback process with staff. She made general comments to staff about what she was observing rather than giving individual feedback to teachers. She was concerned that this latter process could increase resistance to her presence in classrooms.

Being in classrooms enabled Janelle to monitor progress of school wide initiatives and be knowledgeable about the practice of teachers. It allowed her to identify and support teachers who were experimenting with new assessment practices. It was one of several strategies she used to gain a sense of the school climate. Classroom observations were used to triangulate other sources of information and at times sometimes provided her with surprisingly different perspectives on teacher performance.

Janelle felt a great sense of accountability to work with staff to address areas of concern that surfaced as a result of her visits to classrooms. She suggested that her regular presence provided her with concrete information for this purpose. Janelle indicated that classroom visitation would be a starting point to help her orient to her new principal assignment the year after the study. This statement indicated clearly how much she valued this process.

The notion of being in rooms on a metaphorical level was my proxy for a pedagogical orientation to leadership practice that was inspired by and responsive to the needs of children. I was interested in knowing if principals would focus on the experience of students as a result of being in classrooms in the direct presence of children. Janelle referenced her observation of student stress as part of the rationale for her efforts to change assessment practices. She also appeared to be touched by the experience of the student who sent her the e-mail. Her description of her approach to teaching the CALM class and her description of the child's learning with the authentic science assessment suggested that she was attentive to student experiences.

Aporias

Janelle was initially challenged to help her teachers to see the need for change in practice. She clearly understood that high achievement on the part of the students made it difficult for teachers to see any need to change their teaching. The culture of competitiveness with other schools also made it more difficult to have teachers take the risk involved in changing practice. Because the need to change was not apparent to all members of staff, Janelle also felt that her credibility was vulnerable: she was suggesting a change in direction from that which the staff had already committed to. Finally, Janelle

was herself challenged to be able to articulate for others a strong rationale for the shift she was proposing. It was clear that Janelle had a vision of teaching and learning that was radically different from the paradigm in which her teachers were relatively comfortable in operating and one which she seemingly had not previously realized or been able to articulate for herself.

Addressing Aporias

Janelle's success as a pedagogical leader rested first in her ability to understand and then to address the difficulties that she encountered in her practice. According to Janelle, six key factors guided her response-ability and 'pedagogical tact':

Timing: Janelle understood the importance of timing in the change process. Her comments suggested that she had been interested in addressing assessment practices and that a crisis created by the experience of students, the concerns of parents, and perhaps the pressure on staff coinciding with a district emphasis and support available to teachers all came together in a manner that Janelle felt made the timing right to focus on assessment practices.

Building Support for Change: Because Janelle saw the need before her staff and because the direction required a shift from the plan that had been agreed to Janelle had to work to build staff understanding and support for the direction she was proposing.

Making Personal Meaning: In preparation to lead the change with staff, Janelle engaged in reflective practice to clarify and make connections between critical thinking and assessment for herself. Doing this deepened her understanding and learning. She also worked to learn to articulate these new understandings clearly for staff. In turn, these activities helped her to understand what she needed to do that support her staff.

Knowledge Creation: In working with her staff Janelle created a variety of learning opportunities to intentionally build a common language and understanding of assessment practices. She worked to help teachers make links between the school's focus on critical thinking and assessment.

Modeling: Because of her own knowledge of assessment she was able to model and share appropriate assessment practices. Janelle invited staff to experiment with new practices, supported early implementers and created opportunities for their successes to be shared. Janelle believed these things supported change in teacher practice by creating safety and in doing so she reduced resistance.

Taking Action: As a risk taker, Janelle was quick to take action on a personal level. This also created learning opportunities, in both of the stories about her own teaching experience she learned lessons by acting that she would not otherwise have know. As a leader, despite the risks she did proceed and worked with her staff to change the plan.

Discoveries

The transition to authentic teaching and learning situations in which real questions are asked and real answers are sought is challenging in a school community in which teachers, parents and perhaps students were fairly invested in a status quo. There was a risk to change perceptions of a school that was seen as a high achieving one. A clear vision and strong knowledge base as well as a supportive district culture facilitated positive change. The situation in her school legitimated a direction internally while her knowledge base, support available from and alignment with district direction supported this change from the outside.

Leaders can set direction but for change to occur, they also need to build expertise, provide support, and invite and encourage staff to take the risk to change. Modeling and encouraging skilled staff members to share their practice builds momentum. Sensitivity to the needs of teachers in the change process has an impact on the change process. Leaders need to be sensitive to the needs of individual staff members and tactful in providing support to some and recognition and leadership opportunities to others all with the aim of building momentum to change practice. Throughout the change process leaders need to monitor on an ongoing basis through being in classrooms and on the ground from a variety of perspectives. Finally leaders need to recognize, support and share the changes in practice on the part of teachers.

In the end Janelle suddenly seems to have grasped that she was engaged in something larger than simply changing assessment practices. She started to develop an understanding that the vision that she so clearly articulated really amounted to a transformation of schooling. It seemed to be the same kind of surprise and insight that she experienced when she received the letter from one of her former students.

Finally, while these are not Janelle's words they reflect the essence of what seems to inspire her leadership.

Choose life
only that and always,
and at whatever risk.
to let life leak out, to let it wear away by
the mere passage of time, to withhold
giving it and spreading it
is to choose
nothing.

Sister Helen Kelley (Wheatley, 2002. p. 142)

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY TWO

Background

Case study two focuses on David. David has a broad base of experience as a teacher and a school leader. He has taught and held leadership positions in elementary, junior high and high school settings. David's current assignment was his second as a principal and at the time of the study, he was in his third year as principal of a large junior high school.

Concern for Students

As a leader, David was sensitive to the needs of students and spoke of trying to get teachers to "flip over to looking into the eyes of those kids." He suggested that his closeness to students was impacted by his experiences as a teacher in the inner city. David stated, "You could just weep for those children." Now, as the principal of a large school he felt badly that "I don't know the kids." He saw his work very much as working with teachers to improve practice to support students. As a principal, he would pay particular attention to a student who was experiencing difficulty during his classroom visits in order "to light a fire under that teacher" or by saying "[what would you do] if this was your daughter." This orientation in part inspired his work to shift assessment practices in his school. Referring to a strong student who had failed due to incomplete assignments, he noted "it can't be right that we send students away from here with no hope by punishing them with marks." He believed that assessment practices in which "every single thing you do counts against your final mark" really discourages students from taking risks in learning. His school had a large number of students identified as academic challenge (AC) students. He shared his belief that the "AC kids are the least

likely to risk.” David questioned the kind of teaching that encouraged students to sacrifice learning for marks.

You better get this done, it’s going to count for marks . . . You better do a good job, it’s going to count for marks.[You’d] better use good handwriting, it’s going to count for marks . . . what are we modeling?

David was a leader who was sensitive to student needs and had the knowledge base to critically reflect on the impact of traditional assessment practices. These concerns and understandings grounded, informed and energized his leadership practice. As a result of his work in the area of assessment, David’s school was in the process of making a transition from percentage grades to letter grades during the school year in which this study occurred.

David’s Stories

David also shared experiences and stories that illustrated how he interpreted and enacted his role as pedagogical leader. He shared two types of stories: stories of success and stories of challenge. The first stories titled Commitment, The Reluctant Leader and Like Hearts Falling center around the theme of engaging staff. These stories illustrate how a principal acknowledges the distributive nature of school leadership (Spillane, 2006), and employs a variety of strategies to build leadership across his school. David’s final story, My Struggling Learner, surfaces the challenging *aporias*, the “messy secrets” (Jardine 1997, p. 161), that can arise when a principal is persistent in requiring teachers to practice pedagogically.

Story One: Commitment – Aligning Leadership Direction

Our former superintendent said, “Leadership is the art of getting people to do willingly that which they would rather not do.” This story describes how David sees how

his work as a pedagogical leader engages his staff and builds their commitment for change.

David viewed the district initiative as a process for “helping kids to achieve better. But really . . . it is a way to get teachers to change what they’re doing [to achieve that result]” At the school level leaders build ownership by engaging in rigorous and critical examination of data, research and practice to build the deep understanding and commitment necessary to bring about the changes that will yield the intended results. His story highlights the importance of common language, conversation and responding appropriately to feedback in building commitment to the change.

Importance of a Common Language

David talked about how the district direction had supported him in this work at his school. “It’s brought this staff from a group of people who assembled at staff meetings to talk about issues like staffroom clean up and rules for students to hav[ing] an actual centre of their conversation around the practice.” He believed that the district-wide approach made it “easier to have conversations . . . because we are all speaking the same language, we know what we are talking about.”

These factors eased staff transition between schools. New staff “know when they come to this school that we’ll have an instructional focus.” This enabled them to quickly become part of the team. “We have five new teachers this year . . . [I]n trying to bring them up to speed with what’s happening in the school, their colleagues have had to talk the talk [using the common language].” The ability to communicate with and understand each other creates a starting point for meaningful dialogue that builds commitment to change. Fullan (2003) suggests that “you need ownership for fundamental change but you

can't get it on a large scale by relying on bottom up strategies . . . the larger infrastructure really is crucial for system change" (p. 34). A common language was a part of this infrastructure.

Building Commitment Through Conversation

Maximizing opportunity for conversation is a key ingredient in building and sustaining momentum for change. David indicated that the process involved "a hundred conversations" in which he had used analogies to challenge beliefs and deepen understanding about assessment. This work happens with staff and with parents. David indicated,

I use the same example over and over again once I get the parent to a certain point. I say, you know we suggest a level of accuracy that really doesn't exist. It's like measuring the distance to Calgary with a metre stick. Can you do it? Absolutely. Would there be a purpose in it? None whatsoever. Who cares if Calgary is 289.6 metres or whatever. It's three hundred kilometers to Calgary, and Lethbridge is further and Red deer is shorter. . . . people even say when they live 50 miles from Calgary, they live in Calgary.

David used this metaphor to shift thinking about assessment. He was able to do this because he was knowledgeable about the issues related to assessment and used that information to work with staff and parents.

David believed his conversations and analogies were helpful in shifting thinking. But the following incident highlights that personal factors also influence a shift in a teacher's thinking. David believed that resistance was a very personal phenomena. "I don't have people that say . . . 'that doesn't apply to my subject area' . . . they really say to you 'that doesn't apply to me'." David described one staff member, who though initially resistant, had become a very strong supporter of the work because of a personal interest related to the impact he believed this work would have on his young daughter.

“There’s no question . . . it’s his belief now . . . it’s what he does in his classroom.”

David believed another staff member, who would retire at the end of the year, would simply not do this work and that both the teacher and David believed that there was nothing David could do to make him. Within the context of this conversation, David was very clear in indicating that he was not “making” staff change. Rather, David and his leadership team continued to work to build support for change amongst the staff. “We’re going along with them and showing them and opening doors.”

Assessing Readiness for Change

David noted that the number of teachers who were “resisting” or who “aren’t changing their teaching practice . . . for whatever reason is becoming fewer, and fewer and fewer.” Reflecting on the success of his work at his school, David highlighted the need for ongoing monitoring and the ability to interpret human responses. He noted that they did not go “someplace big that had failed. Because we watch and listen and were careful . . . watching the conversations . . . and the facial expressions.”

All of this work to change assessment practices culminated at the time of second interview. Reaching consensus on a significant change in practice is a high and hopeful point for leaders. David’s work demonstrated that it was indeed possible to build teacher support to change assessment practices at the junior high level, even in a school with a very mark oriented school community accustomed to very traditional assessment practices.

My staff has agreed that we’re going to do our report cards in letter grades . . . two and a half years I’ve been trying to do this. . . . because we need to take the focus away from the marks, we need to focus on the work. We need to have kids asking us, “Is this answer correct?” rather than “Can I get a half a mark for this?”

Building Commitment with all Affected Stakeholders

Principals need to read the culture of the school carefully and on an ongoing basis be watchful for potential problems that need to be addressed. David learned he had more work to do in building parental support for change in assessment practices when he received a parent petition to protest the change in assessment practices. In this situation he surfaced a real challenge of involving parents, who had a high stake in decisions, but who did not have the expertise to make an informed choice. He had tried to work with these parents but interpreted the petition as evidence that he had not done a strong enough job of teaching them the reason for the decision. He was prepared to stand by his decision because “it’s so well grounded in research, . . . [it’s] the right thing to do . . . [The petition] just tells me I need to do a better job of teaching [parents], that’s all.” He reflected that, the change in assessment practices “happened faster than I would have preferred. . . . I didn’t have enough conversations with parents.”

School leaders need to think beyond staff when they consider readiness for and commitment to change. Problems related to implementation of a change often arise because some group affected by the change has had limited involvement in, understanding of and support for the direction being taken. These are the problems that can sometimes be avoided by careful preparatory work. However, the principal can not predict all of the challenges and complexities that arise during a substantial change in practice. Unanticipated complexity and surprises are a part of doing new work no matter how strong and thorough the preparation.

Being responsible sometimes means that principals need to hold fast to decisions that are not popular. Pedagogical practice is about encouraging teaching practices that are

valid based on current professional knowledge. What seems to be important is that the direction is well founded and that the leader has the depth of pedagogical knowledge to work credibly and collaboratively with others throughout the change process. Also this story highlights that leaders need to continually monitor and be open to feedback from a range of sources to assess the impact of their work in order to learn from both their successes and failures. This requires the ability to acknowledge mistakes, re-teach when necessary, and work with people in different ways while holding true to a course that holds promise for improvement.

Spillane (2006) suggests that the distribution of leadership does not always align with “the grand designs of principals.” (p. 45) Pedagogical leadership sometimes requires doing what is right in the face of opposition. David made it clear that there were areas of practice not left to the individual discretion of staff members. For example, David shared some information about actions he had taken to change the manner in which discipline was handled at the school. Yet, despite his efforts, David shared that he was disappointed to learn that there were still teachers who felt that discipline was not “strong enough in the school.” Some teachers preferred the approach of the previous administration, rather than having teachers held “accountable for student discipline.” Their words made it clear to David that while they may not have liked his approach, his staff understood his beliefs about where responsibility for discipline lay.

Because of their position, leaders sometimes must enforce changes before staff is wholly committed. Principals need to assess the impact of these decisions over the long term and continue to work to build understanding. David noted that as staff became more engaged, some were “starting to get worried [that] I’m going to leave.” Fullan (2005) has

emphasized the importance of creating change in a manner that can be sustained over time even when the leader changes. . . . “What’s going to keep us [moving forward is] the absolute commitment of every single teacher in the school . . . that’s the way we do it.” For David it is commitment that safeguards change.

Story Two: Reluctant Leader – Encouraging Leadership

As story one reveals, for David true and sustainable change was only possible when staff were committed. However, David wanted more for his staff. He wanted to invite and develop their leadership capacity so that they were true partners in the change process. David stated explicitly that he “has a real strong belief in sharing leadership.” Because of this belief, he very intentionally worked to build the capacity of his staff to collaboratively lead pedagogical change. This story describes David’s efforts to invite teacher leadership and encourage those with concerns to be a part of the solution.

As part of the improvement framework each school established a leadership team comprised of the principal and identified staff members who would lead, support and facilitate the change process at the school level. While some guidelines were provided regarding the formation and the operation of the school’s leadership team, much was left to the judgment of the principal. David engaged in deliberate actions to build leadership capacity in his school to support building commitment for what was essentially a critical self-examination of the efficacy of teaching practices.

David understood the importance of involvement in building commitment to the change process. To enable teachers to be active creators and leaders of all aspects of this work, he engaged staff “by dropping it down so that . . . [teachers] are really responsible for making the decision.” David’s process for the selection, support and development of

this team was intentional and an important part of his work as a leader to affect positive change in practice in his school. He encouraged teachers who had concerns about the direction taken by the team to become members of the team.

Actually I had three people that came on [the team] this year because they wanted to move in a different place and when they talked to me about it, . . . saying “why aren’t we doing this?”

I [said], “You know, it’s really important . . . that if you have such strong beliefs that you [become a] part of this group.”

[Their initial response was] “I’m not going to go there and waste my time.”

David remained firm in his stance that staff needed to be part of the solution. “[Y]ou develop that sort of leadership role from these people because they know that’s how they are going to get things to happen, rather than sitting back and complaining.” His practice embodied Gandhi’s notion to “be the change you want to see in the world”, holding individual staff resolutely accountable to take person action to address their concerns. Membership on the leadership team was open, and those who have concerns had an opportunity to shape the course of the work in the school by becoming members of the team. As an administrator, he seemed to share Collins’ notion that leaders need to have the “right people on the bus” (Collins, 2001 p. 42). For David the right people were those who “come with commitment and devotion to the work.” While the leadership team didn’t have representation from all subject areas, David felt that the team worked well. For David, ideational integrity was more important than structural integrity. “If I forced them to do something, I’m not going to get their commitment.”

Encouraging Open Discussion

As part of the district initiative, each principal was to identify a teacher who would accompany the principal to district professional development events. It was

expected that the principal and the teacher would bring relevant information back to the school and share it with the school leadership team for them to consider in their planning at the school level. David encouraged active involvement in school level planning from all members of the leadership team and noted that over time the team had developed from being a team in which the designated lead teacher shared information and the team listened to having “quite animated conversations” where “people are more willing to speak their mind in opposition to what’s happening”. Some team members had concerns about the appropriateness of speaking out. “[T]hey apologize.” David had been openly supportive of questioning by members of the leadership team. He recounted his reaction to staff apologizing. “I [said] ‘No! . . . We need to hear what you want to say. So, I’m really happy with . . . that group and where we are going.’” The team continued to evolve as a result of David’s openness and his own commitment to shared leadership.

Inviting Teacher Leadership

David is a follower of Linda Lambert who has authored two books on building leadership capacity (1999; 2002). During the year of the study, he attended one of her workshops with members of his school leadership team. Reflecting on his own learning from the workshop, David highlighted her analogy between what happens in a high performing classroom and what happens at staff meetings. He referred to Lambert’s comments about the need to examine ‘the interactions that happen, who’s talking’ and noted that good teaching is happening in staff meetings because the work done with the leadership team helped them talk about the processes.

David noted that staff can be reluctant to step forward to lead for a variety of reasons and indicated that he was challenging and supporting staff to take this growth

step as professionals. He spoke of the anxiety some staff initially felt regarding taking on these leadership roles by describing an interaction with a teacher.

When you think of a situation that makes your stomach kind of turn a little bit, I need you to go there. . . . That's where I'm going to take you . . .

She says, 'But I get mad really easily.'

I said, 'No, you don't, . . . you get frustrated when people don't come along with you . . . that doesn't mean you get mad . . . So learn from that . . . when you feel yourself going there, think "okay, right, this isn't working really well, I need to figure out why" . . . you do this in your classroom all the time.'

. . . [This is] the same thing. . . . You try to figure out why this person isn't coming along with you.

Individuals like this teacher are confident and skilled with students and need to develop this ability in their work with adults. David's actions were direct in encouraging and supporting her to challenge herself to grow. He helped her understand that "what she is doing is teaching the teachers". David felt that it was important for him to assist her to develop self-confidence in this new role.

Story Three: Like Hearts Falling – Teaching Leadership

Confidence grows in teacher leaders as they develop their leadership repertoire. An important part of David's practice focused on helping the members of his administration and leadership team build and refine their skills as leaders in order to enable them be a powerful force for change in the school. One purpose of the school leadership team was to engage other staff members to build agreement to take collective action in the form of specific practices that everyone would engage in as part of the improvement process. On a monthly basis the school leadership team organized meetings with the whole teaching staff to identify and agree upon practices that every teacher in the school would use to help students improve. In this story, David reveals his

talents as a teacher of leadership as he helps his leadership team prepare for their meeting with the whole staff.

What we're really looking at now is . . .
 focused around the area of vocabulary development.
 We bought all our teachers a book . . .
 . . . page 608 to 614 was the reading they had to do
 . . . they come to the staff meeting after we've done that.
 . . . our little catch phrase . . .
 "getting words in front of kids"
 . . . how do we get words in front of kids?
 . . . they brain stormed that
 . . . interestingly the instructional focus team now understands that's what we do,
 . . . we set kind of a hard target.
 This is where we want everybody to be at the end of our focus staff meeting.

David coached his leadership team to help them learn to engage and build commitment of other staff members to facilitate change in the school. Initially the leadership team wanted to "just tell [the other teachers] what was expected." David realized, "you have those kinds of people[on the leadership team] who view change in this way because that's what's happened to them in the past." David challenged the leadership team to help them develop strategies to build the teachers' commitment to change.

I said, "will we get [commitment]?"
 [team member]"you will from some, you won't from others."
 [David] "Okay, I'm not willing to do that. I need to have . . . [commitment from everyone]. . . . That's all there is to it."

David was resolutely clear about his belief in the importance of building commitment of those involved in the change process. "Speed isn't the thing; the getting to the goal is the thing. I prefer their being committed to it and not really seeing any other way to do it." In the end the leadership team used a process that involved all staff in the development of solutions.

... [We] just start off with a [professional] reading to say ... we need to get words in front of kids. How are we going to do that?

... these teachers are very creative, when they're left, and if they think that it's their idea, oh my God! ...

... "we can do this"

... "I've seen this"

... "We can try this"

... "That's no big deal"

... "Oh, that's a brilliant idea."

You know that's just the way it went.

Tick, tick, tick, ... like hearts falling!

David coached his leadership team and held them accountable to use processes that would build commitment amongst all members of the teaching staff. He also supported these teacher leaders in learning how to create opportunities that invited other teachers to share their professional expertise and strong teaching practices. The process developed by the team acknowledged the strengths of the staff in a manner that continued the process of building commitment and broadening expertise to support the change process.

Encouraging Reflective Leadership Practice

David also mentored his leadership team by building in a "debrief" process to teach staff the value of reflecting on the impact of their work and solidify their learning as leaders. "The team was just thrilled when they came out" because their "strategy really worked". As David noted "what they're actually learning from that is leadership skills."

Facilitating Leadership Learning by Holding Back

Leadership development takes many forms. David believed that having his assistant principal assume a school leadership role in his absence created an opportunity for professional growth. David's debrief with these staff after this lived experience suggested that they had increased understanding of the demands leaders face. His

assistant principal had clear ideas on discipline, but had learned that one can not just go in and tell staff what they should be doing. This leadership experience had provided “him an opportunity to see how the process unfolds with staff.” David acknowledged that as a teacher of leadership he sometimes needed to hold his own thoughts and perspective “a bit in abeyance” and allow the individual to learn from experience. Van Manen (1991) describes this intentional holding back as a form of pedagogical tact. David viewed his role in facilitating the leadership growth of staff as a very important part of his teaching role as a principal. “It’s an advantage... having so many people working with me....I can teach them as well.” His reflections on his work with his assistant principal also indicate his tactfulness as a teacher of leadership.

This story illustrates how a principal mentors leadership and builds momentum for change. In working with his leadership team and with his assistant principal, David knew that the initial strategy “let’s just tell them” had limited likelihood of success and challenged these individuals to think about the most probable outcome of their initial strategy of just telling teachers what to do. As a result, less experienced staff deepened their understanding of leadership processes through experience and reflective leadership practice. David was clearly aware of the double positive result. David noted that these staff were gaining strength as leaders because of the success they were experiencing and the work in the school was progressing.

Story Four: My Struggling Learner – Seeing Reality in Classrooms

David reiterated his belief that we need to affect “teachers’ teaching and then we’re going to get the students learning.” Being in classrooms requires leaders to acknowledge the reality of teaching practice and student learning experiences on a day to

day basis. With this awareness comes a responsibility to act on behalf of students and teachers. The complexity and the *aporias* that can surface when principals work to shift teacher practice are the themes of the next story.

Being in Classrooms as a Strategy to Support Pedagogical Leadership

David felt supported by the expectation that he and other principals spend time in classrooms. “[Principals] needed a vehicle to make it okay for them to go in and watch their teachers teach.” The district initiative “provides . . . an expectation, it’s sort of a group expectation” that made it easier for principals to take steps to open up teacher practice. David noted that opening or improving teacher practice “is a risky thing, something that I don’t know if you would have been able to do in a school unless you had some [top down requirement].”

Monitoring Progress by Regular Classroom Visits

David indicated by being in classrooms frequently “you see trends very definitely developing.” He suggested that what staff tell you can be misleading and sometimes is not “confirmed by the observations.” Regular classroom visits reveal the truth about practice.

When I’m in your classroom ten times and eight of those times I see something happening, I’m almost getting to the point where I can say that 80 per cent of the time this is what’s happening in your room . . . so, if it’s not true I need to know when you’ve shifted.

David noted that being in classrooms “confirms that there are people that are not moving as quickly as we’d like to, in the direction we need them to go.” This information was important as a source of data to inform future actions such as the frequency of visits. “There are classrooms that, as a group [the administration] make sure that we attend every single day” to gather a “real solid view” of what was happening. Daily visits

prevented the excuse that “I’ve caught you on a bad day.” David indicated that there were some teachers whom he wanted “to feel . . . the scrutiny level . . . the concern level.”

Being in classrooms holds teachers accountable. As an example, David described how all core teachers came together to develop strategies for meeting the needs of students who were at risk. These strategies were written down and these strategies were sent to the teachers of complementary subjects. Visiting classrooms allowed the administration to monitor the extent to which the commitment to implementation was honoured.

When I come into your class [and] you’ve said that [this is] what you do with [students] and I’m sitting in your class and I’m not seeing that. How come that’s not happening? Then I get interim marks and [students have D’s]. Well, there’s something [needed]. . . . Again [it] just comes back to the same thing . . . it’s the practice that’s observable . . . that’s the real practice.

David was clear however, that his presence in classrooms was not always sufficient to change teacher practice. “For some of them it makes absolutely no difference, you see the same thing ongoing, ongoing, ongoing.”

Opening Teacher Practice to Colleagues

David suggested that there would be value to having the leadership team visit classrooms because direct observation would help them to know “when do we move to the next step.” David felt that direct observation would help them to know “whether we can go on, or whether we need to revisit and to . . . find another way of approaching the subject.” David cited several examples of how teacher’s perceptions of each other may differ from the reality of their actual practice. Direct observation breaks through this barrier. Because of this, David believed it was important that members of his leadership team actually saw teachers in their classrooms, “they know what they are looking for . . .

they go in with a purpose [and learn to] comment about it.” Direct observation by teachers who are knowledgeable about the practices they are observing could be a powerful strategy for change. If we are truly to expect members of leadership teams to lead change in instructional practice in schools then they need access to the important data that is provided through direct observation. David believed that members of his leadership team “have this passion of where we need to go “and he believed they needed to see real practice as he did in order to know what to do next. Elmore (November 2004 - verbal presentation) suggested that to be considered professional, educators must claim a professional practice. He indicated that the hallmarks of a professional practice are that practice is open both to rigorous critique and is accessible to peers in a manner that it can be built on by other professionals. David’s thoughts seem very much in line with Elmore’s thinking.

David acknowledged that this shift required training because the skill of the observer is critical to the success of this process. “I can set up all kinds of things where science teachers go see each other and . . . , there’s no analysis . . .” The pedagogical impact of classroom visitations either by teachers or principals is dependent in the first instance on the knowledge base and tact of the observer. Teacher leaders can facilitate the change process in a school. It was this thinking that prompted the district to have school principals bring at least one staff member to attend the district professional development sessions and participate in classroom visits to other schools.

Addressing the Discrepancy Between Words and Deed

David's primary leadership challenge centered on his work to affect change in the teaching practice of Mary, a respected teacher, who was a member of the leadership team.

She's got history with these people, they know her, they trust her, she's just such a nice kind person. She can sit and talk to anybody on staff about their practice and they won't be offended and they'll move with her and they'll do these things . . . so actually it's worked out really well. Just that . . . she's not changing her classroom practice.

Being in Mary's classroom provided David with information about the discrepancy between what she said and her actual practice.

She . . . tells them [other teachers] what they should do, and then I go into her classroom and she's [not following her own advice]. She's running weekly spelling tests . . . the other teachers don't sit in her classroom and watch her practice [so they don't know]. . . she talks the talk, but doesn't walk the walk.

David acknowledged the need to address this situation directly.

Seeking Understanding

Being in classrooms requires principals to address what they find, "the good, the bad and the ugly." David had questions about how he should address situations where he consistently saw a difference between what teachers said they were doing and his observations in their classrooms.

You're telling me you're doing this all the time, I've been in to see you pretty much every day. I've never seen it. . . . I mean do you go to that level where you say tell me when you're going to do it [in order to observe it]. . . . do you go to that level?

Fullan (2004) suggests that there are many reasons for lack of implementation. Leaders need to diagnose the situation to determine why change or follow through is not happening in order to set an appropriate course of action to address the situation. David

described “an interview technique” that he had learned from a colleague. He used it to help him assess a teacher’s knowledge and articulate their practice. “when the person says something, I just ask, . . . ‘the last time you did that in your classroom, explain. . . to me, what did that look like?’” David felt this strategy required the teacher to become clear about practice, to talk about it in a way that it could be observed. It was not the same thing as observing, but it helped David know if the teacher had the depth of understanding to talk about particular practice coherently. David noted that doing this “puts phenomenal pressure on people that don’t have solid practice.”

Difficult Conversations

David was experiencing a particular challenge with Mary. He indicated that, “because it was so on [his] mind”, he had quite “a deep conversation” with her about the discrepancy between her teaching and the requirements in the curriculum. David recounted in detail his conversation with her. “I’ve gone through this whole [curriculum] document several times. I see three lines on spelling. . . . I just, I guess I don’t really get this.”

Her response was “[If] they can’t spell, they can’t write.”

David countered.

I don’t really accept that part because I’ve been told that I’m a good writer [and] I’m a lousy speller. . . . My brother is a horrible speller, but he’s a, a very successful businessman and he writes lots and lots of things. You know . . . [what you are saying] isn’t supported in the research.

David intentionally used a strategy that he had learned from a principal colleague that both recognized what was appropriate and inappropriate in what he had observed.

The spelling lesson that you use, . . .
the attack skills [for]spelling. . .
it was(sic) really strong . . .

the problem was the word that we're going after is 'carburetor'....
I want you to think about the word, 'carburetor'.
You've got 33 kids in that classroom . . .
[Which ones of those will ever] write the word 'carburetor'.

Her response was that the word didn't matter. David countered,

I think it does. I think it really does because, if you connect with even three more kids because the word is something they've [recognized].... It is important to make that connection. They [will seldom] ... use that word [even if] one of them, . . . becomes a mechanic, it will only be talking about the history of automobiles that they use the word carburetor because they are not in cars anymore . . . It's not something in their lives.

He continued trying to shift Mary's practice to a more meaningful spelling activity.

"What if we took the words from their own writing?"

In this conversation David challenged her teaching practice both from the standpoint of its legitimacy in relation to emphasis in the curriculum and also from the perspective of relevancy to and engagement of students. He suggested an alternate process that aligned to his beliefs about how children learn to read and spell.

Mary responded, "But they won't go there."

David countered, "There are kids that do."

Mary's next question, "How do you do that and what about the phonetics?" confirmed that she had other beliefs about how students learned that needed to be addressed.

David viewed this interaction with Mary as following through on his responsibility as a principal as expected by the superintendent. "So when he [the superintendent] talks about pressure and support . . . and I just thought . . . I can do that." Through his conversation, David had a better understanding of Mary's underlying beliefs about student learning. However, challenging teachers and telling them what is wrong with their thinking does not help them to determine how to change. David did suggest an

alternative, but it was not acceptable at that point. Confrontation can result in each person holding more firmly to their ground as in this incident. In situations like this leaders need additional strategies to bring about change.

Promoting Growth Through Professional Development

As his understanding of the situation increased, David indicated that he took advantage of the timely offering of a three day conference that “magically happened” to support Mary to develop her teaching practice. He made the decision to send Mary and several other teachers to this conference. These teachers did not work together in the school context. David indicated that the cost of sending all the teachers caused him some concern in part because one of the teachers was on a temporary contract and might not be in the school next year, but he justified the expense for this teacher that the district would benefit from her increased knowledge.

Monitoring Impact

David indicated the change in Mary’s initial practice as a result of attending the workshop was evident in the ideas she shared with others upon her return. “[J]aws were dropping on the table because [she] was bringing in all of these other things that aren’t related to conventions and spelling.” David also gauged progress on the basis of what he saw in Mary’s classroom. He had been in her classroom prior to our discussion that very morning and seemed elated by what he saw.

So I was in her class this morning, watching, . . . I’ve never seen this before. They’re doing . . . a brain drain, and they write all the things they know about . . . , like we construct [knowledge] . . . you’re going to be a constructivist teacher now!!! . . . but she’s done it and used it, it’s worked, so now she can do it because she’s got . . . the skill level and the confidence level to do it in her class . . . and it works, and the kids are engaged . . . I’ve never seen her push their desks together . . . [with] elbow partners and talk about the things that you know... Where did you get that word from, ‘your elbow partner!’? That [was] not her [traditional]

vocabulary. And now it makes sense . . . to her. And she's excited. She's welcoming the kids into the classroom. I say, 'okay, good. There's a couple of thousands of dollars of district funds well spent.'

Building a Theory of Practice

At the time of our meeting David had ample evidence of the wisdom of his decision to send the teachers to the workshop together.

She never [worked with] those two teachers professionally . . . Now they're . . . sitting around talking . . . It cost me almost \$6000 to send the three of them there, but it was well worth it. The difference that it's made here . . . they've already brought things in from [the workshop].

David believed that this change was a result of a powerful professional development experience “. . . it's a belief I have about professional development, you have to dip them in it, you know . . . to immerse them in it . . . so there's no way you can fight around this.” David believed that “three days” of professional development provided opportunities for “every question . . . every ‘well that doesn't really work in my classroom’,” to be answered by someone who is highly credible. “[Y]ou've got [the workshop leader] standing there, [saying] ‘No, it's not how kids learn to spell. This is how they learn to spell.’”

What David saw substantiated his belief in providing teachers with powerful professional development that would change belief systems. “I believe this so strongly, when you see someone who's . . . passionate about what they do. When you change them, they still have the passion . . .” Mary was an example of this phenomenon.

She believe[d] so strongly that what she was doing was right, that she just lived it. Now her beliefs have changed and she has taken on the new beliefs with the same passion.

Well, give me the passion. I'll change the mindset and then they've got passion and the new mind set.

Theory and Metaphor

David's experience substantiated a metaphor that, although he resisted it, influenced his thinking.

I've always resisted relating education to training horses . . . I've got this horse that [is] phenomenally high spirited, and lively, and active, really hard to train. And he's seven now, he's magnificent, because all the energy is still there, now he does what I want him to do. You want the spirit in the animal, you know, and we don't break the spirit out of them. . . . And really in training, horses, the thing that I do is, make it easier for him to do what I want him to do, than to do what he wants to do.

People think that when you're riding a horse you pull on the rein to make them go left. Well, what I do is put pressure on the left rein to stop them from going right . . . that's the whole principle behind it. So, when I, when I pull on the left rein it puts pressure on the right cheek so the horse can't go to the right . . . I can't make a 1,500 pound animal go left, but I can stop him from or indicate to him that I don't want him to go right . . . as soon as he starts to go left, I stop. So, I put on pressure until you start to turn, stop. No more pressure . . . [So] as soon as she wants to go to the conference . . . how could I not send her.

David was clearly thrilled about the impact of professional development on Mary's practice. It seemed to be a breakthrough moment for him. David sets high standards for himself as a leader. "[W]e run this school as though [the superintendent] is sitting right here . . . It's all part of moral education, you know." Part of the elation and exuberance that I heard in his voice as he shared this success was that he was able to facilitate a change in the situation in a manner that respected Mary's dignity and avoided further unpleasant conversations.

Enacting a Theory of Practice

David suggests that leaders need to appreciate the passion that sometimes shows itself as resistance to change. "Isn't it true that normally you would not go after those people. . . . They're so embedded . . . they just speak so passionately about this. . . . For

me those people are the ones that I get involved.” Turning his attention to his work with Mary he continues,

so I put pressure ‘til you start to turn, stop. No more pressure, . . . so that’s what I do, . . . I just ask questions, . . . why would you want to do it like [that]? You know there’s that resistance. How could I not send her [when she wants to go to the conference]!

David’s change metaphor and his beliefs about the power of professional development influenced his decision. The changes that he saw confirmed and reinforced his beliefs and the change theory that he had constructed as an educational leader.

David shared a second example of how he tried to build commitment by offering another teacher the opportunity to attend an international conference with the requirement that when she returned she would co-present with him at another local conference in the fall.

So I saw her the next morning, and I’m sure she was standing there waiting for me and she was just bouncing. ‘I’ve already got my confirmation for the conference, I’m so excited.’ And she says, ‘Um, I’ve got to tell you, I was one of the greatest resisters to this in the beginning.’

I said, ‘Oh gee, I didn’t realize that [and we laughed]. . . . (B)ut this is just so right, this is the right thing to do. See again, the passion and the commitment . . . you turn it, you’ve got the passion and the commitment . . . away you go.

Confronting the Limits of our Metaphors

While one would hope that a teacher might be changed by a single professional development experience, there is little in the literature that would support this conclusion. (DuFour, 1990) Unfortunately as the literature would have predicted, the change in approach that David witnessed in Mary’s classroom did not hold. At the time of my final interview several months later, it was clear that her classroom practice had reverted to earlier forms of practice.

The exhilaration David expressed at the positive change in Mary's teaching was matched by frustration and perhaps even despair as he was forced to confront the work that still needed to be done to improve her practice. Reflecting on our observations that morning he noted, "the word she asked them . . . was not in the curriculum. She just pounds on them. It's horrifying!!!!"

Learning from Failure

David was clearly very disturbed by this and asked "My question is how, how, how is the right way to start it?" Direct observation requires us to acknowledge a truth about practice even when it is bad news. Confronting these situations calls leaders to enact plans to change the situation. As a resilient leader David very quickly moved in that direction. He first sought to understand what had happened by talking to colleagues. David began to review a set of options to address his concerns. Looking for ways to have "the greatest impact" by supporting Mary while at the same time holding her accountable to change her practice. He talked about setting up a structure that would have strong teachers and an administrator work with Mary. The administrator would be assigned to work with the teachers to coach them on how to bring our struggling kids to the acceptable level, and [the coach would] have to [take Mary] to a practice level which was acceptable." These teachers worked together outside the classroom, but as David indicated the result in the classroom looked very different perhaps because "they never see each other teach."

Adjusting Plans

Part of David's reason for having teachers visit classrooms to observe each others' practice was to develop the potential to impact Mary's practice. He felt that direct

observation would assist her to reflect on the difference between her teaching and that of other teachers whom she respected and admired.

I think [Mary] would be stunned by being in [another teacher's] class because, . . . they share . . . resources. They sit and talk, and probably [Mary] would believe that [this teacher] does exactly what [Mary] doesTo be honest with you[enabling teachers to improve their practice by observing one another]. . . is one of the driving forces behind having the [teachers visit classrooms].

David's plan was to create a common prep time so that the teachers would have the opportunity to learn from each other. He noted that Mary believed that one of the other teachers "is probably the best language arts teacher that ever existed." He wanted to create an opportunity for Mary to see how the other teacher executed a lesson, to learn by observation.

David reflected for the second time on what had happened at the three day professional development experience. "All [Mary] did was pick the bits that affirmed her practice. Is [it] a natural human thing? Is that what I do as I listen to you and wait to hear something that affirms what I already believe?" This was a very important question on many levels. I acknowledged that "it is easier to hear those things" that align with our beliefs and that the structure he was planning "would create opportunities" for direct observation. David continued to explain his plan. "What they'll be doing . . . is talking about strategies that they use everyday in their classroom that meet the needs of the kids that are struggling in class".

Seeking Input

After David had finished explaining his plan he asked, "[I]f I'm missing something here?" David's direct question signaled to me that he was open to hearing my thoughts.

I stated “Given everything you’ve talked about, you’re going to have to monitor, [to see if your actions are] changing her practice?” I also shared a perspective that had been helpful to me when I had tried to address issues related to teacher performance and this was to shift the focus from the teacher practice to student behaviour as a response to the teacher’s actions. “Have you looked at the student learning part of it? Is there some way to focus her [on students?].”

Teaching and leading are both reciprocal acts. Each should be informed by the impact on the other. Just as David needed to monitor the impact of the plan he had set in place on teacher practice, Mary needed to be able to see and accept student learning, or lack thereof, at least in part, as a consequence of her teaching. David also needed to assess the quality of teaching by looking at student responses and evidence of learning. David’s response suggested that he grasped this notion.

Absolutely! You touched on the absolute centre of the issue. . . . [It’s not about the spelling words.] Essentially where we came to this morning was [that Mary] looks at what she is doing rather than what the kids are . . . learning, and . . . doing. . . . [I]t’s really like a very early teaching practice mode. . . . [S]he doesn’t spin off the movement of the class.

David’s subsequent comments indicated that he was focusing on students as he reflected on what he had felt and seen in Mary’s classroom.

| | |
|--|-----------|
| | They Just |
| take those sheets, | |
| put them in their binder with the 250,000 other sheets | they just |
| took those forms, | |
| | they just |
| opened their binders, | |
| | they just |
| put them in. | |
| day after day after day. | |
| Lots of teaching was going on . . . | |
| But was there learning? | |

There was never monitoring for it,
there was never checking for it, there was,
there was no sense of . . .

No sensitivity to the experience of the student. “[I]t’s uncomfortable for me [to see] the body language of the kids in there. [T]hey slouch . . . not engaged, not actively participating in that lesson.” David started to see that focusing on students was a lever to help Mary shift her perspective just as it had helped him. “Until she starts to look at what the kids are producing, until she actually sits down and says [to herself] ‘Let’s look at the kids . . .’” she will not understand the need to adjust her practice.

Anticipating Potential Roadblocks

David stopped abruptly shifting to surface “a strong, strong barrier” to reflective and responsive practice. For years his teachers had believed that “the best teachers in the city assemble in this building.” Students demonstrated strong achievement in all areas but language arts. Staff believed the students were bright. They also believed that these students were “just not strong in language arts!!!!!!” Now this may be true because there were many students in the school who came from second language backgrounds. There was an insidious quality to these belief systems because they could support low expectations for students and blind teachers to the need to change practice. Perhaps, as David suggested, there is a tendency to hear and act on the things that align with our beliefs.

What this story has surfaced is the deep and complex connections that exist between beliefs, interpretation and practice. Teachers and leaders seek positive coherence and in doing so construct theories and act in a manner that attempts to maintain stability

between themselves and their environment. Change disrupts the delicate stasis in which one feels comfortable and confident.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) suggest that we often resist change because it involves loss - in this case a loss of a sense of personal efficacy. Teachers may also be resistant to hearing that their practice is wanting relative to the needs of the students. Clearly, both the principal and the teacher have more work to do. The principal's persistent commitment to improving practice has required both he and Mary confront the limits of their own practice and seek to improve. The matter is complicated further because the lives and experiences of children are being negatively impacted by the current situation. The *aporia* here is that while we want to be humane and supportive to the teachers, students can't wait. This kind of work is very challenging for principals, both personally and professionally. Holding ourselves responsible for the learning of students is a huge shift in thinking. David suggested that we shouldn't be "surprised at the resistance" that surfaces when suggesting changes in practice conflicts with fundamental beliefs. He reflected that although the results of Mary's attendance at the professional development workshop was not as he had hoped, maybe it was worthwhile . . . because "we've set up a framework for [Mary]. [Now] we can talk to her now about [the workshop]." For David, it was a starting point rather than an end point.

As our discussion continued David spoke to the exploratory nature and uncertainty of our work as leaders in this process as he stated, "we're poking this thing in as many ways as we can to find out which one will get us in." David incorporated his new perspective and began to refine his approach into one that considered the relational dimension of the work.

Telling [Mary] that she needs to go to watch [another teacher] to learn how to teach will never work. So, . . . the reason she's going in there, is to watch the kids. . . . To watch what they do with this, with this kind of instruction, or parameter, or setup or whatever it is. . . . Are [students] engaging, are they writing, are they sitting, are they. . . ? . . . And to flip it around and have, and the teacher will be coming in to watch [Mary's] kids' response. That's the centre of it . . . We talk about kids, what can we, you know, how can we get this product from them? . . . in order to get that, [Mary] has to ask the question, then what do I need to do differently.

Although, David's plan was still in its early stages, he seemed to understand that this shift required reflection on the part of his teachers. His approach already included elements that were supported by the research for achieving sustained change in teacher practice. It included ongoing professional development experiences that were embedded in the teachers' day to day work. It created a place for teacher support, ongoing dialogue and coaching to truly change practices. (DuFour, 1991). As he continued David thought about his relationship to Mary. "She's one of my struggling learners here and I haven't been able to find the little key yet."

Summary

David's Interpretation, Construction and Enactment of Pedagogical Leadership

Building commitment to the change process was fundamentally important to David and he constructed his pedagogical practice around this notion. He engaged staff in conversations and used analogies to build understanding. David acted on his belief in shared leadership by encouraging his staff with varying views, strengths and levels of self confidence to lead change within the school. He supported these individuals by supporting their attendance at professional development sessions to build their knowledge base. David worked closely with those who volunteered to be part of his leadership team explicitly teaching them about leadership. He modeled acceptance of diverse viewpoints

by encouraging open dialogue. He coached his team to develop strategies such as seeking the expertise of the other staff as a means of generating broad based involvement. He encouraged his team to engage in and learn from reflective practice.

David and his leadership team closely monitored the level of commitment of others to school wide change. Through his presence in classrooms David was able to assess the extent to which commitment was being translated into action. When support was not as strong as David would like, he held himself responsible and renewed his efforts to engender support for strong practice by re-teaching. David clearly understood that he needed to develop sufficient commitment that strong practice would be sustained even in his absence.

Pedagogical Practice in Classrooms

David felt that being in classrooms revealed what was really happening in relation to school initiatives. He felt that a regular presence in classrooms held teachers accountable to follow through on commitments. David utilized information that he observed in classrooms as a starting point for his supervision of individual teachers. David also felt that a regular presence in classrooms provided information that was critically important to his leadership team and for this reason he considered processes that would eventually involve training his leadership team members to visit classrooms. This practice of being in classrooms served as a “leadership tool” (Spillane 2006, p. 77) for David.

Aporias

In his work David faced two major *aporias*. The first from a group of parents who opposed the changes to assessment practices. David committed to working with these

parents but also decided to proceed even without their support because of his professional confidence in the direction the school was headed.

The other challenge to David's pedagogical leadership was his work to help Mary develop more appropriate teaching practices. This experienced and, to this point, successful teacher felt that her practice had been acknowledged by others. For this reason and because of beliefs that Mary held about the nature of learning and the needs of her students, she appeared unaware of the need to change either her teaching practice.

Addressing *Aporias*

David tried to facilitate change by deepening his understanding of Mary's perspective, speaking honestly to her about concerns, and providing professional development opportunities. While there seemed to be some initial change, these supports were not sufficient to help Mary shift to practice that was meaningful and relevant for her students. This instance highlighted the limits of David's metaphor of gentle support to change practice while still maintaining passion which worked with other teachers. It seemed that in the case of Mary commitment and passion were not sufficient. David created a new metaphor for Mary as a struggling learner and continued to refine interventions to support her in the subsequent year.

In David's struggle with this experience, he requested that I become directly involved and my strategy was to shift his focus to the students in the class. I did this by drawing on my own professional experience working with principal leaders. The dilemma for principals in these situations is that while teachers need support and time to develop their practice, the students in their classes bear the brunt of the problem.

Determining what it means to act pedagogically in these situations is extremely complex because of the potential consequences for both students and teachers.

Discoveries

This case study reveals that a great deal can be accomplished by a principal who leads from his principles, is knowledgeable about appropriate classroom practice and has strong facilitative skills. David worked diligently to practice according to his values and beliefs.

Teachers need to develop their own pedagogy in order to secure “sustainable improvement” (Hargreaves 2003, p. 178). Hargreaves suggests that teachers need to view teaching as a process of “shared inquiry” that is “evidence informed”. In these “communities of practice” teachers accept “joint responsibility” for developing “local solutions”.(p. 184) David’s work provides an example of how principals work with teachers in a way that acknowledges the complexity of the beliefs and practices that surround the teaching and learning processes. David’s plans address some supports that can facilitate this process.

David’s experience with his ‘struggling learner’ indicates that the leadership processes that he utilized require a level of competency from the teachers. Skilled teaching involves a thoughtful process of adjusting and accommodating to respond to the needs of the learners *in vivo*. This requires that the teacher has a highly developed and internalized understanding of pedagogy. Teachers must be able to read or interpret classroom situations and determine what is called for. This requirement places teaching beyond a set of technical skills. While technique matters, professional judgment must

guide the process. Successful school reform is truly dependent on the existence of high quality teaching in every classroom.

The principal's relationship with his or her staff must be one that supports increased professionalism in teachers. However, while the principal can support, inspire, and require that teachers move towards exemplary teaching, it is only when this goal is internally driven on the part of every teacher that we will see the full power of the teaching profession.

For deep and sustainable change to occur on a large scale across all classrooms, school and district leaders need to confront the limits of their impact in order to understand why teachers practice as they do and then work on multiple fronts to support and require change that will enable all students to achieve success. Leaders also need to have processes in place to deal with situations in which teacher practice does not reach an acceptable level.

Professional identity is very wrapped up in success or failure at work. However, personal success or failure may not be equally impacted by the success or failure of the young people we serve in any real sense. A former superintendent said, we are at times too driven by "adult comfort" as opposed to student need. Teachers and leaders need opportunities and processes to come together to share and critically reflect on their practice and think about changes. In the end, we all need to hold ourselves rigorously accountable for taking actions to promote the well being and learning of all students.

How then can we become truly focused on change in the interests of students? What kind of pedagogical leadership is required? What kind of passion, courage, knowledge and skills are required to lead in a manner that truly and demonstrably makes

a difference for the students in our classes today? Perhaps part of the art of a successful change agent rests in the ability to see, touch, surface, energize and guide the passion that resides in the dreams and hopes of the students who inhabit the school community. It is my hope that the sharing of David's story with its successes and challenges contributes to the ongoing conversation that will help us all to move forward with the challenging work of tailoring teacher practice to students' learning needs.

CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY THREE

Background

At the time of the study Christina was the newly assigned principal at a large and relatively new junior high school. Christina had a broad base of experience as a teacher, district consultant and assistant principal. This was her third principalship and her first in a school that “wasn’t the fix up.”- a comfortable school in a comfortable neighbourhood.

Orienting to a New Leadership Context

Transitions are sensitive times in the life of a school community and even more so for an incoming leader. Principals hold a powerful position in a school, and because of this their actions are closely monitored by members of the school community who interpret them and likely position themselves, based on what they understand about the leader. For this reason, leaders need to be particularly attentive to their actions as they enter a new environment. A new assignment creates opportunities for a leader to set a tone for the future. However, any new assignment, even a desired one, can create a level of apprehension for the principal. Christina noted “some of my fear about [this new principal] assignment [was not knowing] if I’m good with this kind of parent . . . I came out of two assignments where I believe that I’d been very successful not just with parents but with kids and staff.” In addition, the school had higher order thinking skills (HOTS) as its instructional focus. “I had come from a place where reading was the focus. I had the background [knowledge as a former language arts consultant].... Reading was tangible, it was black and white, I knew what to do.” This new assignment moved Christina out of her comfort zone based on her prior experience and her expertise.

For Christina it seems pedagogical leadership is about knowing enough to lead. Christina was used to leading from a position of expertise and in her mind this new assignment did not offer her this place of comfort. Christina openly shared her concerns with staff. “I was also very honest with the group that I didn’t know if I understood what HOTS was.” She committed to take steps to develop her knowledge over the summer by “touching base with colleagues at other schools who had a [similar] focus in order to gain and gather more information that would help me in working with them.”

Christina’s Stories

In her first two stories, *Putting It on the Table* and *Out on the Proverbial Limb* Christina shares her actions as she enters her new school. Her third story, *Going Slow*, describes how she worked to build trust among teachers as they opened their classroom doors to other adults. The fourth story, *A Different Leader*, describes her changed leadership orientation. It contains a call to address some of the challenges, *aporias*, she feels lie ahead for principals and the district.

Story One: Putting It on the Table- The Value of Honesty

Christina’s first story is about her entry into the school. In this story one can see how her personal honesty, integrity and her commitment to doing what is right inform her leadership practice from her first days at the school.

Immediately after being assigned to the school, as part of her preparation for her new assignment, Christina met with the outgoing principal and staff members. She asked questions and listened carefully in an effort to build an understanding of the school community.

My first gut reaction was something’s not sitting well here; there was hesitation, and as they tried to describe things . . .it didn’t seem that . . .[their work] was

moving.” (9) “A leading message [confirmed by conversations with the former principal] was ‘what a great staff we are, what great kids we have, but that we weren’t necessarily nice to each other.’”

She also had a sense that the lead teacher, a committed and dedicated individual, was working in isolation from the administration and colleagues. Christina learned that she had inherited a newly expanded leadership team. She noted that there appeared to be a lack of “cohesiveness” and that lots of people had volunteered “so that they could manage” and “corral” the direction of the team.

Building From Where You Are.

Given this situation, Christina “invited” the leadership team to spend some time with her in early July. “I really wasn’t sure how they would respond, . . . so [I] decided to only go with a half day.” This gave her an opportunity to “develop some of their skills”. As an experienced presenter and leader of staff development Christina knew she needed to structure this day to match her purposes. “I basically made it a ‘process’ morning.”

As a result of the time spent with the leadership team, Christina learned that the staff was involved in a lot of meetings but that there was not a lot of “decision making.” A general trend emerged and Christina identified an immediate priority for her work.

One of the first things I did in my leadership team meeting that summer, which I also repeated with my full staff [at the beginning of the year], was [to talk] to them about the fact that through information from staff that I learned that they were a great staff, but they weren’t very nice to each other.

I put it on the table. . . .

I talked about it and gave impressions from things I had read in a manner where...

I wasn’t accusing anyone one of anything.

[There was] lots of head nodding . . . heads down.

[I said] I believed that our work was really hard and that we spent way too much time together not to [be able to] work [well] together.

[She also made it clear that] if you really weren't happy here, or happy with your colleagues, you needed to do one of two things- get out or talk to your colleagues in a private professional way.

These kinds of difficult conversations require careful delivery to have the intended result. Christina provided a great deal of build up to support and make audible her essential message.

When I worked with the staff, as a whole group, I used lots of the analogies . . . [from professional resources] . . . talked about philosophy and talked about this work. This is hard work. We don't get to change it, we don't send kids back because we don't like them, but we can choose how we work with them.

By her handling of this situation Christina modeled exactly what she was asking from her staff. Acts such as these require a combination of tact, skill, and courage as well as a deep understanding of the importance of honest relationships.

Being Clear and Setting Direction

When leaders transition to new assignments, they encounter differences in practice between their new school and the old one. In deciding which issues to address principals need to read the environment and reflect on their personal beliefs and style. Principals diagnose situations and determine appropriate action or decide to attend to some things at a later time.

Christina's discussions with her assistant principal's previous supervisor, and her own sense led her to believe that that he was an individual of "high integrity . . . ethical". However, she also became aware in this process that he "was not involved in the instructional leadership work at the school". This was a serious concern and Christina's conversation leaves no doubt as to her expectations for her assistant principal in this regard. Christina had a clear understanding of her responsibility as a leader to mentor other leaders. This was a part of her history. As an assistant principal, Christina, herself,

was mentored directly by her principal and had been intentional about taking on this role in her previous schools. She knew, as well, that this is a district expectation. She asked the assistant principal if he had aspirations to be a principal. She then was very clear about what this individual needed to do to prepare for the role of principal.

. . . you will not have a position in this district if you are not doing this work. . . . It's just not going to happen. . . . If you think you really want to be a principal, you're on that leadership team and you're providing leadership to it, so that's not a negotiation. If you really want to be a principal get on board.

So that move came quickly.

Maxine Green (1995) talks about the importance of speaking the truth. Christina's actions were in support of this notion. For Christina, leadership is about being clear about what you stand for; communicating expectations effectively; providing guidance to enable individuals to address issues constructively; and being and holding everyone accountable for aligning actions to beliefs and expectations.

Story Two: Out on the Proverbial Limb - The Importance of Fairness and Purpose in Decision Making

While aligning practices and beliefs is important, how the leader goes about doing this affects how well changes are received by the individuals affected, particularly when the change results in some sacrifice on the part of staff. This next episode details how Christina dealt with a situation which required that she increase teaching time for a number of her staff.

Christina discovered in early July, that the timetable for the upcoming year provided considerable release time for staff. "I think that over time we have often paid people with time for what they've done and we quit saying on a yearly basis do you need it or not, and just sort of run with it." The release time represented the equivalent of

almost two teachers. Christina believed that the original time table was not consistent with the direction set by the superintendent.

I really believed that our boss [the superintendent] said that we need people to teach to the max. So I just . . . did what I thought I should do, and this was one of those stands where you say . . . I don't believe our current timetable did what we needed it to do.

So I went out on the proverbial limb and I cut all of the time. . . .

Changing a time table to reduce teacher release time has the potential to cause huge discontent with staff. Christina faced the additional challenge of having to do this in an environment where she had not yet established relationships with staff and also at a time when she would have to make the decision with minimal conversation, consultation or explanation to staff.

Providing Rationale for Decisions

Christina decided to use some of the extra teaching time created from this change to reduce large class sizes and distributed the remainder of the release time in a manner that reflected and supported the leadership direction of the school.

I made a couple of decisions. Number one in terms of the leadership team, the gal who was leading it, chairing the meetings, who was taking the minutes, on and on, I gave her a period a week to do some of that work. And I told the group that I needed to have the continuity of her leading the ship and that I was making the decision, not them, I was making the decision that she could continue to provide leadership until January . In January if there was somebody else who wanted to step up to the plate, we could make that happen. So they just nodded and said, 'Okay'.

By doing this Christina provided a solid rationale for the unequal assignment of release time in a manner that reduced the possibility of resentment of other teachers. She also identified priority areas that would be assigned to teachers with available time. The first priority was

covering in classes where we believed there was a risk factor. . . . The next priority for their time would be for anyone who wanted to do work on a HOTS project or needed collaboration time . . . The third chunk [of the plan was that] you'd work with kids.

Christina communicated her decisions and the rationale to the whole staff. "So I called a meeting . . . probably the second day of school and announced it." She began by providing context. "You have to accept that you have been in a very luxurious position . . . the mandate, not just from our superintendent, but from the Learning Minister, was that teachers will teach their full complement." She also indicated that she had made decisions so as to not take away resources from priority areas. "[W]e have a leadership structure here that is going to shift [and] . . . the reality is we need people in front of kids."

Christina believed that it was her responsibility to ensure that resources (including, and perhaps most importantly, teacher time and presence) were to be used to maximally support students. When she presented her rationale for the change she used "higher" authorities to strengthen her position. However, there was no reluctance in her communication; she clearly supported this direction as being the right thing to do. As she reflected, Christina noted that she "pretty much decimated some of the strong hold" . . . that some staff had enjoyed. She also gave a clear signal that things were going to be different and demonstrated that decisions, even hard ones, were going to be made.

Committing Support

Very importantly in this process, Christina committed to support her staff in other ways. "I will do my best to support you by not having as many meetings' . . . I made a promise to them that I would be organized; that I would start on time; that I would end when I told them; and that I expected them to come prepared to listen and participate."

Christina's actions were a demonstration of her respect for the staff and a clear indication that she valued people's time. This act was of significant importance because of some other demands that she felt had been put on staff.

When speaking about pedagogical tact, Van Manen (1991) uses the concept of the pedagogical appropriateness of the action. Appropriateness is determined by the extent to which actions support the pedagogical interests of students and staff and also how the action is received. In making her decision, Christina showed herself to be willing to do what she believed was right even though it had the potential to be unpopular and placed her at some risk in terms of her relationship with staff. What was apparent was that Christina had the courage of her convictions. She also had practical knowledge and political acumen to implement this change effectively. Release time was aligned to the priorities of the school and available to staff who wished to take on initiatives related to the school's instructional focus. Christina also was open about her need to have continuity of support from her lead teacher. There was equity in distribution of the teaching assignments. Christina accepted full responsibility for how she allotted the remaining release time. Christina modeled principled decision making.

Doing what one feels is right or what is called for is not always easy. Acknowledging that there are opinions on both sides of the issues of class size and release time for teachers in terms of their overall contribution to student learning, Christina's decision was motivated by a desire to do the right thing as she understood it. While Christina's decisions were influenced by the district direction and initiatives, it required courage to take the action and skill to make these changes in a manner that they were accepted by staff as being fair.

Monitoring Impact

Christina monitored and interpreted the impact of her decision by noting the responses of staff. “Some came running out to find out what their new assignment was. Some of them thought it was just fine. Others thought there was a leveling . . . this is fair. And we have reduced meetings in the school overall. They’ve been . . . appreciative of that.”

One of the tensions, *aporias*, of leadership is negotiating multiple perspectives. From the teacher’s point of view release time is likely seen as a legitimate way to recognize and support improved teacher practice. Teachers know that their work involves much more time than the time that they spend with students. They require time beyond assigned teaching minutes to engage in a variety of preparation activities that impact students. They experience the impact of having, or not having this release time in a very direct and personal way. While the principal, as a former teacher, understands this, he or she is not directly impacted by the decision in the same direct way and in addition is influenced by other factors such as the costs of release time, and requirements to be answerable to superiors. Principals are answerable for the time table in a way that teachers are not. On the other hand, teachers live very directly with decisions related to their assignments. The competing tensions that arise from these different perspectives are negotiated in the light of shrinking resources and increased expectations in terms of accountability for student learning.

Story Three: Going Slow - The Importance of Being Sensitive

While the initial stories focused on Christina’s decisiveness, this story highlights her sensitivity to individual teachers.

Christina found that the nature of the students, the stability of the staff and the preliminary work she had done enabled her to get into classrooms early in the school year. “So I just started doing walk abouts.” She quickly discerned from the reaction of staff to her appearance in classrooms, “that this had not occurred” previously.

Teaching stopped. There was introducing of Mrs. . . . and even now in a couple of classes, the teacher will, you know, is everything okay? . . . So the first, well even now, it’s still just getting in and them knowing I’m not going to hurt them, and I’m not going to rip them apart for something they’ve done or not done. And I’ve gone slow with that.

As Van Manen notes “tact is the practice of being oriented to others”. (Van Manen, 1991, p. 139) Successful leadership requires consideration of multiple perspectives and demands in the course of practice. This sensitivity to the impact of one’s actions on others is very much at play when principals visit classrooms. By going slowly Christina was intentionally trying to create for her teachers a sense of safety in their relationship with her. She believed that trust was an earned commodity particularly in a historical context of traditional principal practice where classroom visitations were primarily associated with judgment and evaluation by someone with power who had a direct impact on the teacher’s job security.

Professional Judgment

Christina felt that being in classrooms informed her other practice. She indicated that she needed to have “enough regularity in classrooms that they [teachers] believe I know what’s going on in them [in order] to impact other discussions”. Christina suggested that her presence in classrooms gave her credibility.

Following a walk-through of classrooms Christina reflected that she always needed to “confirm” her understanding of her staff both inside and outside of the

classroom so that she could coach them. On the day of one of our visits we saw two different teachers (in separate classrooms) seated at their desks. Christina was able to describe how in one case this was a concern to her and in the other it wasn't. While she had some concerns about the practice in both cases she felt that in one case the teacher was "engaging" the students and in the other the teacher was giving the students "busy work".

Addressing Concerns Appropriately

Christina felt responsible for addressing concerns that surfaced as a result of classroom visits and her pedagogical practice was reflected in the manner in which she addressed concerns. She spoke of a meeting with a teacher who was having some serious personal difficulties that were, Christina believed, drawing her attention from her students. Christina seemed very sympathetic to the teacher's situation but she stated, "I've got a responsibility to bring that forward".

In another case, Christina was direct in her discussions with a teacher. "As I think of visiting your classroom . . . , you are either at your desk or you're on the phone. It's hard to be a good teacher from either of those positions." At other times, Christina jointly problem solved with a teacher and realized an unanticipated impact of having the teacher instruct four sections of the same subject. While the original decision was made to ease her workload, Christina and the teacher discussed the possibility that the teacher might be bored by the repetition. Christina tried to help teachers positively address areas of need. "Sometimes kids or groups of kids or classes challenged [a teacher's] skill level . . . and that [suggested that they] needed to develop different strategies" to meet the needs of a particular group of students. Christina tried to address such concerns in a "proactive"

manner, for example, by bringing in someone to work with this teacher and others with similar needs. In each of these situations, Christina felt that she needed to interpret what she was observing in light of what she knew about the situation in order to determine an appropriate response that would support the teacher to progress. Christina indicated that she felt that she was holding herself “more accountable” and regularly asking herself “am I doing the best I can do?” She labeled this “ethical leadership”.

Responding Appropriately to Feedback

Christina extended the collegial work started over the summer with the teacher leadership team to classroom visits by requiring all staff to participate in a visit to another teacher’s class.

“[She] made the mandate, the requirement, that they [teachers] all had to be in to observe a colleague” by the end of October. In addition she required “that they needed to drop a note or an email to their colleague and provide a copy to her . . . with a focus on what they had seen and what they had learned. She noted “that with the exception of four or five staff, they all did it easily [and] quickly”. Opening up teacher practice to direct observation and feedback by other colleagues is an important feature of a professional learning community. It is however, a very sensitive process in which teachers can feel and be vulnerable.

Some of tensions and vulnerabilities became apparent in the response of teachers to Christina’s requirement for feedback. A few staff didn’t “want to send me a note or a copy of what they had sent” because they were concerned with the Alberta Teachers’ Association code of professional conduct. In light of this reaction, Christina clarified that she was “not asking staff to evaluate colleagues” nor to “tell her if it was good or bad”.

She explained that part of her reason for follow up was the belief that “what gets done is what gets monitored.” However, Christina was aware of the sensitivity of this point and noted that she “wasn’t prepared to take that battle” so she decided on a compromise and instead asked staff to “drop her a note” letting her know that they had visited a colleague. She indicated that she “got some really interesting stuff” from the staff. Christina also tried to “respond back to open up dialogue”. She “began talking to them a lot about raising awareness of their work and having more professional conversations”.

Monitoring Through Collegial Reflection and Conversation

As part of the district process, Christina and the members of her leadership team completed a reflective activity in which they were asked to highlight actions that they felt had a significant impact on the progress at their school. During our second meeting, Christina shared their responses with me. Staff indicated that opening classroom doors and allowing visitations was viewed as a positive change. “[There were] positive strokes back to me. They recognize that I have been a chunk that’s made a difference in this. They don’t really know how or why, they just know it’s happened”.

Christina indicated that she had received a great deal of unsolicited positive feedback from her staff during individual meetings with teachers. As Christina probed, a “very strong teacher” shared how he had benefited from observing a peer who taught in another subject area. He noted, “It was really good, and it was really nice to watch her. She’s come in and watched me [too] . . . I would never have done that [without the expectation] . . . He talked about how comfortable he was [with Christina and the other teacher] coming in [to observe him in his classroom]”. He also indicated that while he

didn't plan a "fancy lesson" that in the presence of another adult "you make sure your questions are posed a little bit better".

Demonstrating Appreciation of the Complexity of Teaching

Part of her success with her staff was due to her ability to communicate her understanding of the complexity of the teaching process. Christina recounted a situation in which, while covering a class, she had to consciously think about "how do I get beyond the basic recall questions to higher levels?" She shared her experience with other staff. In doing this, Christina communicated her recognition that "as a teacher and learner, [she] would have to work really hard at this because it [wasn't her] daily work".

Christina's approach to classroom visits, her follow up with individual teachers, her responsiveness to teacher concerns about their collegial visits and her acknowledgement of the challenge of high quality instruction, all modeled her respect and appreciation for the complexity of teaching. Christina realized that while the knowledge and skill sets that principals and teachers possess overlap, there are some areas where principals have more depth of knowledge, skill and experience and others in which the teacher has the stronger practice. These differences need to be acknowledged, appreciated and valued in the development of a professional learning community.

Story Four: A Different Leader-Sharing Leadership

Christina indicated that she had never been in a situation where she could "so comfortably talk with such pride about the strength of the staff". Hargreaves (2003) suggests that "sophisticated professional learning communities seem to work best with high capacity teachers in high capacity systems, where teachers are skilled and qualified, the schools are already reasonable effective, leaders are capable of motivating and

engaging their teachers and sufficient resources are available to provide the time and flexibility they need to work together professionally.” (p. 189) Recognition of the strengths of staff enabled Christina to “be a different leader” and to share leadership. Sharing leadership demonstrates trust and confidence in staff. For Christina this was a significant shift in her practice. In her last school she had a direct hand in all leadership work. “I was leading it. It was mine. I had to be up and ready to chair the meetings . . .” Christina indicated that she’s “more willing and able to let the committee run” with an idea. She also indicated that she felt comfortable doing this because “there’s enough of a process [in place] to let them go”.

Christina had the ability to vary her leadership style to suit the situation. Throughout the case study she demonstrated that she could take decisive action when necessary; however, she was also able to lead in a more facilitative style when that was appropriate. She was sensitive to the needs of her staff and seemed to know when to push and when to step back. Her ability to interpret what was called for in a particular situation allowed her to build momentum and support. Change continued even if it was not always exactly as she planned in advance. This story provides an example of how within a distributed approach, “leadership practice takes place in the interactions between leaders and followers.”(Spillane 2006, p. 57)

Anticipating Needs Beyond the School Level

Christina was concerned about a lack of clear direction from the district related to work on assessment. She felt that there had not been sufficient conversation about the potential impact of new assessment practices to call into question “cranking out numbers

... for the schools in the district who provide monthly interim report cards”. Christina indicated that

[i]n the same way that I need discussion with my staff, I need discussion with my boss. And I don’t think as principals we have had discussions about the ramifications of this . . . I guess I’m feeling that I can’t lead my staff right now, because I’m not sure of where we’re really going. And that makes me nervous.

As our conversation proceeded, I acknowledged Christina’s comments about “needing to engage principals in conversation”, but then asked her directly “Should you be expecting someone else to have an answer?” Christina acknowledged,

I would really like to think my boss had the answer and he would just tell me and I’d do it [but] I’m not foolish enough to think that he’s got the [answer] . . . What makes me nervous is that the conversations are happening more at the school, which leads us to the potential of schools doing a variety of things . . . I think that we could end up hanging ourselves . . . In a community like mine, that is . . . [comprised of] people who believe their children are going on to post secondary education [and] who have a vision of marks and what they mean it’s a very tough road.

When we come out and say as a district we’re doing some things, it gives me the strength and ability to more easily do what I need to do in my community. . . . I would be more comfortable with some senior level dialogue . . . to start plotting our the path . . . that’s what I am trying to do in my school.

I want us to do the right things . . . to serve our community. And for me right now...I don’t feel I have the rest of the district to back me and this is a very difficult community [to be in without that back up].

Christina was concerned that the parents in her school community would respond to changes in assessment practices. While the district has directed a change in principal practice, Christina felt vulnerable in this work and was confident enough to state her concern.

Surfacing Fundamental Dilemmas

As part of this discussion Christina surfaced another problematic issue related to professional learning for teachers. She noted that “the most troublesome piece for our

staff is the amount of time they are out of class”. Christina shared that for the second round of classroom observations many teachers “are using their preps, they don’t want to plan, they don’t want to have a sub in . . . they don’t want to be out of their classes that long.”

The current structure of schools and traditional beliefs about teaching may make intervisitations and other forms of professional development costly, both fiscally and in terms of the work load for teachers. The traditional view of teachers as imparters of knowledge and students as receivers of these transmissions supports a requirement for a teacher to be in place with students in the classroom. Many parents view professional development days as another day off for teachers who already have a short working day and extensive holidays. These beliefs create an *aporia* for the teaching profession that needs to be addressed in schools, with parents, in school districts and at the government level.

Principal Conversation to Support Leadership and Develop Professional Practice

Christina identified the need for open dialogue with senior district administration to begin to address potential and emerging difficulties. She was suggested that members of senior administration needed to work to develop the same relationship with principals that she was working to develop with her teachers. Just as “she really had to work to create a comfort level” with her teachers, she felt principals needed to feel safe enough to be willing to share the difficulties, *aporias*, “the down and dirty . . . that I don’t know what I’m doing”. Christina indicated that earlier in her career she might have just done as she was told; however, she now had the confidence to question “why am I doing this?” She also indicated that principals are “trying so hard to do the right thing” but this is

more difficult for principals who do not have strong collegial support. She was concerned that, “we have “colleagues who are isolated, disconnected” and spoke of her membership in a principal study group as a source of support and learning for her. Christina indicated that the group was using a working description of “a community of practice as a unique combination of three fundamental elements: a domain of knowledge, a community of people and shared practice”.

For Christina, being a different leader meant acting as a facilitator with her staff within her school, but it also meant developing “a community of practice” at the district level. She saw this action as necessary to support the change she was trying to achieve within her school community. Her comments are in line with those of Fullan (2005) and Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) who suggest that significant and sustainable change will only happen on a broad scale when strategies are used to “foster leadership at all levels of the system. This requires leaders who are able to develop other leaders, who form a critical mass of interacting and coalescing leadership for change across all levels of the system-school, district and state.” (Fullan et al, 2006, p. 95). Christina was seeking both an alignment of leadership direction and respect for the unique and overlapping complexities of leadership both within her school and at the district level.

Summary

Christina’s narrative emphasizes the leadership opportunities and challenges that surface for a principal who is transitioning to a new school. In her new assignment, Christina had a need to understand the school culture and practice, but she also had a limited time frame in which to take action if she wanted to make changes that would impact the current school year. Effective leaders seem to be able to see further down the

road and have a sense of what is required to get there. As a leader Christina needed to read the landscape correctly, making judgments about next steps and executing them in a manner that would set direction, build relationships and establish her credibility as a new school leader.

Christina's Interpretation and Enactment of Pedagogical Practice

From the outset, Christina engaged in a skillful process of action oriented pedagogical inquiry. She intentionally gathered information to help her understand the culture of her new school and quickly used information to engage her staff in a collaborative process of change and growth to strengthen the school.

Christina's narrative illustrates that it is possible to make substantial changes quickly and still maintain the support of staff. Pedagogical purpose legitimated her action. However, her success was also due to the manner in which she helped her staff to face the truth. She was honest, clear about her expectations and provided staff with ways to address issues. Her actions were characterized by fairness and confidence in the capacity of her staff, when properly supported to positively address issues. Christina's story is one of a knowledgeable individual who is able to assess situations and quickly determine and execute an appropriate course of action.

Christina's leadership work focused on building a structure to support the development of a positive and collegial learning environment. As a leader of leaders, she utilized her training as a consultant to inform her facilitative leadership style with her large leadership team. She actively monitored and was appropriately responsive to feedback from teachers using this information to shape future practice. She emphasized her confidence in the professionalism of the staff and operated like a conductor whose

aim was to bring together talented musicians to perform as an orchestra. She was direct, open and decisive in making changes, such as reorganizing the timetable in order to realign the work of individuals to support teaching, learning and team development. Her management was grounded in her assessment of what needed to happen to move the school forward educationally. Increased or changed demands on staff were balanced with actions that respected teacher time, again emphasizing that pedagogy was the *raison d'être* for all decisions and actions.

Pedagogical Practice in Classrooms

Christina used her professional judgment to inform her practice in classrooms. She concentrated her initial efforts to build the trust of her teachers and felt a strong sense of accountability to address issues that she observed in classrooms in a manner that would promote positive growth. Christina adapted her leadership style to the strengths and needs of her staff. She structured inter-classroom visitations to build an appreciation of each others' practices.

Aporias

Christina faced some significant challenges upon arrival at the school. The timetable and staff relationship are two examples. However, because of her own abilities, courage and determination, she was able to quickly address these issues. Christina's strength as a leader enabled her to anticipate dilemmas and think beyond the confines of her own school. She surfaced the *aporia* that exists between the need for teachers to have professional development activities and stress created by their absence from their regular classroom teaching duties. She was aware of the potential conflict that might be created

by changing assessment practices without at the same time working with parents and the community to develop understanding and support for changes.

Addressing Aporias

Christina confidently used a variety of approaches in unique combinations to align the structure of her school timetable and staff in support of teaching and learning. Her talent rested very much in the ability to be simultaneously directive and supportive. From the beginning she showed herself to be a highly skilled learner who was able to gather data from a variety of sources, create a picture, and check with others to see if her hypotheses were correct. She was open, honest and respectful of her staff and they responded in kind. She seemed to have a keen sense of when to move forward and when to take a step back in a manner that over time would build positive momentum.

Christina saw the need for dialogue at the district level to begin to address complex issues related to the professional development needs of teachers and changes to assessment practice. Her strategy was in fact not to solve the problem but to again mobilize people to begin to address it through dialogue with colleagues.

Discoveries

Christina was action oriented, skilled and clear about what needed to be addressed. This combination of factors resulted in significant change occurring quickly and positively in a manner that set the stage for future growth. One might speculate that perhaps staff readiness also played a role in the speed of the transition in Christina's school. This relatively stable staff had not been able make these shifts on their own, but Christina was able to act as a catalyst and make changes that might assist staff to realize their potential as a collective. When change happens quickly and easily, as it did in

several examples in this case study, it causes one to speculate on why these same changes are so difficult in other circumstances. Further inquiry into factors that support or restrict pedagogical practice, is warranted.

CHAPTER 7: PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to examine and portray principal practice through a pedagogical lens in response to Evans' (1999) call for educational leadership that

is rooted in a concern for the deep meaning and purpose of education, including its aims and intentions, as well as its hopes, its wishes and its dreams. In other words, it is the notion of education that gives the idea of leadership its purpose, rationality, coherence, intelligibility, meaningfulness and so on. (p. xiii).

The study was conducted with three principals from a large urban district that was using a school improvement framework that had shown promise in several other school districts. However, the local district included a unique feature by creating an explicit expectation that principals work toward spending fifty percent of their time in classrooms or directly supporting the work of teaching and learning in classrooms. This context provided an opportunity to explore and contribute new knowledge about how principals practiced within this unique context to improve teaching and learning in their schools. The study examined how the new and explicit expectation for principal practice was enacted and how these experiences informed, supported and were connected to other instructional leadership practices. It also surfaced principals' perceptions of the *aporias* that became apparent in the process of leading school improvement within this framework and described how principals understood and attempted to address these difficulties.

The multiple case research design enabled a portrayal of a rich and detailed picture of principal practice related to the research questions. Each case was considered separately in order to permit the development of a coherent picture of leadership by each of the three junior high school principals. The use of multiple case study design added to

the illustrative nature of the study and made it possible to show both uniqueness and common trends across the cases. Data, gathered primarily through unstructured interviews, enabled each principal the latitude to focus on areas that were of particular importance to the individual in his or her local school context. Each of the cases was presented as a series of stories that revealed aspects of pedagogical leadership. Some stories were more directly connected to the explicit expectation for principal practice than others. The intent of sharing all of these stories was to illustrate how the new principal practice of being in classrooms connected with other pedagogical leadership practice.

Secondary Principals' Interpretation, Construction and Enactment of Their Role as Pedagogical Leaders

The three principals interpreted, constructed and enacted their role as change agents whose goal was to improve teaching practice so that learning outcomes and the quality of learning experiences for students would improve. Principals focused primarily on their work with teachers as key agents in the improvement process and viewed themselves, metaphorically, as teachers of teachers. At times, they explicitly identified themselves as teachers and in other instances they acted as teachers. Principals were exceptionally sensitive to the learning needs of teachers in this process of school improvement, working to make it safe for teachers to take risks to change their practice. Through their leadership practice, the principals attempted to engage and support teachers to build understanding and further develop their teaching practice. Principals focused on different aspects of this process in each case study and while there were overlaps, the open ended nature of the interviews allowed principals to construct their own leadership stories.

Principals worked to structure a learning environment for teachers that provided opportunities for adult learners to build their teaching repertoire. Principal leadership practice was shaped by the principal's pedagogical and instructional knowledge and experience in response to their local context. All principals recognized the distributive nature of leadership in relation to their teachers. (Spillane 2006) They were intentional about supporting the development of teacher leadership as a way to engender and sustain change and improvement of practice. In addition to being reflective they closely monitored the impact of their own actions in order to learn when and where to make adjustments to continue progress.

Each principal operated from a perspective or dominant lens that influenced their actions and interpretation of their context. For Janelle, leadership was about willingness to take risks to bring about change, and managing risk so that teachers would feel safe throughout the change process. David affected change through building commitment in order to harness and redirect passion to inspire new work. Christina's perspective was about facilitating growth in a school that was not a "fix up". Although she uncovered things that needed to be addressed, her original orientation guided her approaches.

Principals were aware of the need to self monitor. Janelle frequently spoke about her risk taking as a potential vulnerability. David "resisted" his own horse training metaphor perhaps as an acknowledgment that it might not be adequate to address the complexity of his role as an educational leader. Christina intentionally used facilitative processes to structure the work of her staff to enable them to shift from a collection of skilled individuals towards becoming a highly professional staff team.

Principals were also keenly aware of the need to monitor the cultural context of their school communities and realized that successful changes would require them to build community support for strong pedagogy. However, work with staff seemed to precede work with parents.

Principals' Enactment of an Expectation That They Spend Time in Classrooms Supporting Teaching and Learning

Principals were supportive of the district expectation that they spend a significant portion of their time in classrooms and in work that directly supported teaching and learning. They felt the district expectation made it easier for teachers to accept a regular principal presence in classrooms. However, they acknowledged that there was still a level of apprehension on the part of teachers and therefore principals were careful to act in a manner that would establish a level of trust for this work with their teaching staff.

Principals felt a heightened sense of personal accountability to be responsive and to address issues that surfaced as a result of their classroom visits. Principals understood that the pedagogical impact of any strategy is only evident when the strategy is skillfully and appropriately used, and were firm in their resolve to use their professional judgment to determine how they would practice while mandated to be in classrooms and how they would provide feedback to teachers individually and in groups.

Principal support for the value of classroom visits was evidenced by their subsequent efforts to enable and require teachers to participate in collegial inter-visitations for professional growth. Principals felt that there was a need to further develop the ability of teachers to work with and learn from each other through visiting each other's classrooms. The impact on principals I believe was so strong that it would be hard

for any of these principals to imagine authentic school leadership that does not involve a strong base of current lived classroom experience. For example, Janelle indicated that classroom visitations would be a starting point to help orient her to her new principal assignment the year after the study.

The value of the principal's presence in classrooms was dependent on the pedagogical skills and knowledge of the principal, both in terms of direct knowledge of teaching as well as leadership understanding and skill. Principals were in the early stages of creating and developing professional practice related to their physical presence in classrooms. Christina was very clear that she wanted to develop her skills further in this area. She highlighted a need to learn to coach strong teachers. For this reason, I was reluctant to probe too much in this area during the research process, feeling like Christina needed to go "slow" because I did not want principals to become defensive and as a result be less open about this aspect of their work.

It would be worthwhile to inquire further about principal practice in classrooms with the intent of generating new information specifically about the impact of this form of principal practice from the perspective of others in the school community.

Impact of 'Being in rooms' on Pedagogical Practice

Principals felt that the information gleaned from regular classroom visits was an important source of data which they used to inform other leadership practices. Classroom visits provided an opportunity to monitor both individual teacher practice and to gain a sense of teaching practices and student learning experiences across the school.

Sometimes the information surfaced problems that needed to be addressed. Visits enabled principals to see emerging trends and served as a rich and credible source of data to

reflect on progress of school wide initiatives, as well as growth at the individual teacher level. There was a very close connection between what principals saw in classrooms and how they worked with their leadership teams and individual teachers.

The stance of principals in classrooms was primarily a supervisory one. Principals believed that their regular presence had a generally positive impact on teacher practice. A regular presence served as a monitoring device that allowed principals to see actual classroom happenings on a day to day basis. Principals worked privately with teachers where there were concerns and used positive exemplars as validation of the impact of initiatives. Being in classrooms provided principals with information that helped them reflect on and more accurately assess the impact or lack of impact of leadership actions. Classroom observations were used to triangulate other sources of information such as traditional achievement data and teacher perceptions of student progress. The information principals gathered from being in classrooms provided them with details that would enable a shift in the culture of their schools. For example, principals began to encourage, and in some cases require, teacher inter-visitations to further open teacher practice. This both improved instruction at the classroom level and increased professional collegial awareness and respect.

Spillane (2006) suggests that within the framework of distributed leadership, the central work of the principal is the “design and redesign” of “tools and routines” that “cause instructional improvement.” (p. 93) The manner in which the principals developed and enacted their practice in relation to the expectation that they spend time in classrooms supporting teaching and learning contributes new information to this emerging knowledge base about leadership practice.

Aporias

During the course of the study, each of the principals anticipated or actually encountered challenges or *aporias* as they led their schools. The *aporia* that emerged in the course of the research in all three case studies was a growing awareness on the part of the principals and myself that these principals were engaged in transformational change. Transformational change requires more than having individuals do things differently. It asks them to in fact *be* different, in an ontological sense, to see the world with new eyes. Within this context leadership takes on a profoundly different meaning. In a transactional context, I do things to have an impact on you. In a transformational context, I *am* different and my transformation fundamentally changes my orientation to my understanding of events, my actions and interactions with others. The principals all seemed to be aware of the futility of using the power of their position to bring about change in teacher practice. Catching these *aporias* in action has enabled me to reveal what principals bring to bear in the face of perplexing obstacles. In the face of these challenges principals relied on leadership practices that invited, supported, facilitated and built commitment amongst their teachers to engage in learning that would engender awareness of need and develop the ability of teachers to practice differently. Future research might also look at the *aporias* facing teachers.

Blades (1997) notes that “Change, true change that makes a difference in lives, must explore *questions of being*.” (p. 195) As Blades explains, confronting this sense of personal accountability is truly difficult. “I did not want the fate of children tied to the very discourse of a life-*my life*- I was terrified of the personal responsibility of change, and worried that even with an ontological turn to questions of change, there still

might be the possibility that nothing will happen". (p. 195) This is perhaps in reality an *aporia* that leaders must address. As educational leaders, each of us is called upon to enact to the best of our ability pedagogical practice in every aspect of our work and life. In this calling, we seek wisdom to help us orient and act appropriately to the issue at hand. Pedagogical leadership is a way of being in the world.⁵

Principals experienced *aporias* as they struggled to develop transformational leadership practices that would support their teachers to think differently. Being in classrooms on a regular basis increased awareness of personal accountability and thus intensified the experience of the *aporia* for principals. It created urgency because it required principals to face directly the day to day teaching and learning that was happening in their schools. David's emotional response to being in the classroom of his lead teacher is one example of this.

Often principals were able to surface potential *aporias* in advance. Doing this enabled them to reflect and develop ways in which to appropriately understand and thereby address and perhaps avoid difficult situations. Janelle's development of a process to help her staff make connections between critical thinking and assessment practices; Christina's skillful handling of the timetable change; and David's proactive work to guide his leadership team to use appropriate processes to engage staff are all examples of this kind of anticipatory leadership practice.

Principals surfaced an *aporia* in their efforts to improve assessment practices. The strong emphasis and reliance on large scale assessments as primary indicators of success was a serious concern for all principals. Principals were aware that the direction in which

⁵ "Being-in-the-world is a Heideggerian phrase that refers to the way human beings exist, act or are involved in the world. (Van Manen, 1997 p. 175)

they were moving had the potential to create conflict with their parent community. David received a petition from parents who, despite all of his conversations and analogies, did not support a move away from percentage grades. Janelle was aware of the danger posed by lowered results on these measures. Christina worried about potential parent reaction to changing assessment and grading practices and indicated that she felt that there should be conversation amongst principals and district administration to consider how to address this issue. Future research that focuses on the 'teaching of parents' within the context of this new initiative would no doubt have a readership and possibly lead to new and innovative practices.

Another related *aporia* was how the combination of strong students and the current assessment accountability system creates a closed discourse that blocked awareness of the need for teachers to reflect on teaching practice in schools where achievement is high. Janelle encountered this thinking prior to the study and was able to counteract its influence by opening up the school to all community students and expecting teachers to provide a strong instructional program to meet their needs. Teacher beliefs sometimes also blinded them to the need to examine practice. For example, David commented that his lead teacher thought that students in the school were not strong in language arts. This belief enabled her to absolve herself of the responsibility for questioning her teaching practice.

While some *aporias* were common across the case studies others were unique. Janette grappled with potential resistance from staff in response to changing the school plan in mid-year. David faced extreme difficulty with many facets of his work and relationship one of his teachers. What I began to understand through this study is that

perplexing difficulties are relational rather than existing in some objective sense. These difficulties surface when there is a mismatch between the leader's understanding and actions and the needs or understanding of the other. However, no matter what the obstacles, each principal continued to seek ways to move forward in every aspect of their work and evidenced caring, commitment, skill and sensitivity, in the process.

Addressing *Aporias*

Smits (1997) suggests that *aporias*, because of their troubling nature, capture our attention and serve as a call for deeper understanding. This may be why they are so perplexing to principals who tend to be action oriented and see obstacles as problems to be solved rather than situations to be understood. The ongoing challenges that David faced in working with his lead teacher suggest that this understanding may not come easily. Each of David's well intentioned attempts to address the situation with his lead teacher did not eliminate the issues, but did illuminate further David's understanding. This suggests that it may not be possible for leaders to deeply understand these *aporias* without taking some action even if all it yields is a clearer understanding of the challenge. Addressing *aporias* requires that principals engage in rigorous and critical self- reflection and that they remain open to divergent perspectives that may be very different from their own point of view. Principals need the ability to be appropriately responsive to multiple perspectives while holding true to what emerges as fundamentally important for students and the adults who support them. To address *aporias*, leaders need to be committed learners themselves, constantly and intentionally building their practice. Appendix 2 contains a synthesis of promising practices and orientations to practice which principals in this study employed to bring about change. These ideas are intended to function as

starting or reference points for consideration of others in addressing the challenges of pedagogical leadership.

Discoveries

The following information summarizes the key learnings that I suggest arise from this study.

District Direction Matters

Focused district requirements can act as a catalyst in making a significant shift in pedagogical leadership practice. The explicit expectation for principals to work toward being in classrooms or engaged in work to directly support teaching and learning in classrooms provided direction that shifted the practice of the principals in the study and led to the creation of new and more transformative cultures in their schools. Principals understood the rationale for this direction and this increased their commitment to change. The principals felt that having the direction set by the district supported them in their work with teachers as they enacted this change. This has important implications for policy and direction setting at the district level. Policy makers at the district level need to reflect and consider how their policies support pedagogical practice in schools. Future study into the relationship between district policy and pedagogical practice is warranted.

Professional Judgment

Because leadership is a complex form of pedagogy, districts need to exercise rigorous self discipline to avoid being too prescriptive in determining how principals will enact practice. Principals in this study strongly asserted the need to have the freedom within this requirement develop their practice in classrooms in a manner that was meaningful and appropriate to the school and individual classroom context. On the other

hand, as professionals, district leaders and principals need to hold themselves individually and collectively accountable for developing and enacting practice that meets professional standards. This combination of freedom and accountability may be the first step in surfacing underlying understanding and beliefs that need to be opened for discussion in the development of pedagogical leadership practice that places “the needs of the client (students) at the centre of professional work” (O’Day, 2004 p. 34).

Support for Principal Learning

Principal knowledge impacts how principals enact district requirements. Principals, even highly skilled ones, who work in isolation, are vulnerable to having blind spots and limitations in their practice. Principals require access to a variety of professional development opportunities and support to develop this new practice. Professional development should be responsive to areas of need identified by principals. Provision of regular opportunities for collegial observation and feedback, have potential to support this work.

Pedagogical leadership requires continual development of learning. Henderson and Hawthorne (1995) suggest that transformational leadership requires “practical educational wisdom” or “deliberative artistry”. They suggest that this “personal – professional intelligence” has three features: practical inquiry, pedagogical imagination, and critical reflection.” (p. 7) Principals and district leaders need to work together to create appropriate learning opportunities for professional dialogue to deepen inquiry and reflection into pedagogical practice related to being in classrooms. A part of the obligation of pedagogical leadership is a commitment to continuous personal and shared professional growth.

A New Role for District Leaders

The new role for principals creates a requirement for new pedagogical practice on the part of district leaders. In my combined role as researcher and assistant to the superintendent, there were a few occasions during the study when I provided coaching, support and sometimes direction to assist the principals in their work. Just as principals need to monitor teacher classroom practice, district leaders need to monitor principal enactment of new expectations in order to provide appropriate support, coaching and feedback to principals. The requirement for principals to be in classrooms creates an obligation on the part of district leaders to be in schools working with principals as they develop this new practice. Being in schools allows district leaders to acknowledge, support and share strong principal practice. Opening principal practice to observation and constructive feedback is essential for the continued growth of principal practice. Further research inquiry to surface district leadership practice that can support professional growth of principals is warranted.

Sensitivity to Student Experience

The notion of being in rooms on a metaphorical level was my proxy for a pedagogical orientation to leadership practice that was inspired by and responsive to the needs of children. I was interested in knowing if principals would focus on the experience of students as a result being in classrooms in the direct presence of children. A few examples surfaced. Janelle's experience of student stress due to assessment practices influenced her leadership direction. She appeared to be touched by the experience of the student who sent her the e-mail. Her description of her approach to teaching the CALM

class and her description the child's learning with the authentic science assessment suggested that she was attentive to student experiences.

From the unstructured interviews it was possible to see how the principal participants lead in the direction that matters to them and that they feel is addressing the researcher's area of interest. As indicated earlier, principals spoke mostly about their work with teachers. In my work with David I did at one point suggest that he focus on the students. His subsequent responses illustrated his concern for the experience of students in the class of one teacher. Future research might further examine how these principals become more comfortable with the new initiative of being in classrooms, as well as how the initiative impacts the overall school division over time. A focus on principals talking more about the role that students played in enacting the new mandate would also be a worthy study.

The question of how leadership practice is affected by and affects student experience is certainly a profoundly important one. When principals spend significant amounts of time in classrooms they have access to direct observational information about the relationship between teaching and the experience of the learner. If leadership matters at all it needs to ultimately make a difference for students. Certainly the connection between leadership and student experience may be an indirect one, but it is one that principals should be reflecting on and inquiring about as part of their practice in their work in classrooms.

Aporias and Growth

I began this research project many years ago in an attempt to understand my own sense of uncertainty as I faced complex challenges in my leadership practice. It was at the

start a personal quest. But doctoral research requires more than personal answers to personal questions. I anticipated from my own experience and research that the principals in my study would also experience *aporias*. This research has helped me to appreciate the role that *aporias* can play in our growth, evolution and transformation as educators and educational leaders. Further study of *aporias* may be a way to better understand and deepen leadership practice.

Van Manen (1997) suggests that pedagogy “is an embodied practice and that pedagogical research and theorizing, too, are pedagogic forms of life.” (p. 139) He suggests that the researcher is often transformed in the process. I am different as a consequence of doing this work. I have new insights about the nature of the improvement process in which both the principals and I participated. So I end this study with one personal and as yet unresolved *Aporia*.

As a member of the design team, I had hoped that having principals spend a significant amount of time in classrooms supporting teaching and learning would result in increased attention to the student perspective and voice. Principals in this study were clearly motivated to do what they believed was in the best interest of students. They used a variety of well intentioned and effective strategies to attempt to develop the beliefs and practices of staff members in order to realize positive results for students. It is possible that because of my position as a central office administrator, principals inferred that my primary interest was in their efforts to influence and support improved teacher practice. Certainly directing their efforts to support teachers is one important way to positively impact students.

Christina commented that she was feeling more and more accountable and she wasn't sure why. I find that I am experiencing a similar phenomenon. In the process of conducting and writing this research, I have become much more sensitized to the presence or absence of student voice in many conversations about school improvement. Leadership practice, if it is to be pedagogical, must create a space to enable the student voices and experience to be heard, understood and attended to – through teachers and principals. Children have much to teach us about the impact of teaching practices and their own learning. The students in the science class in Janelle's school vividly shared understandings that had developed when they represented the location of organs. Again, the student who sent the letter to Janelle helped to deepen Janelle's understanding of the impact of her practice. David realized that the student experience combined with coaching might be a way to help Mary develop an awareness of the impact of her teaching practices.

Being in classrooms allows principals direct access to the student's experience of learning. Principals are often in the fortunate position of being able to focus on individual or small groups of students without the responsibility of monitoring the whole class. This is an excellent opportunity to gather information about student learning that can be shared with the teacher or serve as a piece of information to reflect on the state of pedagogy in the school. In any classroom there are a range of student voices. Leaders, teachers, and researchers need to pay particular attention to those who are marginalized in an effort to create more equity in the system. As principals focus on student experience and share their understandings, their actions have the potential to shape the focus of teachers as well. What might this mean in relation to principal practice in classrooms?

Being in classrooms heightens our awareness of and our responsibility for the day to day experience of students in our classrooms. The teachings of engaged Buddhism suggest “means and ends can not be separated. . . . Means are ends in themselves . . . there is no way to peace; peace is the way.” (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1998. p. 6) This suggests that what students experience everyday in their classrooms, in their relationships with their teachers and classmates is their reality. When principals and when I visit classrooms, we need to ask ourselves if the moment to moment experience of the children who inhabit these places and spaces mirrors what we would hope for each and every one of them. When our visits confirm this, leadership actions need to support and sustain these environments. When we see something else, as leaders we need to act pedagogically to change the experience of children. This perhaps is the essence of pedagogical leadership: children as the starting point and the endpoint of our change efforts.

Aporias of the Research Process

One of the *aporias* of this research process emerged from the dilemma of insider research, particularly the power relationship and ethical concerns of the researcher and participants. I chose to conduct this study within my own district because the expectation for principals to spend fifty percent of their time focused on supporting teaching and learning was a unique and research worthy practice. As an insider, I had personal knowledge which allowed me to portray a rich picture of principal practice relative to the research questions. However, researching in this context made explicit the real or perceived power imbalances between myself and the principals whose stories I have shared. I tried through both the selection of participants and my own conduct throughout

the research process to be sensitive to these matters. In reflecting on this, I was very honoured that the principals not only shared their successes, but also chose to be open and courageous in sharing times of confusion and uncertainty. They also were willing, from time to time, to constructively critique the district for its actions or lack thereof. In the final analysis, I am convinced that insider research contributes to a deeper understanding of practice in all educational research. Furthermore, looking to the future, insider research has great potential for narrowing the gap between theory and practice.

APPENDIX 1**LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR PRINCIPALS**

Dear Participant,

I am writing to thank you for agreeing to consider participating in my doctoral dissertation research project. At this point, I wish to provide you with further information that will enable you to make an informed decision relative to your participation. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of secondary principals and how their practice is impacted by Edmonton Public School's expectation that principals spend fifty percent of their time in classrooms supporting teaching and learning.

The following is a brief overview of the research procedure involved in this study. I plan to visit you on three to four occasions with each visit lasting two to three hours.

Each visit will consist of a pre-classroom visit conversation during which we would discuss your plans and purposes for visiting classrooms on that particular day. We would then walk through the classrooms together. Following the classroom visits, we would debrief the experience through a semi-structured interview/conversation. The data will be collected through a combination of my own field notes and tapes of our conversations before and after the visits. I would also welcome copies and samples of any written documents that you believe would help me to understand your thoughts and practice relative to the work you do in supporting teaching and learning. Within one week following each meeting, you will have the opportunity to review the written summary transcripts of our taped conversations and my field notes to verify their accuracy and suggest additions, deletions and clarifications. I plan to commence the study in September 2003 and to arrange visits on a biweekly to monthly schedule for four months.

I want to assure you that if following receipt of this letter you agree to participate in this research project, your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected throughout the study and in the written publications that ensue (my thesis and published articles). If you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time without prejudice. Data collected as part of the study will be secured. The raw data will only be available to myself and my advisor, Dr. Olenka Bilash in the Department of Secondary Education at the U of A. You may also withdraw any data collected from the database or from inclusion in the study at any time prior to publication. You will also receive a copy of the final thesis prior to publication.

This study will be submitted to the University of Alberta as part of my requirements for completing a EdD in Secondary Education. The information may also be used in presentations, research articles and to inform my own leadership practice. I hope, as well, that the experience will be valuable to you as a vehicle for reflection and conversation about your leadership practice.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the study or your involvement.

Sincerely,

Donna Barrett
donna.barrett@epsb.ca
Office - 429-8035

In case of concerns, please contact my Supervisor:
Dr. Olenka Bilash

Olenka.bilash@ulbertra.ca. Office – 492-5101

This student has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at 492-3751.

**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA CONSENT FORM OF ALBERTA RESEARCH CONSENT
FORM**

I, _____, consent to be a participant in the research study "**Being in Classrooms**" with Donna Barrett. Participating in this research study involves the researcher visiting you at your school on three to four occasions with each visit lasting two to three hours. Each visit will consist of a pre-classroom discussion, classroom walk through with the researcher and a post classroom visit taped interview. Following the classroom visits, we will debrief the experience through a semi-structured interview/conversation. The data will be collected through a combination of my own field notes and tapes of our conversations before and after the visits. I would also welcome copies and samples of any written documents that you believe would help me to understand your thoughts and practice relative to the work you do in supporting teaching and learning. Within one week following each meeting, you will have the opportunity to review the written summary transcripts of our taped conversations and my field notes to verify their accuracy and suggest additions, deletions and clarifications. I plan to commence the study in September 2003 and to arrange visits on a biweekly to monthly schedule for four months.

I understand that I will be interviewed three to four times for approximately three hours each over the period September 2003 to January 2004.

- I may withdraw at any time without penalty, or that the project may be terminated
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially and I will not be identified
- Data will be kept on file in a locked and secure place during the data collection period and for a period of five years after successful defense of the thesis
- Anonymity will be respected in all public documents - your name and the name of the institution will be kept confidential and anonymous
- Our conversations will be taped and I will be taking fieldnotes throughout the process.
- I may decline to respond to any questions if I feel necessary.
- Data will be validated by participants. (I will be given the opportunity to read summaries of our conversations and my fieldnotes and suggest changes or clarifications. Any interpretations that I do not want included will be removed at my request).
- The raw data will only be available to myself and my advisor, Dr. Olenka Bilash in the Department of Secondary Education at the U of A.

I understand that the results of this research project will only be used for the following:

- Research project
- Presentations and written articles for other educators

If you have any questions or concerns about this research or your involvement in this project please feel free to contact me by e-mail at: donna.barrett@epsb.ca or by telephone at 429-8035.

Signature of Participant

Date Signed

In case of concerns, complaints or consequences, the following person may be contacted:

Course Instructor: Dr. Olenka Bilash
Olenka.bilash@ualberta.ca
 Office phone: 492-5101

APPENDIX 2

PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

The information that follows represents a synthesis of some important aspects of pedagogical leadership practice that have emerged in the course of this research. The complexity of pedagogical leaderships rests in part on the need to simultaneously yet differentially consider each of these interrelated factors. Slatterly (1995) notes, “The past and the future are comprehensible only in the context of the present.” (p. 264)

Pedagogical leadership is about actions in the present that are informed by an understanding of the past and with an eye to the future. Pedagogical leaders understand that while theory and practical experience can guide their practice, their actions need to be informed by a sense of practical judgment that is attentive to the unique conditions that exist within their context.

Focusing on What Matters.

Pedagogical leadership places students and their learning at the centre of all leadership practice. Pedagogical leaders on an ongoing basis continue to challenge themselves to clarify and deepen their understanding and articulation of their own pedagogical beliefs. They understand that they are one important voice but not necessarily the central voice in developing a shared understanding of what matters in terms of the student experience of schooling. Knowing this they engage in dialogue with adults, teachers, parents, and the students to build an understanding of and common language to speak about student learning, the experience of schooling and what matters from the student perspective. In this process they work with others to think about how

they and other members of the school community will recognize appropriate student learning.

Understanding Cultural Context

Pedagogically leaders are intentional in their efforts to deeply understand school culture and this knowledge informs how to enact leadership appropriately. They are sensitive to the cultural values that surface in conversations about what is important for students. Leaders seek to understand the beliefs that underwrite existing teaching practices and other ways of operating in the school. Through observation and conversation they gather information about how members of the immediate school community relate to each other, teachers' understandings of the teaching and learning processes, parents' hopes and desires for their children, students' perspective on learning and what individuals accept as evidence of learning. Inquiring into the school culture helps leaders to determine the extent to which others in the school community are aware of the need for change and as well as their readiness to enact change in practice. Leaders use their knowledge of the culture and individuals to assess the level of comfort with the uncertainty, risk and ambiguity that are part of the change process.

Pedagogical leaders also consider the external community/culture, their views and understanding because these factors impact support for practices in the school. They do not let these views dictate pedagogical practice, but rather work strategically with the community to build understanding and support for appropriate practice as part of the change process.

Authorize Leadership Practice Through Inquiry and Reflection.

Pedagogical leadership practice is “critically informed practice”.(Henderson and Hawthorne 1995 p. 131) Leaders hold themselves accountable through reflection and inquiry to legitimate their leadership practice through reference to current professional literature and the pedagogical impact of their actions. They create opportunities for direct observation and contact with students as well as engaging in and dialogue with teachers, parents and other adults in the school community as appropriate to deepen their understanding of the impact of leadership actions. . They attend to divergent perspectives and try to maintain an open stance that will allow them to learn about unanticipated consequences of their actions. In order to authentic their practice, on an ongoing basis, leaders use the information they have gathered to understand the nature of student experiences: who is thriving; who is vulnerable; what students are learning by what and how we teach and by being in the school environment.

Respecting the Complexity of Teaching.

Pedagogical leaders appreciate the complexity of the teaching process and understand that skilled teachers have and develop a body of practical knowledge in the course of their practice. For this reason, leaders avoid prescriptive approaches to change. They question and provide feedback to staff to help them critically reflect on teaching practice and hold them accountable to authorize their practice based on findings in the professional literature knowing that appropriate teaching is always responsive to the unique needs of the individual context.

Building Commitment

Pedagogical leaders frame the school as one supporter of children's growth and learning. They understand that in order to meet the needs of students, schools need to be a part of a community of commitment in support of children. The principals use a variety of processes to engage others to build commitment to change practice to support students. Pedagogical principals are invitational, open to a range of views, set an example, listen and are appropriately responsive. They support and encourage members of the community to be a part of change that is in the interest of students. They use their knowledge of leadership to create structures that support others to excel. They celebrate success and continue to look for ways to work with teachers where success has not been achieved.

Intentionally Building Leadership Capacity

Pedagogical leaders believe that they are not the sole source of knowledge. They understand that leadership comes from many sources and that part of the principal's job is to identify and encourage a broad base of leadership in the school. They nurture, support and teach others to grow as leaders. Principals model pedagogical leadership by engaging in an open process that encourages divergent thinking on the part of teacher leaders. They help and require teacher leaders to use processes with other staff that build commitment by providing meaningful opportunities for others to contribute their professional knowledge to the change process. They also guide teacher leaders to become reflective practitioners. While they sometimes provide structure and support at other times they mentor others by allowing them to learn from experience and they develop understanding by guiding them through a reflective process.

Being Appropriately Responsive

Pedagogical leaders build commitment to change and to make changes with strong support in order to support students. They know however there are times when they must take a stand to do what is right even if they do not have a strong base of support. Very close monitoring is critical in these situations to ensure that actions are pedagogically appropriate in the short and long term. Principals enact this role in a manner that is respectful, considerate and supportive of those who are being asked to change.

When they receive negative feedback, pedagogical leaders work to understand underlying issues related to expressed concern. This understanding assists them to determine an appropriate response. They understand that it is possible to require a direction for change while at the same time providing others with the opportunity to have a say in how some aspects of the change will occur. They also understand that there are times when they may need to step back from an idea or re-teach to build support before proceeding. Their goal is always to build understanding and support in process of addressing concerns.

Being in Classrooms

Pedagogical leadership requires that principals spend time in classrooms in order to maintain a current understanding of student experiences and teaching practices within their school. This information forms an important basis for understanding how they need to orient their leadership practice with individual teachers and across the school as a whole. A regular presence in classroom demonstrates interest concern and support for quality teaching and learning. It allows principals to gather information about promising

practices, to recognize and support teachers who are challenging themselves to develop their teaching practice and to identify areas in which teachers may need additional support.

Pedagogical leaders understand their responsibility to develop their leadership practice in relative to their presence in classrooms. This involves both ongoing study of teaching and learning as well as developing their own expertise in responding appropriately to what they do or do not observe in classrooms. They work to develop the ability to support and provide feedback that assists teachers with a range of abilities, needs and strengths. In this work they need strategies to provide feedback and encourage reflection on the part of teachers that engenders positive growth.

Monitoring and Watchfulness

Pedagogical leaders maintain an open stance. They are vigilant about seeking and paying attention to information both inside and outside classrooms that can help them to understand the perspectives to the school community. Because they appreciate that it is hard to predict the impact of one's actions, they create many opportunities for others to safely provide feedback to help them to evaluate and to determine appropriate future action. Seeking feedback and inviting others to share divergent views helps them to stay in touch with the needs of others in the school culture. They understand that they are part of a living system that is constantly changing and evolving and for this reason they need to work on an ongoing basis to understand their context as it exists at the present moment.

Align Structures to Support Pedagogy

Pedagogical leaders align all aspects of the school operation in support of student learning. They think about how they can organize time tables, assign staff, and structure meetings have positive impacts on students and create learning opportunities for staff.

Reflective Practice

Self awareness and self management are critical to pedagogical practice. Leaders may have natural personal tendencies that they need to monitor and manage. Creating opportunities for reflective conversations and dialogue with colleagues helps principals to clarify their thoughts and gather new perspectives. This information can inform future leadership practice. Like all others, principals need to assess themselves to identify areas for growth.

Construct Personal and Shared Meaning

Pedagogical leaders understand the importance of taking time to construct personal meaning about practice. They also understand that in order to teach others they need to be able to articulate these understandings clearly. Effective communication strategies such as using powerful metaphors and analogies, use of strong positive or negative examples can help others to shift their perspective or provoke questioning of standard practice. They understand that deep change comes from within and hold conversation to help others begin to see the world with new eyes.

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