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Quality Leadership: A Literature Review for Northern Gateway Public Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize current research in educational leadership that will support Northern Gateway Public Schools with articulating quality leadership practices within the school district. In a previous literature review, quality teaching within a quality learning environment was explored; in this review we provide a follow-up with a focus on leadership in K-12 school contexts. Three broad themes were selected to help narrow the scope of this literature review: (1) leadership as collaborative practice; (2) leading learning; and (3) adaptive leadership within complex systems. The Alberta Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) was used as a frame of reference in the analysis of the literature. Connections are made between leadership themes and dimensions of teaching within quality learning environments. Potential implications for school-based and jurisdictional leaders are identified, and recommendations are made for Northern Gateway Public Schools as they continue on their journey towards quality learning for all students.

Keywords: Alberta Leadership Quality Standard, quality leadership, quality teaching, school leadership

Foreword

Although this synthesis of the literature prepared by Van Rosendaal and Brown was specifically designed for the benefit of educational leaders in Northern Gateway Public Schools (NGPS), it also serves as a helpful guide for all Alberta school and system leaders who strive to provide quality leadership that results in quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in their schools. Systematic research reviews such as this are increasingly being used to inform the professional judgments of individual leadership practitioners and to frame coherent, collective approaches to professional practice within school systems.

This comprehensive and systematic 28-page review of the leadership literature unfolds in five parts. After addressing carefully selected general research on quality leadership in relation to the Alberta Professional Practice Standards in part one, the heart of the documentation focuses on three major themes in three separate sections. These themes will be welcomed for their clarity and contextual applicability by those who provide leadership in various ways and from a range of positions in classrooms, departments, schools, and jurisdiction offices. A fifth section provides recommendations to support the articulation of a NGPS vision for quality leadership.

Connections are made throughout the synthesis between its findings and the results of a previous literature review on quality teaching (Brown, Thomas, Delanoy, & Brandon, 2018) completed for the same district. In fact, connections between leadership and teaching practices are a recurring feature. A number of comparative and summary tables support Theme One, which emphasizes the impact of *collaborative leadership practice*; Theme two, which focuses on the centrality of *leading learning*; and Theme Three, which underscores the need for and importance of *adaptive leadership in complex systems*.

Readers of this publication will find that it has the potential to influence practice in at least four significant ways. First, highlights connections between quality leadership, quality teaching and student learning. Second, it provides a readable and actionable synthesis of current school leadership literature. Third, it situates findings in relation to the professional practice standard and nine competencies for school leaders in Alberta. Finally, the review identifies a number of potential implications for school-based and system leaders.

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Overview

Purpose: The purpose of the literature review is to synthesize literature that can inform the articulation of quality leadership in a district that focuses on quality teaching and quality learning environments to ensure optimal learning for all students.

Quality Teaching: A previous literature review conducted for Northern Gateway Public Schools synthesized contemporary research on the topics of quality teaching and quality learning environments.

Northern Gateway Public Schools District Mission Statement: Northern Gateway Public Schools is committed to providing a quality education for all students to achieve their personal best in a dynamic and respectful environment.

Alberta's Professional Practice Standards: To support the implementation of the Alberta Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS), Northern Gateway Public Schools (NGPS) is working in collaboration with school-based and district leaders to articulate a shared vision for quality leadership.

Guiding Questions: The following questions were used to guide this literature review:

- How does an examination of contemporary literature inform the articulation of quality leadership?
- What is the relationship between quality leadership, quality teaching, and student learning?
- What is the connection to Alberta's professional practice standards for school leaders?

Overview: In this literature review, we:

- make connections between quality leadership, quality teaching and student learning;
- provide a synthesis of current literature related to school leadership;
- relate findings to the professional standards for school leaders in Alberta; and
- identify potential implications for school-based and system leaders.

Themes: The literature is organized into three themes relevant to school leadership:

- leadership as collaborative practice,
- leading learning, and
- adaptive leadership within complex systems.

Structure: Within each theme, an overview is provided of the topic and its significance to the field of school leadership. Suggestions are made for how leaders might create the conditions for quality learning environments and connections are made to Alberta's Leadership Quality Standard. Finally, characteristics of effective leadership actions and decisions are described that are consistent with the findings of the research literature.

Leadership Considerations at the School Level and Beyond: An analysis of quality leadership requires consideration of factors at the school level, the jurisdictional level and at the provincial level (Wahlstrom,

Louis, Leithwood & Anderson, 2010). Within the highly interdependent structures of Alberta's education system, leadership impacts, and is impacted by, the actions and decisions at the classroom, school and district levels. The focus of this literature review is an analysis of the leadership practices that most directly influence quality teaching and optimal learning for all students. Although potential implications are identified for district leaders, an emphasis has been placed on school-based leadership.

Models of Educational Leadership: The field of educational leadership is extensively researched; over the years a number of models or frameworks have been developed through which one's particular approach to leadership might be studied. Proponents of *Visionary Leadership* hold that the role of a school leader is to articulate a sense of direction that inspires passion and commitment from their community, for example, while *Transformational Leaders* are committed to building collaborative, innovative, solution-oriented communities dedicated to ongoing professional learning. *Heroic Leaders* courageously (and often single-handedly) rescue and transform floundering schools while practitioners of *Distributed Leadership* strategically delegate responsibilities to others in the organization (MacBeath, 2003; Spillane, 2010) or lead professional collaboration towards improved teaching and learning (Harris, 2014). A comparative analysis of various leadership models was out of scope for this literature review; rather, specific leadership practices are considered irrespective of the particular leadership theories or framework(s) to which they may belong. Although terms like instructional leadership, collaborative leadership, or adaptive leadership are used, they are used descriptively rather than to denote a specific set of theories or practices.

Alberta's Professional Practice Standards

In September 2019, new professional practice standards for teachers, leaders and superintendents come into effect in the province of Alberta (Alberta Education, n.d.). In addition to guiding programming for new teachers and emerging leaders, and providing the basis for teacher, principal and superintendent certification, these professional practice standards offer a frame of reference for professional reflection, learning, and supervision.

The Alberta Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) (2018) states, ***“Quality leadership occurs when the leader’s ongoing analysis of the context, and decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality teaching and optimum learning for all school students”*** (p. 3). The following competencies are identified in relationship to the LQS:

- fostering effective relationships,
- modeling commitment to professional learning,
- embodying visionary leadership,
- leading a learning community,
- supporting the application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit,
- providing instructional leadership,
- developing leadership capacity,
- managing school operations and resources, and
- understanding and responding to the larger societal context.

Following a similar structure, the Alberta Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS) (2018) states, ***“Quality superintendent leadership occurs when the superintendent’s ongoing analysis of the context, and the superintendent’s decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality school leadership, quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in the school authority”*** (p. 3). The following competencies are identified in relationship to the SLQS:

- building effective relationships,
- modeling commitment to professional learning,
- visionary leadership,
- leading learning,
- ensuring First Nations, Métis and Inuit education for all students,
- school authority operations and resources, and
- supporting effective governance.

Alberta’s professional practice standards are nested, meaning that educators who meet the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) must also meet the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS), and educators who meet the Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS) must also meet the LQS and TQS. The LQS will be used as a frame for analyzing the literature in this review.

Connections between Quality Teaching and Quality Leadership

In a previous literature review for Northern Gateway Public Schools, Brown, Thomas, Delanoy, and Brandon (2018) explored the topic of quality teaching in quality learning environments. Their findings were summarized around four dimensions of quality teaching:

- **Teacher as Designer:** Teachers are designing: (1) knowledge creating systems with opportunities for everyone to be contributing members in the learning community; (2) engaging learning experiences with opportunities for deep learning to occur; (3) for the digital age with opportunities for learners to use technology (p. 9)
- **Teacher as Engaged Professional:** Teachers are engaging in professional learning: (1) in the company of peers in physical and digital learning spaces; (2) involving cycles of inquiry centered around student learning (p. 11)
- **Teacher as Expert in Pedagogical Knowledge:** (1) Teachers design learning intentionally integrating content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of the discipline; (2) Teachers draw on research-informed strategies to purposefully embed assessment when designing learning (p. 13), and
- **Teacher as Cultivator of Quality Learning Environments:** Teachers design learning: (1) with attention to providing culturally responsive instruction; and (2) to promote a positive classroom culture and safety in taking risks for learning (p. 15).

Quality Teaching: Implications for Leadership

In Brown et al.'s (2018) Quality Teaching literature review, a number of recommendations were made for how leaders might support the development of quality learning environments (p. 18).

- **Shared Leadership:** Promote shared and distributed leadership that supports learning at all levels of leadership so that leaders are not doing things to people but learning alongside teachers (Timperley, 2011)
- **Collective Responsibility:** Shift the focus in the workplace from individual to collective responsibility (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2011; Yuan & Zhang, 2016) and goal setting
- **Modify Schedules:** Modify and rearrange schedules to allow for collaboration (Yuan & Zhang, 2016) with frequent opportunities (Penuel, Sun, Frank & Gallagher, 2012) for teachers to engage in ongoing inquiry (Timperley, 2011) into their teaching practice and for teachers to work together so they can design intellectually engaging learning experiences for students (Friesen, 2009)
- **Focused Collaboration:** Provide time for focused collaborative professional meetings with expectations (Robinson, 2011); use the time purposefully and effectively (Timperley, 2008); find strategies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of collaboration (Berlin & White, 2012); emphasize the critical examination of teaching practices (Yuan & Zhang, 2016)
- **Access to Expertise:** Make sure expertise is available to support teachers in getting help when they need it (Fogarty & Pete, 2009); this can be provided through a variety of forms (i.e. coaching, mentorship, learning leaders, teacher leaders, external expertise/consultants)

- **Evidence Informed Dialogue:** Facilitate evidence informed conversations (Earl, 2008; Timperley, 2008) with teachers and use these to challenge existing assumptions and reflect on teaching practices to inform instructional decisions about learning designs
- **Small Changes:** Start with small changes to facilitate the implementation of new practices recognizing that teachers are making changes while doing their day-to-day normal routines (Wiliam, 2016)

Common Characteristics of Quality Leadership, Teaching and Learning

In many ways, findings from this quality leadership literature review mirror Brown et al.'s (2018) findings about quality teaching and quality learning environments. In part, this is due to the nature of leadership practice—an effective leader is one who creates the conditions under which quality teaching can flourish. In part, though, the alignment is more systemic or structural—there are parallels in how we orient ourselves as professionals, how we conceptualize the work of learning organizations, and the kinds of teaching, learning and leadership actions that are understood to positively impact student learning. The table on the following page summarizes characteristics that are common to the four dimensions of quality teaching identified by Brown et al. (2018) and the three themes of quality leadership discussed in this literature review.

		Quality Leadership		
		Theme 1: Leadership as Collaborative Practice	Theme 2: Leading Learning	Theme 3: Adaptive Leadership within a Complex System
Quality Teaching Dimensions	Teacher as designer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High levels of individual and collective autonomy and ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personalized learning designed for and with teachers and students Shared vision, sense of direction and real-world connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short cycles of evidence gathering, problem/possibility definition, design and adjustment Data that is closely linked to classroom practice
	Teacher as engaged professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible, networked structures for distributed or collaborative leadership Shared responsibility for student learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained inquiry into student learning and teaching practice Strategic, intensive, learning-centered interactivity between professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Openness to divergent thinking and creative solutions Shared ownership of problems of practice
	Teacher as expert in pedagogical knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively making use of individuals' professional knowledge, skills, experience, interest and expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embedded professional learning with a clear through line to student learning Opportunities to learn from one another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible, responsive approaches to teaching, learning and leadership based on specific contextual variables
	Teacher as cultivator of quality learning environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture of mutual respect, honesty and integrity Meaningful connections to experts beyond the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to optimal learning for every student Supported risk-taking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity of voices and perspectives Attentiveness to emergent conditions

Table 1. Characteristics of Three Quality Leadership Themes in Relationship to Dimensions of Quality Teaching

Introduction

Quality Leadership

School leaders are widely recognized as having a positive, if indirect, impact on student learning (Hallinger, 2011; Harris, 2014; Leithwood, 2007; Pont, Nushce & Moorman, 2008; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). By influencing the people who are in a position to directly impact the learning, leaders create the conditions under which quality teaching and optimal student learning can occur. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2019) recently revisited their seminal research on successful school leadership, and found that:

School leadership has a significant effect on features of the school organization which positively influences the quality of teaching and learning. While moderate in size, this leadership effect is vital to the success of most school improvement efforts. (p. 2)

Investigating the question of what constitutes quality leadership requires looking at leadership broadly—not simply analyzing the leadership actions of school principals. Quality leadership can explore the wider range of leadership practices that positively impact teaching and learning, regardless of an individual’s assigned role within the organization (Brandon, Hollweck, Donlevy & Whalen, 2018). As we will explore in Theme 1, leadership can be understood as collaborative practice, with the principal (or others with positional authority within a school) playing a critical role in designing and sustaining leadership networks. In Theme 2, we consider school leadership for learning—examining the leadership actions and decisions that foster a culture of professional inquiry and knowledge building in support of student learning. Finally, in Theme 3, we take a closer look at the nature of change within complex systems and the adaptive leadership practices that foster flexibility, responsiveness, innovation, and a culture of continuous improvement.

At the core of quality leadership practice is a persistent focus on improving student learning (Hallinger, 2011; Hopkins, 2008; Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). After more than a decade of research in the field, however, Elmore (2016) observes that there is no universal formula or model for school leadership that guarantees improvement in student learning—what is essential, rather, is the ability to recognize the contextual variables influencing one’s leadership actions and decisions, and to be able to respond accordingly (Harris & Jones, 2017). According to Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2019), the vast majority of school leaders apply the same basic leadership practices; the difference between those who positively impact student learning and those with a neutral (or even negative) impact have to do with one’s ability to decide the appropriate course of action based on the unique characteristics of the situation. This is the essence of the Alberta Leadership Quality Standard (2018):

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

A school leader’s ongoing analysis of the context incorporates information from a wide range of sources while attending to what is significant to the specific situation. Principals who adopt a stance of curiosity

and focused inquiry have a greater impact on teacher practice, and ultimately on student learning, than principals whose leadership is firmly rooted in their own established knowledge and authority (Fullan, 2014; Robinson, 2017). Effective leaders seek to learn from students, teachers, colleagues, and experts in the field—they continually adapt and refine their practice to incorporate new ways of thinking and working, and continually adjust their approach to meet the ever-changing contextual variables of teaching and learning in their schools (Kools & Stoll, 2016).

Principals play a critical role in fostering teacher agency and advancing a culture of teacher professionalism (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015); a distinct feature of quality learning environments is a collective orientation toward focused professional inquiry and collaboration (Brown et al., 2018; Kools & Stoll, 2016). The work of a school leader centers on designing, developing and improving structures, and systems that elicit meaningful engagement from students, teachers and the broader community (Kools & Stoll, 2016). Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) note:

The factors that separate Canada, Singapore, and Finland from many systems, for example, are not their teacher evaluation systems or lists of professional standards. The fundamental difference between these systems and many other countries is a culture of collaborative professionalism that permeates the system, serving both individual and collective learning.
(p. 7)

In learning organizations with a culture of collaborative professionalism, internal accountability precedes external accountability—teachers feel a sense of responsibility, first and foremost, to students, colleagues, parents, and the broader educational community (Harris, 2012). Teachers who are empowered and engaged also feel a greater sense of individual and collective efficacy—they show a greater willingness to take risks, and to invest time and energy, as they have reason to believe that their efforts will pay off in terms of positive outcomes for students (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

Fostering meaningful engagement also requires working with the school community “to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 5). The vision and values of the school community guide decision-making, provide direction for goal setting, and shape shared approaches to problem solving; they are implicit in both the ends and the means of educational leadership (Hallinger, 2011). Leadership decisions that are grounded in moral purpose (Fullan, 2002), that are made ethically, with openness and integrity (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015), and that are consistent with an established theory of action (Leithwood, 2007) are known to positively impact school culture, teacher practice and student learning.

Effective school principals are not just visionary leaders but are also capable educators. In order to create the conditions under which a culture of collaborative professionalism can flourish, teachers need to believe that the principal is knowledgeable about teaching and learning, competent with organizational structures, and capable of managing complex issues in ethical and respectful ways (Hallinger, 2011;

Robinson, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The importance of trust in building individual and collective efficacy in learning organizations cannot be overstated (Breakspear, 2017).

Exploring the question of what constitutes quality leadership requires taking a broad view of the leadership actions and decisions taken by individuals and groups within a learning organization. Actions and decisions that lead to quality teaching and optimal learning for all students are clearly focused on student learning, and are adaptive to a wide range of contextual variables. Effective leaders continually revisit, refine and improve their leadership decisions, making adjustments based on the unique opportunities and constraints of specific teaching and learning situations. Quality leadership is trusted as credible, grounded in a shared vision and values, and oriented toward teacher professionalism and a culture of professional inquiry and collaboration. This literature review explores the topic of quality leadership through three themes: leadership as collaborative practice, leading learning, and adaptive leadership within complex systems.

Theme 1 | Leadership as Collaborative Practice

Quality Teaching Dimensions and Leadership as Collaborative Practice

As per Table 1, which lists characteristics common to quality leadership and dimensions of quality teaching (Brown et al., 2018), leadership as collaborative practice incorporates:

- High levels of individual and collective autonomy and ownership
- Actively making use of individuals' professional knowledge, skills, experience, interest and expertise
- Flexible, networked structures for distributed or collaborative leadership
- Shared responsibility for student learning
- A culture of mutual respect, honesty and integrity
- Meaningful connections to experts beyond the school

Overview

School leadership, considered broadly, includes not only those with formal leadership titles such as principals, assistant principals, department heads and learning leaders, but also includes a wider group of professionals within and outside of schools (Pont et al., 2008). Within the research literature, a range of models or frameworks are referenced, representing various ways leadership might be taken up in a shared way (i.e. distributed, distributive, collaborative, participatory, shared or collective leadership). No single framework is the focus for this literature review. Rather, an analysis was conducted of important themes, within and across these various leadership models, that are shown to positively impact teaching and learning.

Leadership practices that actively and intentionally share leadership responsibilities across a learning organization are widely recognized as contributing to a culture of heightened professionalism, an inclination toward continuous improvement, increased accountability for student learning, and a greater sense of individual and collective efficacy (Brandon et al., 2018; Fullan, 2014; Fullan, 2019; Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson & Slavit, 2011; Sussman, 2018). When leadership is taken up as collaborative practice, individuals recognize the influence they have on one another and on the decisions that are made within the organization; this leads to a greater sense of responsibility for ensuring optimal learning for all students (Fullan, 2014; Harris 2012; Kools & Stoll, 2016). Staff engagement, persistence, and the ability to creatively and independently overcome obstacles also improve when they are empowered to take leadership actions based on areas of knowledge, interest and expertise (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Kools & Stoll, 2016; Leithwood, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Ultimately, the effectiveness of collaborative leadership practice depends on the relationship between student learning needs and the patterns of shared ownership within the organization (Leithwood et al., 2019), and requires high levels of teacher autonomy and professionalism (Priestley et al., 2015).

When leadership is distributed throughout the organization, schools are better positioned to withstand changes in leadership and sustain momentum towards student learning goals (Kools & Stoll, 2016). They are also better able to adapt to changing circumstances, such as emergent complexities within the student population, new learning mandates from the school authority or the province, or developing trends in

educational research (Harris, 2012; Pont et al., 2008). Distributed leadership can contribute to mobilizing expertise and building overall capacity for organizational change (Harris, 2012).

How leadership is shared within a school depends on a number of variables: the kinds of decisions to be made or leadership actions to be taken, the specific expertise of individuals or groups of professionals, factors specific to certain student populations, or the leadership aspirations and professional learning intentions of individual staff members (Pont et al., 2008; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Within systems of distributed leadership, different patterns of involvement and influence will emerge in different situations (Harris 2014; Pont et al., 2008; Wahlstrom et al., 2010), and different patterns of leadership and decision-making will emerge at different times (Hallinger, 2011). Networked leadership responsibilities tend to fall along lines of expertise and interest, with different individuals becoming a central node in the network at different times, depending on the leadership action to be taken (Elmore, 2004). “Distributed leadership does not mean everybody leads but rather that everybody has the potential to lead, at some time, depending on expertise and experience” (Harris, 2014, p. 41).

When leadership is taken up as collaborative practice, it is important to recognize the dynamic interplay of autonomous individuals within the learning organization. While school leaders can be highly influential in terms of the cultural and organizational factors leading to adaptive leadership structures, these self-sustaining networks tend to operate independent of direct organizational authority (Elmore, 2016). When the conditions of the system incorporate high levels of interconnectivity, interdependent interaction and active engagement toward a common purpose, patterns of collective inquiry and action emerge. Leadership, therefore, can be understood as an emergent property of a complex system and thus not exclusively directed by school leaders (Hallinger, 2011).

Distributed leadership is not something done “by” or “to” members of organisations, but rather an emergent property inherent in the social collective such that “concerted action” responsive to situational needs and opportunities is carried out within a set of shared relationships where expertise and initiative are pooled. (Pont et al., 2008, p. 82)

Creating the Conditions for Leadership as Collaborative Practice

Although there is no single formula for developing effective leadership networks (Harris, 2012), principals and others with formalized leadership roles do play an important role in designing the structures and developing the cultures where these networks can thrive (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). In general, schools that positively impact student learning tend to have thicker leadership structures—not just flatter, but more highly interconnected (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2019; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Effective school leaders design leadership networks that share responsibilities broadly, with a high degree of interdependence; this often requires redefining roles and building stronger connections between distributed areas of leadership (Harris, 2012).

Shared leadership creates conditions for maximizing individual and collective strengths in service of student learning (Sussman, 2018). Although the sharing of administrative responsibilities (ordering supplies, managing shared spaces and resources, timetabling, etc.) may be an established method of

managing school operations (and may, in fact, be very closely related to the enacting of learning-centered leadership decisions), these responsibilities in and of themselves don't create the conditions for collaborative, learning-centered leadership (Harris, 2012). The goal, rather, is to nurture the development of a culture where professionals share in the responsibility of high-quality teaching and learning for all (Hallinger 2011; Hargreaves, Halász & Pont, 2008; Hopkins, 2008). Responsibilities within learning-centered leadership networks center on defining and refining problems of practice, improving student learning environments, developing a range of effective teaching strategies, and examining evidence of impact on student learning (Pont et al., 2008).

Principals also play a critical role in building the culture of trust and mutual support necessary for interdependent, cohesive leadership networks (Hallinger, 2011; Kools & Stoll, 2016; Pont et al., 2008; Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). School leaders create space for all voices to be heard, while ensuring that none dominate (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). They establish expectations for culturally responsive communication and a safe space for challenging the status quo (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). They spend time working alongside teachers and other professionals and show genuine interest in and appreciation for their leadership within the learning community (Donald, Glanfield, & Sturenberg, 2012).

In addition to the development of leadership networks with teachers and other professionals in their schools, effective school leaders build strong working relationships with students, parents, Elders, knowledge keepers and experts in the community (Hargreaves, 2008; LearnAlberta, n.d.; Pont et al., 2008). When these working relationships begin to take on similar characteristics to the collaborative leadership practices within schools, new possibilities emerge for addressing the complexities of our current educational reality (Hargreaves et al., 2008). Effective leaders work with students, empowering them to develop new approaches to learning and the design of supportive learning environments (Kools & Stoll, 2016). Parents and community stakeholders are engaged in visioning, resourcing, and overcoming obstacles to student success. Elders, knowledge keepers, and post-secondary partners help to reimagine and reconcile the ways we work together, developing innovative approaches for the benefit of all learners (Alberta Education, 2018a). The role of the leader in creating networks that extend beyond the school involves finding common purpose and coherence, creating mechanisms for communication and collaboration, and ensuring a shared understanding of the impact that the decisions made within the network have had on student learning (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016).

Characteristics of Leadership as Collaborative Practice

The Alberta Leadership Quality Standard (2018) speaks to decision-making based on ongoing analysis of contextual variables. When leadership is taken up as collaborative practice, these decisions are:

- Inclusive of a wide range of professionals, regardless of formal leadership designation
- Adaptable to changing circumstances
- Dependent on the dynamic interplay of autonomous individuals engaged toward a common goal
- Grounded in a shared responsibility for high quality teaching and learning for all
- Dependent on a culture of trust and mutual support, and
- Inclusive of students, parents, community stakeholders, Elders, knowledge keepers, experts and post-secondary partners

Connections to Alberta's Leadership Quality Standard

While all nine leadership competencies function in an integrated and interdependent way (Alberta Education, 2018a), it is worth considering the significance of three specific leadership competencies at play in this context:

- **Fostering Effective Relationships:** *A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community* (p. 4). This involves collaborative problem solving within a culture of trust and mutual respect. It requires leaders to create opportunities for the meaningful involvement of parents or guardians, and establishing relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents/guardians, Elders/knowledge keepers, local leaders and community members.
- **Building Leadership Capacity:** *A leader provides opportunities for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and to support others in fulfilling their educational roles* (p. 7). This involves team building and promoting shared leadership among members of the school community, mentoring and empowering teachers in educational leadership roles, creating processes for consultative and collaborative decision making, establishing effective school councils, and ensuring students have the opportunity to exercise their voice in school leadership and decision making.
- **Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge About First Nations, Métis and Inuit:** *A leader supports the school community in acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students* (p. 5). This involves actively pursuing opportunities and engaging in practices to facilitate reconciliation within the school community.

Theme 2 | Leading Learning

Quality Teaching Dimensions and Leading Learning

As per Table 1, which lists characteristics common to quality leadership and dimensions of quality teaching (Brown et al., 2018), leading learning incorporates:

- Shared vision, sense of direction and real-world connections
- Sustained inquiry into student learning and teaching practice
- Supported risk-taking
- Embedded professional learning with a clear through-line to student learning
- Commitment to optimal learning for every student
- Opportunities to learn from one another
- Strategic, intensive, learning-centered interactivity between professionals
- Personalized learning designed for and with teachers

Overview

In a new system that enables and is reinforced through effective collaboration in networks, learning is placed at the center of the education endeavor, and evidence of improved learning takes precedence over any claims of non-compliance. In a learning-oriented system, lead learning, or creating the conditions for all to learn while learning alongside them about what works and what does not (see Fullan, 2014) is the new role of leaders across the educational system, regardless of their formal role within a hierarchy. (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016, p. 18).

Within the research literature, one of the most significant and consistent findings is the importance of a clear through-line between leadership decisions and student learning (Elmore, 2004; Hallinger, 2011; Kools & Stoll, 2016; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Effective leaders ensure all staff have a shared understanding of what they are trying to achieve on behalf of student learning, and that all staff are actively engaged as professionals—and as learners—toward that end (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). In a learning-oriented system, educators systematically inquire into the practices that will lead to optimal student learning in the context of their classroom or school (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). Teachers and school leaders engage in professional learning through cycles of collaborative inquiry, instructional design, and the analysis of evidence of student learning (Kools & Stoll, 2016). Leaders of learning organizations (organizations that learn) set the tone for professional inquiry (Harris, 2012; Tschannan-Moran & Gareis, 2015), create structures for learning from, and with, one another (Davis, Sumara & D’Amour, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), and provide guidance in interpreting evidence of the relationship between student learning and teacher practice (Timperley, 2011).

Sustained, embedded professional learning requires meaningful engagement—deep, purposeful inquiry that is directly connected to the real work of teachers in classrooms, and the real learning of the students in their care (Timperley, 2011). This type of professional learning centers on interesting questions and problems of practice—it invites risk-taking, disrupts the status quo, and empowers teachers to recognize and overcome constraints within their classroom and beyond (Kools & Stoll, 2016). For school leaders, developing a culture of professionalism and professional learning involves creating opportunities for

learning between colleagues (Breakspear, 2017), recognizing teachers' areas of interest and expertise, and creating spaces for the cross-pollination of knowledge and skills (Hopkins, 2008; Kennedy et al., 2011; Kools & Stoll, 2016). Learning organizations that collectively inquire into the impact of their professional practice in this way can be described as knowledge building communities.

As described by Scardamalia and Bereiter (2010), knowledge building communities are characterized by a high level of agency and intentionality, sustained inquiry into problems worth solving, and constructive engagement in democratic knowledge-building dialogue. In knowledge-building schools, the collective work of learners and teachers is "improving the *knowledge itself*, rather than the contents of students' minds" (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2010, p. 8). Knowledge advancement is understood to be a community achievement, rather than an individual endeavour, and it is undertaken with the aim of ongoing idea improvement, rather than the achievement of a predetermined final state. In learning organizations, new knowledge does not rest with individuals or groups, but rather evolves into new ways of thinking and working throughout the organization (Reid, 2014).

The goal of knowledge-creating communities is not uniformity of ideas (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2010) or the establishment of universal "best practices." Practice within endeavours as complex as teaching and learning must allow for divergence rather than requiring convergence on the same enactment of knowledge and skills (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016).

What you see when you watch how divergent learning environments work is something radically different: You see adults and young people engaged in a common pursuit of interesting questions, disciplined by a set of agreements for membership in a community, with the expectation that the world is capable of delivering gratifying surprises if one stays engaged with it. (Elmore, 2016)

Learning organizations are tightly linked—structurally, symbolically, and culturally; they operate as an organic whole rather than as a collection of independent subsystems (Robinson, Bendkison, Mcnaughton, Wilson & Zhu, 2017). Frequent interaction between teachers, students, leaders and experts (including those outside of the school) is essential for highly effective networks. When a high density of interactivity exists, both within the group and between the group members and external experts, we maximize the potential for professional learning (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016) and foster high levels of individual and collective responsibility (Fullan & Hargreaves 2016).

Creating the Conditions for Leading Learning

In learning organizations, principals set the tone for professionalism, implicitly and explicitly, through their actions and decisions (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2016). Effective leaders model interdependence and mutually supportive relationships, generosity with professional knowledge and skills, and openness to constructive feedback (Timperley, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). They invite consideration of alternate views, model respectful conflict resolution, and foster a shared commitment to student learning (Robinson, 2019). Leaders play a pivotal role in creating the kind of culture where teachers are willing to submit their practice to scrutiny—where they

regularly reflect on evidence of their impact, seek feedback and insights from students, leaders and colleagues, and explore new ways of thinking and working (Robinson et al., 2008).

Leadership in learning organizations requires comfort with changes in patterns of growth, tolerance of messiness and ambiguity, and a willingness to explore new possibilities alongside teachers and other professionals (Pont et al., 2008). Effective leaders are highly attuned to teachers' practice, and they seek to understand the belief system that underpins it (Priestley et al., 2015; Robinson, 2017). Within schools that function as knowledge building communities, leaders themselves also actively seek out ways to improve the quality of their thinking and decision-making (Elmore, 2016). They question their assumptions, examine their belief systems, and continually seek to understand what they are missing and where it might be learned (Elmore, 2004; Elmore 2016). Growth-oriented leaders tend to take a broader view of instructional leadership focused on inquiry, exploration and creative problem solving (Breakspear, 2017). In short, effective leaders are effective learners (Robinson, 2008; Hallinger 2011).

Learning does not occur independent of lived experience, but unstructured, on-the-job learning does not automatically generalize to a robust set of professional skills (Elmore, 2016). Sustained day-to-day interaction in a feedback-rich environment, combined with rigorous investigation into research, theory and outside expertise, is required (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). Effective leaders structure embedded professional learning around the development and refinement of a research-supported theory of action and evidence of impact on student learning (Elmore, 2016). This kind of learning takes time and practice in a safe, supportive environment (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016).

Leadership in knowledge-building communities can be challenging work. Learning organizations with a healthy diversity of teaching and learning styles, strengths, talents and interests are often fraught with disagreement and contention (Fullan & Hargreaves 2016). Effective leaders pay careful attention to learning conditions—too much tension leads to unproductive conflict, while too much complacency leads to stagnation. Asymmetrical power structures and non-reciprocal relationships can undermine collective professionalism (Priestley et al., 2015). Communities that lack a sense of direction and shared purpose can flounder, while overly-directed systems lack the professional autonomy necessary for developing individual and collective efficacy (ibid). Grounded in a belief system about why the work to be undertaken is worthwhile, and coupled with a specific theory of action, effective leaders guide systematic inquiry into what works for students (Timperley, 2011) while taking a stance of a learner themselves. In other words, school leaders are committed to continual improvement, learning alongside others and advancing the learning of every individual in the community, including their own.

Characteristics of Leading Learning

The Alberta Leadership Quality Standard (2018) speaks to decision-making based on ongoing analysis of contextual variables. When leadership is learning-centered, these decisions are:

- Focused on a clear through line between teaching practice and student learning
- Designed to foster a high level of professionalism and autonomy
- Oriented toward sustained idea improvement
- Tolerant of divergence, messiness and ambiguity
- Grounded in a sense of curiosity and authentic engagement
- Geared towards interconnected networks of professionals
- Committed to the learning of every individual in the community
- Open to continuous improvement

Connections to Alberta's Leadership Quality Standard

While all nine leadership competencies function in an integrated and interdependent way (Alberta Education, 2018a), it is worth considering the significance of three specific leadership competencies at play in this context:

- **Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning:** *A leader engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to identify opportunities for improving leadership, teaching, and learning* (p. 4). This involves engaging with others to build personal and collective professional capacities and expertise, seeking, critically reviewing and applying educational research to inform effective practice, and actively seeking out feedback and information from a variety of sources to enhance leadership practice.
- **Leading a Learning Community:** *A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning* (p. 5). This requires developing shared responsibility for the success of all students, creating meaningful, collaborative learning opportunities, and cultivating a culture of high expectations for all students and staff.
- **Providing Instructional Leadership:** *A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences* (p. 6). This involves building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students, interpreting and taking action based on a wide range of data, facilitating access to resources, agencies and experts within and outside the school community, and providing professional learning and mentorship opportunities that support each teacher in meeting the Teacher Quality Standard.

Theme 3 | Adaptive Leadership within Complex Systems

Quality Teaching Dimensions and Adaptive Leadership within Complex Systems

As per Table 1, which lists characteristics common to quality leadership and dimensions of quality teaching (Brown et al., 2018), adaptive leadership within complex systems incorporates:

- Flexible, responsive approaches to teaching, learning and leadership based on specific contextual variables
- Attentiveness to emergent conditions
- Openness to divergent thinking and creative solutions
- Short cycles of evidence gathering, problem/possibility definition, design and adjustment
- Data which is closely linked to classroom practice
- Shared ownership of problems of practice
- Diversity of voices and perspectives

Overview

Historically, education systems (and their requisite leadership strategies) were modeled after simple, mechanical systems. Organizations, even when exceptionally complicated, followed a logic of linear cause and effect relationships—if leaders could manage the inputs effectively, they could reasonably expect predictable outputs. Current research, however, models learning organizations according to the characteristics of complex, adaptive systems (Davis et al., 2012; Snyder, 2013). Leadership within these systems requires flexibility, creativity, and an orientation toward learning and design.

Complex systems are characterized by a large number of highly interconnected elements that co-evolve (or *learn*) together (Cilliers, 2002; Davis et al., 2012). Operating far from equilibrium, complex systems exhibit self-organizing properties whereby new structures or patterns of behaviour emerge independent of a central locus of control (Cilliers, 2002; Snyder, 2013). Complex adaptive systems are open—they influence, and are influenced by social, political, community, and academic factors outside of the organization (Hallinger, 2011). Complex systems are also sensitively responsive to certain conditions—it can be exceedingly difficult to predict or project how small changes in interactions amongst elements of the system, or between the system and its environment, will play out over time. Operating within these systems requires a robust and dynamic repertoire of leadership practices that can be flexibly adapted to emergent conditions (Fullan, 2019; Hallinger, 2011).

Adaptive leadership is characterized by continuous experimentation, learning and refinement (Snyder, 2013), with an openness to new ideas and a genuine curiosity about how to create the conditions for optimal student learning (Breakspear, 2017). “The process of improvement, like all developmental processes, is neither continuous nor linear; it looks more like a process of punctuated equilibrium: periods of significant increases in performance, followed by periods of consolidation.” (Elmore, 2008, p. 64). Within knowledge-building communities (as described in section 2), school leaders take on the role of responsive, creative change agents within holistic, interdependent systems (Kools & Stoll, 2016). As Leithwood et al. (2019), advise, “A school leader’s main question should always be ‘Under these conditions, what should I do?’” (p. 7).

The ability to be agile—responsive, quick to spot emerging problems or opportunities, and work in short-iterative cycles of adaptation, learning, and improvement—is a critical meta-capability for the future of school leadership at all levels. Rather than engaging in efforts to create perfect, detailed plans and milestones and then implementing the strategy with fidelity, agile approaches embrace the inherent complexity and ambiguity of change processes in complex-relational environments. (Breakspear, 2017, p. 69)

Adaptive leaders are highly attuned to the dynamic interplay of people, practices, ideas and aspirations within their learning organizations, and they influence organizational dynamics important ways. On one hand, adaptive leaders help to build coherence and a sense of common purpose; on the other hand, they are responsible for disrupting complacency, apathy or entrenched beliefs about teaching and learning. In order to build coherence, effective school leaders develop processes whereby teachers can align the patterns of their work in complementary ways and teaching practice can be consolidated and refined through shared experience (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016; Robinson, Bendkison, Mcnoughton, Wilson, & Zhou, 2017). Unless disrupted, however, learning organizations tend to re-enact their histories (Davis et al., 2012). Effective leaders, therefore, create school cultures where assumptions are challenged, alternative views are considered, and all educators actively inquire into how best to advance student learning (Hopkins, 2008; Robinson 2019). Through both coherence-oriented and disruptive leadership actions, school leaders exercise influence in bringing the whole together in ways that are greater than the sum of their parts (Kools & Stoll, 2016).

Creating the Conditions for Adaptive Leadership within Complex Systems

Adaptive leadership actively pursues divergent thinking within a well-defined problem of practice (Elmore, 2016; Snyder, 2013; Timperley, 2011). Short cycles of evidence-based inquiry into teacher practice and student learning are used to generate novel solutions to complex problems, or to adjust compelling ideas to the unique constraints of specific learning contexts (Elmore 2016; Hallinger 2011). Defining a focus for professional inquiry requires careful analysis of current teaching practice and evidence of student learning, as well as strong connections to an established moral purpose for the work of the school community (Hallinger, 2011). Problems of practice must be defined at an appropriate scale—achievable, yet challenging enough to foster productive struggle and sustained engagement (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). Effective leaders consider a number of key factors as they guide others in defining the focus for collective inquiry:

- *depth*: doing what matters or has moral purpose;
- *breadth*: reaching many, not just a select few;
- *justice*: avoiding harm and promoting benefit;
- *diversity*: open to multiple versions or interpretations;
- *resourcefulness*: using what is available in an efficient and sustainable way;
- *conservation*: retaining what is working; and
- *endurance*: outlasting specific individuals involved in the change and taking on a life of its own; (Hargreaves et al., 2008)

Establishing shared priorities and expectations is consistently identified as a hallmark of effective leadership, particularly when there is a clear focus on the desired impact on student learning (Davis et.

al., 2012; Hallinger, 2011; Kools & Stoll, 2016; Pont et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2008). A shared understanding of learning goals helps to focus and coordinate improvement effort, and offers a sense of purpose and priority in the midst of competing demands (Robinson et al., 2008). Once priorities have been established, effective leaders create structures and systems for professional inquiry that involve collecting evidence of impact very quickly, learning from successes and failures, and making steady, incremental change by incorporating new practices, refining existing practices, and discarding practices that are not shown to positively impact student learning (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). Throughout the change process, adaptive leaders reflect on evidence of impact: *what is working now, in what way, for whom, under what conditions?* (Breakspear, 2017).

The development of comprehensive, user-friendly data sets that can be used to guide cycles of inquiry and innovation is essential (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). These data should be highly contextual—very close to the day-to-day work in the classroom—and triangulated between varied sources (Timperley, 2011). Effective leaders create cultures where teachers are immersed in evidence of student learning—where they become highly attuned to subtle changes and begin to notice patterns that might not otherwise have surfaced (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). Within complex adaptive systems, data is not static—progress monitoring is not exclusively reliant on predetermined external standards or universal measures of achievement; rather, evidence is generated through the same sorts of dynamic, divergent, responsive processes that characterize other aspects of the learning organization. This is critical in fostering teacher agency, building individual and collective efficacy, and mitigating potential performative effects (Priestley et al., 2015).

Leaders also play an important role in reducing the ‘noise’ in what might otherwise become a chaotic system. Effective school leaders strike a balance between stability and innovation (Wahlstrom et al., 2010), prioritizing a small number of changes (Breakspear 2017) with a clear focus on the anticipated impact on student learning. They ensure that organizational and operational decisions, such as scheduling, daily routines, and the allocation of resources (time, staff, physical resources, etc.) align with identified priorities for teaching and learning (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). Ensuring an orderly environment where students and staff feel safe, comfortable and cared for, and where time isn’t consumed by minutiae that do not significantly impact student learning, are vital to the health and productivity of a learning organization (Robinson et al., 2008).

Characteristics of Adaptive Leadership within Complex Systems

The Alberta Leadership Quality Standard (2018) speaks to decision-making based on ongoing analysis of contextual variables. Adaptive leadership decisions, made within complex systems, are:

- Attuned and responsive to changing conditions
- Oriented towards organizational goals and priorities
- Open to divergent thinking
- Enacted through iterative cycles of inquiry
- Grounded in evidence of impact
- Aligned across operational, organizational and instructional practices

Connections to Alberta’s Leadership Quality Standard

Although all nine leadership competencies work together in an integrated way within the Alberta Leadership Quality Standard (2018), it is worth considering the significance of three specific leadership competencies at play in this context:

- **Embodying Visionary Leadership:** *A leader collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being* (p. 5). This involves promoting innovation, enabling positive change, and fostering commitment to continuous improvement. It requires accessing, sharing and using a range of data to determine progress towards achieving goals, and collaborating with other leaders to address priorities and challenges within the learning organization.
- **Managing School Operations and Resources:** *A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources* (p.7). This involves identifying and planning for areas of need, and following through by allocating resources (human, physical, technological and financial) to address established priorities.
- **Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context:** *A leader understands and appropriately responds to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting schools and the school authority* (p. 7). This requires a recognition and responsiveness to the influence of external factors and their implications for education.

Potential implications for school-based and system leaders

Exploring the question of what constitutes quality leadership requires taking a broad view of the leadership actions and decisions taken by individuals and groups within complex learning organizations. As school-based and system leaders consider their leadership practices in relationship to the Alberta Leadership Quality Standard, the following questions may be helpful in guiding reflection and conversation:

Leadership as Collaborative Practice

- Describe the leadership network within your school. What are the key connections? Points of influence? How are individual strengths, interests and areas of expertise being leveraged? How are broadly distributed leadership responsibilities meaningfully integrated or interdependent?
- Consider your leadership culture. What factors encourage a culture of professionalism, autonomy and participation? What might be working against the development of such a culture?
- What mechanisms are in place for students, parents, Elders, knowledge keepers or community experts to have voice, enact change or otherwise help to lead work in the school or district?

Leading Learning

- What elements of your school culture could be characterized as knowledge-building (as per Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2010)? Under what conditions has knowledge-building occurred?
- In what ways is your approach to leading professional learning commensurate with a defensible theory of professionalism?
- What structures are in place that enable regular connections for professional collaboration? What structures impede those connections?
- Does professional collaboration center on a shared understanding of priorities for student learning? Why or why not?
- What opportunities exist for the cross-pollination of professional knowledge and expertise within your learning organization? Connecting with experts outside of the school?

Adaptive leadership in complex systems

- How would you describe the dynamic relationships within your learning organization? Where do you have points of influence?
- What steps have you taken to build coherence within your learning organization? How have you disrupted the status quo?
- How do you attune yourself to the continuous changes within your learning organization?
- What is your school's vision for learning? Could all members of your school community speak to why it is important and what it would look like if you were successful?
- To what extent does the allocation of resources in your building (financial, human, expertise, time, etc.) align with your shared goals or vision? Support the structures and activities of learning networks? Foster shared leadership?

- What has taken time and attention away from learning recently? What distractions or disruptions have your teachers encountered? What steps could be taken to mitigate these disruptions?

Potential Future Directions

In addition to the research findings detailed in this literature review on the topic of quality school leadership, a number of important findings emerged about characteristics of quality leadership at the level of the school authority. While out of scope for this literature review, it is important to consider elements of effective school authority leadership that impact school-based leadership, quality teaching, and ultimately student learning. Here, two important dimensions briefly discussed:

- **School Authority Practices for Collaborative Leadership**

Further to the topic of leadership as collaborative practice, research suggests that school-based leaders need responsibilities beyond the school, just as teachers require responsibilities beyond the classroom. A district-level approach to distributed or collaborative leadership allows for the sharing of ideas and expertise while collectively addressing shared problems of practice; effective school jurisdictions empower school leaders to make system-level decisions that positively impact teaching and learning (Hopkins, 2008; Harris 2012). When mechanisms are in place that enable principals and other leaders to invest in, and take ownership of, these broad organizational needs, there is potential benefit for both schools and school jurisdictions (Pont et al., 2008). By reducing isolation through lateral, networked leadership, individuals can both contribute to and benefit from the operations of the whole learning organization (Fullan, 2014; Hargreaves et al., 2008; Hopkins, 2008).

- What structures exist for collaboration across schools and for knowledge building within the district? What invitations exist to share expertise beyond one's school and to contribute to the leadership of the broader organization?
- How does the district foster a culture of participation in knowledge building? What factors impede the development of such a culture?

- **Leadership Development and Succession Planning**

Leadership development requires the same type of focused, intentional professional learning as the development of quality teaching practices. School leaders require guidance from the district regarding research-supported leadership and instructional practices, and benefit from structures such as leadership development programs, mentorship opportunities, and time for scaffolded collaboration (Pont et al., 2008; Schleicher, 2012; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Opportunities for coaching and mentorship, particularly between new and experienced principals, or between leaders with different areas of expertise, strengthens the system as a whole while building the capacity of individuals (Kools & Stoll, 2016). Within schools and school authorities, a proactive approach to leadership development is essential for succession planning and ensuring continued growth as individuals move on or retire (Harris, 2012).

- How are leaders intentionally and systematically developing leadership capacity in others? What does this look like within a school? Across the district?
- How is succession planning cared for such that quality learning maintains its momentum when leadership changes?
- As a leader, where are you getting support?

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to synthesize literature that can inform the articulation of quality leadership in a district that focuses on quality teaching to ensure optimal learning for all students. In the first section, we introduced the topic of quality leadership and its relevance to the introduction of the Alberta Professional Practice Standards. In the second section, we explored three main themes within the literature: (1) leadership as collaborative practice, (2) leading learning, and (3) adaptive leadership in complex systems. Connections were also made between the findings of this literature review and the findings and recommendations of a previous literature review on quality teaching (Brown et al., 2018) for the same district. Finally, we offered possible recommendations or considerations for the district as they articulate their vision for quality leadership.

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