TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ON SELF-EFFICACY:
A STUDY OF RELATIONS

Michelle Linda Suddaby

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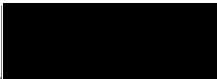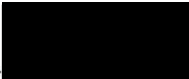
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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ON SELF-EFFICACY: A STUDY OF RELATIONS

MICHELLE LINDA SUDDABY

Approved:

███████████████	April 6, 2022
Supervisor: Jim Parsons, Ph.D.	Date
████████	April 6, 2022
Second Reader: Lorin Yochim, Ph.D.	Date
█████	April 6, 2022
Dean of Faculty of Education: Ramses Ilarraza, Ph.D.	Date

Dedication

For my students- past, present, and future.

Who have taught me far more than I could ever teach them.

The reason I do what I do and love doing it.

You are a blessing.

Abstract

Teacher self-efficacy involves the belief in one's ability to support and promote student learning, growth, and achievement. Effective leadership is essential in promoting teacher self-efficacy by empowering teachers to have confidence in their ability to support student learning and achievement. Quantitative research has confirmed a relationship between leadership and teacher efficacy. This qualitative study explores Alberta teachers' experiences with school leadership and its impact on their self-efficacy. With increasing demands, diverse student needs, and high expectations for student success, teachers may doubt their ability to make a difference in the classroom. At the forefront of this study is the idea that teachers, like students, require support to thrive in what they do. This qualitative study will gather personal stories from teachers regarding their experiences and perceptions associated with different leadership to gain insight into how school leaders can promote, support, and sustain teacher self-efficacy. Teachers who feel supported, confident, and capable in their role can support their students to feel the same in their learning and growth. The findings will provide a lens for educators to examine their practice with respect to leadership actions that influence self-efficacy. Additionally, the results will inform leaders on quality practices to foster high teacher efficacy in their schools.

Key Words: teacher self-efficacy, school leaders, leadership, education, support

Acknowledgments

A special thank you to my family and friends- my cheerleaders- for supporting and encouraging me throughout this process. On days I said I couldn't, you were there to remind me that I could.

To my students who inspire me every day to continue learning and have fun doing so. To the teachers that inspired this study, who show up each and every day for those students- you are so valued.

To my participants, Leah and Natalie, for sharing your stories and lived experiences with me. I have learned so much from our conversations. Your passion for what you do shines through in everything you shared.

To my supervisor and mentor, Dr. Jim Parsons, for walking through my first research project and sharing his wisdom and expertise with me along the way.

To my master's cohort for sharing your stories. It has been an honor to learn with, alongside, and from you. The future of education is in good hands with you as teachers and leaders.

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Research Context

"As you head into this school year, if there is anything I want to remember it is to give it your best, not your all."

These words from our school division's superintendent to a room full of first-year teachers back in 2018 resonate as I reflect on my experiences as a beginning teacher and consider more deeply how school leaders impact teacher self-efficacy. "Give it your best, not your all." How simultaneously reassuring, motivating, and uplifting those words were to me at that very moment, just days before my first day as a teacher, and still are to this day, now in my fourth year in the profession.

This statement set the tone for my career and will carry forward with me. As a teacher still early on in my career, I recognize how crucial support from school leadership is not only for pre-service or beginning teachers but also for seasoned veteran teachers. I have seen how imperative it is for teachers to have the support of their administrators as they navigate challenging situations and the ever-changing landscape of education. Relevant now more than ever in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers like me rely on school leadership to be the "bottom hands" (Carrington, 2019) to uplift and support.

School leaders are held responsible for educational outcomes, including student achievement; however, teachers actively facilitate learning and instruction. While previous studies have "eliminated the possibility of principals having direct effects on student achievement…principals can improve students' performance by working through their teachers" (Lambersky, 2016, p. 380). For quality teaching and learning to occur, teachers must have confidence in their abilities to contribute to student learning and achievement via support from

their administration. When teachers feel supported and engaged, their students will be supported and engaged.

Additionally, when students are engaged, they will learn, and when they learn, they will experience opportunities to achieve. Thus, when teachers feel supported, confident, and capable in their role, they can then support and engage their students in meaningful learning. From this idea, along with my experiences as a beginning teacher, my research focus emerged and evolved.

Research Aims & Objectives

Many teachers experience low self-efficacy and self-doubt at some point in their careers. With increasing demands, diverse student needs, and high expectations for student success, teachers may find themselves overwhelmed and lacking confidence in their ability to make a difference in their students' academic and personal lives. At the forefront of this study is the idea that both students and teachers require support.

The research question on which this study is based was, "In what ways do teachers perceive that school leadership impacts their self-efficacy?" Effective leadership is essential in promoting teacher efficacy by empowering teachers to have confidence in their professional expertise and abilities to support student learning and achievement. Therefore, understanding how teachers perceive school leadership as impacting their sense of self-efficacy was at the heart of my research.

With the overarching goal of supporting student learning and achievement, this research aimed to determine the impact of school leadership on teacher self-efficacy and how school leaders can best support teachers in promoting and sustaining high self-efficacy. Informing leaders of ways to fortify and increase teacher efficacy to impact student learning will develop a mutual understanding of best-supporting teachers in their roles. Understanding and unpacking

the correlation between educational leadership and teacher self-efficacy will help those in leadership roles ensure teachers feel supported and confident in their abilities, translating to the staff collective, and then further down the line, to support student learning and achievement. Teachers' beliefs about their abilities to impact student learning and achievement are essential components of effective school change.

Another goal of this research was to provide an opportunity for teachers to share their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions surrounding school leadership. Allowing teachers to be heard and have a direct say in what they need from leaders will create a space and school culture of growth. Last, a final goal for this research project would be to grow as a professional in my current role as a teacher and potential future role as a teacher-leader. I aspire to understand the needs of teachers better so that they are supported to the utmost degree for them to go on and support the needs of their students.

Teacher self-efficacy positively influences key variables related to student achievement in their learning and school improvement (Thornton, 2020). Examining the impact of school leadership on teacher self-efficacy will create effective school leaders who can advance both concepts. Typically teachers enter the profession because they care about students and wish to help them learn, grow, and achieve. This cannot be achieved unless they feel supported by their schools' leaders and have high self-efficacy.

Past research has primarily utilized quantitative methods to study teacher self-efficacy; however, little qualitative research exists on the topic. Although quantitative research confirms a definitive relationship between school leadership and teacher efficacy, qualitative research, the method of this study, will aid in identifying how leadership impacts teacher self-efficacy with a specific focus and emphasis on teacher perspective. By exploring the experiences and

perceptions of Alberta teachers, this research will contribute to understanding the correlation between school leadership and teacher self-efficacy and can ensure there is equal focus and emphasis on supporting teachers as there is on students.

Related Literature

The review of related literature explores various topics related to this research project's primary focus. First, I have written an introduction to the concept of self-efficacy, where it originated, and what it entails. Next, I have taken a deeper look into the evolution of self-efficacy into teacher self-efficacy in the context of education. Last, I have created a final section that bridges the connection between teacher self-efficacy and school leadership.

Self-Efficacy

In 1977, psychologist Robert Bandura introduced self-efficacy to describe an individual's belief or confidence in his or her ability to execute behaviours necessary to achieve desired results (Bandura, 1977). The construct of self-efficacy is grounded in Bandura's theoretical framework, a social cognitive theory that emphasizes the evolution and exercise of human agency, or the idea that individuals can exercise some influence over what they do (Bandura, 2001). Self-efficacy has a direct impact on how people feel, think, and behave in their everyday lives. Bandura (1993) found that "self-efficacy exerts its influence through four major processes…including cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes" (p. 117). The stronger the sense of self-efficacy, the higher the goals individuals set for themselves and the more substantial commitment to meeting or achieving such goals (Bandura, 1993). In contrast, those who doubt their capabilities and possess a low sense of self-efficacy tend to focus on potential failure and dwell on what could go wrong.

The four primary sources of self-efficacy he identified are "performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states" (Bandura, 1977, p. 195). Performance accomplishments, the most prominent contributor to self-efficacy, have to do with repeated success and mastering of tasks or skills (Bandura, 1977). Vicarious experiences involve seeing others succeed or achieve, thus feeling capable of experiencing the same or similar success. Influential or significant people in an individual's life can strengthen and fortify their beliefs to succeed through verbal persuasion- being persuaded or encouraged that one is capable of overcoming obstacles to experience success (Bandura, 1977).

Last, an individual's emotional and physiological state will influence their self-efficacy. Because "high [emotional and physiological] arousal usually debilitates performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are not beset by aversive arousal than if they are tense" (Bandura, 1977, p. 198). Negative emotions can diminish confidence and decrease performance output, while positive emotions can fortify confidence in achieving the desired outcome. Together, these four sources have the ability to impact and contribute to an individual's sense or level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be applied to the educational setting in regard to teachers and their practice.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Over the years, a second conceptual strand of theory and research grew out of the work of Bandura, identifying teacher efficacy as a type of self-efficacy (Erdem & Demirel, 2007). Self-efficacy, applied in education, has generated a line of research on teacher self-efficacy concerning student learning and achievement. Bandura (1993) extended his research and narrowed his focus further to analyze teacher self-efficacy. He found that "the task of creating

environments conducive to learning rests heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of teachers" (p. 140). Teacher self-efficacy, a more specific branch of self-efficacy, focuses on a teacher's "judgment of his or her own capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 783).

Teacher self-efficacy has been connected with various educational outcomes. Sehgal, Nambudiri, and Mishra (2017) identified that teacher self-efficacy is positively associated with three factors of teacher effectiveness: "teacher's delivery of course information, teacher's role in facilitating teacher/student interactions, and teacher's role in regulating students' learning" (p. 506). In their study, Chwalisz et al. (1992) found that teachers who believe in their abilities endeavor to help all students learn and achieve. Efficacious teachers believe they possess the skills to support student learning needs and have confidence in their ability to impact student learning and achievement.

Teachers who believe in their abilities and professional judgment are more effective in their practice- having greater confidence in their abilities, open to trying innovative teaching styles, and developing meaningful connections with students, staff, and families. If teachers lack confidence in their ability to effectively teach, student learning will suffer. Thus, their research findings maintain that support of teachers by school leadership will result in enhanced learning and increased levels of student achievement.

Teacher self-efficacy is related to significant variables in education, such as student achievement (Armor et al., 1976). Focusing on building teachers' self-efficacy is one way to address student achievement. Just as teacher self-efficacy impacts variables in education, some variables similarly affect it, such as school leadership. Bandura's (1997) identification that self-efficacy beliefs are context-specific has resulted in "teachers' self-efficacy being examined in

relation to a number of school-level variables, such as…leadership of the principal" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007, p. 946), an idea central to my research topic.

Education is rooted in supporting students to learn, grow, and achieve success in doing so. Teachers can significantly impact student learning and achievement; however, their self-efficacy directly affects student learning. For teachers to support their students learning in meaningful ways, they must first feel support from the leadership in their school.

According to Lambersky (2016), teachers' emotions are important to their practice and school leaders had important influences on these emotions. Specific leadership practices that support positive teacher emotions and influence their teaching practice include "professional respect shown for teacher capability, encouraging and acknowledging teacher effort and results, providing protection, allowing teacher voice, and communicating a vision for the school" (p. 400). Emphasis on the emotional dimension of school leadership will ensure the human side of school leadership is not lost.

Lamberksy (2016) attested that school leaders can indirectly impact student achievement by leading their staff in emotionally supportive ways. Bandura's (1997) identification that self-efficacy beliefs are context-specific has resulted in "teachers' self-efficacy being examined in relation to a number of variables" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007, p. 946). One variable of focus is their state of health and wellness. To support and sustain the psychological health and wellness of teachers involved identifying factors that underlie teacher self-efficacy and recognize the "myriad stressors encountered by these professionals, the extent to which support of "personal" resources are necessary, and the characteristics that describe the highly efficacious teacher" (Vesely et al., 2016, p. 73). Vesely et al. (2016) concluded that "the effects of both acute and chronic stress affect not only the physical and psychological health of teachers but also

their "sense" of efficacy both personally and professionally, which, in turn, is a powerful predictor of student learning and achievement" (p. 81). Thus, for teachers to facilitate meaningful learning and growth and be confident in their ability to do so (i.e possess high self-efficacy), they must first have their own needs looked after by the leaders in their school.

School Leadership and Teacher Self-Efficacy

In their research, Cansoy and Parlar's (2018) findings supported those of Bandura when they found that, as school leadership behaviours increase, teachers' self-efficacy also increased, and vice versa. Therefore, self-efficacy theories are used to provide a framework in determining how school leaders can best support teachers to develop and sustain teacher efficacy in schools. They described how "[e]ducational leadership behaviours can contribute to teachers' efficacy by improving their beliefs in their own competency" (p. 556). Demir's (2008) research on the direct and indirect relationship of leadership practices with teacher efficacy reaffirmed that self and collective efficacies, while different constructs influence one another, and leaders should actively support both.

Lambersky (2016), too, highlighted the connectedness of school leadership and teacher self-efficacy, presenting emotion as a big factor. He specifically highlighted the effects principals have on teacher emotions, including teacher morale, self-and collective efficacy, stress, and commitment, stating, "[e]mphasis on the emotional dimension of school leadership will ensure the human side of school leadership is not lost" (p. 402). Implications for school leadership are presented by exploring what school leaders can do to lead more effectively through others by acting in emotionally supportive ways.

Lambersky (2016) found that placing teacher emotions at the heart of school leadership will ensure that teachers feel supported, encouraged, and committed in their roles and as a result,

increase and fortify self-efficacy in staff. Teachers who took part in his study described feeling "exhilarated and engaged when principals found ways to express their confidence in teacher ability" (p. 395). Kass (2013) reiterated that the human dimension of teacher-principal relationships is the decisive factor determining teachers' sense of professional self-efficacy in his study. He added, "principals' behaviours can have an impact on teacher effectiveness and on teachers' confidence in their ability to promote students' achievements" (p. 209).

Through their research on the direct, indirect, and mediating relationships between principal leadership teacher self-efficacy, Kurt et al. (2012) confirmed that "the efficacy of teachers can be improved by the modelling of inspiring and supportive principals" (p. 73). Furthermore, principal leadership and teacher self-efficacy are constructs they describe as having a proven impact on student achievement. This "slinky effect"- how leadership impacts teacher efficacy and teacher efficacy then impacts student learning and achievement - is referred to frequently by researchers on the topic of educational leadership and teacher self-efficacy.

Kurt et al. (2012) pointed out that "Teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy have been found to be more willing to take risks, to be less critical of student behavioural issues, and to work harder with academically struggling students" (p. 74). Therefore, principals who support their teachers not only benefit teaching quality, teacher health and wellbeing, and overall school culture, but they also benefit student learning and achievement.

Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to attend to the perceptions of two teachers to inquire into their experiences with school leadership and how it impacts their self-efficacy. This research was framed by the question, "In what ways do teachers perceive that school leadership impacts their

self-efficacy?" Utilizing qualitative research, I interviewed two participants, Leah and Natalie[1],

through one-on-one semi-structured interviews guided by aspects of narrative inquiry.

Consent Process & Recruitment

I submitted my proposal to the Research Ethics Board of Concordia University of

Edmonton for review to begin the research process. Upon approval, I reached out to the Assistant

Superintendent of Educational Excellence, seeking permission to conduct my research with

teachers in the selected division. In the email, I included the approval letter from the Research

Ethics Board, the "Conducting Research in the District Proposal" form required by the division,

and a *School Division Information and Consent Form* (see Appendix A) I created.

The letter included background about myself, the purpose of my study, procedure,

potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, contact information, and a consent page to sign, date,

and return. Once signed consent was granted by the Assistant Superintendent, careful

consideration was given as to which schools would be contacted to recruit a teacher. I decided to

select participants from two different schools within the division to elicit a more diverse range of

experiences with leadership.

I reached out to three principals within the division via email. Of the three, two

responded and approved interviewing one of their teachers. They, too, were supplied with a

School Principal Information and Consent Form (See Appendix B) to review, sign, and return.

Last, I recruited participants. Purposeful sampling, where researchers "intentionally select

individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 205),

was utilized to select participants from two different schools as a way to better provide a range of

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[1] Leah and Natalie are used as pseudonyms to protect participant's identities.

teaching experience for rich and diverse data collection. Each principal put me in contact with one interested teacher at their site. After I made initial contact with both participants, they received the *Participant Information and Consent Form* (See Appendix C) to review. Last, I obtained signed consent from them to partake in the study.

Participants

Teachers were selected to be the primary sample group because they could provide insight based on experiences throughout their careers with different school leadership and how it impacted their sense of self-efficacy. Both participants worked within the same division but at different schools. Another significant factor to note is that both participants experienced a change in school leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant one, Leah, has been teaching for exactly one year. Before receiving her education degree in December of 2020, she worked as an educational assistant within the division. Her current role is Kindergarten teacher. Her passion for her students was evident throughout our conversation as she shared the stories from her first year in the profession.

Participant two, Natalie, has been teaching for around 18 years. Natalie has spent most of her career teaching at the same school where she works today. Her current role is a Grade 1 teacher, and her primary roles have been in the primary grades, specifically Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. She is passionate about play-based learning and bringing play back into classrooms. Natalie completed her Master of Education in Educational Leadership one year ago.

Data Collection

Teacher self-efficacy is best studied by having teachers share their experiences with different leadership; therefore, I facilitated data collection through individual semi-structured interviews.

Parsons et al. (2013) noted that, "researchers use interviews to allow participants to share their situations, and to give each person a voice and opportunity to be heard" (Chapter 5). Semi-structured interviews helped provide opportunities to gain in-depth information and insight into themes relating to teachers' personal experiences with different leadership styles. The interviews were guided by narrative inquiry, "the view that education and educational research is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Incorporating narrative inquiry into the interviews allowed dialogue and conversation to unfold so that participants could share their lived experiences regarding leadership and their self-efficacy.

Using open-ended questions (see Appendix D) to facilitate dialogue, one-on-one interviews that lasted between 45 minutes to an hour were conducted. Three weeks following the initial interviews, a second individual interview of 15-20 minutes took place with the same participants. Doing so created the opportunity to reflect on previous conversations and allow participants to share any further thoughts or insights they might have had from the last meeting. It was also an opportunity for me, as the facilitator, to share the overarching themes that emerged from the initial interviews with participants and offer an opportunity if they wanted to add anything on the topic of leadership and teacher self-efficacy.

The interview questions were designed to be open-ended, using question words such as "why," "how," and "to what extent," to prompt answers without facilitator bias. The semi-structured interview format was chosen to understand how different leadership experiences have impacted their sense of efficacy. As the facilitator, I ensured that I took on an active listener's role - letting the participants guide the direction they wish to answer the questions to avoid any possible chance of interviewer bias affecting the data. Parsons et al. (2013) emphasized that "this

format also helps you to capture and compare different perceptions" (Chapter 8), making it the appropriate structure for this study which focuses on teacher perceptions. Due to the ongoing nature of the COVID-9 pandemic, all interviews took place virtually via Google Meet.

Data Analysis

The final step, data analysis, involved drawing and verifying conclusions based on the findings in the data. Interviews were recorded using the record option in Google Meet and transcribed in real-time using an extension program called Noty. I also took field notes during and throughout the interviews to add additional details or information that would aid in the analysis process afterward. I then listened to the recordings and reviewed the transcription to ensure accuracy.

The qualitative data from the interviews were then analyzed using Creswell's (2015) six steps for analyzing qualitative data. This process consisted of reviewing the participant's responses to the interview questions, coding the responses, and identifying themes. Coding the transcripts enabled me to identify key themes that emerged throughout all interviews. I grouped similar codes into subcategories, which were narrowed down into four key themes. The reflective conversations and subsequent thoughts, emotions, and experiences associated with school leadership yielded themes related to teacher perceptions.

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Shape of the Data

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This section will serve as a transparent, pre-analysis presentation of the data. Reading through the shape of the data and what participants had to say enabled me to better identify the major themes that follow in the findings section.

Personal Definitions of Self-Efficacy of Teachers, By Teachers

Inquiring on how the participants personally defined self-efficacy was an important starting point when looking at the data because no one is more suitable to define or describe teacher self-efficacy than teachers themselves. By having Natalie and Leah share their interpretations and understandings of self-efficacy in the context of education, I was able to better understand how teachers viewed their senses of self-efficacy and, as a result, how school leaders can foster self-efficacy within schools.

Natalie's personal definition of self-efficacy in the context of teaching was connected to the word confidence. As someone who had been teaching for over fifteen years, she noted how her understanding of self-efficacy had evolved with time and experience. She shared:

I think the biggest thing for me is that it's almost like confidence or the ability to implement ideas, get out there, expand your knowledge, (and) try new things. (Transcript with Natalie, January 5, 2022)

Leah noted that prior to engaging in this study she did not know much about the term self-efficacy. After doing some learning of her own, she described it as:

Your ability to promote student learning and their growth and development in the classroom. I guess, it just means, thinking what can I do? What impact do I have on my student's learning and growth? (Transcript with Leah, January 7, 2022)

Both Natalie and Leah's definitions of self-efficacy connected back to the idea of confidence in one's ability to make a difference in the classroom, which ultimately supported student learning and achievement. Additionally, both participants agreed that school leadership has the ability to impact teacher self-efficacy in a significant way.

Characterizing Excellent Leadership

Both participants focused primarily on what leadership traits or characteristics increase their self-efficacy during interview conversations. Through stories and examples, Natalie and Leah painted a picture of the dynamic interconnectedness of leadership qualities and teacher self-efficacy. Much of what they spoke to was positive experiences with school leadership and corresponding characteristics that increased their self-efficacy, demonstrating how impactful excellent leadership truly is. It was evident that was what resonated most with participants.

As the literature review elicited, a significant part of supporting teacher self-efficacy is the emotional side of leadership. Lambersky (2016) stated that an "[e]mphasis on the emotional dimension of school leadership will ensure the human side of school leadership is not lost (p. 402). Characteristics connected to emotion - such as caring, supportive, encouraging, and trusting - emerged throughout the interviews.

Leaders taking on an active role instead of a passive role of leading the school community were areas both participants felt were essential for increasing staff members' self-efficacy. Leah and Natalie both mentioned the significance of administrators being present and actively engaged in the school day. Visiting classrooms, being present in the halls, greeting at the door, and taking time to check in on teachers personally were some of the ways mentioned leaders can foster efficacious teachers. Both participants tied these leadership actions back to working as a team where everyone ultimately has the goal to support student learning and achievement. Participants characterized what they considered excellent leadership, leading to several key themes that emerged, all of which will be explored in the following section.

Research Findings

The experiences and stories shared by participants throughout the interviews enabled me to identify four key themes. All the emerging themes were connected and were leadership findings that support teacher self-efficacy. The results have been organized into the following themes: relationships, support, trust, and leading by example. While it is important to note that various other topics were discussed, these four themes were most prominent across all interview discussions. The themes are explored in the following subsections.

Theme 1: Relationships

A significant theme that emerged between both participants was the importance of relationships: establishing, building, and maintaining relationships between teachers and school leaders to foster efficacious teachers. The value placed on relationships was evident throughout conversations with both participants. Leah and Natalie elaborated on how the principal's genuine care for staff contributes to the development of meaningful, trusting relationships.

> I feel like I really need those relationships with admin, I feel like I wouldn't be able to really show up for my students in the way that I want without that. (Transcript with Leah, January 7, 2022)

> Both participants also took the COVID-19 pandemic into consideration, as they

mentioned how connection and relationships are more challenging in times when the world is calling everyone to be so isolated. On the other hand, Natalie noted a silver-lining of the pandemic in that it emphasized and shed light on just how important building and maintaining relationships is, no matter the circumstance or situation.

Theme 2: Support

Both participants also acknowledged that support from school leaders played a pivotal role in teacher self-efficacy. Kurt et al. (2012) described how "the efficacy of teachers can be improved by modelling of inspiring and supportive principals" (p. 73). In the interviews, participants discussed support in two specific contexts: (a) support to try new and innovative teaching practices in the classroom to enhance student learning and (b) overall support navigating complex scenarios or uncertain times. As a beginning teacher, Leah discussed how she relied on support from her administrator as she navigated her first year teaching, describing how she wouldn't be where she is today if it weren't for that support. Leah referenced Dr. Jody Carrington's (2019) notion of leaders being the "bottom hands" for teachers, or in other words, the support teachers can count on to quite literally uplift them and hold them throughout any and all situations, positive and challenging.

> It boils down to the leadership that we're working under… that they're here to help us work through things. (Transcript with Leah, January 7, 2022)

Without support from her administrator, Natalie described how she would not have been able to try new things in her classroom and school, such as play-based learning, something she is passionate about and wants to share with others. She referenced that administrators who are open to their teachers trying new things and "giving it a go to see how it goes" create an environment where teacher self-efficacy can bloom.

Theme 3: Leading by Example

In their experiences, both participants saw a significant impact on their self-efficacy by having a leader they look up to who models passion and dedication. They discussed how a leader

could be a model to staff by leading by example and following through in their actions and words. Versland and Erickson (2017) state, "principal's steadfast commitment not only ensured the success of instructional initiatives to promote student achievement, but that the initiatives themselves… increased individual teacher efficacy" (p. 14). Leah believed leaders must show teachers that they're committed and dedicated. Natalie added on to this idea describing how just as teachers must be role models to their students, administrators must be the same to teachers.

> Passionate leaders breed passionate teachers. You need to be able to motivate your staff, and the more in tune you are as a leader with your staff and what their priorities are, I think that makes a big difference too. (Transcript with Natalie, January 5, 2022).

It is evident, through the stories and experiences shared by both participants, that leading by example is an important contributor to teacher self-efficacy. When teachers see leaders committed to trying their best, learning from mistakes, and being passionate about what they do, teachers can embody the same as they teach their students. Leah emphasized that school leaders must "show teachers that they're committed and dedicated," which models teachers to do and be the same.

Theme 4: Trust

Perhaps the most significant theme to emerge from the interviews with participants was trust. Bukko et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of school leaders creating a climate of trust, stating that "[e]ffective principals recognize the impact trust can have on teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction" (p. 61). While this specific term was not used in both conversations, participants discussed and described reciprocal trust.

Trust in my research focused on the sense that teachers' senses of self-efficacy relied heavily on the level of trust they feel from their administrators to try new things, build

connections, and support student learning. As well, trust included their trust that administrators had their best interests at the heart of all decisions and they were there for staff. Natalie described trust in the context of her principal placing trust in her as a teacher and professional to do her job.

> I think there has to be a level of trust and a level of understanding that I am a professional and I'm not going to choose the easy path, right? Understanding that my dedication is to my students and I want them to have the best experience. And so I think that makes a big difference when you have administrators that believe in you. (Transcript with Natalie, January 5, 2022)

On the other hand, Leah referred to trusting her school leaders to be there for her when she needs it. In her first year of teaching, she recounted times when she needed someone to talk things through, seek advice from, or be supported. For her, trust was an essential component that made her feel comfortable approaching her principal in doing so. She used words such as "safe" and "comfortable" to describe an administrator she trusts - words we as educators use when describing how we want our students to feel and words leaders can carry forward on ways to increase and fortify self-efficacy in their teachers. She says:

> It's such a breath of fresh air just knowing that I can come to my administration and feel safe and just comfortable (Transcript with Leah, January 7, 2022).

Both types of trust that emerged from the interviews with participants are essential contributors to teacher self-efficacy. These provide a sense of reassurance when teachers know they can trust the leadership in their school to be there for them and when administrators trust their staff to do their jobs. Without trust, there is no foundation for self-efficacy to build.

Key Learnings

When identifying the key learnings from the study, I broke them down into three areas of my life. In the following subsections, I share what I have learned as a researcher, a teacher, and a leader.

As a Researcher

The opportunity to step into the researcher role and study an area I am passionate about has allowed me to take what I have learned and share it with others in education to help leaders best support efficacious teachers. The findings from this study demonstrate that the participating teachers feel their sense of efficacy is increased mainly as a result of their school principal's leadership. The experiential stories shared by Leah and Natalie confirmed the relationship between teacher self-efficacy school leadership. The discussions focused primarily on the relationship between teachers and leaders and shed light on what my supervisor referred to as the "slinky effect."

One main finding of this study is that, when administrators make it clear to their teachers that these teachers are supported, trusted, and believed to be capable of engaging their roles, teachers then work to support and engage their students in meaningful learning. Similar to a slinky toy going down a set of stairs, each step it hits along the way down is another variable that is impacted by excellent school leadership. Two of these important variables include teacher self-efficacy and student learning.

An important learning is that most of the themes that emerged - including relationships, trust, and support - were deemed reciprocal in nature by both Leah and Natalie. Cansoy and

Parlar (2018) described this idea as a "reciprocal casual relationship" (p. 555). They noted that many characteristics worked both ways with teachers and leaders.

Given the reciprocality of school relationships, it is vital that leaders establish meaningful relationships with their staff and that teachers build relationships with their leadership. Additionally, teachers who trust their leadership and believe their leadership trusts them are more willing to innovate in their classrooms. The reciprocal nature of many of these key themes demonstrates how closely interconnected school leadership is with teacher self-efficacy.

As a Teacher

Listening to Leah and Natalie reflect on their experiences with school leadership and how it impacted their self-efficacy provided me an opportunity for self-reflection of my own. Recognizing what I need from school leaders to be the best teacher for my students is essential in my professional growth. It also enabled me the opportunity to stop and reflect on my current sense of self-efficacy.

Attending to my experiences, alongside the participants' experiences, has made me realize that teachers, like students, require support from administrators to prosper and do their best. As a teacher still early on in my career, I understand now more than ever how much and to what degree school leadership can and has impacted my self-efficacy.

Additionally, teachers' self-efficacy beliefs influence students' self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, as a teacher, I can and should consider the self-efficacy of my students and consider how I can promote these within my classroom community. Just as teachers must believe in their ability to impact student learning, teachers must ensure students are confident in their ability to learn, grow, achieve, and succeed. Being more attuned to my self-efficacy will help ensure that I can support every student who walks through my classroom doors.

As a Leader

After listening and learning from Leah and Natalie's experiences, I recognize now more than ever how significant the impact school leadership has on teacher self-efficacy. As someone who is not yet in a leadership role, my eyes have been opened to how teachers themselves describe school leaders who can foster, support, and sustain efficacy in their schools. As a future teacher-leader, I envision prioritizing teachers to build relationships, trust, and a supportive environment.

I have come to learn that leaders can help teachers gain more confidence in their own work. As a result, teachers who are instilled with confidence in their own abilities can then positively impact student learning and achievement. In addition, I hope all teachers recognize the many gifts and talents they bring to their classroom and the greater school community while feeling recognized, seen, heard, and supported simultaneously.

As a primary teacher, I cannot help but make comparisons to lessons I do in my Grade 1 classroom. At the beginning of every year, I teach a lesson about being "bucket-fillers" - people who say or do nice things to others to uplift and "fill" their imaginary bucket. When people's buckets are full, they are happy, and when they are empty, they are sad.

Through this research, I've first realized that what fills teachers' buckets is supportive, caring school leaders. Second, I've realized that full buckets represent highly efficacious teachers. This begs the question: How can school leaders not only ensure teachers' buckets are full and remain full but perhaps even overflow?

I believe there's a correlation. Teachers whose buckets are themselves full then go on to fill the buckets of their students, supporting their needs in the classroom. This perspective that

emerged from my years as a primary teacher will carry forward with me in future roles as a leader in education.

Next Steps and Concluding Thoughts

Education is rooted in supporting students to learn, grow, and achieve success in doing so. Teachers have the ability to impact student learning and achievement significantly; however, the self-efficacy of teachers impacts their ability to do so and to what extent. For teachers to support their students in meaningful ways, they must first be supported in their role by the leadership in their school. This study found that school leadership influences teacher self-efficacy by putting teacher perceptions at the forefront.

The findings from this research will be used to inform the actions and decisions of school leaders to not only promote and sustain teacher efficacy in their teachers, but to better understand it. Teachers' beliefs about their abilities to impact student achievement are essential components of effective school change. Effective leaders are crucial to supporting teacher efficacy by empowering teachers to have confidence in their professional expertise and abilities to best support student needs and learning.

Understanding and unpacking the relationship between educational leadership and teacher self-efficacy will help those in leadership roles ensure teachers are supported and confident in their abilities, translating further down the line to student learning and achievement. As the saying goes, teachers who love teaching teach students who love learning. Perhaps we can now preface that quote with "leaders who love leading, support teachers who love teaching." And whether it's teachers or leaders, may we always be reminded of the words my superintendent shared- to give it our best, not our all.

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Contact Details

Michelle Suddaby

Concordia University of Edmonton

Masters of Education in Educational Leadership

7128 Ada Blvd NW

Edmonton, AB

T5B 4E4

msuddaby@student.concordia.ab.ca

Appendix A: Division Information and Consent Form

Teacher Perceptions of School Leadership on Self-Efficacy: A Study of Relations
School Division Information Sheet

Research Investigator:	**Supervisor:**
Michelle Suddaby	Dr. Jim Parsons
Master of Education Student	Professor, Faculty of Education
Concordia University of Edmonton	Concordia University of Edmonton
7128 Ada Blvd	7128 Ada Blvd
Edmonton, AB T5B4E3	Edmonton, AB T5B 4E4
msuddaby@student.concordia.ab.ca	jbp@ualberta.ca

Background

My name is Michelle Suddaby and I presently teach Grade 1 at St. Luke Catholic School. In addition to my teaching duties, I am working towards a Master of Education in Educational Leadership at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE). As part of my program requirements, I am conducting a research study on the impact of school leadership on teacher self-efficacy. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of CUE.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore Alberta teachers' experiences with school leadership and its impact on their self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to support and promote student learning, growth, and achievement. With increasing demands, diverse student needs, and high expectations for student success, teachers may doubt their ability to make a difference in the classroom. At the forefront of this study is the idea that teachers, like students, require support to thrive in what they do. The findings will provide a lens for educators to examine their practice with respect to leadership actions that influence self-efficacy. Additionally, the results will inform leaders on quality practices to foster high teacher efficacy in their schools.

Procedure

If you grant permission to allow Elk Island Catholic School Division to participate in the research project, three teachers from three different schools within the division will be asked to participate in two interviews conducted on a one-on-one basis with the researcher. The initial interview will take approximately forty-five minutes to complete. Once all initial interviews are conducted, the same teachers will be asked to participate in a brief follow-up interview. Interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.
The interviews will take place outside of regular classroom hours (e.g., after school) at a mutually agreed upon location or, in the case that COVID-19 persists, virtually via Google Meet or Zoom.

Upon request, the findings of this research project will be provided to Elk Island Catholic School Division after all data is received and overall findings have been processed. All data collected will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used to ensure privacy.

Potential Risks

There is little risk involved in participation other than those typically experienced in daily life and/or in interview responses. The research will be conducted with the highest ethical standards and in a way that minimizes any potential risks; however, possible risks or discomforts may include strong or difficult emotions evoked when speaking candidly about personal experiences. Available mental health care and/or services will be made known and presented to participants should they require support after participation in the interview process. Concordia University of Edmonton's Research Ethics Board's rules will be diligently followed, and all participants will be treated in a respectful manner at all times. Should there be any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact Concordia's Research Ethics Board directly at reb@concordia.ab.ca.

Potential Benefits

The anticipated benefit of participation in this study is the opportunity for teachers to engage in a reflective process by considering their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of different leadership practices on their self-efficacy and teaching practice. It will also benefit the collective school community by ensuring an equal focus and emphasis on supporting teachers as there is on students moving forward.

Confidentiality

Participation in this research project is voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any time without penalty until completion of the interviews. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Names and personal identifiers will be kept confidential by applying a pseudonym if and when necessary. To protect the participants' confidentiality and privacy, all paper and digital files containing the participants' information will be shredded and destroyed upon completion of the research.

Contact

If you have any questions or require any further information with regard to this research project, you may contact Michelle Suddaby by email at msuddaby@student.concordia.ab.ca. You may also contact Dr. Jim Parsons by email at jbp@ualberta.ca.

Sincerely,

Michelle Suddaby

Michelle Suddaby

Teacher Perceptions of School Leadership on Self-Efficacy: A Study of Relations

School Division Consent Form

Study Title: Teacher Perceptions of School Leadership on Self-Efficacy: A Study of Relations

Principal Investigator: Michelle Suddaby, Concordia University of Edmonton

Supervisor: Dr. Jim Parsons, Concordia University of Edmonton

Consent

Elk Island Catholic School Division's participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and you may refuse permission for the staff to participate or may withdraw from the research project at any time without consequence.

I, _____(print name) have read the attached information sheet and provide my consent for Elk Island Catholic School Division to participate in this research study.

Signed _____ Date _____

       EICS Division Representative

Signed _____ Date _____

       Researcher

Appendix B: School Principal Information & Consent Form

Teacher Perceptions of School Leadership on Self-Efficacy: A Study of Relations
School Principal Information Sheet

Research Investigator:	**Supervisor:**
Michelle Suddaby	Dr. Jim Parsons
Master of Education Student	Professor, Faculty of Education
Concordia University of Edmonton	Concordia University of Edmonton
7128 Ada Blvd	7128 Ada Blvd
Edmonton, AB T5B4E3	Edmonton, AB T5B 4E4
msuddaby@student.concordia.ab.ca	jbp@ualberta.ca

Background

My name is Michelle Suddaby and I presently teach Grade 1 at St. Luke Catholic School. In addition to my teaching duties, I am working towards a Master of Education in Educational Leadership at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE). As part of my program requirements, I am conducting a research study on the impact of school leadership on teacher self-efficacy. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of CUE and Thérèse deChamplain-Good on behalf of Elk Island Catholic Schools.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore Alberta teachers' experiences with school leadership and its impact on their self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to support and promote student learning, growth, and achievement. With increasing demands, diverse student needs, and high expectations for student success, teachers may doubt their ability to make a difference in the classroom. At the forefront of this study is the idea that teachers, like students, require support to thrive in what they do. The findings will provide a lens for educators to examine their practice with respect to leadership actions that influence self-efficacy. Additionally, the results will inform leaders on quality practices to foster high teacher efficacy in their schools.

Procedure

If you grant permission for your school to participate in the research project, one teacher will be asked to participate in two interviews conducted on a one-on-one basis with the researcher. The initial interview will take approximately forty-five minutes to complete. Once all initial interviews are conducted, the same teachers will be asked to participate in a brief follow-up interview. Interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. The interviews will take place outside of regular classroom hours (e.g., after school) at a mutually agreed upon location or, in the case that COVID-19 persists, virtually via Google Meet or Zoom.

Upon request, the findings of this research project will be provided to your school after all data is received and overall findings have been processed. All data collected will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used to ensure privacy.

Potential Risks

There is little risk involved in participation other than those typically experienced in daily life and/or in interview responses. The research will be conducted with the highest ethical standards and in a way that minimizes any potential risks; however, possible risks or discomforts may include strong or difficult emotions evoked when speaking candidly about personal experiences. Available mental health care and/or services will be made known and presented to participants should they require support after participation in the interview process. Concordia University of Edmonton's Research Ethics Board's rules will be diligently followed, and all participants will be treated in a respectful manner at all times. Should there be any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact Concordia's Research Ethics Board directly at reb@concordia.ab.ca.

Potential Benefits

The anticipated benefit of participation in this study is the opportunity for teachers to engage in a reflective process by considering their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of different leadership practices on their self-efficacy and teaching practice. It will also benefit the collective school community by ensuring an equal focus and emphasis on supporting teachers as there is on students moving forward.

Confidentiality

Participation in this research project is voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any time without penalty until completion of the interviews. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Names and personal identifiers will be kept confidential by applying a pseudonym if and when necessary. To protect the participants' confidentiality and privacy, all paper and digital files containing the participants' information will be shredded and destroyed upon completion of the research.

Contact

If you have any questions have any questions about participating in this study or require further information with regard to this project, you may contact Michelle Suddaby by email at msuddaby@student.concordia.ab.ca. You may also contact Dr. Jim Parsons by email at jbp@ualberta.ca.

Sincerely,

Michelle Suddaby

Michelle Suddaby

Teacher Perceptions of School Leadership on Self-Efficacy: A Study of Relations
School Principal Consent Form

Study Title: Teacher Perceptions of School Leadership on Self-Efficacy: A Study of Relations

Principal Investigator: Michelle Suddaby, Concordia University of Edmonton

Supervisor: Dr. Jim Parsons, Concordia University of Edmonton

Consent

Your school's participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and you may refuse permission for the staff member to participate or withdraw from the project at any time without consequence.

I, _____ (print name) have read the attached information sheet and provide consent for a teacher from _____ (school name) to participate in this research study.

Signed _____ Date _____
      School Principal

Signed _____ Date _____
      Researcher

Appendix C: Participant Information & Consent Form

Teacher Perceptions of School Leadership on Self-Efficacy: A Study of Relations
Teacher (Participant) Information Sheet

Research Investigator:	**Supervisor:**
Michelle Suddaby	Dr. Jim Parsons
Master of Education Student	Professor, Faculty of Education
Concordia University of Edmonton	Concordia University of Edmonton
7128 Ada Blvd	7128 Ada Blvd
Edmonton, AB T5B4E3	Edmonton, AB T5B 4E4
msuddaby@student.concordia.ab.ca	jbp@ualberta.ca

Background

My name is Michelle Suddaby and I presently teach Grade 1 at St. Luke Catholic School. In addition to my teaching duties, I am working towards a Master of Education in Educational Leadership at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE). As part of my program requirements, I am conducting a research study on the impact of school leadership on teacher self-efficacy. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of CUE and Thérèse deChamplain-Good on behalf of Elk Island Catholic Schools.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore Alberta teachers' experiences with school leadership and its impact on their self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to support and promote student learning, growth, and achievement. With increasing demands, diverse student needs, and high expectations for student success, teachers may doubt their ability to make a difference in the classroom. At the forefront of this study is the idea that teachers, like students, require support to thrive in what they do. The findings will provide a lens for educators to examine their practice with respect to leadership actions that influence self-efficacy. Additionally, the results will inform leaders on quality practices to foster high teacher efficacy in their schools.

Procedure

If you agree to participate in this research project, you will participate in two interviews conducted on a one-on-one basis with the researcher. The initial interview will last approximately forty-five minutes. At a later date, you will be asked to participate in a brief follow-up interview. Interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. The interviews will take place outside of regular classroom hours (e.g., after school) at a mutually agreed upon location or, in the case that COVID-19 persists, virtually via Google Meet or Zoom.

Upon request, the findings of this research project will be provided to you after all data is received and overall findings have been processed. All data collected will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used to ensure privacy.

Potential Risks

There is little risk involved in participation other than those typically experienced in daily life and/or in interview responses. The research will be conducted with the highest ethical standards and in a way that minimizes any potential risks; however, possible risks or discomforts may include strong or difficult emotions evoked when speaking candidly about personal experiences. Available mental health care and/or services will be made known and presented to participants should they require support after participation in the interview process. Concordia University of Edmonton's Research Ethics Board's rules will be diligently followed, and all participants will be treated in a respectful manner at all times. Should there be any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact Concordia's Research Ethics Board directly at reb@concordia.ab.ca

Potential Benefits

The anticipated benefit of your participation in this study is the opportunity to engage in a reflective process by considering your thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of different leadership practices on your self-efficacy and teaching practice. It will also benefit the collective school community by ensuring an equal focus and emphasis on supporting teachers as there is on students moving forward.

Confidentiality

Participation in this research project is voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any time without penalty until completion of the interviews. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Names and personal identifiers will be kept confidential by applying a pseudonym if and when necessary. To protect the participants' confidentiality and privacy, all paper and digital files containing the participants' information will be shredded and destroyed upon completion of the research.

Contact

If you have any questions have any questions about participating in this study or require further information with regard to this project, you may contact Michelle Suddaby by email at msuddaby@student.concordia.ab.ca. You may also contact Dr. Jim Parsons by email at jbp@ualberta.ca

Sincerely,

Michelle Suddaby

Michelle Suddaby

Teacher Perceptions of School Leadership on Self-Efficacy: A Study of Relations
Teacher (Participant) Consent Form

Study Title: Teacher Perceptions of School Leadership on Self-Efficacy: A Study of Relations

Principal Investigator: Michelle Suddaby, Concordia University of Edmonton

Supervisor: Dr. Jim Parsons, Concordia University of Edmonton

Consent

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and you may refuse permission to participate or withdraw from the research project at any time without consequence.

I, _____ (print name) have read the attached information sheet and provide my consent to participate in the research study.

Signed _____ Date _____
       Participant

Signed _____ Date _____
       Researcher

Appendix D: Interview Guide & Questions

<u>Interview #1</u>

Introductions:
- Introduce myself
- Introduce/review the purpose of the study
- State the research questions:
- How does school leadership impact teachers' self-efficacy? An
- In what ways do teachers perceive that leadership impacts their self-efficacy?

Consent:
- Ask participant if there are any questions with the study
- Review guidelines outlined on information sheet previously given to participant
- Participant and researcher sign consent form before proceeding

Participant Introduction:
- Have participant share about themselves (such as name, age, role, how many years of teaching experience, what grade taught, etc)

Questions related to participant's sense of self-efficacy:
- What does self-efficacy mean to you?
- What is your current sense of self-efficacy?
- In what ways does your self-efficacy impact your teaching practice? [Ask probing/sub-questions as needed]

Questions related to self-efficacy and school leadership:
- To what extent does your current school leadership impact your efficacy?
- Have experiences with different school leadership or leadership behaviors influenced your level of self-efficacy? If so, how?
- 'Are there particular leadership actions, behaviors, or styles that you recall increased your self-efficacy? Decreased?
- Why is it important that school leaders lead by example?
- How can school leaders encourage you, as an educator, to have confidence in your abilities to impact student learning and achievement?

[Ask probing/sub-questions as needed]

Wrap-up and conclusion:
- Would you like to add or discuss anything else relating to this topic?
- Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts today. I look forward to connecting at our next meeting date on
  (set date).

Interview #2:

Introduction:
- Thank you for taking the time to meet with me again!

Consent:
- Review guidelines and consent form from the previous meeting
- Ask verbally for consent to record interview again

Follow-up questions:
- Since we have spoken, have you thought of anything else you would like to share relating to school leadership and teacher self-efficacy?
- Here are the overarching themes that emerged from this study. What are your thoughts?
- Are there any parallels or connections between the key themes and what you said in the initial interview?
- Any concluding remarks or thoughts you would like to add?

Conclusion:
- Thank you once again for participating in my research study. Your contributions are valuable and greatly appreciated.