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Ambiguity in Leadership: Perceptions of the Instructional Leadership Role of the Assistant Principal

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Ambiguity in Leadership: Perceptions of the Instructional

Leadership Role of the Assistant Principal

by

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ABSTRACT

This case study utilized multi-methods to address an identified gap in practice and in theory: the role of the assistant principal is largely undefined and unrealized. The purpose of this research was to investigate the distinct role of the assistant principal in instructional leadership by answering the following question: In what ways do assistant principals, as instructional leaders, support high-quality teaching and optimal learning? In this research I combined participant observation, document review, and a questionnaire and an activity log disseminated through Qualtrics Software to Battle River School Division's (BRSD's) participating principals and assistant principals to elucidate the following: the roles that are typically filled by assistant principals (i.e., instructional leader, teacher, school manager, student disciplinarian); the ways in which assistant principal roles are determined (i.e., authoritatively assigned and cooperatively determined); the main challenges to instructional leadership (i.e., district budgetary constraints, insufficient time, efficacy and confidence issues, insufficient personal initiative); and opportunities for instructional leaders (i.e., personal growth and learning, professional learning opportunities, and career advancement). The research reveals that assistant principals support high quality teaching and learning through direct delivery, analysis and exploration, modelling, risk-taking, problem-solving, collaboration and communication, relationship building, organization, and innovation to create educational environments with the following characteristics: a collaborative and cooperative culture that values and builds relationships between all stakeholders; excellent communication; a safe, healthy, and inclusive environment; a dynamic approach to learning and teaching that encourages research-based analysis, innovation, and self-directed and life-long learning. The study concludes with a BRSD Instructional

iii

Leadership Model, which features distinct role descriptions for the principal and the assistant

principal.

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DEDICATION

To Dr. Elizabeth Hill – mentor, advisor, and most important of all, sister.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

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. (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 3)School leadership makes a difference to teaching practice and student learning (Robinson et al, 2008). Many educational researchers have identified a strong positive correlation between instructional leadership and student achievement (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson, 2011). This theoretical understanding has led many educational practitioners throughout North America to adopt the concept of instructional leadership with a student-centred focus as a basic framework on which to construct the following administrative practices: setting direction, creating environments conducive for learning, improving instruction through teacher development, developing relational trust, and aligning resources to support learning (Leithwood, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Wallace Foundation, 2012).

This heightened focus on instructional leadership and student-centred learning is also an important aspect of the current government's educational policy in the province of Alberta, Canada. The professional development of teachers and the impact of high-quality teaching on student learning are at the forefront of all educational directives from the Ministry of Education. As a result, system leaders throughout the province are now responsible for concentrating their efforts on increasing teacher capacity and on creating optimal learning opportunities for students, while simultaneously decreasing the erstwhile emphasis on the operations and management of school facilities (Alberta Education, 2016).

Battle River School Division (BRSD) in north central Alberta serves as an example of a school division that is incorporating into its educational system the principles of instructional leadership and student-centred learning. The ultimate aim of these imperatives is to enhance the teachers' instructional capacity and to increase the students' academic success. To initiate the process of change, I, as Superintendent of BRSD, along with the senior leadership team, first assessed the current state of leadership knowledge and abilities in the division. Using the Accountability Pillar[1] results from Alberta Education to measure academic success, and through dialogue and site visits with our school leaders, we discerned that teacher capacity needed to be addressed. It became evident that many principals and assistant principals[2] were not keeping abreast of professional reading and that most of them lacked the necessary confidence and ability to provide meaningful instructional feedback to teachers. These discoveries caused us to conclude that if we were to achieve the goal of enhancing the instructional capacity of teachers, it would first be necessary for BRSD's system leaders to provide to school administrators professional learning opportunities that develop sound pedagogical abilities and instructional leadership capabilities.

Our first step in this direction was to examine the existing roles of principals and assistant principals in BRSD. This investigation revealed the following state of affairs: principals were not visiting classrooms to observe teachers; principals were reluctant to comment on instructional practices; principals required support in instructional leadership pedagogy and strategies; principals lacked the capacity to provide mentorship in instructional leadership; principals and assistant principals were not sharing leadership responsibilities; both principals and assistant

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[1] The Accountability Pillar is produced annually by Alberta Education to report on a set of common measures of academic achievement and parental satisfaction for every school division in the province.
[2] The terms "assistant" principal and "vice" principal are used synonymously throughout this study.

principals were unsure of their responsibilities; assistant principals needed and lacked

mentorship in instructional leadership.

As a result, it was determined that the first priority in the division was to clearly define

the instructional leadership roles of principals and assistant principals. Preliminary work in this

regard revealed that, in particular, the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal was

undefined and undeveloped throughout the division, which means that the position of assistant

principal was largely underutilized in an underfunded division that needed to make use of every

available human resource. The division's need to clarify the instructional leadership

responsibilities of the assistant principal provided the basis for my own research, which aimed to

define the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal. This inquiry is documented in

the following chapters of this thesis as part of the requirements of the Doctor of Education

degree at the University of Calgary.

Chapter One of this thesis begins with a synopsis of the context, the background, and the

rationale for this study. The next section of the chapter presents the research problem, the

purpose of the research, the research questions, the research perspective, and the research

methodology. This is followed by a glossary of key terms used throughout the thesis. The

chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the study.

Context of the Study

Alberta Education

The research was undertaken in the Battle River School Division of the province of

Alberta. This study is inspired and framed by a broad set of goals set out for school jurisdictions

in the annual business plan published by Alberta Education. The two main foci of the Ministry of

Education for all sixty-one public and separate school divisions are inclusiveness and high

academic achievement results. Therefore, Alberta's school divisions are expected to simultaneously meet the needs of all students and to continuously improve achievement outcomes. All school divisions are measured against the provincial averages in many areas of academic achievement and school improvement. The term "academic achievement" refers to the provincial averages of Acceptable and Standard of Excellence in Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma Exams. School improvement entails a more complex set of measures that ascertain a variety of data including high school completion rates, transition to post-secondary institutions, and parental satisfaction with the schools their children attend.

Alberta Education currently has several specific initiatives in place: (a) to reduce the gap in achievement between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students and all other students; (b) to provide for the needs of all students, including those with mild, moderate, and severe needs; (c) to improve overall achievement as measured in the Accountability Pillar results in the province. In each school division, all levels of professional staff are expected to increase their background knowledge and understanding of First Nation Métis Inuit and to use effective instructional strategies that will enhance the learning of all students.

Four of the predominant goals of Alberta Education relate to improved instruction and leadership. These goals are intended to enable Alberta Education to make the following claims: (a) Alberta's students are successful; (b) Alberta's education system is inclusive; (c) Alberta has excellent teachers, schools, and school authority leaders; and (d) Alberta's education system is well governed and managed (Alberta Education, March 2018). The work of superintendents is driven by these broad goals of Alberta Education (March 2018) and by the three new documents relating to high quality teaching and leading: *Teaching Quality Standard, Leadership Quality Standard, and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard*. It is the work of school and system

leaders to build capacity in teachers and leaders in order to improve the quality of instruction students are receiving. Superintendents and division office staff thus strive to accomplish the following objectives: to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers; to keep abreast of current trends in education (such as Instructional Leadership and Distributed Leadership); to foster strong teaching practices and to provide ongoing assessment and mentorship; to maintain a student-centred approach that aims to support all students; to improve outcomes (school retention rates, graduation rates, increased percentages of students moving on to post-secondary institutions, and achievement scores on Alberta Education measures (Alberta Education, March 2018).

The expectations of Alberta Education have put a heavy toll on the school and system leaders in the sixty-one school jurisdictions of the province. Each school division is held accountable for student achievement, high quality teaching, equality of achievement between FNMI and all other students, and for the fulfillment of all needs of all students. School leaders are accountable for achievement results in the following areas: Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) scores, Diploma Exam scores, high school completion rates, and transitions to post-secondary institutions. Each of these requires an instructional leadership focus to improve teaching and learning and to provide the necessary supports for students who, in many cases, face challenges that are outside the school's realm of influence.

BRSD is currently attempting to deal with the many challenges faced by every school division as we work towards the standard of excellence required by the provincial government. As Superintendent of BRSD, I, along with my senior leadership team, am responsible for improving both student achievement and the quality of teaching throughout the division. To that end, our Division is currently developing strategies and introducing initiatives to build teacher

and leader capacity as the preliminary steps towards improving student learning. One of our first initiatives is to ascertain and refine the leadership roles of school administrators in BRSD.

Background and Rationale for the Research

As Superintendent of Schools, I am responsible for leading BRSD in meeting the requirements laid out by the Ministry of Education. Within Alberta Education's framework, my district leadership team and I have identified for the school division four key areas of focus, which the senior leadership team refers to as "the Everyday Four". These four aspects include: (a) welcoming and caring environments, (b) literacy, (c) numeracy, and (d) teaching and learning. Throughout each of priority area, instructional leadership theory and practice provides the foundation for building the capacity of staff. The senior leadership team has developed a program called Principal Academy in which the senior administrators work closely with the school principals to develop solid pedagogy and instructional practices. Academic research provides the data used to inform instructional leadership practice, to identify principles of strong instruction, and to develop an understanding of relational trust (Leithwood, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Aside from Principal Academy, BRSD senior leaders also provide a similar, but smaller, program for assistant principals. BRSD senior leaders and assistant principals meet less frequently and for a shorter period of time than is the case with principals, but they do work on the same strategies. The goal is for principals and assistant principals to become highly effective instructional leaders who incorporate sound instructional practices in their schools and who use staff collaboration, professional development sessions, and daily supervision to enhance the instructional capacity of their teaching staffs.

As the Superintendent, I work closely with my school leadership teams to support their growth as instructional leaders. I collaborate directly with principals and assistant principals to

pinpoint areas in need of improvement and to ascertain the best ways in which to assist these

school leaders to build their own capacity and that of the teachers within their individual schools.

Throughout this cooperative process, it has become glaringly apparent that within BRSD the

responsibilities of district assistant principals differ among schools as greatly as the individual

building designs. Consequently, role descriptions for assistant principals vary (sometimes

significantly) from school to school. No two assistant principals within BRSD have the same role

definition. The assistant principal in a smaller, rural school is usually required to support the

principal by taking on many and varied responsibilities. In contrast, the assistant principal in a

larger, urban setting might only deal with a certain group of students and staff or focus solely on

specific duties, such as, for example, Occupational Health and Safety regulations.

This diversity in roles throughout BRSD is problematic because the division requires

consistency in all areas of leadership, particularly instructional leadership, of assistant principals.

All assistant principals need to gain experience in all areas of leadership to broaden their

instructional leadership capacity and to assist with district-wide school improvement efforts. The

lack of consistency within BRSD hinders the ability of district office personnel to slot assistant

principals throughout the district because it cannot be assumed that all assistant principals

possess the same leadership skills and goals. The lack of consistency also hinders the

professional development of assistant principals. Those who do not possess the required

instructional leadership skills are relegated to managerial tasks and are less likely to be promoted

to principalships. Many assistant principals experience frustration at not receiving the job-

embedded mentorship that they require to build their own capacity to become instructional

leaders within BRSD.

Thus, from a practical point of view as Superintendent, I believe that it is imperative to clearly define the assistant principal's role in terms of instructional leadership. In order to create some standardization and sustainability in school leadership positions throughout BRSD, it is necessary to set clear expectations for the mentorship and training of assistant principals in order to build their instructional leadership capacity as current school leaders and as future principals. Once assistant principals have acquired the necessary skills, they will be able to participate fully in the instructional leadership practices that directly affect teachers and students. This will ultimately stimulate system improvement and enhance student learning.

The Research Problem

The problem addressed in the research is a practical concern that I have identified in the course of my work as Superintendent of Battle River School Division (BRSD): the lack of a clear role description for assistant principals. This issue finds its roots in the provincial education system as a whole and in the specific configuration of schools within BRSD itself. There is no job description for assistant principals in the Education Act; however, Alberta Education's *Leadership Quality Standard* outlines competencies in various areas of leadership. Assistant principals are to be held accountable only for those that match their leadership responsibilities. Hence there is no province-wide job description for assistant principals that clearly articulates instructional leadership expectations and it has become obvious to me through professional conversations with Alberta's superintendents that instructional leadership from assistant principals is rarely evident in the province. As well, as Superintendent of BRSD, I have observed that the geographical diversity of this particular school division (which limits the opportunities for district office staff to observe and interact with teaching staff in outlying schools), combined with the individuality of school administrators, makes consistency in role definition difficult to

achieve. Furthermore, a review of the research literature (presented in Chapter Two of this thesis) reveals a dearth of academic research directed at the assistant principal role.

Research Purpose

The purpose of my research study was therefore to address a gap in my school division's current practice and in the research relating to instructional leadership roles of assistant principals in education. In BRSD, the duties of the assistant principal are determined at the school level. Consequently, the responsibilities vary significantly – from managerial to instructional – across the division. However, the *Leadership Quality Standard* competencies and the current academic literature on distributed leadership stress the need for instructional leadership tasks to be shared more equitably between the principal and the assistant principal. To address this issue, I involved principals and assistant principals in a research study that aimed to define the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal. I compared the current responsibilities of assistant principals with the competencies outlined in the *Leadership Quality Standard.* An intended practical consequence of the research was therefore to define the exclusive instructional leadership role of the assistant principal so that the definition could be applied equitably across the division. By doing so, BRSD will be better equipped to provide appropriate mentorship and professional learning opportunities for assistant principals, who, in turn, will be better equipped to initiate effective instructional leadership practices in their schools. An intended theoretical consequence of the research was to fill a comparable gap in the research literature, where the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal is rarely dissociated from that of the principal. The study addresses this omission in the literature by initiating a theoretical discussion about the distinct role assistant principals can play in effective instructional leadership.

Research Questions

The research questions which are listed below derive from the *Leadership Quality Standard* published by Alberta Education in 2018. The specific research question addressed is as follows: "In what ways, as instructional leaders, do assistant principals support high-quality teaching and optimal student learning?" My subordinating questions are as follows:

1. What roles are currently assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?

2. How are instructional leadership roles assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?

3. What are the instructional leadership roles of the assistant principal in BRSD?

4. What are the main challenges and opportunities for assistant principals in BRSD?

Ultimately, these questions determined the common areas of responsibility for assistant principals, their sense of self-efficacy in their assigned roles, their perceived effects in their schools, and the general overall place of assistant principals in the instructional leadership hierarchy.

My Research Perspective

I bring to this research a multi-dimensional perspective that is informed by my personal attributes, beliefs, and experiences. My personal views and values have been influenced by each and every role that I have had in life: as a Canadian citizen, a student, a teacher, a parent, an assistant principal, a principal, and as a superintendent. I recognize that as a Caucasian, middle-class, educated, Anglo-Canadian female I have a privileged view of both Canadian society as a whole and of its educational microcosm. My personal attributes have, to a large extent, ensured that my formal educational experiences have been positive. In my professional life as an educator and an administrator, I have deepened my appreciation both of the necessity for school systems to improve and of the difficulties in implementing the changes that generate improvement. I believe that educational systems must strive to provide all students with positive

learning experiences. I recognize and respect both formal and informal methods of educating and I firmly believe that lifelong learning is essential to one's personal and professional development. For me, academic research has real, practical value to the individual and I therefore value research that is conducted with thoroughness and integrity and which, by enhancing our understanding of the world in which we live, has the capacity to contribute to the empowerment and transformation of humanity.

In addition, my professional experiences within the educational system have greatly influenced my attitude towards education. I recognize that differences in abilities, attitudes, and attributes exist, but I firmly believe the following: that there must be equal opportunity for all; that we benefit when we are supported in our learning; that all students, regardless of circumstance, can have positive educational experiences in schools if the proper supports for those students and their teachers are in place. There is an opportunity through this research to support system and school leaders and, consequently, teachers in their learning and professional growth. By creating the chance for assistant principals to voice their views about the realities they face as current school leaders, and, furthermore, by engaging them in the process to determine the challenges and opportunities that exist, this research allows us to collaboratively construct strategies for meaningful change that will benefit administrators, teachers, and students in BRSD.

My personal and professional perspectives, my collaborative research that both engages and benefits the research subjects, the ascertainment of the current realities faced by assistant principals, and my overarching aim to initiate meaningful educational change are consistent with the epistemological stance of social constructivism, which Michael Crotty (1998) describes as individuals making sense of the world through their unique experiences. Like all social

constructivists, it was imperative to first acquire a solid understanding of the existing

circumstances before attempting to change them. My research discovered how assistant

principals experience and describe their reality and then ascertained the changes necessary to

improve the situation. Following the research principles of social constructivism, my

methodology included open-ended questioning, and a holistic, contextualized interpretation of

the findings based on the understanding that there are multiple levels of understanding and

reality. Finally, my overarching research goal to conduct research that ultimately could lead to

new social constructions and meaningful change that will enhance the educational system for

leaders, teachers, and students has been met. The introduction of meaningful change that

improves the world we live in is the ultimate goal of all social constructivist research.

Research Assumptions

As a researcher, I recognize that I view the world through personal and cultural filters of

which I am not always cognizant. I also bring to my research personal understandings and

interests that I have consciously developed throughout my experiences and my formal and non-

formal education. The following section sets out the major premises and biases that influenced

this research.

Premises

My first premise was that people socially construct their reality. This premise stems from

the epistemological orientation of social constructivism, which I have adopted as the foundation

of my research.

My second premise was that school administrators[3] play a valuable role in influencing the

lives of students and that school administrators themselves are committed to fulfilling that role to

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[3] The term "administrators" is used interchangeably with the word "leader". Administrators include principals and assistant principals.

the best of their ability. I therefore accept that, as Superintendent of Schools, I must help school leaders to acquire the skills that will enable them to help teachers to improve their teaching practice. Equally, I assume that school administrators are receptive to my assistance. A third premise was that all staff share my view that every student, regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, or any other personal trait, is a valued member of our society and is equally deserving of the best educational experience that educators can provide. I assume that every student has great potential and that every administrator and every teacher is committed to developing each student's unique potential.

A fourth premise was that teachers also have great potential and that most teachers are willing to accept from their school administrators the mentorship and feedback that will enhance their skill sets. I also believe that assistant principals are committed to professional improvement and that they understand the need for enhanced teaching practices. I assume that assistant principals are also committed to bettering their own practice, both as teachers and administrators, and that they will grasp the professional benefits of having participated in the study. A fifth assumption was that I would be perceived as an "insider" by the participants of this study because I have developed strong professional relationships with most assistant principals in BRSD. I therefore expected that the participants would feel confident that they could be direct and honest in their assessments and answers. Lastly, I maintain that both quantitative and qualitative methods of research are appropriate for this study because some knowledge is best gained from impartial facts and figures and other knowledge is best gained in a more subjective manner. For instance, some of the quantitative information garnered in this study is demographic facts such as gender and educational attainment. This information allowed me to make useful connections between these factors and the qualitative perspectives of the participants. Such

information can subsequently be used to refine new district initiatives that stem from this research.

Biases

In addition to my premises, I also brought some personal biases to this research study. The foremost of these was that I am convinced that instructional leadership can and should improve in BRSD. Therefore, I did not approach the research with an open-ended question as to whether improvements to the status quo are needed. Rather, the queries I brought to the research are the following: What are the areas of concern? How can they best be addressed? What improvements need to be made? A second bias was that I believe that assistant principals are under-utilized in their role in BRSD, and that this is an unacceptable waste of the human resources that are available to support teachers in improving their instructional practices. I strongly feel that principals need to mentor their assistant principals as they seek to become effective instructional leaders. Again, this means that, throughout the research, it was taken for granted that principals should be involved in the mentorship of assistant principals. Finally, I feel that, in general, the viewpoints of practitioners are often not given adequate consideration by theorists conducting educational research or by division office administrators introducing new initiatives into school divisions. The research on assistant principals countered that concern by seeking the direct input of former and current assistant principals, who are most directly affected by the research.

Methodology

This research employed a case study methodology that utilized multi-methods, some of which are embued with action research sensibilities. A case study "is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') within its real-life content" (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). A major feature of case study methodology is participant observation, where the researcher is immersed in the local context which drives the action and the understanding of the study. In this study, the local context is the Battle River School Division and the unit of analysis is the assistant principal role within the district. As the superintendent of BRSD, I was both a participant observer and the primary researcher for the study. As superintendent and participant observer, I observed and participated in district practices and policies and my knowledge of such was central to the study. I also examined various BRSD documents (for example, One-Year Term Assistant Principal Contract Letter, 2020-2021 Staffing Information Sheet, School Reviews Document – Instructional Leadership Indicators, Accountability Pillar Overall Summary) and such Alberta Education documents as the *Education Act* and the *Leadership Quality Standard.*

This case study features multiple methods of data collection. These methods include participant observation, document analysis, and tools of inquiry such as a questionnaire and an activity log which were distributed to participating principals and assistant principals. The value of having both principals and assistant principals actively involved in the study is that both groups are directly affected by the study. All principals in BRSD are former assistant principals who were able to provide insights into the instructional leadership skills they feel are either apparent and practised or lacking for those individuals who are newly appointed to principalships. Their input, based partially on their own experiences as former assistant principals and partially on their observations of the skill sets of current assistant principals, highlight the abilities that they feel are necessary for assistant principals to acquire before assuming principalships. As principals, they also are expected to mentor their assistant principals, with whom they will share instructional leadership responsibilities. The input of

assistant principals clearly reveals from their perspectives the current reality of assistant

principals and these perspectives helped me to develop a more in-depth understanding of their

experiences. Assistant principals should ultimately benefit the most from recommendations

arising from this study since the research was directly focused on them and aimed to provide

positive and meaningful change specifically for them, but also for the teachers and students with

whom they work. The use of such research tools as a questionnaire and an activity log as well as

the formulation of recommendations that will ultimately benefit participants and effect positive

change are important aspects of case study methodology.

The field study component of this research took place over the course of two months

(November and December) during the 2018 – 2019 school year. Participation in the study was

voluntary. I did, however, endeavour to have representation from each of the school

configurations of K-5, 6-8, 5-12, K-9, K-12 and 9-12. Because I am the Superintendent of BRSD

and the district supervisor of the study participants, ethical considerations required me to use the

services of a primary investigator (a qualified individual whose role was to maintain direct

contact with the study participants, to ensure that I did not have any direct contact with

participants, and to remove any identifiers from the research tools and data). This was done to

ensure that no administrators in BRSD felt pressure to participate and to alleviate any fears of

repercussions from either their participation or their non-participation in this research study. The

primary investigator was my thesis supervisor, Dr. Jim Brandon, who distributed a questionnaire

through Qualtrics Software to all current principals and assistant principals in BRSD. He also

requested participating assistant principals to log their activities for a period of six weeks through

Qualtrics. The questionnaire and activity log generated the following kinds of data: a description

of the roles typically assigned to assistant principals; the methods by which assistant principal

roles are assigned; the challenges and opportunities for assistant principals; the leadership roles of assistant principals.

Definitions

For the purposes of this research, the following terms will be used throughout the study:

"Administrative time" is the full-time equivalency that is provided to a school administrator (principal or assistant principal) to complete his or her instructional and administrative duties.

"Administrators" is used interchangeably with the term "leaders." School administrators include principals and assistant principals.

"Assistant principal" is used interchangeably with the terms "associate principal" and "vice principal". These appellations refer to those individuals who hold positions that are secondary to the principal of a school. They assist the principal in the leadership of the school, but do not hold the same authority as the principal.

"Central office staff", "district office staff", "senior administrators", "senior district staff", "senior division staff", "senior leadership team", "senior leaders", "senior office staff" are all used interchangeably to refer to superintendents and assistant superintendents who work in the district central office and lead all district initiatives and ensure that all schools meet provincial educational requirements.

"Distributed leadership" is the allocation and sharing of leadership tasks by principals in light of school goals and access to requisite expertise, in addition to providing genuine opportunities for input from teachers and others in school decisions" (Anderson, 2012, p. 55).

"Instructional leadership [is] those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination and improvement of teaching and learning" (Robinson, 2010, p. 1).

Specifically, these actions to enhance the learning in schools include the setting of goals, the allocation of resources, the supervision of teachers and support staff, and the development of professional learning opportunities for the purpose of promoting student learning.

"Managerial duties" of the principal are those tasks that in an indirect way support the learning of students. These tasks include budget preparation, building management, and the timely completion of required paperwork.

A "principal" is the administrative and professional leader of a school who reports directly to the superintendent. The major role of the principal is instructional leadership with a focus on improving teaching and learning.

"Professional development" and "professional learning" are used interchangeably and refer to all activities and practices that are provided to enhance teacher and school leader abilities and practice.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for both practical and theoretical reasons. The research results should provide insights that support the work of teachers, the school leadership teams, and Division Office leaders in BRSD. One intended result is to provide teachers and leaders with a clear definition of the role of the assistant principal. With such a definition in place, teachers should be able to identify the individuals they can approach for assistance. Because of this study, the assistant principals of BRSD should be able to work on building their capacity in the various aspects of their clearly defined role. Once the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal has been defined, assistant principals will have an administrative definition by which to interpret their roles and responsibilities and against which to consider their success. It is also possible that this study will provide a starting point for other jurisdictions throughout the

province to refine their instructional leadership practices and to develop the leadership roles that are so crucial to the academic success of all students.

The theoretical implications of this study are two-fold: the research addresses an existing knowledge gap and it pinpoints areas in need of further academic exploration. Currently, the existing body of research contains little or no information about the specific role of the assistant principal in instructional leadership. This study addresses that gap by focusing specifically on the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal. The findings of the study should therefore increase awareness of the largely untapped capacity for assistant principals to assume instructional leadership responsibilities in their own right, and will perhaps stimulate further explorations into the potential for developing that unique administrative role. For instance, one area for further investigation could be an examination of the need for a mentorship program for assistant principals.

Further analysis of the philosophical ideals underpinning current organizational structures in Alberta's schools as well as comparative studies devoted specifically to the role of the assistant principal could also arise from the current study. This increased attention to the role of the assistant principal should greatly benefit the field of education as a whole by galvanizing the placement of assistant principals in meaningful leadership activities that are personally fulfilling and beneficial to teachers, by stimulating school districts to make good use of all the human resources at their disposal, by delineating a distinct position that complements the role of the principal and distributes the leadership burden in a more equitable manner, and by encouraging the development of a more collaborative style of leadership that allows creative individuals to combine their talents and abilities for the best advantage of students everywhere.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter One has set out the context and the rationale for and the background to the study. As well, this chapter has defined the research problem and has explained its purpose. It has set out the overarching and subordinating questions. In addition to delineating my research assumptions, premises and biases, this chapter outlined the methodology and methods. Chapter One has concluded with a glossary of key terms and a discussion of the significance of the research study.

The remaining four chapters provide additional background material, a precise explanation of the methodology for this study, the presentation and analysis of the findings, and the final conclusions and recommendations. Chapter Two consists of an extensive literature review and a conceptual framework for the study. Chapter Three details the research methodology, including the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter Three also examines limitations and delimitations, ethical concerns, and issues of reliability, validity, transferability, trustworthiness, and generalizability. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study and Chapter Five provides the conclusions and recommendations arising from the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this thesis was to define the instructional leadership role of assistant principals in school settings. Inspired by the lack of a definitive, district-wide job description for assistant principals in the Battle River School Division in Alberta, Canada, I undertook the following literature review to ascertain how the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal is defined in the academic research directed at leadership roles in education. This review of the published research examines the general role of school administrators, the various types of leadership models currently espoused or employed in school systems, and instructional leadership theory and practices. This work proceeds from the following premises and field observations:

1. School administrators are necessary to manage the daily operations of schools and to provide leadership that creates the vision and the culture of a school.

2. Schools have typically had hierarchical structures with the principal and the assistant principal representing the formal leadership at the top of a pyramid, followed by lead teachers or department heads, then classroom teachers and finally, at the bottom, the school's support staff.

3. The hierarchical model of school organization is changing as more schools are adopting distributive models of leadership.

4. The primary role of the principal is also shifting from an emphasis on managerial aspects to a focus on instructional leadership for school improvement.

5. The role of the assistant principal, which in the past has typically been of a managerial nature, is beginning to include more aspects of instructional leadership.

6. In practice, the current role of assistant principals varies significantly between

schools, remains largely undefined, and consists primarily of managerial tasks.

My purpose in conducting the literature review was multifaceted: (a) to ascertain whether or not the published research supported my field observation that there is no specific instructional leadership role definition for assistant principals; (b) to examine the practical realities of and the theoretical insights into the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal; (c) to identify the organizational structures of schools and the instructional leadership role of administrators within those structures; (d) to determine how administrative responsibilities are distributed; and (e) to review the fundamental aspects of instructional leadership theory. I accessed electronic theses and dissertations on instructional leadership in Canada by using the search engine ProQuest at the University of Calgary Library. I also accessed articles and other documents in the ERIC database using the following search terms: administration, administrative roles, assistant principals, distributed leadership, instructional leadership, principals, school leadership, and school leaders.

The organizational structures of schools, the various ways in which administrative roles are delegated and shared, and the attention given both within school divisions and in academia to the concepts of distributed leadership and instructional leadership all have an impact on the ways in which the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal is, and can be, defined and applied in educational settings. The ensuing discussion of the literature pertaining to this research problem is therefore divided into the following three categories: organizational structures and roles; the role of the assistant principal; and instructional leadership.

Organizational Structures and Roles

Most schools have traditionally been characterized by a hierarchical structure consisting of both formal and informal leadership roles. Formal leadership positions include principalships

and assistant principalships. Informal leadership roles are filled by the rest of the school staff, who nowadays are expected to be involved in a shared model of leadership (Harris, 2002; Storey, 2004). In current school settings, creating a vision and a culture conducive for learning are major responsibilities of the principal, while other tasks are typically distributed amongst the other staff members (de Lima, 2008; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson, 2011).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership (DL) is a term that, for the most part, describes the sharing of leadership activities across a broad spectrum of staff. However, there was no widely agreed-upon definition of the term in the academic literature. Storey (2004) defined distributed leadership as a "shared process of enhancing individual and collective capacity of people to accomplish their work effectively" (p. 252). Harris (2013) referred to it as "actively brokering, facilitating and supporting the leadership of others" (p.547). de Lima (2008) described it as "a conception of leadership as enacted in multiple roles and multiple role incumbents" (p. 160). Hall, Gunter, and Bragg (2013) acknowledged "that the lack of conceptual clarity around the term DL and its correspondingly elastic qualities have left the door open to a myriad of understanding of this term" (p. 484). However, despite the lack of agreement on the term's meaning, the following definition has been adopted for the purposes of this research: "the allocation and sharing of leadership tasks by principals in light of school goals and access to requisite expertise, in addition to providing genuine opportunities for input from teachers and others in school decisions" (Anderson, 2012, p. 55).

The idea of shared or collaborative leadership rests on the realization that the principal alone cannot deal with all aspects of leadership in a modern school. As Storey (2004) pointed out, the role of the principal has become more complex over time as it has expanded beyond

mere managerial aspects to encompass instructional leadership as well. Lumby (2013) further explained "first, that achieving the engagement of a wider group of staff is more effective in implementing change, and second, that in a more complex world, the skills and experience of more diverse people are necessary to create successful leadership" (p. 583). Ultimately, then, distributed leadership is a way to create and utilize capacity in staff and to collaboratively make decisions that will lead to school improvement.

Much of the discourse on distributed leadership describes the common practices employed in schools. In their discussion of distributed leadership, Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2001) divide the varied responsibilities of school leaders into macro functions (large-scale organizational work) and micro functions (day-to-day tasks). Macro functions of leadership include building teacher capacity and creating shared leadership. The authors found that in most cases, the principal assumes the responsibilities associated with the improvement of instruction and with the provision of appropriate professional learning activities that help teachers to enhance their practice. The assistant principal is usually responsible for the more mundane micro tasks – such as the creation of supervision schedules and the administration of student discipline. At times, non-administrative staff complete such micro tasks as arranging busing for field trips, creating the supervision schedule, or organizing a school event. In this way, the principal utilizes the principles of distributed leadership to share the daily tasks within a school setting (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

Various authors, such as Heck and Hallinger (2009) and Harris (2013), pointed out that in some instances principals spontaneously create opportunities for staff to work collaboratively to solve a given problem or to garner ideas about improving instructional practices or processes. At other times, as Harris (2013) mentioned, a principal might allow specific individuals who have

demonstrated an interest in or an aptitude for a particular skill set to take on specific leadership tasks. An example of this type of distributed leadership could presumably be that a teacher who is an expert weaver might seek and be given permission to run a weaving club in a particular school.

It is important to note that these authors did present typical examples of distributed leadership as it is practiced in most schools. However, it is also true that these authors failed to mention that schools have traditionally incorporated distributed leadership in this way and that for many decades the distribution of tasks in schools has functioned more as a practical tool for sharing the workload than as a theory of educational leadership. Teachers and other staff have always assumed a variety of leadership roles – such as organizing Christmas concerts or collaborating on supervision schedules or even leading professional development seminars. So, in essence, the examples of distributed leadership put forward by contemporary theorists serve to demonstrate that distributed leadership (as it is typically practiced) is not at all a new concept in schools. The authors in this section of the literature review did not provide any novel insights into how distributed leadership could be practiced in new ways in schools, particularly with respect to instructional leadership roles.

In addition to delineating the various facets of distributed leadership, many authors also asserted that distributed leadership is an effective framework for building capacity and for improving schools (de Lima, 2008; Spillane, 2004; Storey, 2004). They claimed that when school staffs collaborate by engaging in professional dialogue about teaching and learning, instructional capacity is enhanced: "We know, for example, that schools with shared visions and norms around instruction, norms of collaboration, and a sense of collective responsibility for students' academic success create incentives and opportunities for teachers to improve their

practice" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 3). Spillane et al. also argued that when principals encourage skilled and knowledgeable individuals to participate in decision-making, school improvements usually follow because this collaboration creates a shared vision and the possibility for instructional innovations.

The claim that a distributive style of leadership affects school environments (Spillane et al., 2004) appears to be well-supported by research in this area. Camburn et al. (2003) conducted a study of more than one hundred elementary schools in the United States that were using a distributed style of leadership. They found that staff members observed each other more frequently and provided more feedback to each other on how to improve their instruction than did staff members in schools where the principal alone observed and critiqued teacher practice. Although these findings are useful because they show that distributed leadership apparently does have an effect on teacher behavior, further research is necessary to determine if there is a causal relationship between distributed leadership and school improvement or between distributed leadership and student achievement.

Notwithstanding the potential benefits of distributed leadership, several theorists also called attention to the possible deterrents to the full-scale adoption of a distributed leadership model in schools. Although researchers agreed that distributing the leadership burden helps to balance the load of responsibilities in a school, such authors as Storey (2004) and de Lima (2008) also identified several potential challenges to instituting this practice. These challenges to instituting this practice: the frequent reluctance of teachers to assume leadership roles; unresolved issues of power and authority; and occasional conflicts with priorities and incompatible leadership styles.

de Lima (2008) stated that many teachers are reluctant to take on any decision-making

tasks that could put their relationships with their colleagues at risk. Camburn et al. (2003) cited a lack of role definition for the required leadership tasks and a lack of staff development as other reasons for the non-participation of teachers. Lumby (2013) continued in this vein when he stated that there is no clear role for anyone besides the principal in the distributed leadership process. He observed that some staff members just naturally assume some leadership tasks that support the instructional practice of their peers and he implied that other staff members are uncomfortable taking on roles that are not directly assigned by the principal or that are not part of the formal hierarchical structure of the school.

The second deterrent – unresolved power issues – also captured the attention of several researchers. Lumby (2013) pointed out that the "major part of the literature on distributed leadership tends not to problematize power nor [sic] its relationship to distributed leadership" (p. 583). He further stated that this is an unrealistic view of any workplace. Harris (2013) concurred that this tendency to overlook power issues in distributed leadership is problematic: "issues of power, authority and inequality loom over distributed leadership as they do in any other form of leadership and its associated practice" (p. 546).

Harris (2013) noted that a potentially thorny issue with embedding distributed leadership as school leadership policy is the allocation of responsibility for making decisions (including decisions regarding who is allowed to do the allocating). Ultimately, as Harris (2002) said, the principal tends to make these decisions. This tendency, she astutely observed, represents more a top-down than a truly distributed approach to decision making.

Harris (2002) did not offer a definitive reason for this stubborn adherence to a traditional hierarchical model instead of a widespread and reasonable acceptance of the more equitable, collaborative model that distributed leadership purportedly represents. She observed that the

relinquishment of power and authority is often a struggle for formal leaders and she suggested that formal leaders consider the relinquishment of power a challenge to their personal authority. Lumby (2013) concurred that a formal leader might equate the surrender of authority with failure. These are valid assertions that have been noted time and again by me and by many other superintendents in our fieldwork. Principals frequently are reluctant to relinquish their authority. However, egoism is not the only reason for this behaviour.

Educational theory in this area could benefit from a more in-depth consideration of the reasons why principals are disinclined to hand over their authority to others because such study might illuminate some unexpected drawbacks to instituting in schools a distributed style of leadership. In practice, a principal might refuse to share power for any number of reasons. Sometimes the reluctance is egoistic in nature: some principals regard as a personal insult any suggestion that someone else has an idea worth mentioning. It is also possible that some principals might misunderstand the concept of distributed leadership as an opportunity for teachers to exhibit leadership in the work they do. Instead, they might view it as a power grab or an attempt to undermine the principal's authority. At other times, other factors influence a principal's decision to retain all the decision-making power. First, the roles and responsibilities of the principal are delineated in the Education Act and therefore principals might well be reluctant to delegate those responsibilities elsewhere. Moreover, external stakeholders (such as parents or other community agencies) typically prefer the principal to make the decisions and the principal's retention of power could serve to reassure stake-holders and reinforce their confidence in the school. Occasionally, a principal retains power to prevent or quell competition and distrust amongst staff members who are vying for positions of power. It is also possible that a principal might refuse to relinquish authority because his or her staff is young or inexperienced

and not yet capable of assuming authority. In such cases, a traditional hierarchical model might be the best option for the overall smooth functioning of the school.

Finally, since principals are typically held solely accountable for the running of a school, they are often understandably reluctant to hand over power to others when the blame for mistakes remains firmly attached to them. The widespread adoption of a distributed style of leadership would require changes in attitude and custom at higher levels of administration in the school district and in government departments of education. District administrators and government officials are not often trusted to make such adjustments to their thinking. These examples illustrate that, in reality, it is often very difficult for leadership to be truly distributed. This suggests that while equality through distributed leadership is desirable as a theoretical construct, it might be neither practical nor attainable in current school contexts.

In addition to potential problems with participation and power, a third deterrent raised by researchers was the potential for conflicts over ideas and priorities. In her study of schools using a distributive leadership model in England, Storey (2004) found that conflicts relating to priorities led to feelings of mistrust and a deterioration in the relationship between the teacher leader and the principal. There were disagreements amongst the staff about objectives, work habits, and time allotments. Moreover, the lead teacher felt that the principal was not providing adequate support in terms of time and resources. These findings suggest that although some leadership tasks can be shared amongst staff, the potential for conflict is ever-present and the principal's involvement will always be required to deal with conflicts and to ensure that staff feel confident and supported in their various roles.

These works that discuss the drawbacks of and the deterrents to distributed leadership have relevance to the proposed study because the provision or enhancement of an instructional

leadership role for assistant principals will necessarily be dependent on some form of distributed leadership. The potential for success when instituting an instructional leadership role for assistant principals is likely to be affected by the extent to which distributed leadership is practiced and also by the inherent problems associated with that type of leadership. Such factors must be considered while developing a definition of the instructional role of assistant principals that can be successfully applied in school settings.

A final significant observation regarding the academic discourse on distributed leadership is that the role of the assistant principal in distributed leadership is largely ignored in the theoretical and research papers (Petrides & Jimes, 2013). Although Spillane and Healey (2010) gave passing mention to assistant principals in their study of school leadership and management from a distributed leadership perspective, no other researchers focused on the specific role of the assistant principal in a distributed leadership model. Scholarly discussions of distributed leadership focused solely on the role of the principal and referred only generally to the process of engaging the rest of the staff. It could be that the roles of principal and assistant principal were conflated in the language of "principalship" or "leadership", but this was not clearly indicated in the literature. No researchers wrote specifically about the role of assistant principals in distributed leadership. The proposed research will address this obvious gap in the academic literature.

The Role of the Assistant Principal

There was little research regarding assistant principals in general or specifically in relation to instructional leadership – a fact that has also been noted by several researchers, including Searby et al. (2016), Petrides et al. (2014), and Gurley et al. (2015). This lack suggests that much future research could be directed at assistant principals, especially with respect to their

instructional leadership role.

The existing research on assistant principals did reveal that the role is diverse and lacks consistency from site to site (Shoho et al, 2012). Much of the research indicated that assistant principals are largely uninvolved in instructional leadership. Some researchers pointed out an incongruity between the aspirations of assistant principals and their quotidian practices. Searby et al. (2016) and Shore and Walshaw (2016), as well as many others, observed that many assistant principals would like to function as instructional leaders, but instead are frustrated to find that the vast majority of their time is being spent on managerial tasks relating to the operation and the maintenance of the school (Enomoto, 2012; Hausman et al. 2002; Peters et al., 2015; Searby et al., 2016; Shore & Walshaw, 2016). For the most part, student discipline was the most consistent responsibility of assistant principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Sun, 2012). Assistant principals also identified such other issues as student absences, the creation of supervision schedules, and assorted paperwork as key aspects of their workload. Additional responsibilities also included special education issues and other concerns (such as bussing and dealing with angry parents) that had only an indirect impact on student learning (Melton et al., 2012).

As well, the authors of the published literature tended to present the assistant principal role merely as succession practice for principalships (Gurley et al., 2015; Hausman et al., 2002; Munoz, & Barber, 2011; Searby et al., 2016; Shore, & Walshaw, 2014). Searby et al. (2016), Munoz & Barber (2010), and Shore and Walshaw (2016) generally agreed that the assistant principal role is a "pipeline to the principalship" and that there is a need for appropriate mentorship to prepare assistant principals for their future role as principals. These are certainly reasonable claims.

However, these researchers appear to have overlooked the fact that assistant principals themselves have an active part to play in instructional leadership. Historically, the position of assistant principal was created to support the principal in the management aspect of the day-to-day running of a school, but the principal's focus is currently shifting from management issues to instructional leadership. Although there is a realization (on the part of educational leaders) that the focus of assistant principals should change in a similar way, in practice, most assistant principals do remain mired in a mass of managerial matters. Not many of the published researchers suggested that the assistant principal position itself be modified to include an instructional leadership aspect that is distinct from the instructional leadership role of the principal.

Barnett et al. (2012) were among the few to advocate that assistant principals be more involved in providing instructional leadership. They noted that the recent shift in the role of principals from managerial leadership to instructional leadership has been accompanied by the realization that the work of school leadership is too all-encompassing for principals to handle on their own. This realization, along with educational research that consistently confirmed that instructional leadership had an impact on student learning, led Barnett et al. to conclude that instructional leadership should be the focus of the work done not only by principals, but also by other school administrators.

A few other authors also gave passing mention to the need to build instructional leadership capacity in assistant principals (Enomoto, 2012; Peters et al., 2015; Searby et al., 2016; Shore & Walshaw, 2016). Shore and Walshaw (2016) and Searby et al. (2016) agreed that existing measures to build capacity are both informal and insufficient, and that increased and better mentorship to build instructional leadership capabilities is required. However, while the

assertion that assistant principals lack instructional leadership capacity has merit, none of the

published research provided any definitive steps for how to remedy this problem. This is hardly

surprising given the prevailing proclivity to regard the position of assistant principal merely as a

stepping stone to a principalship. When the assistant principal position is not viewed as a distinct

and vital role in educational leadership, insufficient attention is then given to the potential for

assistant principals to be instructional leaders in their own right. Consequently, little effort is

expended by researchers to identify, and by division office administrators to develop, the

instructional leadership capacity of assistant principals in their current role. The research

presented in this document addresses this issue.

The palpable lack of published research defining the specific role of assistant principals is

consonant with my observation of such a lack in BRSD. However, a broader search under the

term "administrators" unearthed articles that articulated the need for instructional leaders to

acquire the skills (the ability to build relationships and to motivate others; the ability to formulate

a school vision; the ability to set practical goals to achieve the desired vision) that will enable

them to set organizational goals and to create a collaborative climate conducive to both student

and professional learning (Hallinger, 2003, 2005, 2011; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson,

2011; Robinson et al., 2008; Thoonen et al., 2012). Because these works help to clarify the

meaning of "instructional leadership", they are useful to practitioners in developing specific job

descriptions for principals and for assistant principals. This is particularly important for this

research study, which formulates a definition of the instructional leadership role of assistant

principals that can subsequently be applied to practice in BRSD in the form of a specific job

description that includes an instructional leadership dimension for assistant principals. These

works also provided a framework for the study by helping to clarify the requirements and

responsibilities of instructional leaders and by highlighting the need for research on the

instructional leadership role of assistant principals.

Instructional Leadership

Because the research study aimed to define the instructional leadership role of the

assistant principal, it was necessary to thoroughly examine the concept of instructional

leadership as it is presented in the theoretical literature. This review primarily sought to define

the term "instructional leadership" and to describe its facets and dimensions. The results of this

endeavour helped determine which facets of instructional leadership are currently in educational

practice, which facets constitute an essential part of a definition of an instructional leadership

role, and which aspects are desirable to implement in BRSD in the future. It was also necessary

to trace the studies that have already been conducted in this area in order to contextualize the

proposed research on the assistant principal's role in instructional leadership in the broader field

of instructional leadership scholarship and to avoid duplication of research topic.

This review of the literature dedicated to instructional leadership revealed that the

published works can be divided into the following categories: definitions; models of instructional

leadership; philosophical discussions of the benefits of instructional leadership; case studies;

Canadian studies; and descriptions of the role school administrators play in instructional

leadership.

Definitions of Instructional Leadership

For the research study, it was important first to define the term "instructional leadership"

before attempting to formulate a study which focused on that concept and which sought to cover

the elements that are essential for its successful implementation in the schools in BRSD.

Works that provided etymologies and definitions of "instructional leadership" abounded

in the literature. Neumerski (2012) and Searby et al. (2016) published articles on the etymology

of the term "instructional leadership". Searby et al. (2016) traced the term's first usage: "Instructional leadership is a term that was introduced in the 1970s, but the definition has remained somewhat elusive for decades" (p. 5). Neumerski (2016) also discussed the first appearance of the term, dating it to "the effective schools movement in the 1970s", when researchers compared "successful" schools with "ineffective" schools and subsequently listed the key characteristics of effective schools, one of them being that the principal was a strong instructional leader (Neumerski, 2012). Similar to Searby et al. (2016), Neumerski (2012) wrote: "Unfortunately, what did not emerge from the effective schools movement was a consensus as to precisely what an instructional leader was, what he or she would do to make the school effective, how he or she would do this work, and whether the work would vary by context" (Neumerski, 2012, p. 317). Neumerski (2012) himself pointed out that school leaders are more than managers. Rather, he described them as instructional leaders whose core work should be focused on teaching and learning.

Accompanying the articles tracing the development of the term "instructional leadership" were articles that attempted to define the term. Perhaps the most clear and succinct denotation came from Goldring et al. (2009), whose ideas provided the foundation in defining instructional leadership as "those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination and improvement of teaching and learning" (Robinson, 2010, p. 1).

Robinson (2010) and Robinson et al. (2008) further specified the idea of instructional leadership as "represent[ing] the extent to which the principal ensures that the school has high standards of student learning, rigorous curriculum (content), quality instruction (pedagogy), a culture of learning and professional behaviours, connections to external communities, and performance accountability" (Robinson, 2010, p. 1). By 2011, Robinson had adopted the term

"student-centered leadership" to refer to leadership and "its impact on the learning and achievement of students for whom the leader is responsible" (Robinson, 2011, p. 4). Millward and Timperley (2009) took a more teacher-centered view when they presented instructional leadership "as the leadership practice that develop[s] teachers' professional practices in ways that [improve] students' learning" (p. 141).

Less clear definitions included those of Blasé and Blasé (1999), Coldren and Spillane (2007), Glickman (1985), and Louis and Wahlstrom (2012). Coldren and Spillane (2007) defined instructional leadership as "the practice of making and sustaining connections to the instructional unit (i.e., the interaction of teachers, students and material) that enable instructional improvement" (p. 371). Blase and Blase (1999) used the ideas of Glickman (1985) to define instructional leadership "as the integration of the tasks of direct assistance to teachers, group development, staff development, curriculum development, and action research" (p. 130). Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) suggested that instructional leadership constitutes principal support for improved instruction through development of improved learning and innovation contexts (Leithwood & Louis, 2012, p. 40).

As with definitions themselves, there were also some differences in the literature regarding how to realize instructional leadership. Several researchers indicated that principal modelling and coaching are key components of instructional leadership. Goldring et al. (2009) claimed that the extent to which the principal ensures high standards is important. Millward and Timperley (2009) concurred that leaders have to demonstrate a strong sense of their role as leaders of teachers' learning and Robinson (2011) also indicated that the school leader is responsible for the teaching and learning that is occurring. Neumerski (2012) stated that instructional leaders must focus on teaching and learning. Coldren and Spillane (2007) related

instructional leadership to improving instruction and Glickman (1985) referred to the integration

of tasks that assist teachers. Others, however, suggested that instructional leadership is composed

of many practices, with leadership constituting only one component. Hallinger (2011) linked

leadership to learning through vision and goal setting, academic structure and process, and

people. Wahlstrom and Louis (2012) suggested improving instruction through the development

of improved learning contexts. The only point of commonality appears to be that instructional

leadership includes improving teachers' abilities to enhance student learning.

It is unclear why educational theorists have been unable to agree on one simple,

straightforward definition for what does not appear to be a particularly difficult concept to grasp.

After all, according to Hallinger (2003), school administrators and teachers in "effective schools"

were practicing instructional leadership long before theorists coined a term ("instructional

leadership") for it. The lack of consensus on a definition of instructional leadership had

ramifications for the study. Primarily, the lack of agreement on a definition means that any

researcher in this subject area must choose more or less at random a definition that seems to that

individual to be the most reasonable in terms of clarity, completeness, and practical applicability

in educational settings. Following that necessity, for the research study, "instructional leadership

[is] those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordinate and

improvement of teaching and learning" (Robinson, 2010, p. 1). Specifically, these actions to

enhance the learning in schools include the setting of goals, the allocation of resources, the

supervision of teachers and support staff, and the development of professional learning

opportunities for the purpose of promoting student learning.

A second problem with the lack of consensus on a definition of instructional leadership

affects the way in which the research study fits into the body of existing research on instructional

leadership. If other researchers employ a definition of instructional leadership that differs from the definition used in this study, it becomes more difficult to find related studies that are purportedly dedicated to the same concept. In turn, the study might also be irrelevant to other studies that claim to focus on instructional leadership. A final potential problem is that the lack of definitional clarity has led to much confusion and some resistance on the part of school leaders who do not fully understand the concept, but are nonetheless expected to implement practices that are commensurate with it. That lack of definitional clarity is a problem in Battle River School Division is discussed in some detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Theoretical Models of Instructional Leadership

In addition to a myriad of definitions, the literature contained several theoretical models of instructional leadership in education. A single Google Scholar search revealed over 400 000 entries. Blase and Blase (2000), Elmore (2000), Hallinger (2005), Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Heck (1990), and Wahlstrom and Louis (2012) are some of the researchers who have constructed models of instructional leadership. The three most prevalent models, however, were developed by the Wallace Foundation (2012), Leithwood (2012), and Robinson (2011). These straightforward models most clearly delineated the key elements of instructional leadership.

The Wallace Foundation (2012) model of instructional leadership identified five practices that embody the concept. These are as follows:

1. shaping a vision of academic success for all students, based on high standards;

2. creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail;

3. cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision;

4. improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn to do their utmost; and

5. managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement. (p. 6)

This framework also proposed a "distributed model of leadership" where the principal frees up his or her time for instructional leadership activities by delegating other areas of responsibility to specific individuals (Anderson, 2012).

The Wallace Foundation (2012) framework sets the stage for school principals to incorporate the concept of instructional leadership in a practical manner in their schools and it shifts the focus of the principal's duties from managerial to instructional. This model provides a theoretical framework, but lacks depth in terms of practice. It supplies objectives or goals that are idealistic: having a vision for the success of all students; creating a hospitable climate to education; cultivating leadership in others; and improving instruction. However, it seems to overlook some practical realities and it fails to explain what each of the practices entails. For instance, creating a vision of high standards for all students suggests that all learners are capable of high academic achievement. The model fails to address the inclusive education policy that is a reality in Alberta schools. Alberta's classrooms are composed of children with wide-ranging abilities. Many students have no special needs, but some students have mild, moderate, or severe learning disabilities. These students with special needs require many different kinds of supports, which can range from readers or scribes to medical assistance and tube-feeding. Depending on the diagnosis, a student might only be able to respond to sensory stimulation. In such a situation, there would be little or no academic achievement. Another example of the model's shortcomings is the key practice of improving instruction. The assumption appears to be that all principals have the knowledge required to identify superior teaching practices and to provide support and

mentorship to those whose practices need improvement. In reality, not all principals possess such knowledge. Moreover, although the model recognizes the importance of improving instruction, it contains no practical suggestions for how to do so.

A second prevalent model of instructional leadership was developed by Leithwood (2012), who proposed that transformational leadership and instructional leadership be combined to provide an all-encompassing approach to student learning and school improvement. In Leithwood's (2012) view, "transformational leadership" occurs when a leader exerts influence over others. Leithwood's (2012) model presented four core leadership practices designed to build instructional capacity in teachers and to improve student learning. The first core practice is setting direction, which presupposes a teacher's moral imperative for teaching. Teachers and administrators create high expectations by collaborating to establish the overall vision and goals of the school. The second core practice involves the development of people. This is done by providing support, mentoring and professional learning. The third core practice establishes within the school a collaborative learning environment that is connected to the larger community. Such collaboration helps to build a learning network which, in turn, supports the work of teachers. The fourth and final core practice consists of actions that have a direct impact on students. These actions include hiring staff, providing instructional support, and aligning resources to support student learning (Leithwood, 2012). These are reasonable practices, but again, as in the Wallace Foundation (2012) model, it is assumed, perhaps erroneously, that the principal has the knowledge and the capacity to generate the ideas and to build the capacity in others that will lead to improved student learning.

The third major model of instructional leadership was Robinson's all-encompassing "student-centered" model (Robinson 2011). Robinson (2011) first identified three requisite

capabilities of an instructional leader: the ability to recognize, obtain, and use relevant knowledge about teaching and learning for decision making; the ability to solve complex problems; the ability to build relational trust. In Robinson's (2011) model, these capabilities pervade the following five leadership dimensions: establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; ensuring quality teaching; leading teacher learning and development; and ensuring an orderly and safe environment (p. 16).

Similar to the models proposed by Leithwood (2012) and the Wallace Foundation (2012), Robinson's (2011) model outlines the key components of instructional leadership, emphasizes the importance of creating and communicating a shared educational vision, and affirms the need to collaboratively set goals for student achievement. The three models all advocate the creation of a collaborative culture that supports learning and encourages teaching excellence. Only Robinson's (2011) model, however, incorporates the underlying capabilities that are necessary for the desired growth in teaching and learning to occur. Robinson's (2011) framework acknowledges that the attributes of the leader are critical to the success of instructional leadership practices.

Other important differences between the models are also evident. Unlike Robinson (2011), Leithwood (2012) and the Wallace Foundation (2012) both recommended that other methods, such as distributed and transformational leadership, be used in conjunction with instructional leadership to allow the principal to focus his or her energies on the instructional aspects of leadership. Moreover, while Leithwood (2012) propounded that trust must be established before the real instructional work begins, Robinson (2011) stated that relational trust is developed while the work is being planned and implemented.

A final point regarding the available models of instructional leadership is that there is

room for more research in this area. Several questions have yet to be addressed. Are there particular strategies that principals and assistant principals should employ that are more effective than others? Additional research could determine specific ways to build capacity within the framework of instructional leadership by identifying which areas of professional learning should be targeted and how best to address them. Furthermore, is instructional leadership a stand-alone model of leadership or is it necessary to blend leadership strategies to fully augment the practices that lead to increased student learning and system improvement? Future research could determine the responsibilities that should be part of the principal or the assistant principal role and those that could be distributed to or shared with others. This is of particular relevance to the study, which necessarily considers which models of instructional leadership or which aspects of the combined models would be appropriate for implementation in BRSD.

Benefits of Instructional Leadership

In addition to definitions and models of instructional leadership, the body of literature devoted to instructional leadership also included works that highlighted the advantages of incorporating instructional leadership capacity into schools. Several researchers, such as Hallinger (2003), Robinson et al. (2008), and Wahlstrom (2012), concurred that instructional leadership practices contribute to school effectiveness and that the leaders of high performance schools focus on instructional leadership. In 2008, Robinson et al. determined that the effect size of instructional leadership on student learning was 0.84. This finding demonstrates a huge advantage to using instructional leadership practices to improve student achievement. In 2003, Hallinger suggested an indirect correlation between instructional leadership capacities and student achievement. That is, small improvements in instructional leadership capacities are accompanied by large improvements in student achievement. Leithwood (2012) and Wahlstrom

(2012) agreed that some specific practices of instructional leadership help to build teacher capacity, which, in turn, affects student learning in positive ways.

It is thus evident from the literature that there is a positive causal relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement. Nevertheless, gaps remain in the research. What are the specific instructional leadership practices that contribute to student learning? Which of these practices directly affect the learning of students and which have an indirect influence? Further research, including this study, could provide specific pathways for school leaders in their quest to create high achieving, successful schools where all students achieve to the best of their abilities.

Case Studies in Instructional Leadership

A fourth category in the broad mix of instructional leadership literature was case studies. Most of the case studies were very narrow in scope, restricted to one or two grade levels, or focused on one location (usually in an American context). The basic findings of the case studies were that setting direction and building capacity in instructional leadership are critical precursors of educational success (Shulman & Sullivan, 2015; Valle et al., 2015). These results are consonant with the conclusions contained in other types of instructional leadership research.

Canadian Studies

In addition to American case studies, a few Canadian studies have also been published. Of particular interest are a research study by The Canadian Association of Principals and the Alberta Teachers Association (2014), and various case studies conducted by Brandon et al. (2015), Hanna (2010), Goslin (2008), and Mason (2013), In 2014, The Canadian Association of Principals and the Alberta Teachers Association jointly conducted a research study that focused mainly on the future of the principalship in Canada. The researchers identified many

commonalities in workload issues and other pressing concerns (such as inclusive education, diversity in the classroom, and social media). One important finding was that principals lacked efficacy in instructional leadership. The research revealed that the participating principals did not feel that they had the necessary skills and knowledge to provide adequate instructional leadership. Principals indicated that this lack caused them to focus on managerial aspects of their jobs while avoiding the more subjective tasks associated with instructional leadership (Canadian Association of Principals, 2014).

This interesting finding supports Robinson's (2011) view that principals must have sufficient knowledge, problem solving skills, and relational trust to allow them to work through the dimensions of instructional leadership. At the same time, the finding appears to contradict the presupposition in the models of Leithwood and the Wallace Foundation that these skills are inherent in the individuals who hold leadership positions. The research therefore underscores the necessity to determine the individual needs of principals and assistant principals and to help build their specific skill sets before implementing other instructional leadership practices.

In other research, Brandon et al. (2015) established the importance to system leaders of building purposeful, trusting relationships and of utilizing expertise both within and also outside the organization. These researchers studied six highly successful school jurisdictions in Alberta and identified five prevailing instructional leadership themes: a focus on student success; the provision of engaging instruction; the fostering of collective efficacy; the scaffolding of instructional leadership; and the strengthening of professional learning. Although the study was directed at the superintendent's role in leading learning, the emergent themes have relevance for principals as well.

Another Canadian case study, conducted by Goslin (2008) as part of her doctoral

research, focused on how principals in three Alberta high schools conveyed instructional leadership to their teachers. Goslin concluded that effective instructional leaders do the following: (a) impart beliefs about their role as instructional leaders; (b) articulate a focus on instructional change and improvement; (c) assess the needs for professional learning and instructional improvement; (d) possess curricular and instructional knowledge; (e) facilitate change processes that lead to instructional improvement; (f) demonstrate the relevance of changes; (g) set expectations for implementing instructional improvement; (h) assess the progress of implementation of instructional improvement; and (i) manage the complexity inherent within high schools (Goslin, 2008, p. 247). While the study was conducted in only three high schools, it has relevance for other principals, and also for the proposed study, because it identifies key instructional leadership practices.

As did Goslin, Mason (2013) conducted a case study in Alberta as part of his doctoral requirements. Mason investigated the challenges with instituting instructional leadership practices by analyzing documents such as school improvement plans and three-year education plans, and by conducting interviews with the superintendent, fifteen principals, and sixteen teachers in one Alberta school division. Five instructional leadership themes emerged from Mason's study: (a) vision/mission; (b) teaching and planning time; (c) managing classroom instruction; (d) student success/progress; and (e) positive atmosphere. Mason also identified several factors that have an impact on the successful implementation of instructional leadership activities: time constraints, limited financial and human resources, and such distractors as malfunctioning equipment or unexpected school visits from upset parents. This case study has relevance for other school and system administrators, as well as for this study, because it discusses important instructional leadership themes and because it itemizes possible deterrents to

incorporating instructional leadership into schools. The study similarly takes into account these themes and deterrents.

Hanna's (2010) case study, also conducted in Alberta as part of her doctoral requirements, investigated how principals in two high-achieving school districts used instructional leadership strategies. Her key finding was that the participating principals demonstrated instructional leadership practices in the following areas: (a) vision/goals; (b) learning/achievement; (c) leadership; (d) accountability; and (e) communication. Furthermore, Hanna also discovered that the participating principals struggled to balance their managerial and their instructional leadership roles – a finding that was corroborated by the Canadian Association of Principals and the Alberta Teachers Association in 2014. Hanna recommended that a specific definition of instructional leadership be used by school divisions throughout the province to assist in developing instructional leadership capacity. These findings seem to point to the need for a clear definition of instructional leadership and the need to develop parameters for an instructional leadership role that take into account the fact that school administrators function both as instructional leaders and as school managers. These needs are addressed in my research study.

Although the findings of the existing studies are undoubtedly useful both in identifying pertinent aspects of instructional leadership and in highlighting the overall importance of employing instructional leadership strategies, these studies also highlight a need for more studies. For example, in their 2015 study, Brandon et al. used the Accountability Pillar standards of Alberta Education to determine whether or not a given school jurisdiction could be considered "highly successful". Alberta Education tends to consider as "highly successful" the schools with the highest academic achievement scores as well as those with above average high school

completion rates. However, one could question whether those attributes alone constitute success in school. Is the criterion of students feeling safe and welcome part of being a "successful" school? Moreover, the study identified all of the practices that are employed by the successful divisions. Are any of those practices embedded in the work of less successful jurisdictions? Comparative studies might shed more light on why particular strategies work and whether their success is dependent on other, individualistic, factors.

More work also needs to be undertaken with respect to isolating the specific steps required to successfully incorporate instructional leadership practices in the Canadian context. The Canadian Association of Principals' (2014) study found that principals experienced an overwhelming sense of helplessness and uncertainty towards their role in instructional leadership, but neither that study nor the doctoral theses produced specific, in-depth suggestions for how to overcome those problems. Mason (2013) suggested that school district leaders could create clear expectations of instructional leaders in their schools and that they could create practicums for potential school leaders (p. 208). He did not indicate what those expectations should be or how they should be monitored and assessed; neither did he suggest the desirable parameters of a practicum designed for instructional leaders. Future research could address such issues. My research study provides specific information about a school jurisdiction in Alberta, and is one of the few existing studies to be conducted in an Albertan setting. My study addresses the widely-observed uncertainty of school administrators with respect to instructional leadership and takes into account both the managerial and the instructional leadership functions of BRSD's instructional leaders. It also provides for practitioners, a clear definition of the term "instructional leadership" that can be used to define and also to assess their functions and tasks as instructional leaders. At the same time, the research contributes to the existing body of

Canadian research and will also hopefully provide a stepping stone for future studies in the province of Alberta.

Administrative Roles in Instructional Leadership

A final category in the instructional leadership literature was works that focused on the role of administrators (particularly principals). These works included government publications, studies of the principal's role in instructional leadership, and general articles that discussed the assistant principal role.

Of particular importance to my proposed study was Alberta Education's *The Principal Quality Practice Guideline* (2009), which discussed the changing role of the school principal and outlined seven practices that are essential to a school leader. In particular, Dimension Four identified instructional leadership as one of the key standards for school leaders. A more recent edition of this publication, entitled the *Leadership Quality Standard* (published February 7, 2018), again identified instructional leadership as one of the dimensions school leaders must demonstrate in their daily work. This document sets the standard for instructional leadership in Alberta by identifying nine competencies that the Ministry believes are essential for effective leadership of all school and district leaders. These documents have direct relevance to the proposed study for two reasons: (1) they clearly indicate that instructional leadership must be provided in Alberta's schools and therefore the concept of instructional leadership merits academic study by Alberta's scholars; and (2) five of the listed competencies form the basis for the questionnaire and the activity log that are part of this study. These five competencies are as follows:

1. 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.

2. Leading a Learning Community – a leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning.

3. Providing Instructional Leadership – a leader ensures that every study has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences.

4. Developing 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.

5. Managing School Operations and Resources – a leader effectively directs operations and manages resources.

The first four above-mentioned competencies represent for assistant principals the key instructional leadership competencies that are important for school leaders in BRSD. The fifth competency addresses managerial competency, which is also a component of the work of school leaders in BRSD. It was important to include this competency in the study because a definition of instructional leadership can only be successfully applied in BRSD if it also takes into account the inevitability that some of the assistant principals' time will be devoted to managerial tasks. Many of the previously mentioned authors in this literature review noted that school leaders reported devoting most of their time to managerial, as opposed to instructional leadership, tasks. The inclusion of this competency has helped to ascertain that this situation also exists in BRSD.

In addition to government documents, the body of academic work devoted to instructional leadership abounded with studies on the principal's role in instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2003, 2005, 2011; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008; Wallace Foundation, 2012). These studies all presented the principal as the catalyst for student

learning and for school improvement. They all identified the principal as the one to set direction, the one to provide professional development for teachers, and the one to create a positive school climate. However, recent academic research also pointed out that the work of school leadership is too all-encompassing for principals to handle on their own (Barnett et al., 2012; Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, the realization on the part of practitioners and researchers that instructional leadership must be a shared responsibility has not so far produced many published papers that explore the avenues for attaining that desirable state of shared responsibility. There was, for instance, very little research regarding the role of assistant principals in instructional leadership (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Barnett et al., 2012; Gurley et al., 2015; Militello et al., 2015; Petrides et al., 2014; and Searby et al., 2016).

Some of the general research pertaining to assistant principals recognized the role of the assistant principal as succession practice for a principalship (Gurley et al., 2015; Hausman et al., 2002; Munoz & Barber, 2011; Searby et al., 2016; Shore & Walshaw, 2014). Much of this research showed that while assistant principals ideally view themselves as instructional leaders, they also recognize that, in reality, they are restricted to managerial roles in their current positions (Barnett et al., 2012; Enomoto, 2012; Gurley et al., 2013; Hausman et al., 2002; Peters et al., 2015; Militello et al., 2015; Petrides et al., 2014; Searby et al., 2016; Shore & Walshaw, 2016). Hartley (2009) pointed out that many assistant principals become school leaders with the intention of having an impact on instruction and instead find themselves enmeshed in the managerial aspects of school leadership. In addition, some works gave passing mention to the need to build instructional leadership capacity in assistant principals (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Barnett et al., 2012; Enomoto, 2012; Gurley et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2015; Petrides et al., 2014;

Searby et al., 2016; Shore & Walshaw, 2016). However, the available literature contained no suggestions for how to build that capacity.

The body of research pertaining to assistant principals did indicate that assistant principals are ill-prepared for the role of instructional leader. Although many assistant principals expressed a desire to participate in this type of leadership, they acknowledged that their training and their duties have not prepared them for this work (Barnett et al., 2012). Many assistant principals were said to lack the confidence to provide effective feedback to teachers. In some cases, as Oleszewski et al. (2012) pointed out, this could have been the result of teachers assuming administrative positions without having first adequately developed their own teaching skills through many years of classroom experience. Barnett et al. (2012) also mentioned that the lack of confidence on the part of assistant principals might have been the result of a lack of practice because the principal had assumed the instructional leadership role of teacher evaluator and mentor. Barnett et al. (2012) and Melton et al. (2012) mentioned that assistant principals sometimes struggled to balance the managerial facets of the job with the instructional leadership aspects. One interesting omission in the academic literature is that none of the authors mentioned that assistant principals are frequently assigned teaching and administrative duties.

In addition to pinpointing some of the personal challenges facing assistant principals who wish to be instructional leaders, researchers in this area also identified some systemic practices in educational institutions that impede the assistant principal's ability to adopt instructional leadership roles. Marshall and Hooley (2006) wrote that assistant principals sometimes "find that their roles are at cross-purposes with each other" (p. 7). While assistant principals are expected to work collegially with their teaching staff, there are times (particularly when a teacher's practices or actions are called into question) when they are expected to treat teachers as

subordinates. In other instances, assistant principals feel that although they were expected to deal with difficult situations, they did not have the authority to make the final decisions (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Finally, some authors identified a conflict between the aspirations and the actualities of assistant principals. Many assistant principals aspire to create innovative solutions to problems, but instead are forced to wait for their principal's instructions or permission to proceed. Marshall and Hooley (2006) rightly observed that "the assistant principal whose job description seems to be 'do everything the principal can't and doesn't want to face' will probably feel tremendous dissatisfaction with the position" (p. 122).

This review of the research into the role of the assistant principal in instructional leadership revealed a large research gap that could be filled with further study. The body of research on instructional leadership did not contain a clear description of the roles assistant principals can play in instructional leadership. There was a dearth of material regarding the instructional leadership practices that many assistant principals are engaged in and that they are unprepared for or unable to carry out. It is evident that much more research is needed to explore and assess the potential (and perhaps, in rare instances, realized) role of assistant principals in instructional leadership. This doctoral research partially addresses this need by clarifying the role of assistant principals as instructional leaders in the Battle River School Division.

<div align="center">**Critical Synthesis of the Literature**</div>

In summary, the research aims to define the role of the assistant principal. Such a study required consideration of the following aspects of educational administration: administrative and organization structures in schools; managerial issues; instructional leadership issues; specific duties of the assistant principal that are currently shared with, and distinct from, those assumed by other staff members in a school; desirable duties of the assistant principal. These requirements

have shaped the structure of the literature review that has been presented in this chapter.

The review of the literature has also revealed a few current theoretical trends in school organizations and administration that are increasingly being adopted in schools: distributed leadership, instructional leadership, increased attention to defining specific administrative roles. The current focus on distributed leadership signifies a move in organizational structure from an authoritarian style to a more collaborative model which recognizes, celebrates, and utilizes the various skills and talents that members of a school staff possess. A distributed leadership model is therefore very practical (and economical) because it makes use of "in-house" talent instead of relying solely on external (and often expensive) experts. Distributed leadership models recognized the following: that a school is synergistic; that no one person (that is, the principal) can be solely accountable for how well a school functions; that staff members work best in cooperation rather than in isolation or competition; that opportunities exist to develop distinct duties that take advantage of the specific skill sets of all people in a school. A distributed model also develops collegiality and professionalism while recognizing, utilizing, and developing skill sets in teaching professionals. People who are valued members of a team work hard to develop skills and to contribute ideas and expertise.

At the same time, this review of the literature dedicated to distributed leadership has raised some questions for future research about the nature of hierarchy, authority, collaboration, and decision-making in schools. Schools are traditionally top-down organizations with the principal yielding the decision-making power and distributing responsibilities and roles throughout his or her staff. Further research is required to determine how collaborative decision-making affects the organizational structure of a school and whether or not distributed leadership ultimately contributes to capacity building and school improvement.

The second theoretical trend revealed in the literature review is a focus on instructional leadership. This seems to signify a paradigm change from the business/managerial model that has been quite prevalent in Canadian schools in recent decades to a more appropriate educational model that seeks to create a suitable climate for learning, collegiality amongst staff, professionalism of teachers, and high standards of achievement for students. Instructional leadership focuses on setting goals, creating a vision for school improvement, and building relationships and environments that are conducive for learning. Important components include increasing teacher capacity to enhance the learning of students and encouraging staff collaboration to identify and address targeted areas of improvement. This leadership style appears to view students as the nucleus of the educational system rather than as orbiting clients or consumers of educational products. As well, the theoretical research seems to indicate quite clearly that effective instructional leaders will exhibit creativity (ability to set a vision); practicality (ability to set achievable goals and standards for monitoring and assessing progress); and empathy (ability to foster relationships, mentor, and inspire staff).

At the same time, however, there is obviously more room for both case studies and comparative research into successful leadership strategies and practices, particularly with respect to these practical concerns: applications of theoretical concepts to build capacity in staff; ways to incorporate strategies in Canadian schools; standards and methods of assessment to determine direct and indirect effects of instructional leadership strategies on students; and examination of what constitutes a "successful" school.

A third consideration concurrent with the present shift to distributed leadership and instructional styles of leadership is how the specific roles for more senior administrators (i.e., principals and assistant principals) are defined and the qualities and skills required for their

specific roles. The academic literature focused primarily on the role of the principal and his or her responsibilities in leading schools, using distributed leadership or instructional leadership models. While the theoretical frameworks are provided, some practical considerations need refinement. The current trend to utilize the existing skill sets of professionals is accompanied by a need to define, assess, and develop particular skills sets for particular jobs.

A significant gap exists in the research on the assistant principal. The body of published material contained no existing definition of the distinct role of the assistant principal in the general organization of the school or within instructional leadership positions. No studies found during the time of this research focused specifically on the role assistant principals currently or ideally play and no studies examined or defined the distinct role of the assistant principal in instructional leadership. As a result, no specific research into the existing skill sets and the need for and the development of instructional leadership capacity has yet been published, a lack that is addressed in my research. The following conceptual framework, which is based on the literature review, outlines and relates the key concepts that provided the foundation for this study.

Conceptual Framework

The aim of this study was to define the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal. The development of such a definition depended upon four underlying factors which are presented in the conceptual framework in Figure 2.1. They are as follows: organizational structures and roles, role of the assistant principal, instructional leadership, administrative roles in instructional leadership. Organizational structures and roles are manifest in how school personnel interact with one another and in how tasks are delegated in order to promote the smooth day-to-day operation of the school and the delivery of educational services to the students of the institution. If the structure is hierarchical and authoritarian, as opposed to being

horizontal and egalitarian, the school is less likely to be characterized by a distributed leadership model. The extent to which distributed leadership is practiced has an impact on the involvement of assistant principals in instructional leadership. A distributed leadership model requires not just the principal, but also the assistant principal, to function as instructional leaders.

The second relevant factor in the conceptual framework is the role of the assistant principal. The assistant principal role had traditionally two main functions: support for the principal and preparation for promotion to a principalship. The responsibilities of assistant principals have historically been managerial in nature. However, Alberta's Ministry of Education currently expects school administrators to function primarily as instructional leaders and secondarily as business managers. This requires school administrators to share more of the responsibilities and tasks associated with instructional leadership. A definition of the assistant principal's role in instructional leadership must therefore take into consideration the educational policies of the provincial government as well as the needs and organizational structures of individual schools.

The third factor, instructional leadership, provides the essential elements of the concept of instructional leadership which is currently being incorporated into Alberta's schools. These elements include a clear, concise, and complete definition of the term "instructional leadership", the prevalent facets and models that can be applied in schools, and comparisons of experiences incorporating instructional leadership into Canadian schools. The fourth factor is administrative roles in instructional leadership. The *Leadership Quality Standard* published by Alberta Education (2018) sets out the competencies required by Alberta's school leaders. In particular, this document outlines the instructional leadership competencies that all instructional leaders in

Alberta are expected to acquire and exhibit. These competencies provide the basis for the

questionnaire and the activity log that constitute the research components of the proposed study.

Figure 2.1
Conceptual Framework

EXPERIENCE

Leadership Quality Standard:
- Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning
- Embodying Visionary Leadership
- Leading a Learning Community
- Providing Instructional Leadership
- Developing Leadership Capacity

Observation of Assistant Principal role in BRSD:
- No standard
- No description
- No distinction between principal and assistant

RESEARCH THEORY & LITERATURE

Key Concepts
- Distributed Leadership
- Instructional Leadership
- Defining Administrator Roles
- Role of the Assistant Principal

Research Style
- Epistemological Stance: Social Constructivism

Goals: Change
Define role of Assistant Principal in order to:
- Close the gap in the research and practice
- Create a clear role definition for current assistant principals

Goal: Contribute to Theory
- Define the distinct role of assistant principal
- Initiate a theoretical discussion of distinct role assistant principals can play in instructional leadership and distributed leadership

RESEARCH

Research Question:
"In what ways do assistant principals support optimal student learning and high-quality teaching?"

Subordinate Questions:
1. What range of roles are typically assigned to assistant principals?
2. In what ways are assistant principals' roles determined?
3. What are the instructional leadership roles of the assistant principal?
4. What are the main challenges and opportunities of assistant principals?

METHODOLOGY/METHOD

Research Methodology: Case Study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

- Bounded by: Battle River School Division; 2018/19 school year
- Phenomenon: Assistant Principal Role in BRSD
- Participants: Assistant Principals and Principals

Method
- Researcher Reflective Journal
- Questionnaire: to assistant principals and principals
- Participant Reflections: Weekly Log by assistant principals
- BRSD Documents and Alberta Ed's Leadership Quality Standard

ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, SYNTHESIS OF DATA

CHANGE IN THE ROLE OF THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

Chapter Summary

In essence, Chapter Two has provided a review of the literature which delineates the main theoretical trends that inform this study: distributed leadership; instructional leadership; administrative roles. This chapter has also illustrated how these theoretical trends combine with current school practices and provincial leadership standards to form a conceptual framework for the research study on the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal. The methodology for the study is described in detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Educational leadership in Canada is currently undergoing a paradigm shift from a managerial or business model to an instructional leadership model for the provision of educational assistance (Canadian Association of Principals, 2014). This change in focus has prompted a similar shift in the work of Alberta's superintendents, who must now focus on increasing the instructional leadership capacity of all school leaders in their respective districts or divisions so that these school administrators can function primarily as instructional leaders and secondarily as business managers.

As the senior leadership team in Battle River School Division (BRSD) works to shift the emphasis from managerial tasks to instructional leadership processes, the team is incorporating the principles and practices that stem from both instructional leadership theory and from distributed leadership theory. The primary aims are as follows: (a) to determine how administrative duties should be divided between the principal and the assistant principal, (b) to formulate expectations of principals and assistant principals with respect to specific duties (such as the mentorship and skill acquisition of assistant principals and the mentorship of teachers), and (c) to provide appropriate mentorship and professional development opportunities for both principals and assistant principals to increase their instructional leadership capacity and to create effective school leaders capable of assisting teachers to enhance their teaching practice. As Superintendent of BRSD, I have begun working with school administrators in BRSD to build their instructional leadership capacity. In the course of my work, I have observed that, throughout BRSD, the role of assistant principal varied significantly from school to school. A first step in the evolution of business managers to instructional leaders was therefore to clearly

define the distinct instructional leadership role of the assistant principal.

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lack of a clear definition of the instructional leadership role for assistant principals in BRSD. Specifically, the study addresses the following question: In what ways, as instructional leaders, do assistant principals support high-quality teaching and optimal student learning? To answer this over-riding question, I sought to answer the following subordinating questions:

1. What roles are currently assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?

2. How are the instructional leadership roles assigned in BRSD?

3. What are the instructional leadership roles of the assistant principal in BRSD?

4. What are the main challenges and opportunities of instructional leadership in BRSD?

Thus, this research elucidates the responsibilities, the goals, the challenges, the limitations, the realities and the expectations that characterize the role of the assistant principal. BRSD will subsequently use the information gleaned in this study to develop appropriate job descriptions and expectations for the position of assistant principal and to provide meaningful professional learning opportunities that will build the leadership capacity of those individuals who hold administrative positions in BRSD. The findings of this study could also stimulate other school divisions to create organizational structures with clearly defined administrative roles for the principals and the assistant principals of their schools.

Chapter One of this research thesis defined the research problem and provided the context of, the rational for, the background to, and the significance of the study. Chapter Two provided an extensive literature review and the conceptual framework for the research study. Chapter Three of this thesis describes in detail the methodology for the research. This chapter first provides the rationale for the selected methodology. It then explains the research context,

the selection of participants, and the specific methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter Three also sets out the limitations and the delimitations of the research and, as well, it examines in some detail the ethical considerations for this case study.

Rationale for Research Approach

The research study was rooted in the epistemology of social constructivism. Researchers who have a social constructivist perspective "seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). They strive to find subjective meaning by using the participants' perspectives instead of trying to prove or disprove a specific theory. Social constructivism is thus a communicative process that stresses interaction over observation. A constructivist approach to research is holistic and it enables context and content knowledge to construct meaning.

Case study is a type of social constructivist methodology that engage educators in "the search for meaning and understanding" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). Case study is a (primarily) qualitative research methodology in which the researcher is interested in "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 37).

Social constructivists (including case study researchers) mainly use qualitative methods of research because they seek to "focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Qualitative research draws out "a research problem through a description of trends or a need for an explanation of the relationship among variables" (Creswell, 2015, p. 13). Nevertheless, neither social constructivism as an epistemological stance nor case study methodology preclude

the use of quantitative methods as well as qualitative methods. Both qualitative and quantitative types of research seek to answer the question "why" and both seek to explain relationships among variables. Qualitative research is especially useful for discovering the subtleties contained within the information that is gathered. Quantitative research has the advantage of eliminating reliability issues and it is useful for gathering information that will have statistical representation. Research that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods can provide useful statistics and other descriptive information while simultaneously providing a holistic interpretation of the resultant data that takes into account the nuances and subtleties of the information and the context from which it is gleaned.

The research study proceeded from a social constructivist stance that aimed to construct meaning from the experiences of school leaders in order to create purposeful change in BRSD. By focusing specially on the role of the assistant principal, I, as the researcher, sought to understand the circumstances in which assistant principals live and work, and to create change by delineating a clear role description for assistant principals in BRSD. My research design incorporated the following components of qualitative research: the goal of solving a problem of practice; the aim of making improvements; and the inclusion as participants in the research study of the people who will be most directly affected by the research. This study aimed to solve a problem of practice and to make specific improvements by defining the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal in BRSD's principals and assistant principals because they will be most affected by the changes resulting from the study.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data. Two primary tools for collecting data were a questionnaire with both close-ended and open-ended questions and an activity log. This approach allowed participants to provide a detailed picture of their reality. The

answers to the close-ended questions in the questionnaire provided specific descriptive information, such as participant demographics, the scheduling of administrative time, the manner in which responsibilities are determined and participants' perceptions of the opportunities and challenges of the assistant principal role. Because this type of descriptive information helped provide context that is easily verifiable, the inclusion of such data enhanced the trustworthiness of this research. The questions that sought quantifiable data were not designed for in-depth statistical analysis, but instead provided contextual information that enhanced the holistic understanding of the phenomenon and increased the reliability of the study. The answers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire supplied contextual information relating to the reasoning and the realities that underlie the status quo, thus providing the deeper understanding that was necessary for social constructivist research. In addition to the questionnaire, a secondary tool for assistant principals was an activity log that recorded the daily activities of assistant principals. The activity log served as a credibility check because it provided a record of what assistant principals do, and this record was then compared with what participants report in the questionnaire about what they do. This feature increased the study's trustworthiness.

Along with the questionnaire and the activity log, additional information was collected through participant observation and the examination of district documents. As Superintendent of BRSD, I was the participant observer and I used my knowledge of policy and procedure to provide an in-depth and holistic understanding of the district and to compare and contrast district goals and realities with provincial standards and goals and with the information collected through the questionnaire and activity log. These multiple sources of data were intended to increase credibility and enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design and Methods

Research Setting

Battle River School Division

Currently, the school jurisdiction covers approximately 6700 kilometers of area in north central Alberta and is comprised of a number of very individualistic schools, which at the time of the study ranged in size of student population from 60 to 700. A few schools are located in small cities, but most are situated in small rural towns or villages. The school configurations vary from kindergarten through grade twelve to kindergarten through grade five. In addition, there is an urban middle school and a grade nine through twelve school. BRSD's student population is largely homogeneous, comprised mainly of Euro-Canadians, with very few immigrants. However, the needs of each school differ greatly due to school size and location.

The diversity in size and location of the schools has an impact on the programming options that are available, and on the size and configurations of classes. Traditionally, the schools have been funded using the same model favoured by Alberta Education. This provincial model is largely based on student numbers: the lower the enrollment, the lower the funding. Therefore, the smaller the student population, the fewer the teachers and course offerings. Within BRSD, declining enrolments in rural areas make it more difficult to adequately fund and staff schools. Smaller rural schools have more split grades covered by fewer teachers and the rural high schools have difficulty providing the full range of core and complementary courses each year. Many courses are cycled, which means that the schools only offer them every other term or year. These conditions tend to have a deleterious effect on the pedagogical and professional development of affected instructors. Teachers of split grades are often so busy that they do not have the time or the energy to spend developing better personal pedagogical practices. Moreover, when teachers only occasionally teach a course, they lack the continuity that stimulates the

improvements that are continually made when they are teaching a course several times in a row. Thus, district-wide professional development is extremely important to allow these teachers to keep abreast of effective instructional strategies.

Professional development activities in BRSD typically occur in a central location. This creates an additional financial burden for the district because it must cover travel expenses for staff to attend the courses and the travel time must be included as part of the twelve-hundred-hour cap on assignable time for teachers. Staff from the rural areas often have difficulty finding substitute teachers to replace them in the classroom while they attend professional learning activities. If they cannot find a replacement, they do not attend such events. This creates further gaps in staff capacity among schools both within BRSD and among BRSD and various other school districts in the province. All of these factors make it difficult to ensure that rural and urban students throughout the district and the province receive the same high-quality educational opportunities and experiences.

Nevertheless, despite any existing differences between school districts, all schools in the province must meet the guidelines set out by Alberta Education and all schools are judged by the same standards (academic achievement on Provincial Achievement Tests, Diploma Exams and High School Completion Rates). Similar to other school districts in the province, BRSD strives to provide appropriate professional development opportunities for all teachers. It is often the case that the provision of professional learning initiatives costs more in BRSD than in some other school divisions because of the increased costs incurred in transporting internal staff and external experts to central locations within a very large area. Nonetheless, school district administrators in BRSD have built collaboration days into the school calendar to allow for staff to share their expertise and to engage in professional dialogue directed at improving instructional practices. As

well, another important initiative is to increase the instructional leadership capacity of all school administrators so that professional development can be internal and ongoing at all times in all schools throughout the district.

BRSD was chosen for this study primarily because it was representative of other school divisions in the province of Alberta. BRSD has a wide array of school configurations and most of these configurations are present in other districts as well. Thus, if someone from another district were to study assistant principals in Alberta, they would likely be able to relate to one of the same types of school configurations. BRSD is also similar to other Alberta school divisions in how problems are identified and in how changes are implemented. In BRSD, as in every other Alberta division, school and district office personnel will, at any given time, recognize a problem that needs change and then typically create engagement and increase investment in constructing a solution. They do this by collaborating with all stakeholders to identify problems or concerns and to create solutions with input from everyone within the district. Therefore, because BRSD is representative of Alberta's school districts and divisions with respect to school configurations as well as processes and practices, the findings of this particular study should thus be applicable to other school districts within the province.

Furthermore, a second reason that BRSD was chosen for study is that I, as superintendent of BRSD, am extremely familiar with the school division. This is advantageous for many reasons: recognition of the problem, establishment of relationships, and creation of solutions. I have worked in different capacities within the division for several years. This extensive experience has given me extended periods of time to observe past and current practice and to identify the research problem. While working with staff within the division, many of whom were participants in the study, I have fostered strong relationships which possibly created more

engagement and investment in helping to clearly define and ameliorate the current practices. My familiarity with the division and the collegiality I have established within BRSD may have engendered real commitment amongst the stakeholders to finding a creative solution to the identified problem.

Research Participants and Data Sources

The research was strengthened by encompassing as many viewpoints as possible. Because the total population of possible participants was quite small, all of the current school-level administrators were eligible to participate. The 23 assistant principals and the 25 principals of BRSD were invited to participate in this study. Fifty-four percent of these administrators chose to participate, thus bolstering the trustworthiness of the research. All participating principals and assistant principals were asked to complete the same questionnaire. In addition, all participating assistant principals were asked to complete an activity log for a period of six weeks. Only thirty percent of assistant principals completed the activity log.

Planning and Conducting the Research

After ethics approval was granted from both the University of Calgary and the Board of Trustees of BRSD, the study was conducted during the 2018/2019 school year. Data were collected during November and December of 2018. These two months were chosen because they fall in the middle of the school term and did not interfere with school start-up or end-of-term activities. School leaders had ample time before commencement of the field period of the research to establish school routines and to ensure that their schools had successfully completed start-up. The field period for the study ended before final examinations and other end-of-term activities began. The primary investigator for this research study, Dr. Jim Brandon, presented the purpose and rationale of the research study at a BRSD administrators' meeting in October. At the beginning of November, Dr. Brandon disseminated a questionnaire to all current principals and

assistant principals in the division as well as an activity log to all assistant principals in the division. He requested that all participating assistant principals complete the activity log for a period of six weeks. All participants in the study were requested to submit to the primary investigator the completed documents (questionnaires and activity logs) by the end of December, 2018. The data were then shared with me for the analysis which began in early January, 2019. The researcher completed the analysis in August, 2020.

Data Collection Methods

Case study methodology aims to understand a specific educational phenomenon, which in this study is the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal. The case was bounded by BRSD. According to Creswell (2015), a case study typically utilizes multiple methods of data collection to allow for triangulation of the data. This study employed the data collection techniques participant observation, enquiry, and examination. In this study, I as Superintendent and researcher assumed the role of participant observer. The enquiry (a means of questioning) took the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire elicited from the participants demographic information, perceptions of the assistant principal role, descriptions and assessments of current practice, and suggestions for desirable changes to the assistant principal role. The third technique, examination, refers to the process of using and making records. In this study, the primary tools of examination were the activity log and district documents. The activity log provided the assistant principals' descriptions of their current practice. Both the questionnaire and the activity log were administered through the Qualtrics Software survey, which ensured the anonymity by blocking the IP addresses that enabled participants to answer honestly with no fear of repercussions. The district documents provided additional information regarding provincial and district standards, goals, and policies, all of which contributed to the context and the holistic

understanding of the phenomenon.

Questionnaire

The primary tool for this study was a questionnaire (see Appendix B). The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine how principals and assistant principals perceived the current reality, the challenges, and the opportunities of the assistant principal role. Their responses to the questions addressed the overarching research question: In what ways, as instructional leaders, do assistant principals support high-quality teaching and optimal student learning? The answers also addressed the subordinating questions that sought to determine the following: the range of activities of assistant principals; the ways in which assistant principal roles are determined; the main challenges of and opportunities for assistant principals; and the leadership roles of the assistant principal.

The questionnaire was divided into the following sections:

A. Demographic Information

B. Responsibilities of the Assistant Principal

C. Responsibilities of the Principal

D. How Assistant Principal Responsibilities are Determined

E. Supporting Quality Teaching and Optimal Student Learning

F. Opportunities and Challenges of the Assistant Principal Role (Assistant Principals)

G. Opportunities and Challenges of the Assistant Principal Role (Principals)

H. Teacher Supervision

I. Leadership Practice

J. Further Comments

Sections A to G inclusive consisted of close-ended questions and sections H to J inclusive consisted of open-ended questions. The close-ended questions were designed to elicit a detailed, precise picture. The open-ended questions provided for a deeper understanding of the context in which assistant principals work and the factors underlying perceptions of the assistant principal role.

The quantitative data included such discrete demographic information as educational qualifications, years of experience, and current position. Time allotments with respect to responsibilities generate continuous data (data that can be measured on a scale such as the Likert Scale) for the study. This data also allowed for the comparison of points of view between principals and assistant principals in order to ascertain whether or not there were differences in perceptions between the different levels of administration in the district. The quantitative data are useful to division staff in ascertaining where to direct attention and how to create a plan to meet various needs.

The qualitative data included ordinal data such as responsibilities, and the challenges and opportunities for the assistant principal. The open-ended questions in the last three sections of the questionnaire focused on teacher supervision and leadership practice, and they also provided an opportunity for additional comments. The responses provided a more holistic picture of the situation by allowing participants to express in their own words their thoughts on their experiences. The participants had the opportunity to clearly state their perceptions about what is important to the position of assistant principal, and to indicate where and why there are gaps in practice. Overall, then, the questionnaire was designed to elicit the detailed information about current practice and attitudes with respect to the assistant principal role that allowed for a holistic interpretation of results and to generate the findings, assessments, and conclusions that will

inspire ideas for appropriate change.

Activity Log

The activity log was the secondary source of quantitative data for the research study (see Appendix C). The participating assistant principals completed a six-week log of the activities that consumed most of their time through the Qualtrics software. The activity log was comprised of a checklist of competencies contained in Alberta Education's *Leadership Quality Standard (LQS)*. For each week, the assistant principal indicated the percentage of time spent on the following dimensions of the LQS:

1. Leading a Learning Community (Dimension 4): A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning. Activities include: the provision of professional learning opportunities, the promotion of the safe and ethical use of technology, the fostering of a collaborative school culture, the provision of wrap-around services for students, the recognition of staff and student accomplishments.

2. Providing Instructional Leadership (Dimension 6): A leader ensures that every student has access to high-quality teaching and optimum student learning experiences. Activities include: the supervision and evaluation of teacher, the mentorship of teachers, the use of data to inform decisions, the alignment of instruction with learning outcomes.

3. Developing Leadership Capacity (Dimension 7): A leader provides opportunities for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and to support others in fulfilling their educational roles. Activities include: the engagement in consultative and collaborative decision-making, the empowerment of teachers in

leadership roles, the promotion of parental involvement, the sharing of leadership.

4. Managing School Operations and resources (Dimension 8): A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources. Activities include: the creation of budgets, the implementation and adherence to Occupational Health and Safety, the identification of and planning for areas of need, the recognition of building deficiencies, the provision of supervision schedules.

5. Modeling a Commitment to Professional Learning (Dimension 2): A leader engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to identify opportunities for improving leadership, teaching, and learning. Activities include: the acquisition of knowledge and information to enhance leadership practice, the application of educational research results to inform practice, the engagement with colleagues to build personal and professional capacities and expertise.

The logs were intended to show how much time assistant principals spent on each dimension, in the process revealing the main areas of focus for each participant over the six-week period of time. The accumulated data allowed comparison between the records of administrators, thus revealing variations and similarities throughout the district. Although it is impossible to guarantee that participants provided a completely accurate account of their activities, the activity logs revealed where assistant principals felt they were spending most of their time. This information thus provided answers to the study's subordinating questions.

District Documents and Leadership Quality Standard (LQS)

These documents were used to contextualize the information that emerged from the questionnaires and the activity logs. They allowed triangulation between provincial goals and standards, district goals and policies, and the realities faced by assistant principals and they

connected the provincial and district practices to the theoretical underpinnings of instructional leadership.

Data Management

All participants in the study were ensured anonymity in order to eliminate any feelings of risk that participants might have. When participants are sure that there is nothing personal to be gained or lost by their responses, they are more likely to be open and honest in their responses to the questions. Such openness and honesty was required for this case study to have meaning and ultimately to result in appropriate change. The primary data sources for this study were an electronic questionnaire hosted through the Qualtrics Software and an activity log. The completed answers to the questionnaire and the activity logs were collected through the website interface, wherein participants were not identifiable. The primary investigator, Dr. Brandon, scrutinized the open-ended response and activity log information to remove any potential information about the participants or anyone else that might be referred to. The raw data were stored on the Qualtrics Software server.

Data Analysis

The data for this study were both quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative Research

The quantitative data collected electronically by means of the questionnaire and the activity log included such information as age, amount of administrative experience, current administrative position, and years of education of the participants. It also included the time logged by the assistant principal for activities and leadership dimensions over a six-week period. Graphs and charts of this data were created using the Qualtrics Software. The information from the questionnaire provided the background of the participants and the context for their work. The information from the activity logs identified the differences between the managerial and the

instructional leadership aspects of the assistant principals' responsibilities, as well as the full range of activities in which assistant principals engaged. The Qualtrics Software generated the graphs that are displayed in Chapter Four.

The quantitative data were primarily analyzed using descriptive statistics. The data defined the current practice of assistant principals, revealed trends and variations, and provided insight into issues that exist and need to be addressed.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative data was collected through part two of the Qualtrics Software questionnaire. The questions all related to the subordinating questions of the research study and identified the range of activities that assistant principals were responsible for, the assignment of those activities, the instructional leadership aspect of the activities and the various opportunities and challenges associated with those activities. This data also generated reasons for the status quo and suggestions for improvements to current practice.

Following Creswell (2013), the qualitative data analysis for this study followed these steps:

1. Create and organize files for data.

2. Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes.

3. Describe the case and its context.

4. Use categorical aggregation to establish themes or patterns.

5. Use direct interpretation. Develop naturalistic generalizations of what was "learned".

6. Present in-depth picture of the case (or cases) using narrative, tables, and figures (p. 190-191).

For example, in Section I (Leadership Practice), Question Two asked respondents to describe

their roles and responsibilities. The analysis involved the following process:

1. Read through the responses and highlight key words.

2. Group the highlighted key words under common headings. Re-read and re-categorize as necessary.

3. Display data in appropriate charts and tables. Formulate findings identifying existing themes or the lack thereof in the data.

4. Reveal the status quo and identify areas for planning and change.

The thematic analysis process allowed the researcher to identify patterns within the data. The data were read through initially and then gone over to highlight key words of the participants. Repeated reading of the data was conducted to ensure all key words were identified. The key words were coded and divided into categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Categories were then reviewed in relation to the academic literature. The emerging themes became the categories for analysis.

Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Data

To analyze the data, I employed the two strategies of sequential integration (to connect the local knowledge and practice of BRSD with the provincial *LQS*) and complementary integration (to elaborate on, explain, and clarify the collected data). The combination of quantitative and qualitative data therefore identified issues associated with the assistant principal position and provided necessary clues for how best to address those issues. The data analysis will assist with future planning because it did the following: identified what is currently done or not done by assistant principals, ascertained the reasons for or against assistant principal involvement in various tasks, and generated suggestions for the future instructional leadership

role of assistant principals in BRSD. The analysis illustrated whether or not there is a need for change and where best to initiate desirable change.

Reliability and Validity

A reliable study will generally have consistency across researchers, time, and the items employed in the study. For a study to be reliable, "two researchers studying the same phenomenon will come up with compatible observations" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 162). As well, if a study is reliable, the same participant will give the same responses to the same questions on multiple occasions. In this study, with respect to the quantitative information, any other researcher should be able to give the same questions to the same people and get the same answers. In addition, all independent researchers who analyse the data should arrive at the same results or interpretations. The quantitative questions in the questionnaire were worded specifically and clearly to ensure that the participants all interpreted the questions in the same way. Similarly, the statistical information generated for specific questions should not be susceptible to multiple interpretations by multiple researchers. Finally, the entries in the activity logs provided quantitative data about the time spent on various assistant principal tasks. This information matched the quantitative data about tasks that were provided in the questionnaire. In a qualitative study, "reliability is problematic…because human behaviour is never static, nor is what many experience necessarily more reliable than what one person experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 250). As such, the researcher must demonstrate that the results make sense given the data collected. Being able to demonstrate the process taken for collecting and interpreting the data shows dependability or reliability in a qualitative study. In these senses, the study should demonstrate reliability.

In essence, a study has validity if it studies what it states it will study, if the tools or

methods employed in the study constitute an appropriate way to measure what is being studied, and if the results and conclusions are consonant with the data obtained in the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that "validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations." (p. 253). The research study purported to study perceptions of the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal. The specific question that the study sought to answer was: "In what ways, as instructional leaders, do assistant principals support high-quality teaching and optimal student learning?" The questionnaire and the activity logs both asked principals and assistant principals about their perceptions of the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal. These tools also specifically asked principals and assistant principals in BRSD how BRSD's assistant principals support high-quality teaching and optimal student learning. Therefore, the study has validity of measure. Furthermore, validity is maintained by using appropriate people (principals and assistant principals) as participants in the study. The validity of the data could be compromised by asking these questions of unknowledgeable people or people unconnected in any way with schools. Many of the factors that affect the internal validity of experimental designs (such as pre-testing, changes of instruments, participant attrition during the experiment, unexpected changes during the course of the experiment) did not apply to the study and therefore do not detract from the internal validity of it. The aim of the study was not to present a statistical analysis of BRSD. Therefore, the rate of response (54%) was reasonable because the understanding of the current practices and procedures in BRSD is not strictly reliant on statistical measures. I maintained internal validity by ensuring that my conclusions were consonant with the data gathered and that they are not skewed in any way.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016) define trustworthiness "as a means for reassuring the reader that a study was of significance and value" (p. 162). Because the study involved not only quantitative, but also qualitative analysis, it is appropriate to consider the concept of trustworthiness as it applies to the intended research. Aspects of trustworthiness include the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research method, findings, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Credibility

Credibility is the extent to which the researcher selects appropriate participants and accurately reports what those participants say (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016) and is established through triangulation and member checking for interviews. Triangulation involves the use of multiple methods (i.e., participant observation, survey, documents) and data sources (i.e., leaders, district reports, provincial reports) in order to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied (S. Friesen, personal communication, September 11, 2020). In this case study, the participants had credibility because they were all school leaders who either functioned as, or interacted closely with, assistant principals. They were therefore assumed to be knowledgeable about the position. As the researcher, I endeavoured to provide an accurate picture of the assistant principals' voices. This should be evident in the data presentation in tables, graphs, and direct quotations. To further establish credibility, I employed methods triangulation (participant observation, survey, activity log, documents), triangulation of sources (the superintendent, district reports, Alberta's *LQS*), and analyst triangulation (consultations with thesis committee members when coding and analyzing data to establish and understand themes).

Dependability

Dependability of the study is demonstrated when "one can track the processes and

procedures used to collect and interpret the data" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p.163). I, as the researcher have provided explicit, detailed explanations of how the data were collected and analyzed. This ensured that the findings were derived from responses of the participants and are not the result of any preconceived ideas or biases that I might hold. Although I am sure that instructional leadership can and should improve in BRSD, the nature of the subsequent changes will be determined from the information gathered in the study and not from any preconceived ideas that I might hold. The clarity of data presentation and the detailed explanations of method and analysis enable other researchers to duplicate these processes and procedures, either to validate the results of this study or to conduct similar studies in different jurisdictions.

Confirmability

Confirmability of the study is exhibited through conclusions that are consistent with the data. The researcher must be certain that his or her bias does not affect the findings. With respect to this study, I have ensured that the conclusions are consistent with the data. Because the data are clearly displayed in charts and graphs or reported in direct quotations, it is possible for any observer to determine whether or not the results are consistent with the findings. Although social constructivist research allows for conclusions that are "constructions" of the product of my work and the responses and perspectives of the participants, those constructions should nevertheless appear reasonable to outside observers. Other researchers should be able to determine whether conclusions are reasonable based on the following criteria: a clearly stated purpose for the research; the appropriateness of the research design and tools; the unbiased, clear nature of the questions asked (that is, whether questions are constructed to genuinely elicit participants' points of view or whether the questions are designed merely to confirm the researcher's pre-determined point of view); the overt ways in which the data is displayed and analyzed; the logical way in

which the data connect to the conclusions and recommendations that are generated. I have

attempted to meet these conditions by clearly stating the purpose of the research and by

developing unbiased and appropriate research tools. The gathered data is displayed completely

and honestly and my conclusions were derived from my clearly articulated analysis and

interpretation of the data.

Transferability

The transferability of this research study is determined by the ability to take the findings

from this study and apply them to other, like contexts. Transferability reflects the need to be

aware of and to describe the scope of the qualitative study so that its applicability to different

contexts (broad or narrow) can be readily discerned. In this way, a study is not deemed unworthy

if it cannot be applied to broader contexts; instead, a study's worthiness is determined by how

well others can determine (i.e., through a paper trail) to which alternative contexts the findings

might be applied (S. Friesen, personal communication, September 11, 2020). For this case study,

every attempt was made to elucidate the process and scope of the study in order that each district

in Alberta can accurately assess whether or not the study could be applied to that specific

context. Since all of Alberta's school districts (and therefore schools) are subject to the same

legislation and processes as outlined by Alberta Education, all districts and schools in the

province must provide instructional leadership. Thus, the themes and trends that are identified in

the data from this research study could likely be applied to any school district in the province of

Alberta. I expect that the resulting definition of the instructional leadership role of the assistant

principal could also be applied to schools within the province. In any case, the description of the

scope and process should be clear enough to allow others to ascertain how the study could be

applied to other contexts.

Limitations and Delimitations

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) state that limitations and delimitations "identify potential weaknesses inherent in the study and the scope of the study" (p. 147). By identifying the limitations and delimitations, the researcher demonstrates that he or she has thought critically about the research problem and study and is able to explain the obvious issues and why they were not addressed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Limitations

"Limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from [the] research" (Bloomberg &Volpe, 2016, p. 164). For this research study, the possible limitations included the sample size, the limited scope of participants, the nature of self-reporting, the range of instruments, and the restriction of the study to one school division.

The sample size for this case study was necessarily small because the study focused solely on BRSD, which has a total of twenty-five principals and twenty-three assistant principals. This means that the pool of possible participants could not exceed 48 people. Following the principles of case study methodology, participation in this study was voluntary. Thus, while I could not assume that every eligible person would actually participate in the study, the likely sample size was therefore less than 48. Given the small sample size (26-28), it was not possible to elicit statistically significant results. However, this study mostly generated qualitative data, which allowed for an accurate picture of the division at a specific time.

Secondly, this work was limited to the study of the specific role of assistant principals in educational leadership and was not focused in-depth on other administrative persona such as principals or superintendents who also have roles to play in educational leadership.

A third limitation related to the nature of self-reporting. Although I expected complete

and honest answers because anonymity of the participants was guaranteed, I had no real control over the honesty and thoroughness of the participants' responses. However, the preliminary material sent to participants was intended to allay any qualms about answering questions honestly and the questions were designed to ensure thoroughness. I anticipate that the responses were honest because I assume that the participants understood that the purpose of the research was to identify areas that participants felt were in need of re-dress and also subsequently to introduce changes that would clearly benefit administrators and schools in BRSD.

A fourth limitation was the range of instruments used in this research study. This study used a questionnaire and an activity log. Although other strategies (such as interviews and focus groups) might have been beneficial to the proposed research, they were not employed in this study because of ethical considerations. The fact that I am the superintendent of the participants precluded the approval by the ethics committee of these additional methods in order to limit any possibility of harm to participants. Nevertheless, the inability to use interviews or focus groups did not adversely affect the study. The questionnaire and the activity logs were designed to elicit all of the pertinent information that the research sought to collect. If participants answered fully and honestly, then the potential to create a plan to enhance the role of the assistant principal improved significantly.

Finally, the research was conducted in BRSD schools and the data collected cannot necessarily be applied to all schools everywhere. I do not claim that the prevailing issues or situations in any one school are prevalent or even present in other schools. While I hoped to find specific solutions to identified problems in specific schools or within BRSD, I do not claim that all of the resulting recommendations will be applicable to all schools participating in the study, or indeed, to all schools everywhere.

Delimitations

Delimitations "are those characteristics that define and clarify the conceptual boundaries of [the] research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 165). Delimitations involve choices made by the researcher. For this research study, the possible delimitations included the focus of the research study itself, the methodology of case study, the choice of participants, and the factor of time.

The first delimitation was the selection of the research problem itself. Many formal and informal leaders have an impact on high-quality teaching and optimal student learning. However, much work has already been done on principals and instructional leadership. My field observations as Superintendent of BRSD pointed to a lack of focus on the assistant principal position and my in-depth review of the academic literature revealed a similar gap in this area of educational inquiry, thus leading me to select as my research topic the lack of a clearly defined role for assistant principals.

A second delimitation was the choice of a methodology that included components of case study and which employed a questionnaire and an activity log as its primary tools. There are several other methodologies that could have been employed, including action research, or design-based research. However, there was nothing to be gained in using any of these alternative methodologies that could not be acquired through a case study research design. Ethical considerations prohibited application of a full case study or action research design, but the methodology still allowed participants to voice their concerns, their analyses, and their suggestions for possible solutions. The participants of the research study definitely influenced the decision-making. It was not necessary to conduct a design-based or employ another method

to elicit the desired information. The questionnaire and the activity log were sufficient for the purpose.

The third delimitation was the choice of principals and assistant principals within one school division to be participants in the study. This research study was designed to solve an educational problem within my school division. I expect that most, if not all, assistant principals in Alberta have similar experiences. In addition, there were no existing studies to demonstrate that any one district is distinct or that unique factors in one or more other divisions exist and should be included in the study. Because of this, the study of one representative school division should be sufficient to address the identified problem of the study.

A fourth delimitation was the factor of time. This study was designed to take place over an eight-week period in November and December of 2018. This choice allowed the school administrators to start off their school year successfully and then to complete the questionnaire and activity log shortly thereafter. The field period of the study did not extend throughout the entire school year for two reasons. The first reason is that although activities of assistant principals could change slightly throughout the year, they are unlikely to change greatly. A six-week log generated a realistic picture of the assistant principal role because duties rarely change significantly from one term to another, so there was little to gain in extending the field period. A second reason is that an extension of the field period decreases the possibility that volunteers would continue to participate for the duration of the study; instead, a prolonged field period increased the chances of participant attrition. Assistant principals are tired, busy, and less likely to participate later in the school year.

Ethical Considerations

The first priority among the many ethical considerations pertaining to the research was to

confirm that the proposed research meets the standards for approval of the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) of the University of Calgary and of the Board of Trustees of Battle River Regional Division. As well, to ensure that the research met the highest ethical standards, additional attention must be given to participant consent, potential impacts on participants, and any possible perception of conflicts of interest. A final consideration was to make certain that the research was conducted with integrity.

I successfully completed the University of Calgary required Core Tutorial of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE). I also received ethics approval through the U of C Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB).

In addition, I presented my research proposal to the Board of Trustees of the Battle River School Division. Although I, as Superintendent, typically approve all research applications for our school division, I believe that independent approval from the Board provided widespread reassurance that there was nothing untoward about this research project. As well, openness, honesty, and transparency throughout the research process further assured participants that the research was conducted with thoroughness and integrity.

Apart from acquiring the ethical approval of the University of Calgary and BRSD, it was also important for me, as Superintendent, to give consideration to the fact that my participation in this study might have been perceived to constitute a potential conflict of interest. Most importantly, to assure participants that their responses were absolutely anonymous and that I would have no access whatsoever to information regarding the individual identity of any participant, the questionnaires and activity logs were administered by the primary investigator, Dr. Jim Brandon. I never had access to the individual addresses from which the responses

originated. This was important because some school administrators in BRSD might have felt

pressure or an obligation to participate because I, the researcher, am their Superintendent. By

assuring participants that the primary investigator, Dr. Jim Brandon, was collecting the raw data

and was scrutinizing for and removing any identifying information before releasing it to me

eliminated any such feelings of pressure or obligation.

The Information Email (see Appendix A) and the Description of the Research form (see

Appendix B), that were shared by the principal investigator with intended participants clearly

stated that the study would in no way be used as a filtration method for hiring or firing or

promoting or demoting anyone in the employment process of the division. As well, the primary

investigator stressed that although I was conducting the research as part of the thesis requirement

for my programme of studies, I received no remuneration or employee benefits by conducting

the research in the educational jurisdiction in which I work. Because this study was designed to

provide a clear, consistent role definition for the assistant principal, the participants (many of

whom were assistant principals) would have a direct impact on the outcome of the study. Their

input generated the findings that reflect and meet their needs and desires as current and future

assistant principals. As such, the primary goal of the study was not my personal benefit, or the

promotion of my personal agenda, but improvements in the supports given to assistant principals

and the betterment of my school division.

Before proceeding with the study, the principal investigator sought implied consent from

all of the participants through the Informed Consent form (Appendix A). This was necessary to

ensure that all participants proceeded with the same understandings about the research; that all

participants understood the methods and goals of the research; that all participants accepted the

terms of the research; that all participants understood how confidentiality would be maintained;

and that all participants agreed to the subsequent publication of results. The implied consent also ensured that all other ethical requirements were outlined. These included the following understandings: participation in the study was voluntary; confidentiality would be maintained; each perspective would be respected; there would be no negative repercussions for choosing not to be involved in the study; there would be no perks or rewards for opting to be involved in the study; participation (or the lack thereof) had no bearing on the professional evaluation or the employment status of individuals; every effort would be made to ensure trustworthiness and validity of results.

It was also necessary to consider the possible impact on participants. There were no direct material benefits attached to participation in the study. Assistant principals did not benefit monetarily from the study because no one was hired, paid, or promoted for their participation; conversely, no one was punished with demotion or loss of employment or wages if he or she declined to participate. However, participants may have been affected by the study in other ways. In identifying the key elements that should define the role description of assistant principals, the benefit to the participants was that the resulting knowledge has enabled personnel in the school jurisdiction to create a job description for assistant principals that incorporates greater purpose and engagement. Additionally, by identifying the aspects of assistant principals' roles that were detrimental to their effectiveness and that have a negative influence on the succession to the principalship, this too, should benefit participants by allowing us to remove the barriers that prevent assistant principals from becoming integral parts of a school leadership team.

A final ethical consideration was that this research be conducted with integrity. I have produced work that is as complete and as honest as humanly possible. There are no omissions or skewing of information either in the collection of data or in the interpretation of findings.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three has described the choice of and the rationale for my research design. It has detailed the research setting, the research participants, and the collection, the management, and the analysis of the data. This chapter has also examined the issues of reliability, validity, generalizability, and trustworthiness. It has also explained the limitations, the delimitations, and the ethical considerations for this research study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter Four presents the findings from this multi-method case study. The data obtained through case study methodology include information from researcher reflection and review (primarily the superintendent's in-depth knowledge of the district and its policies and practices) supported by relevant district documents (including 2020-2021 Staffing Information, the Assistant Principal Contract Letter, and the BRSD October 2019 APORI Results) and the provincial Department of Education's *Leadership Quality Standard* (which provides the competencies [including those of instructional leadership] that all school leaders are accountable for and which drives all Battle River School Division (BRSD) policy). The data also include the results of the questionnaire and the activity logs which were distributed to all participants of the study. The six major findings for this study are presented under the three main themes that emerged from the data and can be summarized as follows:

1. Organisational Structures and Roles

   Finding 1: The distributed leadership model that BRSD wishes to institute throughout the district is currently insufficient.

2. Role of the Assistant Principal

   Finding 1: The role of the assistant principal encompasses opportunities to build instructional leadership capacity so that assistant principals can advance to successful principalships.

3. Instructional Leadership

   Finding 1: Too much instructional leadership time is lost to managerial duties;

Finding 2: Challenges faced by instructional leaders include insufficient experience, training, and time;

Finding 3: School administrators demonstrate both a willingness to acquire new instructional leadership skills and proficiencies, and also a reluctance to learn new strategies on their own;

Finding 4: Within BRSD, there is a dynamic interplay between theory and practice.

The pages that follow describe the elements of the questionnaire and the activity log, present the data, detail the findings, and elicit the implications for BRSD.

Method

Pursuant to case study methodology, I, as the primary researcher and reviewer of BRSD documents and processes, used information that I have gathered in my position of superintendent of BRSD. I observed the operation of district schools and I examined all district documents (particularly those pertaining to instructional leadership) that pertain to the role of the assistant principal. For the field study (action research) portion of the research, all 48 current principals and assistant principals in BRSD were invited to participate in the research study. Dr. Jim Brandon, the Primary Investigator, met with the school administrators to explain the study and to distribute the Informed Consent documents. He subsequently administered the survey to 26 voluntary participants who completed the survey in the fall of 2018. In addition, seven participating assistant principals completed the activity log to indicate how they spent their administrative time over a six-week period from October 30 – December 7, 2018. Using Qualtrics (an on-line survey software programme), Dr. Brandon examined all data and removed any potential identifiers before sharing the raw data with me.

Field Research Data Collection

The field research portion of this study employed a questionnaire and an activity log, both of which are described below.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire elicited the participants' perceptions of the managerial and instructional leadership roles of assistant principals in BRSD. The survey contained 47 questions, the first four of which (Questions 1 – 4) elicited such demographic information on the participants as current role, years of experience in that role, educational attainment levels, administrative full-time equivalency. Twenty-three quantitative questions (Questions 15 – 37) measured the participants' perceptions of the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal and ascertained the amount of time spent on managerial and instructional leadership duties and such other information as how the roles are assigned, and which duties are shared between the assistant principal and principal. These 23 questions employed a 7-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The remaining 20 qualitative questions (Questions 5-14; 38-48) elicited opinions and perceptions of the participants with respect to the role of the assistant principal.

Activity Log

The activity log was a chart divided into six one-week sections beginning October 30th and ending December 7th, 2018. Five competencies of the *Leadership Quality Standard* (Leading a Learning Community, Providing Instructional Leadership, Developing Leadership Capacity, Modelling Commitment to Professional Learning, and Managing School Operations and Resources) were listed under each week. Participants indicated the percentage of time they spent

per week on each of the competencies, with an "other" column for additional duties that are extraneous to the five *LQS* competencies listed in the log.

Data Analysis

The raw data from the questionnaire were examined to elicit demographic information of participants, information regarding the role of the assistant principal and the delivery of instructional leadership within BRSD, to determine consistency of school practice with the goals mandated by the Alberta Government in the *Leadership Quality Standard* and BRSD policy, and to reveal areas in need of redress. Specifically, the responses to each question were examined for commonalities, consistencies, discrepancies, and specific information about the duties of the assistant principals and the prevalence, the dimensions, and the quality of instructional leadership throughout the district.

The ensuing discussion of findings first presents demographic information gleaned from the questionnaire and then presents the findings organized into three thematic units: Organizational Structures; Role of the Assistant Principal; and Instructional Leadership.

Demographic Information

The first four questions of the questionnaire dealt with demographic information. These questions elicited the following information about the participants: current position (principal or assistant principal), highest level of formal education attained, years of experience in currently held positions, and descriptions of administrative full-time equivalency.

Twenty-six participants completed the survey: 13 principals and 13 assistant principals. The range of years of experience in their current positions was one year to eight years, with an average of 2.8 years.

Educational Attainment

Table 4.1

Level of Educational Attainment

1	What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?		
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Bachelor of Education degree	19.23%	5
2	Master of Education degree	80.77%	21
3	Doctoral degree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	26

Table 4.1 above shows that approximately 81% of participants hold a Master of Education degree and 19% hold a Bachelor of Education degree. The academic literature and the *LQS* both emphasize that a commitment to lifelong learning is an important facet of instructional leadership and higher quality teaching. Consequently, BRSD policy[4] requires all school administrators to obtain a Master of Education degree within five years of being hired in an administrative position (see Contract Letter, Appendix E). The data thus suggest that, in the area of educational attainment (and thus commitment to continuous learning), BRSD is meeting one provincial requirement for the provision of instructional leadership.

Full-Time Equivalency

According to the academic literature, the demanding role of instructional leader should ideally be shared by administrators within a distributed leadership model. Although the

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[4] Throughout this chapter, I often refer to BRSD policy. When this information is derived from a specific district document, the document is referenced in the text. At all other times, information about BRSD policy stems directly from my practical knowledge about policy and practice, derived from my position as Superintendent of BRSD. This information stems from verbal discussions, decisions, procedures, and current practice.

Leadership Quality Standard endorses instructional leadership as a required competency, it does not provide definitive guidelines for the amount of time that should be assigned to school administrators to fulfill their administrative responsibilities. BRSD prefers that assistant principals have no less than 0.5 full-time equivalency (FTE) in administrative time. However, due to financial constraints, BRSD's current policy is that the FTE for assistant principals should be between 0.3 and 0.75 FTE for administrative time (Battle River School Division, Senior Administration internal discussion; 2020 - 2021 Staffing Information Sheet, Appendix F).

Table 4.2

Administrative Full-time Equivalency (FTE)

1	Which of the following best describes your administrative full-time equivalency?		
#	Answer	%	Count
1	0.4 FTE	7.69%	2
2	0.5 FTE	34.62%	9
3	0.6 FTE	3.85%	1
4	0.75 FTE	38.46%	10
5	1.0 FTE	15.38%	4
	Total	100%	26

Table 4.2 shows a range of 0.4 FTE to 1.0 FTE, with a mean of 0.55 FTE. Table 4.2 thus shows that at the time of the survey, all of the participants' FTEs fell within the range set out by BRSD. Since the time of the survey, FTEs have been reduced throughout the district because of budgetary restraints. Currently, 13 of 20 assistant principals have less than 0.5 FTE (2020-2021 Staffing Information, Appendix F). Therefore, most FTEs currently fall below desirable levels, and administrators are thus likely to feel time pressure constraints as they strive to fulfill their

administrative duties. That this was the case even before the current reductions is shown in Table 4.34. However, beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, each school in the BRSD will have at least one assistant principal on site, a situation which should allow schools to institute distributed leadership and to improve the delivery of instructional leadership activities.

Organisational Structures

The academic literature promotes distributed leadership within a collaborative culture as the best model to facilitate the delivery of instructional leadership. Within this model, the preferred framework is one in which the assignment of administrative tasks is based on the strengths and the interests of the collaborating individuals. The *LQS* does not definitively state that Alberta's schools should not be hierarchical in nature. However, the *LQS* (2018) does stipulate that the environment should be collaborative and respectful and immersed in instructional leadership to support high quality teaching and learning (p.2). As a division, BRSD strives for collaboration and encourages schools to use distributed leadership models rather than hierarchical models.

The following discussion of data on organizational structures in BRSD considers three aspects of organizational structure: type (hierarchical or distributed leadership), culture (authoritarian or collaborative), and framework (assignation of tasks).

Type of Organisational Structure: Hierarchy or Distributed Leadership

The academic research literature recognizes both that distributed leadership is an effective means of building capacity and improving schools and that there is great variation in how responsibilities are allocated in schools. In BRSD, senior administrators have verbally communicated to all school administrators throughout the district that distributed leadership is the preferred model for all schools. The data from this study reveal the following: at least some

of BRSD's schools are using a distributed leadership model of organisation, administrators are willing to participate in a distributed leadership model, there is a need to increase distributed leadership throughout the schools in the district.

Tables 4.3 and 4.4, which follow, reveal that a majority of participants believe that all administrative duties should be shared between the principal and the assistant principal and that this is not currently the case. The results displayed in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 clearly reveal that duties of administration are not shared by the principal and the assistant principal in all schools in the division.

Table 4.3

Sharing of Administrative Duties

Question (25 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19. All duties of administration are shared by the P and the AP	2	7	5	2	5	4	0

Table 4.4

Should More Duties be Shared

Question (25 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. More duties should be shared	1	5	7	11	0	1	0

between the P and AP	

Tables 4.3 and 4.4 indicate that distributed leadership is being practiced to some extent in BRSD. In Table 4.3, 14 of 25 participants agree that all duties are shared by the assistant principal and principal. However, nine of 25 respondents (36%) disagreed that all duties are shared. In Table 4.4, 13 of 25 agreed that more duties should be shared, while 11 were neutral (neither agreeing nor disagreeing). These results indicate that some sharing occurs. However, if a distributed leadership model were being used in all schools, then all assistant principals and principals would agree that all duties are being shared. These numbers probably indicate a currently unmet need for more distributed leadership throughout schools in BRSD.

It is unclear from Tables 4.3 and 4.4 whether or not all duties are shared equally between the principal and the assistant principal or whether there is a division of duties with the principal taking on certain tasks that are distinct from those assumed by the assistant principal. The results could indicate that only one administrator is doing all the work, leaving others with extra time and unfulfilled aspirations. Perhaps certain individuals feel overloaded with their tasks and would like some assistance from others. The expressed need for more sharing of workloads could indicate a morale problem if administrators feel that they are overworked and inadequately supported or if they feel that they are underutilised, unappreciated, or bored with their current duties. The number of people wanting an increase in shared duties suggests that a large number of individuals would like to see change—either a reduction, or an increase, or a change in the nature of individual workloads. In any case, where distributed leadership is lacking, instructional leadership is possibly being compromised.

The consideration for BRSD is that the division should ascertain which schools are not practicing distributed leadership to the desired degree and the reasons for that non-compliance. The division can then implement measures to ensure that distributed leadership is practised and supported in every school in BRSD.

Culture of the Organisational Structures: Authoritarian or Collaborative

Along with distributed leadership, the academic literature links a collaborative culture with successful instructional leadership. Alberta's *LQS* (2018) lists a collaborative and consultative environment as an indicator under several competencies: fostering effective relationships, embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, and developing leadership capacity (p. 4-5, 7) In keeping with the *LQS*, BRSD's verbal policy is that collaboration (with administrators, teachers, parents, community) is necessary for creating a school culture that supports high quality teaching and optimal student learning. Tables 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7, which follow, indicate that in BRSD, principals and assistant principals do sometimes collaborate to determine the duties of the assistant principal.

Table 4.5

Determining Responsibilities

Question (25 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
16. The AP and P decide together what the responsibilities of the AP are	5	10	7	1	1	0	1

Table 4.6

Principal Determines Responsibilities

Question (25 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. The principal (P) determines the responsibilities of the assistant principal (AP)	1	7	11	2	3	0	1

In Table 4.5, 22 of 25 respondents agreed (strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree) that the assistant principal and the principal decide together what the responsibilities are. Two people disagreed, one somewhat, and one strongly. Therefore, most respondents agreed that collaboration occurs. There is, however, an apparent contradiction between Table 4.5 and Table 4.6 because in Table 4.6, 19 of 25 participants agree that the principal determines the responsibilities of the assistant principal and only four of 25 disagree with that statement. This discrepancy might have occurred because of the wording of Question 15 of the survey. The question does not state that the principal *alone* determines the responsibilities of the assistant principal. Some respondents may have merely been stating that the principal is involved in the decision, not that the principal is the sole decision-maker. If that is the case, the findings in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 do not conflict.

Table 4.7

Choice in Responsibilities

Question *(25 responses)*	*Strongly Agree*	*Agree*	*Somewhat Agree*	*Neither Agree nor Disagree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
17. The AP is able to choose the responsibilities he/she is responsible for	0	3	13	2	5	2	0

Table 4.7 further supports the finding that the culture in some BRSD schools is

collaborative. In Table 4.7, 16 of 25 respondents agree that the assistant principal is able to

choose the responsibilities he or she is responsible for. For those assistant principals, it is

possible that there is a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian system in place. However, seven of 25

disagreed with the statement that the assistant principal chooses his or her duties. This might

suggest that some schools have less collaboration and a more authoritarian system in place for

determining the duties of the assistant principal. The current policy of BRSD regarding

authoritarianism and collaboration is more implicit than explicit. BRSD policy does not

expressly state that school administrators must collaborate with each other. Nevertheless, senior

district staff stress collaboration in conversations with administrators and certain routine

practices intimate that collaboration is assumed. For example, all communication goes to both

the principal and the assistant principal. This implies, but does not mandate, that the district

office assumes that both administrators are involved in all aspects of leadership.

Thus, the results in Tables 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7 might suggest that some schools are more authoritarian than collaborative in culture. If that is the case, the consideration for BRSD is that the division should explicitly state that school administrators must implement a collaborative model of distributed leadership.

Framework of Organisational Structures

In this study, the framework of the organisational structure is the assignation of tasks to individuals within the school. The academic literature suggests that high-functioning schools utilise the strengths and interests of the teaching staff. Therefore, in successful schools, an assistant principal is responsible for duties that match his or her particular strengths and interests. While the *LQS* lists competencies (such as providing instructional leadership, developing leadership capacity, leading a learning community), the document does not specify how individuals should be chosen to perform distinct tasks. The implicit policy of BRSD is that principals and assistant principals are both involved in all aspects of leadership and that the designation of duties is not necessarily tied to the assistant principal's current skills or interests. For example, both the principal and the assistant principal are invited to the school reviews and the budget meetings. However, there is currently no explicit written direction that principals should train assistant principals or help them to acquire the necessary skills for preparing budgets or for participating in activities that are assessed in school reviews. BRSD senior administrators expect all assistant principals to continuously improve existing skills and to acquire new skills in all areas and senior staff emphasize this in conversations and during meetings with school administrators. Often the best way to facilitate growth in individuals and to prepare them for principalships is to assign them to tasks that require them to acquire new proficiencies and skills.

Table 4.8

Assigning Duties Based on Strengths

Question (25 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18. The responsibilities of the AP are assigned based on the strengths of the individual	4	7	10	2	2	0	0

Table 4.8 gives some indication of the organisational frameworks in BRSD. Twenty-one of 25 respondents agreed that the responsibilities of the assistant principal are assigned based on the strengths of the assistant principal. There is only weak disagreement, with two respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing and only two respondents somewhat disagreeing. This result is problematic for the district because it might mean that sustainability is being hindered. While it is important to consider and use the strengths of the individual, it is also important to build the capacity of assistant principals. That is, they must grow and become competent in areas that are not necessarily currently areas of strength or interest. Assistant principals must grow and learn all aspects of instructional leadership. Senior district staff strive to develop strong instructional leaders in both the principal and the assistant principal position. Table 4.8 thus highlights an inconsistency between the division's goal of building instructional leadership capacity in all school administrators and the way in which duties are currently assigned in schools. This suggests that the district should set out clear expectations that all assistant principals need to gain experience with all of the competencies of the *LQS*.

Role of the Assistant Principal

Apart from organisational structures, the second theme arising from the data collected in this study is the distinct role of the assistant principal. As the academic literature suggests is generally the case, the role of the assistant principal in BRSD is diverse and can vary significantly from site to site. The data regarding the role of the assistant principal in BRSD are therefore presented under the following categories: assistant principalships as stepping-stones to principalships, opportunities for career advancement; teaching, managerial tasks, student discipline, occupational health and safety, and instructional leadership.

Assistant Principalships as Stepping-Stones to Principalships

The academic literature largely refers to the position of assistant principal as a stepping-stone to the position of principal. The *LQS* (2018) contains a specific competency, Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning, that states: "A leader engages to career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to identify opportunities for improving leadership, teaching, and learning" (p. 4). To that end, BRSD provides to assistant principals professional learning opportunities that are designed to help prepare the assistant principal to assume the role of principal. Recognizing that such preparation necessarily includes continued growth and learning, the division provides Leading and Learning sessions as well as specific feedback through our school review process. Table 4.9 below shows strong agreement amongst the respondents that BRSD provides opportunities for the growth of assistant principals.

Opportunities for Career Advancement

Table 4.9

Opportunities to Grow and Learn

Questions (28 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q30 – There are opportunities to grow and learn as an assistant principal (AP)(15 responses)	8	5	1	1	0	0	0
Q36 – There are opportunities to grow and learn as an assistant principal (P) (13 responses)	5	6	1	1	0	0	0

In Table 4.9, 12 of 15 assistant principals either somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree that there are opportunities for them to grow and learn in their positions. Twelve of 13 principals also somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree that assistant principals have opportunities to grow and learn. No one disagrees that there are opportunities to grow and learn in the assistant principal position. The high percentage of agreement (92.9%) amongst assistant principals and principals indicates that the division has been successful in communicating that continued professional learning is important and that we provide opportunities for such growth and learning

to occur. The agreement that there are opportunities for learning and growth would seem to

indicate that assistant principals and principals find value in the quality of the professional

learning sessions that the division provides.

As shown in Table 4.10 below, respondents in the survey also agree that there are

opportunities for career advancement in BRSD.

Table 4.10

Opportunities for Career Advancement

Questions *(28 responses)*	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Somewhat Agree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Somewhat Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Q31 – There are opportunities to advance my career (AP) (15 responses)	1	12	0	2	0	0	0
Q37 – There are opportunities for assistant principals to advance their careers (P) (13 responses)	7	5	0	1	0	0	0

Table 4.10 shows that 13 of 15 assistant principals agree or strongly agree that there are

opportunities to advance their careers and 12 of 13 principals also agree or strongly agree that

there are opportunities for assistant principals to advance their careers. Since BRSD's practice is

to prepare assistant principals to assume principal roles within a period of five years, it is

unsurprising that there is strong agreement that opportunities for advancement exist in the district. It would seem, then, that BRSD is successful in transitioning assistant principals into principal positions.

Teaching

In addition to their administrative work, assistant principalships in BRSD must also teach. The staffing sheet in Appendix F lists all of the administrative and teaching time assigned to principals and assistant principals in the schools throughout BRSD. For the 2020-2021 school term, the average FTE for assistant principals in BRSD is 0.455; the average teaching time for assistant principals is 0.545 (2020-2021 Staffing Information, Appendix F). Therefore, all assistant principals in BRSD carry teaching loads in addition to their administrative responsibilities.

Managerial Tasks

Following teaching, the fourth category to arise from the data on the role of the assistant principal is managerial tasks. The academic literature recognizes that managerial tasks are a necessary part of the assistant principal role. Although many managerial tasks do not directly involve instructional leadership, they can indirectly contribute to school culture and environment, and, in a broad sense, to academic improvement and achievement. The *LQS* (2018) states that "a leader effectively directs operations and manages resources" (p. 7) and it lists "Managing School Operations and Resources" as Competency 8 (p. 7). For BRSD, then, although the main administrative focus remains instructional leadership, managerial tasks are a necessary part of the administrative role. Ideally, in BRSD, the combined administrative time of the principal and the assistant principal that is spent on managerial tasks should not exceed 20% of the total administrative time.

Budgeting. An important component of the managerial aspect of administration is budgeting. The *LQS* (2018) lists Budgeting as a component of Competency 8 – Managing School Operations and Resources (p. 7). BRSD expects assistant principals to actively participate in the preparation of school budgets and this expectation has been communicated verbally to all administrators in the district. Because budgets are shared with staff and school councils, it is important that both principals and assistant principals be fully aware of all aspects of their budgets. Our finance team meets with individual school teams if they request assistance with completing their school budget. In Table 4.11 below, 12 of 15 assistant principals somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree that they need more training in budgeting. Nine of 13 principals also feel that more training in this area would have been beneficial when they were assistant principals. Only one assistant principal disagrees, and two principals strongly disagree. These findings indicate that the division should perhaps provide a budget session for all school administrators to review key components and processes for preparing their school budgets.

Table 4.11

Time on Budgeting

Question (28 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q27 – In retrospect, I feel that I need(ed) more experience/training in budgeting during my time as an assistant principal (AP) (15 responses)	3	5	4	2	0	1	0

Q33 – When I was an assistant principal, I needed more experience/training in budgeting (P) (13 responses)	4	1	4	2	0	0	2

Student Discipline

A fifth category arising from the data on the role of the assistant principal is student discipline, which is related both to the managerial aspect of administration and, to a lesser degree, to instructional leadership. The *LQS* (2018) lists for the Leading a Learning Community Competency a variety of indicators such as a sense of belonging (p.5), inclusiveness (p.5), and high expectations for all students and staff (p.5). BRSD's senior administrative team has spent a significant amount of time working with school administrators on setting behavioural expectations for students and staff and on building a positive school culture. Some initiatives include: the provision of clear policy guidelines, the provision of educational consultants, goal-setting with individual schools, and the requirement that consultations be held with all stake-holders (including students, staff, school councils). The focus and collaboration are intended to enhance positive working relationships and to reduce the amount of time spent on disciplinary issues so that discipline issues do not exceed more than 10% of administrative time in schools.

Table 4.12

Time Spent on Student Discipline

Questions *(25 responses)*	*0 – 20 %*	*21 – 40 %*	*41 – 60 %*	*61 – 80 %*	*81 – 100%*
5. What percentage of your administrative time is spent dealing with student discipline? (AP) (13 responses)	7	5	1	0	0
10.What percentage of your administrative time is spent dealing with student discipline (P) (12 responses)	7	4	1	0	0

Table 4.12 above shows that a large number of respondents (six of 13 assistant principals and five of 12 principals) spend between 21% and 60% of their administrative time dealing with student discipline. Many of the remaining respondents might be spending more than 10% of their administrative time in the same way. (It is impossible to tell from the table because the given range is 0% to 20%.) Therefore, BRSD's cap of 10% of administrative time dedicated to student discipline is not being met. It is too soon to tell whether the instructional leadership work being done to create positive school cultures is having the desired effect because the district has only recently begun to collect statistics on student discipline issues. Nevertheless, in reviewing BRSD school submissions, student suspensions decreased by nearly one-half between the 2017-2018 and the 2018-2019 school terms in one school in the district that focusses on relationships.

It is obvious that too much administrative time is being spent on discipline throughout the district and discipline issues are therefore decreasing the amount of available instructional leadership time. BRSD's senior leaders should thus ascertain which schools have created successful collaborative matrices for behaviour and then assist all other schools to do the same.

Supervision Schedules and Occupational Health and Safety

The sixth category surfacing from data pertaining to the role of the assistant principal is supervision schedules and Occupational Health and Safety.

Table 4.13

S*upervision Schedules and Occupational Health and Safety*

Questions: (26 responses)	0-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%
6. What percentage of your administrative time is spent dealing with managerial tasks such as supervision schedules Occupational Health and Safety paperwork? (AP) (14 responses)	3	6	5	0	0
11. What percentage of your administrative time is spent dealing with managerial tasks such as supervision schedules, Occupational Health and Safety paperwork? (P) (12 responses)	8	2	2	0	0

Table 4.13 above shows that no assistant principal or principal spends more than 60% of his or her time creating supervision schedules (for exams, playgrounds, buses) or completing paperwork for Occupational Health and Safety. Eleven of 14 assistant principals indicate that they spend 21% to 60% of their time on supervision schedules and Occupational Health and Safety paperwork. In comparison, four out of 12 principals indicate that they spend that amount of time on the same issues. Although it is expected that assistant principals spend a greater amount of time on these tasks than do principals, it appears that far too much administrative time is being spent on these tasks at the expense of instructional leadership time. This is unacceptable in BRSD because the district has clearly communicated that no more than 20% of combined

administrative time be spent on all tasks extraneous to instructional leadership. In the last few years, the central office staff have worked with school administrators to identify and study every conceivable managerial or non-instructional leadership task, to remove redundant items, and to streamline expectations so that no more than 10% of combined administrative time (between the principal and the assistant principal) be spent on supervision schedules or Occupational Health and Safety. The implication from Table 4.13 is that BRSD's senior administrators should communicate clearly to principals and assistant principals that instructional leadership is the primary focus of their work. The district office staff should also support them to find further ways to reduce the time spent on tasks that are not directly connected to instructional leadership.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is the seventh category arising from the data on the role of the assistant principal. This section deals with the amount of time spent on classroom visitations and discussions with teachers about practice and pedagogy. All other aspects of Instructional Leadership will be discussed in the following major section labelled Instructional Leadership.

Classroom Visitations. Table 4.14 below displays the amount of administrative time that respondents claim to spend on classroom visitations.

Table 4.14

Time Spent on Classroom Visitations

Questions *(26 responses)*	*0 - 20 %*	*21 - 40 %*	*41 - 60 %*	*61 – 80 %*	*81 – 100%*
7. What percentage of your administrative time is spent doing classroom visitations?(AP) (14 responses)	13	1	0	0	0

12. What percentage of your administrative time is spent doing classroom visitations? (P) (12 responses)	8	4	0	0	0

Table 4.14 shows that 13 of 14 participating assistant principals spend a maximum of 20% of their time doing classroom visitations. This might mean that in those particular schools, the principals are doing most of the classroom visitations. In Table 4.14, eight of 12 principals spend a maximum of 20% of their time on classroom visitations, but four of 12 (one-third) spend between 21% and 40% of their time on classroom visitations. The amount of time that principals spend on classroom visits might be a direct result of BRSD's Principal Academy, which emphasises the importance of classroom visits. A significant amount of time in the Principal Academy is spent observing and discussing classroom visits. The information from Table 4.14 suggests that the division could now do the same type of work with assistant principals to foster growth in their understanding of classroom visitations and to increase their recognition of the importance of doing this work on a daily basis. Ideally, 20% of the assistant principal's administrative time should be spent doing classroom visitations.

Practice and Pedagogy Discussions. The *LQS* (2018) lists discussions of practice and pedagogy as an indicator under two competencies: Providing Instructional Leadership and Developing Leadership Capacity (pp. 6-7). BRSD encourages principals and assistant principals to engage in discussions with teachers about their practice and pedagogy. The division requires school administrators to document their visits to classrooms and to submit to the district office the feedback and discussion items arising from those visits. Through the Principal Academy, the senior leadership team trains principals to use professional and research materials and articles. Ensuing discussions then focus on meaningful ways to engage teachers in conversations about practice and pedagogy. The district expects all administrators to spend approximately 20% of

their time discussing practice and pedagogy.

Table 4.15

Discussing Pedagogy and Practice

Questions (26 responses)	0 - 20 %	21 - 40 %	41 - 60 %	61 – 80 %	81 – 100%
8. What percentage of your administrative time is spent discussing practice and pedagogy with teachers? (AP) (14 responses)	14	0	0	0	0
13. What percentage of your administrative time is spent discussing practice and pedagogy with teachers? (P) (12 responses)	10	1	0	0	1

Table 4.15 above shows that 100% of participating assistant principals spend a maximum of 20% of their administrative time discussing practice and pedagogy with teachers. Ten out of 12 participating principals (83%) spend a similar amount of time, with one principal spending 21% to 40% of administrative time and one principal spending 80% to 100% of administrative time in this area. A further break-down of the assistant principal administrative time for this area is shown in Table 4.16.

Table 4.16

Assistant Principals' Time Spent on Discussion of Practice and Pedagogy with Teachers

Q. 8. What percentage of Administrative Time Is Spent Discussing Practice and Pedagogy with Teachers (AP)	Number of Responses (14)
5%	2
10%	9
20%	3

Nine of 14 participating assistant principals spend 10% of their time on practice and pedagogy discussions; two of 14 spend five percent; three out of 14 spend 20% of their administrative time on discussing practice and pedagogy with teachers. Table 4.16 shows that the senior administrative team should continue supporting assistant principals to enable them to have these types of conversations with teachers and to meet BRSD's goal of principals and assistant principals devoting 20% of their administrative time to discussions of practice and pedagogy.

Instructional Leadership

After organisational structures and the role of the assistant principal, instructional leadership is the third broad theme arising from the data collected in this study. In the academic literature there was no consensus on a definition of the term instructional leadership. However, the various models of instructional leadership presented in the literature all relate to building teacher capacity and improving student learning. The body of academic literature examined in Chapter Two of this thesis also noted that the school principal or leader plays a significant role as an instructional leader in building teacher capacity to improve student achievement. Building on the research knowledge, the *LQS* identifies nine competencies for school leaders: 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; understanding and responding to the larger societal context. With the exception of managing school operations, all of the other competencies directly relate to instructional leadership. (Managing school operations allows the provision of resources and the creation of a safe and caring environment. Therefore, managing school operations is indirectly related to instructional leadership.) The data derived from this study

reveal six common themes with respect to instructional leadership: defining instructional

leadership, roles and responsibilities, teacher support, assistant principal capacity, professional

learning, and challenges in the instructional leadership role.

Defining Instructional Leadership

As an extension of the *LQS*, BRSD's senior leadership team has adopted the definition of

instructional leadership put forth by Robinson (2010): "Instructional leadership [is] those sets of

leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination and improvement of

teaching and learning" (p.1). Senior administrators have shared this definition of instructional

leadership with all principals and assistant principals in an attempt to eliminate confusion over

the term "instructional leadership" and to increase understanding of the instructional leadership

goals of the district and the province of Alberta. Nevertheless, Tables 4.17, 4.18 and Table 20

reveal that great confusion over the term "instructional leadership" still exists.

That the term "instructional leadership" is often misunderstood by administrators became

apparent when survey participants identified the percentage of administrative time they spend on

"other" items that are distinct from managerial and instructional leadership tasks.

Table 4.17

Other Items

Questions (24 responses)	0 - 20 %	21 - 40 %	41 - 60 %	61 – 80 %	81 – 100%
9. What percentage of your administrative time is spent on other items? (AP) (13 responses)	9	3	1	0	0
14. What percentage of your administrative time is spent on other items? (P) (11 responses)	8	1	2	0	0

As Table 4.17 indicates, most respondents (nine of 13 assistant principals and eight of 11 principals) estimate that they spend a maximum of 20% of their time on "other" activities that they variously list as interactions, meetings, behaviour, communication, supervision, planning and fund-raising. Table 4.18 below, which lists the activities that participants consider "other" tasks, indicates that administrators remain uncertain about the definition of instructional leadership.

Table 4.18

List of Other Items

Items	"Leadership Quality Standard" Competency connections	Assistant Principals	Principals
Interacting with/supporting students	1 – Fostering Effective Relationships 6 – Providing Instructional Leadership	3	5
Interacting with staff informally	1 – Fostering Effective Relationships 4 – Leading a Learning Community	1	1
Supporting proactive behaviour strategies	4 – Leading a Learning Community 6 – Providing Instructional Leadership	1	
Support meetings with Family School Liaison Workers, Learning Coach, Parents	4 – Leading a Learning Community	2	2
Meeting/calling parents	4 – Leading a Learning Community	3	7
Being visible in school	1 – Fostering Effective Relationships 4 – Leading a Learning Community	1	1
Meeting/supporting other administrators	7 – Developing Leadership Capacity	2	
Managing/working with support staff	3 – Embodying Visionary Leadership 4 – Leading a Learning Community	2	2
Overall maintenance of building	8 – Managing School Operations and Resources	1	
Hot lunch/breakfast program	6 – Providing Instructional Leadership	1	1
Web updates, MyPass	4 – Leading a Learning Community 6 – Providing Instructional Leadership	1	
Evaluation of new staff	4 – Leading a Learning Community	1	
Research new AP program	2 – Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning	1	
Interviews	4 – Leading a Learning Community	1	1

Reading/responding to email	*3 – Embodying Visionary Leadership* *4 – Leading a Learning Community*	*1*	*1*
Reviewing report cards	*6 – Providing Instructional Leadership*	*1*	
Supervising special events	*4 – Leading a Learning Community*	*1*	*2*
Meetings with key stakeholders (parent council, Division Office)	*4 – Leading a Learning Community* *9 – Understand and Responding to the Larger Societal Context*	*1*	*1*
Other communication – newsletters	*3 – Embodying Visionary Leadership* *4 – Leading a Learning Community*		*1*
Emergent Needs	*8 – Managing School Operations and Resources* *9 – Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context*		*1*
Coordinating Division initiatives	*4 – Leading a Learning Community* *9 – Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context*		*2*
Coordinating purchasing/fundraising	*8 – Managing School Operations and Resources*		*1*
School Planning	*2 – Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning*		*2*

In Table 4.18, of the items identified as "other" by assistant principals and principals, only three constitute managerial activities (overall maintenance of the building, emergent needs, and coordinating purchasing and fundraising). It could be argued that overall maintenance of the building is, in fact, an important facet of providing a safe, engaging learning environment (which is an indicator of instructional leadership). If emergent needs (which are not clearly described by the principal) are responses to student or staff needs, they too could be considered the task of an instructional leader. Coordinating, purchasing, and fundraising could also be connected to indicators of instructional leadership if those funds are designed to support or enhance student learning. All remaining items (interacting/supporting students; interacting with staff informally; supporting proactive behaviour strategies; support meetings with Family School Liaison Workers, Learning Coach, Parents; Meeting/calling parents; being visible in school; meeting/supporting other administrators; managing/working with support staff; hot

lunch/breakfast program; web updates/MyPass; evaluation of new staff; research new AP program; interviews; reading/responding to email; reviewing report cards; supervising special events; meeting with key stakeholders [parent council, Division Office]; other communication – newsletters, coordinating division initiatives, and school planning) are indicators of the other competencies of the LQS and they are all activities directly related to instructional leadership (*LQS*, 2018 and Petrides & Jimes, 2013). Similarly, in Table 4.20, respondents consider teaching, teaching/coaching/, parent meetings/phone calls, and supporting/managing EAs to be "other" activities.

This research thus shows that several administrators do not understand the term "instructional leadership". Stress and workload issues could result when principals and assistant principals do not understand that identified tasks are not "add-ons" but are instead key components of instructional leadership. This incomprehension of the elements of instructional leadership can result in school administrators failing to schedule adequate time for tasks they consider to be extraneous to their managerial and instructional leadership responsibilities. Insufficient time and attention given to instructional leadership responsibilities set out in the competencies of the *LQS* will then result in a failure to meet the Alberta standard for leaders. It is therefore important for the senior division staff to reaffirm the working definition of instructional leadership and to help principals and assistant principals connect their work to the competencies contained within the *LQS*.

Roles and responsibilities

After Defining Instructional Leadership, the second theme of the Instructional Leadership section is Roles and Responsibilities. The academic literature identifies many broad instructional leadership roles and responsibilities for the school administrator. The *LQS* provides nine

competencies with examples of indicators that principals and assistant principals are responsible

for, but it does not provide an exhaustive list of their roles and responsibilities. BRSD does not

currently have a specific role description for principals or assistant principals, but the senior

administrative team has clearly articulated to school administrators in memos, conversations,

school review documents (School Review—Instructional Leadership Indicators, Appendix G),

and in professional learning sessions that the primary focus of administrative work is

instructional leadership. Senior administrators in the district office expect both principals and

assistant principals to visit classrooms daily, to discuss practice and pedagogy with teachers, to

provide constructive feedback to teachers, and to facilitate collaborative conversations and

professional learning sessions with teachers to enhance instructional practices and improve

student learning. To enable school administrators to meet those expectations, BRSD senior

administrators have facilitated several learning sessions for school administrators. Such sessions

focus on how to support teacher growth and how to effectively supervise and evaluate teachers.

Instructional Leadership Roles of Assistant Principals. Table 4.19 below and the

Table 4.20 set out the responsibilities that respondents say characterise their current roles as

assistant principals.

Table 4.19

Instructional Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

Q.45 Describe in detail the instructional leadership roles and responsibilities you have within the school community.		
Responsibilities	**Specific Examples**	**Number of Responses (26)**
Teacher Support	Observation, coaching conversations, PLCs, Professional Growth Plans, supervision and evaluation, professional learning/development, mentorship,	26

	student assessment, Collaborative Response Model (CRM), feedback, sharing resources	
School Culture	Meaningful communication, relational trust, guiding parent council and community, shaping a lifelong learning community, mental health, breakfast/hot lunch program, education champion, listening to understand, engaging entire school community	9
Procurement of Resources	Accessing/sharing resources, putting supports in place	4
Data analysis	Interpreting data, using data analysis for areas of growth and strength, analyzing data and facilitating collaboration around results, making data-informed decisions	4
Scheduling/Timetabling	Recess supervision schedule, timetabling	2
Developing School Plans	Supporting development of school-based plans	1
Curriculum Development	Development and facilitation of new curriculum, Advanced Placement courses	2
OHS	OHS and Hour Zero	1

Respondents overwhelmingly identified teacher support as one of their instructional leadership roles and included such examples as supervision and evaluation, coaching and mentoring, the provision of feedback, the preparation and delivery of professional learning, and the provision of collaborative opportunities. This result is consistent with a major instructional leadership goal and expectation of BRSD.

Nine of 26 (approximately one-third) of the respondents in Table 4.19 listed school culture as an important aspect of their instructional leadership roles. Creating a positive school culture is another area of emphasis for BRSD. To support this work, the senior administration has brought in educational consultants and provided models of matrices of positive behaviour. The senior leaders have also clearly emphasized (through central office activities, attitudes, and practices) that relational trust is a key component of a healthy school culture. The division's senior leadership team's efforts in this regard appear to be having a positive impact on school administrators. Nevertheless, more work could be done to increase the amount of time and effort

that administrators devote to school culture. Tables 4.12 and 4.13 reveal that too much administrative time is being spent on discipline and other managerial tasks. In Table 4.12, six of 13 assistant principals (46%) and five of 12 principals (42%) are spending 21-60 % of their time on student discipline. In Table 4.13, 11 of 14 assistant principals (79 percent) and four of 12 principals (33 percent) are spending 21-60% of their time on managerial tasks such as supervision schedules and Occupational Health and Safety paperwork. Discipline and other managerial tasks are therefore stealing precious time from such instructional leadership activities as teacher support and creating a positive school culture. BRSD's senior leaders should therefore work with school administrators to reduce time spent on discipline and school management so that more time is available for instructional leadership activities.

Apart from teacher support and school culture, four respondents identified the procurement and sharing of resources as one of their instructional leadership responsibilities. The division does provide textbooks and other professional resources and it does vet software applications for use in our schools. Nevertheless, school administrators are expected to support teachers through the provision of teaching resources that are needed but not included in those provided by the division. Therefore, BRSD's senior administrators regard the provision of resources as part of teacher support and collaboration. Similarly, Competency 8 of the *LQS* (2018) states that school administrators should allocate resources "to provide the learning environments and supports needed to enable and/or improve learning for all students" (p. 7). Resource location and allocation are therefore strongly connected to teacher support.

An additional four respondents identified data analysis as an instructional leadership responsibility. The *LQS* (2018) states that instructional leadership includes "interpreting a wide range of data to inform school practice and enable success for all students" (p. 6). For BRSD's

senior leadership team, data analysis is an important tool for improving the quality of teaching throughout the district and the district office insists that data analysis must occur for division and provincial assessments. Division office staff expect school administrators to build data analysis into their professional learning and collaboration days. Therefore, based on the results of Table 4.19, BRSD should raise the profile of data analysis and ensure that administrators understand it and apply it to their work with teachers.

In Table 4.19, only a few people listed scheduling, timetabling, and curriculum as instructional leadership activities. One person mentioned developing school plans and one person listed Occupation Health and Safety (OHS). The statement "developing school plans" is too broad to allow speculation about what it entails and OHS is a managerial task and not the responsibility of an instructional leader. The listing of OHS as an instructional leadership task demonstrates once again that some administrators are confused about the term "instructional leadership".

Table 4.20 below presents the results of the activity log kept by participating assistant principals. This log provides a point of comparison between administrators' perceptions of their workload and the actuality of their workload. Seven of 13 assistant principals (54%) completed the activity log, meaning that the responses represent the views of 30% (seven of 23) of all assistant principals in the division.

Table 4.20

Activity Log

Findings – Activity Log (Six Week Period - October 30 – December 7, 2018) (7 responses)

COMPE-TENCY	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Average over 6 weeks (%)
	(Oct 30 – Nov 2)	(Nov 5 - 9)	(Nov 12 – 16)	(Nov 19 – 23)	(Nov 23 – 30)	(Dec 3 – 7)	
Leading a Learning Community	Max: 40 Min: 0 Mean: 4.0	Max: 15 Min: 0 Mean: 2.71	Max: 20 Min: 0 Mean: 4.0	Max: 10 Min: 0 Mean: 2.57	Max: 20 Min: 0 Mean: 4.57	Max: 30 Min: 0 Mean: 4.29	3.69
Providing Instructional Leadership	Max: 30 Min: 0 Mean: 9.86	Max: 10 Min: 0 Mean: 2.86	Max: 13 Min: 0 Mean: 3.29	Max:15 Min: 0 Mean: 3.29	Max: 30 Min: 0 Mean: 5.0	Max: 20 Min: 0 Mean: 2.86	4.53
Developing Leadership Capacity	Max:20 Min:0 Mean: 7.0	Max: 15 Min: 0 Mean: 2.86	Max: 20 Min: 0 Mean: 3.57	Max: 30 Min: 0 Mean: 3.0	Max:10 Min: 0 Mean: 2.14	Max: 20 Min: 0 Mean:2.86	3.57
Modeling a Commitment to Professional Learning	Max: 25 Min: 0 Mean: 8.71	Max: 10 Min:0 Mean 2.0	Max: 10 Min: 0 Mean: 2.14	Max:30 Min: 0 Mean: 5.0	Max:20 Min: 0 Mean: 4.43	Max: 10 Min: 0 Mean: 1.43	3.95
Managing School Operations and Resources	Max: 50 Min:0 Mean 15.43	Max: 50 Min: 0 Mean: 8.86	Max:30 Min: 0 Mean: 6.29	Max: 30 Min: 0 Mean: 6.14	Max:20 Min: 0 Mean: 4.57	Max: 20 Min: 0 Mean: 2.86	7.36
Other: Teaching; teaching/coaching; parent meetings/phone calls; supporting/managing EAs;	Max: 65 Min: 0 Mean: 17.14	Max: 65 Min: 0 Mean: 9.29	Max: 55 Min: 0 Mean: 9.29	Max: 60 Min: 0 Mean: 8.57	Max:55 Min: 0 Mean: 7.86	Max: 0 Min: 0 Mean: 0	8.69

In Table 4.20, assistant principals indicated that they divided most of their administrative

time between managerial duties (7.36%) and "other" duties (8.69%). This is consistent with the

data in Tables 4.12 and 4.13 that show that administrators spend large amounts of their

administrative time managing school operations and resources. In Table 4.20, assistant principals

also indicated that they spent some time (8.69%) on other items. The average of zero for the last

week is probably unrealistic and somewhat surprising. Zero responses might be attributed to

work volume of the assistant principals or possibly, weariness of completing another week of

tracking their time. Therefore, a more realistic average over six weeks is likely higher than the

8.69% recorded for "other" duties. Nevertheless, BRSD senior administrative staff would most

likely expect that "other" items occupy the least amount of time, not the greatest amount of time

(as indicated in the activity log). During Weeks One and Two, the range of time spent on "other"

items was 0-65%. This aligns with the data presented in Table 4.17. (Twelve of 13 assistant

principals indicated that they spend up to 40% of their time on other items and one assistant

principal claimed to spend between 41 and 60% of his/her time on "other" items.) In the activity

log, items identified as other included the following: teaching, teaching/coaching, parent

meeting/phone call, and supporting/managing Educational Assistants (EAs). However, every

single item listed under "other" could be considered an instructional leadership activity. That

means that, on average, 13.22% (as opposed to 4.53%) of administrators' time is being spent on

instructional leadership. Similarly, three other categories (leading a learning community,

developing leadership capacity, and modelling a commitment to professional learning) also

constitute components of instructional leadership. When those totals are also added to

instructional leadership, a more realistic average of 24.43% of time is being spent on

instructional leadership. This is slightly more than the maximum of 20% that the majority of

respondents reported in Tables 4.14 and 4.15.

On average, then, the assistant principals who filled out the survey and the activity log devote 20-24% of their time to instructional leadership practices despite the fact that the division office staff expect 80% of administrative time to be spent on instructional leadership activities. It is possible that for the activity log, participants only roughly (and inaccurately) estimated the time they spend on instructional leadership or they may not have viewed those tasks as examples of instructional leadership. Nevertheless, it is clear that at least some assistant principals are not spending enough time on instructional leadership activities. On the other hand, from Table 4.20, participating assistant principals spend an average of 7.36% of administrative time on managerial tasks--which is less than the time indicated in Table 4.13. In Table 4.13, 11 of 14 (79%) participating assistant principals claim to spend 21-60% of their time on such managerial tasks as supervision schedules and Occupational Health and Safety paperwork. An average of 7.36% (from Table 4.20) is an acceptable figure since BRSD's policy is to cap combined managerial time at 20%. Nevertheless, in Table 4.20, some individuals indicate that 50% of their time is spent on managerial tasks. Therefore, there are some assistant principals in BRSD who are spending too much time on managerial tasks. It is incumbent upon the senior administrators in the district office to ascertain why and to provide help in redirecting the focus to instructional leadership activities.

The findings from the Activity Log thus indicate that senior leaders in BRSD must develop the role of the assistant principal in instructional leadership. The district office staff must provide a very clear definition of the term "instructional leadership" and clearly set out the activities that are associated with instructional leadership. Senior leaders must then work with assistant principals to increase the necessary skills, and to find ways to incorporate instructional leadership practices into their daily schedules.

Sharing Instructional Leadership Roles. Table 4.21 below presents the instructional leadership roles that 25 participants feel should be shared between the principal and the assistant principal.

Table 4.21

Shared Instructional Leadership Roles

Q. 42: What instructional leadership roles should be shared between the principal and the assistant principal?		
Duties	**Specific Examples**	**Number of Responses (25)**
Teacher Support	Classroom visits; supervision and evaluation; providing instructional supports; classroom visitation and modeling and mentoring; EA evaluations, classroom observations; supervising teachers and knowing what is going on in classrooms; supervision, should learn but not take the lead on evaluation; classroom supervision, supporting teachers in meeting individual student needs; teacher supervision, mentoring; review of teacher planning, classroom visits; supervision	12
All	All; in many ways all of them as it allows the AP to be familiar with the role; should be sharing of all roles, with supervision/training, so assistant principals can be prepared to take on a principal role dome day; all of them…supervision, evaluation, pedagogy, differentiation, safe and caring classrooms, technology, etc.; all. We share that roles both for teachers and support staff	11
Professional Development	Staff professional development; planning of school-based PD that impact teaching and learning; professional learning planning; leading collaboration days	4
School Culture	The cultural, linguistic, socio-economic and learning diversity in the school community; safe and caring classrooms	2
Majority	Majority of these roles need to be shared, however given that assistant principals have less time to be instructional leaders (they have a greater teaching load)	1
Technology	Technology	1
Data	Review data collected	1

Table 4.21 shows that teacher support was listed 12 times, followed by all roles (11 times) and the majority of roles (once). There were four mentions of professional development, two mentions of school culture, and one mention each of technology and data. According to the table, then, 44% of respondents consider that all instructional roles should be shared between the principal and the assistant principal. "All roles" would include teacher support, professional development, school culture, technology, and data. Therefore, 23 of 25 (92%) of respondents favour sharing tasks associated with teacher support. In a similar way, 60% thus favour sharing professional development tasks (11 all plus four professional development), 52% suggest sharing tasks related to school culture, 48% favour sharing technology, and 48% favour sharing data analysis tasks.

Teacher support is a priority in BRSD (shared with administrators through workshops and other professional learning sessions, the demonstration of strategies, logs of visits, book studies on observation feedback, book studies on collaborative leadership) and therefore it is not surprising that such a high percentage of respondents identified teacher support as a shared instructional leadership responsibility.

Nevertheless, the results in Table 4.21 are not consonant with the senior leadership team's expectation that assistant principals be involved in all instructional leadership activities (teacher support, communication from the division; staffing and budget meetings, school review visits and discussions, leading and learning professional learning sessions, professional development, development of a safe and caring school environment, data analysis, and the sharing of resources). The fact that only 11 respondents indicated that all roles should be shared is a concern for BRSD's senior leaders. This result is possibly because assistant principals, who usually carry heavier teaching loads than principals, feel that they do not have the time to

participate in all instructional leadership tasks. Nevertheless, the division's policy is that all instructional leadership roles be shared and therefore the senior leadership team needs to investigate further to determine the reasons why so few administrators agree that all instructional leadership roles should be shared.

Teacher Support

The third theme of Instructional Leadership is Teacher Support. The academic literature highlights the support of teachers as a major role of instructional leadership. According to the literature, this support can take a variety of forms: distributed leadership, collaboration, professional development, classroom visits, meetings, feedback, communication. While the *LQS* (2018) does not specifically describe the many activities that characterize teacher support, it does state that instructional leadership includes "building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students" (p.6) and it does mention supervision and evaluation.

Supporting Teacher Learning. In keeping with the outlines in the *LQS*, BRSD district office staff strive to provide support to teachers by supplying administrators with specific strategies designed to assist teachers to improve their practice. BRSD processes encourage administrators to visit classrooms on a daily basis. From 2016 to 2018, the division used budget reserves to allocate zero teaching time for principals to enable them to visit classrooms and to embed this practice in their schedules. BRSD practice also requires administrators to create logs of all feedback given to teachers during classroom visits.

Table 4.22 reveals the strategies that participating administrators indicate they are using to support teacher learning and to improve teacher practice.

Table 4.22

How School Leaders Work Together to Support Teacher Learning

Question 41: How do you and other leaders in the school work together to support teacher learning?		
Methods	**Specific Examples**	**Number of Responses (24)**
Professional Development/Learning	PD planning; approach teachers and encourage them to take advantage of PD opportunities; designing PD plans for the school; PD days; professional learning series; PD planning; building professional learning days around needs seen in the school; design/tailor professional learning opportunities; support opportunities for professional development; we plan or assist with professional development of our staff; Professional Learning Communities; PD support from Division Office; support and encourage teacher PD opportunities; review professional learning plans; plan professional learning based on areas for improvement from the 3 year plan	16
Conversations/Communication	Principal and I spend significant time talking about our observations and concerns; work together to develop plans that benefit students; open dialogue regarding how we need to support teachers; debriefing; discussions; constant communication of the different facets of our building; supervision conversations; individual and group pedagogy discussions; communication; frequent discussions with LC and principal of needs in the building; we talk every day during sacred time about student learning and teacher performance	12
Collaboration	Collaboration planning based on identified student/school needs; CRM; collaboration; collaborative days; collaboration between staff members; collaboration; assistant principal and I plan school based collaboration days; planning comprehensive collaboration days	10
Meetings	Team meetings for students with inclusive supports; teacher sharing at staff meetings; scheduled meetings; early out staff meetings; department meetings; meetings for CRM to monitor students at risk; meet with student regularly to ask them how they are progressing and listen to their suggestions; meet with	10

	teacher regularly and listen to their concerns and areas for growth; meet with all teachers to discuss their professional learning plans and provide them with supports; we encourage and support time for teachers to meet with a colleague	
Feedback	Student/parent feedback; sharing feedback to teachers after classroom observations; providing feedback	11
Classroom Visits	Classroom visits	6
Modeling/Mentoring	Sharing supervision responsibilities; modeling and mentoring new teachers; accessing Division support personnel; admin team shares responsibility for teacher supervision; mentorship; both admin doing observations and then sharing our thoughts with each other	5
Data	Data; google doc to track visitation	2
School Culture	Creating behaviour matrix targets	1

According to Table 4.22, administrators in BRSD primarily use the following strategies:

the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers, conversations and

communication with teachers regarding their practice, collaboration, meetings, and feedback.

Other strategies which are mentioned less often are classroom visits, modeling/mentoring, the

creation of measurement tools such as google logs to collect data and track classroom visits, and

efforts to create a safe and caring school environment. Although classroom visits are identified

by a relatively small number of administrators, conversations, feedback and collaboration all are

driven by classroom visits. Therefore, although relatively few administrators list classroom visits

as a strategy for supporting teachers, classroom visits almost certainly have a higher profile than

Table 4.22 indicates. This assertion is supported by the data in Table 4.24 where school

administrators identify classroom visits as the primary method of supervising teachers. As Table

4.22 shows, only two respondents mentioned data at all and no participants mentioned the use of

student achievement data, which is actually a primary indicator of teacher effectiveness. Based

on the data from Table 4.22, BRSD senior leaders should demonstrate to district administrators how to analyse division and provincial data and how to work through the data with the teachers in their schools. BRSD's senior administrators will also need to incorporate data analysis into the district's school review process and require administrators to share with division personnel how they use data analysis to support teachers.

Keeping Informed About the Quality of Teaching. The academic literature emphasizes that the teacher is the most important influence on student achievement (Robinson et al, 2008). The consensus is that if schools employ instructional leadership strategies, the quality of teaching will improve. One primary instructional leadership strategy is to provide support to teachers with the aim of improving the quality of instruction and thus to optimize student achievement. There is no specific outline of how, when, or where assistant principals could or should inform themselves about the quality of teaching in their schools. Alberta's *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). All senior administrators in BRSD's district office agree that the goal of instructional leadership is high quality teaching and optimum student learning. The senior leaders stress to school administrators (in conversations, in school reviews, and in correspondence) that the primary method of assessing the quality of teaching is through observation in classroom visits. Table 4.23 reveals how survey respondents profess to keep informed about the quality of teaching in their schools.

Table 4.23

Keeping Informed about the Quality of Teaching in your School

Q40: How do you keep informed about the quality of teaching in your school?		
Methods	Specific Examples	Number of Responses (25)
Classroom Visits	Frequent classroom visits; supervision and evaluation; watching instruction; drop-in visits; observations; maintain a visible presence	24
Conversations with Stakeholders (teachers, students, parents)	Conversations with stakeholders; talking to parents; talking to students; discussions with staff; parent of student-initiated conversations; engage in conversations with both teachers and students; speak to students and parents; crucial conversations	19
Feedback	Student voice; parent council feedback, parent conferences; liaison from School Council and staff meetings	14
Data Analysis	Provincial assessment standards; using data from BRSD-selected tests/measures; looking at MIPI, DORA, BAS data; using data such as Accountability and BRSD Surveys; DIP and Achievement results	11
Professional Learning	PLP meetings; PLPs; CRM	4

As shown in Table 4.23, 24 of 25 respondents indicated that they keep informed about teaching quality through classroom visits. Nineteen administrators identified conversations and 14 listed feedback as methods they use to keep informed about the quality of teaching in their schools. Eleven administrators said they employ data analysis and four stated that they keep informed about the quality of instruction through professional development opportunities.

Thus, Table 4.23 reveals that 96% of respondents keep informed about the quality of teaching through classroom visits and that 76% also engage in conversations with stakeholders. The former figure of 96% is unsurprising, given the division's stress on classroom visits (although it is unclear why 4% are not using classroom visits). The latter figure of 76% for conversations is undoubtedly slightly misleading because classroom visits would certainly involve conversations with teachers and possibly with students as well.

Supporting Teacher Practices. Academic researchers agree that instructional leaders must support teachers' practices and several models of instructional leadership set out broad categories to do so. These include the following: shaping a vision, creating a learning environment, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction, managing data, providing instructional support. However, the creators of these models appear to assume that principals and assistant principals know and understand the specific strategies they should use to identify and improve the quality of teaching in their schools. The academic models offer no specific strategies that administrators can use to support teacher practice. Similarly, the *LQS* (2018) states: "A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences" (p.6). The *LQS* does suggest a variety of indicators for supporting teachers: building teacher capacity, implementing professional growth, supervising and evaluating, aligning instruction with learning outcomes, mentoring, interpreting data, allocating resources (p.6). However, the *LQS* list being neither definitive nor exhaustive, individual districts must decide upon the precise strategies to be employed throughout the region.

Senior administrators in BRSD work with administrators to create specific strategies to support teacher practice. These strategies include the following: literacy and numeracy strategies; effective student assessment; effective ways to conduct a classroom visitation; the importance of communication with stakeholders; how to analyze student achievement data; how to provide constructive feedback to teachers; how to facilitate collaborative meetings to discuss student learning and instructional strategies; how to use technology to enhance instruction; how to work with concept-based curricula; how to seek student voice; how to infuse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives into curriculum; and how to ensure learning plans are used as working documents in daily lessons.

Teacher Supervision. Tables 4.24, 4.25, and 4.26, which follow, reveal participating administrators' perceptions of teacher supervision and present the priorities and strategies that administrators claim to use to support teacher practice in BRSD.

Table 4.24

What Does Teacher Supervision Mean

Question 38: What does teacher supervision mean to you?		
Response	**Specific Examples**	**Number of Responses (25)**
Classroom Visits	Classroom visits; awareness of teaching practices; being in classrooms to develop an understanding of teaching strategies being used; being in classrooms; visiting classrooms; being in and out of every classroom on a daily basis; being in classrooms; visiting classrooms on a regular basis (daily); daily observations of all aspects of teaching; observation in the classroom; classrooms visits; monitor teacher skills and growth	17
Building Capacity	Working with teachers to support them in building instructional capacity; working closely with teachers to help them develop and maintain skills that maximize student learning; keeping an eye out for teachers who are struggling and offering support; helping teachers become stronger educators; effectiveness of classroom management; support of teachers in their profession; supporting instruction, optimizing classroom environments; supporting teachers with programming, curriculum implementation, teaching strategies; help optimize instruction; supporting teachers to improve their instructional practice; growth in designing, supporting, and assessing learning; mentorship and guidance of professional staff	15
Feedback	Providing feedback to improve teaching and learning; providing feedback both positive and negative; providing feedback and generative dialogue; feedback and modeling; providing written feedback to teachers at regular intervals (1-2 times per semester); providing feedback to teachers; offering feedback and mentoring teachers	9
Meeting the *TQS*	Supporting teachers to ensure they are meeting the Teaching Quality Standard; improve teaching and learning related to the *TQS*; ensure that they are meeting the	7

	Teaching Quality Standard; observing *TQS* in action; aligning their practice to the *TQS*; ensuring that the *TQS* is being met; support and guide instructional practices related to the *TQS*	
Collaboration	Collaboration	1

In Table 4.24 above, 17 of 25 participating administrators recognize classroom visitations as an aspect of teacher supervision, followed closely by building teacher capacity (15). Other aspects of teacher supervision identified in Table 4.24 include feedback (mentioned nine times) and meeting the *TQS* (mentioned seven times). One administrator mentioned collaboration, but did not specify what collaboration entails. The answers presented in Table 4.24 are both surprising and disappointing because BRSD' senior leadership team places a high priority on classroom visits and expects administrators to visit classes every day. It is possible that if the district were successfully transmitting the message that classroom visits are the top priority for teacher supervision, then 100% of participating administrators would have listed classroom visitations as an aspect of teacher supervision. Clearly, this was not the case. Therefore, BRSD's senior leaders need to address this disconnect between teacher supervision and classroom visitations. Senior district staff must further investigate how administrators believe they are building capacity, providing feedback, and supporting teachers to meet the *Teaching Quality Standard* (*TQS*) if they are not directly working with teachers in the classroom. The district office staff must also focus on accountability and provide more direct supervision of school administrators in BRSD.

Areas of Focus. In BRSD, the priorities for teacher supervision are as follows: classroom visits, feedback to teachers on quality of instruction, conversations with teachers about quality of instruction, the review of planning and assessment documents, the use of data to inform

decisions, the creation and implementation of behavioral matrices, the formulation of policies of

inclusiveness and belonging. Table 4.25 below sets out the focus areas of the survey respondents.

Table 4.25

Focus Areas to Support Teachers' Practices

Question 44: List the areas that you are focusing on to support teachers in their pedagogical practices.		
Area	**Specific Examples**	**Number of Responses (24)**
Curriculum/Pedagogy	Scope and sequence of curricula; *TQS*; effective pedagogy; knowledge; emphasizing key principles/concepts (big ideas) in lessons; focus on numeracy, literacy, teaching and learning; ways to adapt lessons to support differentiation; PD for exam review; discussions about pedagogy with teachers; inclusive practices; differentiation, inclusion, using technology; leveraging technology to support students; support and develop pedagogical practices; new K-4 curriculum; improvement of instructional practice	15
Assessment	Student assessment; promoting fair and sound assessment practices; mark books; using assessment to drive instruction	7
Relationships	Strong relationships with students; build stronger relationships; be attentive in discussions; involvement; trusting relationships; student engagement; focus on safe and caring; developing relationships; creating safe and caring learning environments; student engagement	6
Coaching/mentoring	Coaching; mentorship	4
Collaboration	Collaboration; scheduling collaboration time; facilitating meetings to allow collaboration among colleagues; supporting the Collaborative Response Model; allow time and structure for CRM and PLC work to take place; ongoing collaborative Everyday Five Activities	3
Using Data	Data analysis; interpreting data; utilizing data to improve practice	3
Shared leadership	Shared leadership; accessing and utilizing division supports (personnel); visionary leadership	3
First Nations Metis Inuit	Incorporation of Indigenous perspectives/understandings	1

Fifteen of 24 respondents identified curriculum and pedagogy as one way in which they support teachers' practices. Other ways in which the participants support teachers' practices include: assessment (mentioned seven times); relationships (mentioned six times); coaching/mentoring (mentioned four times); collaboration, using data, and shared leadership (each mentioned three times); and First Nations, Métis, Inuit (mentioned once). These comments indicate that administrators have superficial knowledgeable about the competencies of instructional leadership. If administrators in the district had widespread, in-depth understanding of these competencies, then every single administrator would be focussing on every one of these competencies. The implication for senior staff in the district office is that more work is necessary to ensure that the competencies are understood and embedded in practice.

Strategies of Supervision. BRSD's central office staff expect school administrators to provide ongoing supervision by employing a variety of strategies that include: daily classroom visits, the modelling of instructional practice, discussions with teachers about their lessons and lesson plans, meetings, collaboration, the development of trusting relationships, feedback to teacher, data analysis, the provision of opportunities for professional learning. Table 4.26 below sets out the strategies for ongoing supervision that respondents claim to use.

Table 4.26

Strategies of Ongoing Supervision

Question 39: List the strategies that you use for ongoing supervision to provide support and guidance to teachers in your school.		
Strategy	**Specific Examples**	**Number of Responses (25)**
Classroom Visits	Observations of instruction at varied intervals and subjects; classroom visits; classroom observations; classroom visits; classroom walk through; trying to schedule specific times to be in classrooms; frequent	20

	visits to classroom; quick walk through 5-10 min; whole lesson observation; monitor content, circulation, questioning, activities, reviewing kinds of learning students are engaging in; presence in classrooms; scheduled and unscheduled classroom visits; on purpose visits looking specific indicators; class visits; frequent walks/visits around the school; classroom visits; observations; visit classrooms	
Conversations	Informal conversations about student achievement; discussion of pedagogy and curriculum; open dialogue with reference to the *TQS*; communication expectations; asking teachers to invite me into classrooms when they have lessons planned that hey want feedback about or simply want to share; continue conversations from each visit and tie into PGP; discussion; before and after school communication – debriefing, touching base; informal conversations about supporting students; conversations about pedagogy taking place in a safe environment; discussions before/after school; discussion with students about what they are learning/working on; engaging in learning conversations; conversations about best practices; conversations	18
Feedback	Feedback after observations; feedback; corresponding feedback; providing feedback; written feedback provided at least once per semester; providing timely feedback; verbal and/or written feedback; sharing Glow, Grow, Go feedback	12
Data Analysis	Analysis of data including APORI; data; student assessment; keep track of visits and feedback provided in a google form; use the new *TQS* form – helps me to understand the components and what to look for; *TQS* spreadsheet; assessment practices/course weightings; PAT/ DE results	8
Learning Plans	Require submission of year plans; overseeing planning and assessment; reviewing course outlines; long range plans; PLPs	7
Meetings	Planning meetings to address learning supports; individual meetings to discuss professional growth; staff meeting; facilitation of meetings with stakeholders; being open to meet with teachers at any time; PGP/PLP meetings	7
Professional Learning	Supporting professional development; providing professional learning and/or release time to pursue such; resources for professional growth; PD; ensuring teachers have opportunities for growth	5

Collaboration/CRM	Collaborative response; staff collaboration; collaborating with other teachers; Collaborative Response Model time	5

In Table 4.26, 20 of 25 respondents (80%) indicated that they use classroom visits to supervise and to provide support to teachers. This result differs from the 68% (17 of 25) that is recorded in Table 4.24. It is unclear why only 68% of administrators claim that teacher supervision means classroom visits (Table 4.24), yet 80% indicate that classroom visits are a strategy they use for teacher supervision (Table 4.26). In Table 4.26, participating administrators also list these supervision strategies: conversations (18), feedback (12), data analysis (eight), learning plans (seven), meetings (seven), professional learning (five), and collaboration/CRM (five). As with Table 4.24, this result shows insufficient recognition that classroom visits are integral to teacher supervision and support. The senior division staff should help administrators to deepen their understanding of teacher supervision and they should ensure that this important work is embedded into the daily instructional leadership roles of principals and assistant principals.

Assistant Principal Capacity in Instructional Leadership

The fourth theme of Instructional Leadership is Assistant Principal Capacity in Instructional Leadership. The results for this section are organised under three sub-categories: developing teacher capacity, student learning, and timetabling.

Developing Teacher Capacity. According to the Canadian Association of Principals (2014, p.23), most Canadian principals feel inadequately prepared to participate in the key instructional leadership duty of building teacher capacity. Alberta's *LQS* (2018) lists developing leadership capacity as one of the instructional leadership competencies and defines it as "identifying, mentoring, and empowering teachers in educational leadership roles" (p. 7). There

are no provincial guidelines for how to develop this competency in administrators. BRSD's

central office staff provide professional learning opportunities through two types of sessions:

Principal Academy and Leading and Learning meetings. In these sessions, senior administrators

share ideas of what to look for in a lesson and how to provide effective, constructive feedback to

teachers. There are also opportunities for coaching practice that allow teachers, with the support

of their school administrators, to reflect on their own practice.

That these district initiatives appear to be working is evident in Table 4.27. Fifteen of 16

respondents agree that they feel confident to support student learning and 15 of 16 respondents

feel confident in their abilities to build teacher capacity. No one disagrees. The results posted in

Table 4.27 do not match the findings reported in the study conducted by the Canadian

Association of Principals. Table 4.27 thus indicates that at least some of the total number of 23

assistant principals in BRSD feel confident to support student learning and teacher capacity.

Table 4.27

Confidence in Supporting Student Learning (Assistant Principals)

Question (32 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q21 – I am confident in my abilities to support student learning (AP)(16 responses)	4	7	4	1	0	0	0
Q22 – I am confident in my	2	6	7	1	0	0	0

abilities to build teacher capacity (AP) (16 responses)						

Table 4.28 below further delineates administrative confidence and the perceived need for more experience and training in building teacher capacity.

Table 4.28

Experience/Training in Building Teacher Capacity

Questions (28 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q29 – In retrospect, I feel that I need(ed) more experience/training in strategies to build teacher capacity during my time as an assistant principal (AP) (15 responses)	0	4	7	3	0	1	0
Q35 – When I was an assistant principal, I needed more experience/training in strategies to build teacher capacity (P)	3	3	2	3	0	2	0

(13 responses)							

Table 4.28 shows that 11 of 15 participating assistant principals (73%) agree that they

need more experience and training in strategies to build teacher capacity. In comparison, eight of

13 principals (62%) feel that they needed more experience and training in this area when they

were assistant principals. Only one assistant principal disagrees, and two principals disagree.

Table 4.27 and Table 4.28 show slightly contradictory results. In Table 4.27, 15 of 16

(94%) of participating assistant principals somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree that they are

confident in their abilities to support teacher capacity and in Table 4.28, 73% of assistant

principals agree that they need more experience or training in strategies to support teacher

capacity. It is unclear why so many confident assistant principals would identify a need for more

training and experience in this area. BRSD's senior leaders could question further to determine

what kind of experience and training these assistant principals are looking for.

Table 4.29 below presents the strengths that participating administrators regard as

essential to support teachers' pedagogical practices and to build teacher capacity.

Table 4.29

Instructional Leadership Strengths

Question 43: What instructional leadership strengths are important to have to support teachers' pedagogical practices? (24 responses)		
Strengths	**Specific Examples**	**Number of Responses**
Research-based Knowledge	Knowledge of pedagogy and curriculum, use data to inform decision making, firm basis in research-based instruction, knowledge of Program of Studies, knowledge base of instructional practices, differentiation, many approaches to teaching, knowing the *TQS* and solid pedagogy on instruction and assessment, broad knowledge of student support strategies and of structural	14

	requirements, research-based ideas to improve instruction, research-based knowledge, learning measured by improvement	
Communication	Open dialogue, strong communication skills, great communicator, difficult /honest/frank conversations, clear communication	10
Relationships	Relationship building skills, trustful and caring relationships, patience/supportive, relational trust, being approachable, build/maintain relationships	7
Knowledge of Curriculum	Strong knowledge of curriculum, experience of and with curriculum, knowing curriculum, curriculum knowledge	6
Continuous Learning Commitment	Growth mindset, knowledge and involvement, ongoing learning to maintain and enhance leadership capacity, attitude of expecting continuous learning and improvement	6
Experience	Experience as a teacher, knowledge and experience, experience, personal experience, still need to be in classrooms	5
Assessment Skills	Student assessment, assessment strategies, solid pedagogy on assessment, monitor fairness of assessment practices, knowledge and strengths with assessment	5
Collaboration	Collaborative leadership, collaboration, differentiation/inclusion, promote team building	4
Data Analysis Skills	Knowledge of student needs, interpret data, understanding data and data sets, measures for improvement	4
Access to Resources	Variety of resources, access to resources	2

In the academic literature, many models of instructional leadership identify essential

capabilities that characterize effective instructional leaders. These capabilities include: the ability

to create a safe and caring learning environment, the ability to build effective relationships, the

ability to improve instruction, the ability to use data to improve schools, the ability to set goals,

the ability to develop leadership capacity in others and a demonstrable commitment to

continuous learning (Robinson, 2011; Wallace Foundation, 2012). In addition to the fore-

mentioned skills, the Alberta *LQS* (2018) identifies additional skills that Alberta principals and

assistant principals are required to attain. The responsibilities listed under Competency 6 –

Providing Instructional Leadership necessitate that administrators possess the following

additional skills: the ability to demonstrate a strong understanding of pedagogy and curriculum,

the ability to use a variety of technologies to support student learning, the ability to understand

and respond to societal contexts (p. 6).

During the past few years, BRSD's senior leadership team has worked intensively with

principals and assistant principals on the top three strengths listed in Table 4.29 (research-based

knowledge, communication, and relationships). The senior leaders convene a professional

learning series focused on curriculum and outcome alignment by grade divisions for elementary

and junior schools (1-3, 4-6, 7-9) and Humanities, Math, Career and Technology Studies, and

Science for high schools. The senior administrators use both the Principal Academy and the

Leading and Learning sessions as opportunities to practise data analysis. They also provide

opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing. In BRSD, specific days in the school

calendar are designated as 'Collaboration Days'--days when staff meet in small groups to discuss

instructional practices and to share resources.

The responses from principals and assistant principals which are listed in Table 4.29

correspond to the skills identified in the academic literature and the *LQS*. Although not every

respondent identified each one of the skills, participating administrators generally seem to

recognize the importance of these leadership skills. As well, Table 4.29 shows that several

administrators identified relationships, knowledge of curriculum, data analysis, assessment, and a

commitment to continuous learning as strengths in instructional leadership. In addition, a few

respondents identified collaboration and resource-sharing as important strengths.

Despite the correspondence between the results posted in Table 4.29 and the central office staff's emphasis on communication, research-based knowledge and relationships, division data do not show significant improvements in student achievement. BRSD's results on Alberta Education's Accountability Report (Appendix H) show small gains in Provincial Achievement Test scores, but no, or only limited, improvement in Diploma Results, particularly in the Excellence Standards. BRSD staff do express appreciation for the emphasis on collaboration because embedding collaboration time into the school calendar has allowed them time within the school day to meet with their colleagues to discuss student learning and instructional strategies. This appreciation could be seen as improved staff satisfaction.

The results posted in Table 4.29 thus indicate that although administrators' knowledge of instructional leadership is increasing, more work is needed to create sustainable change in BRSD. Principals and assistant principals do connect the priorities of the division with the *LQS* and there is improved communication (with common terminology) regarding the competencies and principles and practices of instructional leadership. However, school administrators must embed these concepts and practices in their daily work with teachers if improvement in school outcomes is to occur. The division therefore needs to ensure that school administrators who receive training in instructional strategies subsequently model the same concepts to the teachers in their schools.

Student Learning. Table 4.30 provides some insight into why BRSD's assistant principals feel confident, particularly in the area of student learning (see Table 4.27). Fourteen out of 16 respondents in Table 4.30 agree that they have received training to build capacity in supporting student learning and 11 out of 16 respondents agree that they have received training in building teacher capacity. The training has probably had a positive effect on the confidence of

assistant principals who are instructional leaders, especially since 14 out of 16 respondents agree

that they would benefit from further training in their instructional leadership role. This suggests

that they have found the currently available training to be beneficial, as do the results presented

in Table 4.31, where seven of 15 assistant principals and eight of 13 principals indicate that more

experience or training in supporting student learning would benefit assistant principals.

Table 4.30

Mentorship and Training Opportunities

Question (48 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q23 – I have received mentorship/training to build my capacity in supporting student learning (AP) (16 responses)	3	8	3	1	1	0	0
Q24 – I have received mentorship/training to grow in how I help teachers build capacity (AP) (16 responses)	3	6	2	3	1	1	0
Q25 – I would benefit from further	2	8	4	1	1	0	0

mentorship/training in my instructional leadership role (AP) (16 responses)						

Table 4.31 below further indicates that there is a need within BRSD for further training

and experience in strategies to support student learning.

Table 4.31

Need More Experience in Supporting Student Learning

Questions (28 responses)	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Somewhat Agree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Somewhat Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Q28 – In retrospect, I feel that I need(ed) more experience/training in strategies to support student learning during my time as an assistant principal (AP) (15 responses)	0	3	4	3	2	3	0
Q34 – When I was an assistant principal, I needed	2	3	3	1	1	2	1

more experienc e/training in strategies to support student learning (P) (13 responses)							

In Table 4.31, five of 15 participating assistant principals disagree or somewhat disagree that they need more experience/training in strategies to support student learning, but seven of 15 agree that they need more experience or training. This indicates that some assistant principals feel comfortable identifying and using strategies to support student learning, perhaps because they are largely skilled classroom teachers. The range between agreement and disagreement might be because at times, the assistant principal is supporting students in classes in which he/she has little background or subject expertise or experience. Eight out of 13 principals (62%) feel that when they were assistant principals, they needed more experience and training in supporting student learning. These findings indicate that there is a need for BRSD district office staff to provide for assistant principals training in strategies to support students' learning. The senior leaders have already worked on literacy and numeracy strategies, but more subject-specific strategies could also be offered.

Timetabling. In BRSD, timetables should be built on the strengths of teachers, but they should also be student-centred. Timetables should match teacher specializations with courses, offer fair course loads to all teachers, have a healthy balance of difficult and easier courses in each semester, and be open to student input with respect to proffered options. Table 4.32 documents participants' confidence with respect to creating timetables.

Table 4.32

Experience/Training in Timetabling

Question (28 responses)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Some what Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q26 – In retrospect, I feel that I need(ed) more experience/training in timetabling during my time as an assistant principal (AP) (15 responses)	0	5	4	3	0	0	3
Q32 – When I was an assistant principal, I needed more training/experience in timetabling (P) (13 responses)	1	2	3	2	1	2	2

Table 4.32 indicates that nine out of 15 participating assistant principals (60%) feel they need more training in timetabling, and six out of 13 (46%) participating principals feel they needed more training in timetabling when they were assistant principals. These percentages are lower than expected. In discussions, the district office staff have identified many problems with the school timetables that are produced throughout the district. Such problems include inappropriate assignments (where veteran teachers have easier teaching loads than new teachers or where subject specialists are teaching inappropriate subjects), lopsided scheduling where one semester is too heavily loaded with demanding courses and another semester has too many options or easy courses, and failure to adjust timetables to best meet student needs. These

problems indicate that much more training is needed to enable administrators to recognise and to create appropriate timetables that fully support student learning.

Professional Learning

The fifth theme of Instructional Leadership is Professional Learning. The academic literature (Robinson, 2011 and Wallace Foundation, 2012), the *LQS*, and BRSD division policy all stress the importance of continual professional learning to enhance administrative competence and teacher practice. Professional learning can encompass such areas as instructional strategies, data analysis, collaboration, and research-based knowledge.

Table 4.33 below shows how participating administrators view the impact of professional learning on their instructional leadership practice.

Table 4.33

Impact of Professional Learning on IL practice

Question 48: In what ways, if any, have the last three years of professional learning impacted your instructional leadership practice? (22 responses)		
Impacts	**Specific Examples**	**Number of Responses (22)**
Collaboration	Ability to connect with people; conversations with other admin; more confident in working with others; support of fellow administrators; to work better with teachers; greater comfort to work with teachers to support them; major focus on collaboration and de-privitization of practice	7
Instructional Leadership Knowledge	Better understanding of what my school division expects; more attention to specific details; better understanding of *TQS*; helped support my instructional leadership practice, more of a focus placed on classroom visits and feedback; solid base for developing my understanding; given me knowledge, practice, experience with all the indicators of instructional leadership	7

Communication	Useful feedback; better at providing feedback; aligning feedback to goals; feedback has increased; conversations with admin colleagues	5
Professional Learning/Development	Changed how I view the role of the administrator; increase own background knowledge; looks at professional learning more as a leader of teachers	3

According to Table 4.33, the respondents' professional learning and development has had the most impact on collaboration and instructional knowledge (both mentioned seven times), followed closely by communication (mentioned five times). Three respondents mention professional learning and development. These results are commensurate with the aims and activities in division-supplied professional development initiatives which have focused on instructional knowledge, communication, and collaboration. The academic literature, the *LQS*, and BRSD policy identify all of these areas as important skills for instructional leaders. These findings align with the focus areas of BRSD.

Challenges in the Instructional Leadership Role

The sixth and final theme of Instructional Leadership is Challenges in the Instructional Leadership Role. The academic literature identifies several challenges to the successful implementation of instructional leadership practices. These challenges include the following: a lack of efficacy in instructional leadership, time constraints, limited financial and human resource, and a struggle to balance managerial and instructional leadership roles. Table 4.34 sets out the challenges identified by participants in this study.

Table 4.34

Challenges in Instructional Leadership Role

Question 46: Provide and discuss an example of one of the challenges you have encountered in your instructional leadership role.		
Challenge	**Specific Examples**	**Number of**

		Responses (24)
Time	Finding the time to be in classrooms as frequently as expected; managerial, planning, reporting and accountability requirements while also teaching 25% of everyday; where do you find time/make time for professional readings and intentional instructional leadership; time to respond to all duties assigned to the admin team; finding the time for teacher supervision with all the other managerial tasks that are required daily; sometimes I don't have time in my schedule to observe a teacher; having to be in reaction mode interferes with time in the classroom; putting out fires with parents whilst attempting to monitor teacher practice and growth; time to collect/record data and visit classrooms; time-balancing a number of other responsibilities with the instructional leadership role; often discipline or managerial demands take away from this work; having a teaching assignment also makes it difficult to balance these demands	12
Teacher Attitude/Knowledge	Teacher's own depth of analysis at surface level; my responsibility to explain that outcome-based reporting had been in our division for more than 5-6 years; challenge is consistency – not easy to hold teachers accountable; challenge between supporting some teachers and pulling/pushing them along; working with staff who are either hesitant/non responsive; working with staff that are "checked out" or retiring in the same year; staff negativity and resistance when asked to dip a bit deeper to support student learning; helping staff move towards embracing inclusion; some staff very hesitant to welcome me into their classrooms; reluctant to get into any conversation about improving practice; difficult to provide feedback to teachers who are seemingly inflexible to new ideas; difficult to move teachers out of the "picking battles" mindset	12
Lack of Experience	Support with instructional leadership without having background information; I feel inexperienced to offer suggestions; having no experience with this division of students, I really wasn't sure how to respond to challenges	3
Lack of Course Knowledge	Not knowing/being comfortable with the POS (i.e., Physics 30); I am not an expert in (phys ed); I don't always get to be involved in PD related to what I teach	3
Relationships	Balancing need for trustful relationships with requirements of accountability; relationships need to be developed	2
Communication	Giving useful/meaningful feedback	1

Table 4.34 shows that 12 of 24 respondents identified time and teacher attitude/knowledge as challenges in their instructional leadership role. Clearly, administrators also find it difficult to balance teaching time and managerial tasks with their instructional leadership responsibilities. In addition, respondents also struggle with negative attitudes of new and experienced teachers and they often find it difficult to support veteran teachers who have more teaching experience than the administrator. That teacher attitude/knowledge is a challenge to administrators indicates that principals and assistant principals have a lack of efficacy in their skill set that detracts from their ability to respond effectively in these types of situations. A lack of experience and a lack of knowledge (both mentioned three times) also indicate that efficacy or confidence is a problem for school administrators. Two respondents indicate that balancing relationships with accountability is a challenge and one respondent indicates that providing effective feedback is a challenge in the provision of effective instructional leadership. These last two challenges could also be attributed to the administrators' confidence level or experience.

BRSD's senior leadership team has tried to address the issues of efficacy and experience. It takes time for administrators to gain the necessary experience and confidence to support teachers and to hold them accountable. To create that time, BRSD's senior administrators limit managerial tasks so that school administrators spend no more than 20% of their time on such tasks. The division leadership team also strives to provide opportunities for assistant principals to gain experience through mentorships (partnering with a strong principal; providing a mentor colleague) and by ensuring that assistant principals are involved in all aspects of instructional leadership in their schools. Throughout the study, participants indicated a need for more training and experience. This indicates a willingness to acquire new skills. Nevertheless, as indicated in the demographic information, the average length of time that participating administrators have

held their current positions in BRSD is 2.8 years. BRSD's senior leaders must devote the time,

money, and resources necessary to build the instructional leadership capacity of all of its

administrators, but it will still take time for many administrators to incorporate those skills and to

embed them in daily practice.

Chapter Summary

Table 4.35 below exhibits the specific findings and their considerations for each of the

main themes of this study: organizational structures and roles (distributed leadership), the role of

the assistant principal, and instructional leadership. Using the information in Table 4.35, the

chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings of this study.

Table 4.35

Findings and Implications

Finding:	Considerations for BRSD The division's senior leaders could:
Distributed Leadership	
1. Distributed leadership is practiced to some extent in BRSD.	1. Ascertain which schools are not practicing distributed leadership; determine reasons for non-compliance and implement measures to ensure distributed leadership is practised and supported in every school.
2. There is some collaboration in determining the duties of the assistant principal.	2. Explicitly set out the expectation of distributed leadership that ensures collaboration to determine how assistant principal responsibilities are assigned.
3. There is inconsistency between the way duties are assigned to assistant principals and the division's goal of building instructional leadership capacity in all administrators.	3. Set clear expectations that all assistant principals need to gain experience in all competencies of the *LQS*.
Role of the Assistant Principal	
4. Too much time is spent on managerial tasks at the expense of instructional leadership time.	4. Clearly communicate to principals and assistant principals that instructional leadership is the primary focus of their work and support them to find further ways to reduce time spent on managerial tasks. The division must also create for the assistant principal position a role description that

	outlines the specific expectations of instructional leadership.
5. Too much instructional leadership time is being spent on student discipline issues.	5. Ascertain which schools have created successful collaborative matrices for behaviour and assist all other schools to do the same. Assistant principals should be involved in the creation and implementation of the matrices.
6. Assistant principals recognize that there are opportunities to grow and learn and to advance their careers.	6. Continue and expand the professional learning that the division is providing for assistant principals to successfully advance to principalships in the division.
Instructional Leadership	
7. Administrators are uncertain about the definition of instructional leadership.	7. Reaffirm our working definition of instructional leadership and support all administrators in connecting their work to the competencies within the *LQS*.
8. Administrators have superficial knowledge about the competencies of the *LQS*.	8. Do more work to ensure that competencies are understood and embedded in practice.
9. Not all assistant principals are involved in all instructional leadership activities.	9. Investigate further to determine reasons why so few administrators agree that all instructional leadership roles should be shared and provide strategies for ensuring that assistant principals spend more time on their instructional leadership roles.
10. A significant number of assistant principals feel confident to support student learning and to build teacher capacity.	10. Continue to support assistant principals in building their instructional leadership capacity to ensure high quality teaching and optimum student learning.
11. Assistant principals spend a maximum of 20% of their administrative time discussing practice and pedagogy with teachers.	11. Devote a substantial amount of time supporting assistant principals to enable them to have effective conversations. This would include identifying key instructional concepts to discuss and practice in having these kinds of conversations.
12. One third of assistant principals devote around 24% of their time to instructional leadership.	12. Delve into the role of the assistant principal in instructional leadership, beginning with clearly defining the term instructional leadership to build an enhanced understanding of what instructional leadership encompasses and then work with assistant principals to increase the necessary skills and to find ways to incorporate instructional leadership practices into their daily schedules so that administrators spend 80% of their time on instructional leadership activities.
13. Classroom visits are not recognized by all administrators as a strategy for supporting teachers.	13. Discuss with assistant principals and principals the importance of and strategies for daily classroom visits and mandate that they provide evidence of specific strategies they use for supporting teachers.

14. There is an insufficient recognition of classroom visits as being integral to teacher supervision and support.	14. Help administrators to deepen their understanding of teacher supervision (strategies to use, kinds of constructive feedback, its impact on quality of teaching and its impact on student learning and ensure this important work is embedded into their daily instructional leadership roles.
15. There is a disconnect between administrators' views on teacher supervision (which they regard as important) and classroom visitation (which is not occurring to the necessary extent).	15. Address the disconnect and further investigate how administrators believe they are building capacity, providing feedback, and supporting teachers to meet the *TQS,* if they are not directly working with teachers in the classroom. The division must focus on accountability and provide more direct supervision of school administrators.
16. The majority of assistant principals spend a maximum of 20% of their administrative time doing classroom visits.	16. Do the same type of work with assistant principals that the division has done with principals in Principal Academy, to foster growth in understanding of classroom visitations and to recognize the importance of doing this work daily.
17. BRSD has been successful in communicating that professional learning is important and provides opportunities for growth and learning to occur.	17. Continue to provide high quality professional learning to build the instructional leadership capacity of principals and assistant principals.
18. Sixty percent of assistant principals and 46% of principals feel they need(ed) more training in timetabling.	18. Provide more training to enable administrators to create timetables that fully support student learning and utilize the strengths of their teachers.
19. Many assistant principals feel comfortable identifying and using strategies to support student learning, but agree that more training would be beneficial.	19. Provide for assistant principals more professional learning in strategies to support student learning.
20. There is a discrepancy between high confidence levels of assistant principals in building teacher capacity and their expressed need for more experience/training.	20. Question further to determine what kinds of experience and training assistant principals are lacking and provide the training and opportunities to gain experience.
21. Administrators feel more training is needed in budgeting.	21. Provide a budget session for all administrators to review key components and processes for preparing their school budgets.
22. Only two assistant principals mentioned the use of student achievement as an indicator of teacher effectiveness.	22. Demonstrate to administrators how to analyse division and provincial data and how to work through data with their teachers. The division must incorporate data analysis into the school review process and direct administrators to share with division personnel how they use data analysis to support teachers.
23. Despite BRSD's emphasis on communication, research-based knowledge, and relationships, division data does not show significant improvements in student achievement.	23. Ensure our administrators who receive training in instructional strategies subsequently model the same concepts with teachers in their schools.

24. Challenges to the position of assistant principal include inexperience (the average length of time in current positions is 2.8 years) and time constraints.	24. Continue to strive to provide opportunities for assistant principals to gain experience through mentorships, and by ensuring assistant principals are involved in all aspects of instructional leadership in their schools. It takes time for administrators to gain the experience and to build the necessary confidence to support teachers and to hold them accountable.
25. Administrators indicate a willingness to learn more about their instructional leadership role, but there is a lack in self-directed learning.	25. Continue to provide professional learning in instructional leadership strategies and delve into the reasons why principals and assistant principals are overly dependent on district leaders and do not demonstrate the initiative to learn strategies on their own.

Emerging Themes

Using a process of thematic analysis, the researcher was able to identify commonalities within the twenty-five findings. A connection between categories and the research themes and questions became evident through this analysis. The emerging themes from the findings were then categorized by the subordinating research question topics: instructional leadership; organizational structures and roles; role of the assistant principal; and challenges and opportunities.

In summary, based on the information in Table 4.35, the findings and implications for this study are as follows:

Theme: Instructional Leadership

1. Within BRSD, there is a dynamic interplay between theory and practice. Educational theory and research into instructional leadership provide the basis for the *Leadership Quality Standard*, which in turn drives BRSD policy, and becomes manifest in the instructional leadership capabilities and practices of the district's administrators, who then inform teachers so they can improve their practice. The experiences of

staff and students then stimulate more research into the area of instructional
leadership.

2. Too much instructional leadership time is lost to managerial duties and BRSD's
senior leadership team could reinforce the primacy of instructional leadership tasks in
the following ways: increased education about the constituents of instructional
leadership and the breadth of instructional leadership tasks, increased support in
building instructional leadership capacity in administrators, and the production of a
role description for administrators that ensures a collaborative environment in which
all instructional leadership tasks are shared by principals and assistant principals.

Theme: Organisational Structures and Roles

3. The distributed leadership model that BRSD senior administrative staff wish to
institute throughout the district is currently insufficient and the division must address
this insufficiency in order to create a collaborative and cooperative school district
that ensures that both principals and assistant principals gain experience in and
participate in all of the *LQS* competencies.

Theme: Role of the Assistant Principal

4. The role of the assistant principal encompasses opportunities to build instructional
leadership capacity so that assistant principals can advance to successful
principalships.

Theme: Challenges and Opportunities

5. Challenges faced by instructional leaders include insufficient experience, training,
and time and BRSD's senior administrators should increase and diversify
opportunities for administrators to gain necessary skills and to learn how to budget

time appropriately so that instructional leadership activities take precedence over other school-related activities.

6. School administrators demonstrate both a willingness to acquire new instructional leadership skills and proficiencies, and also a reluctance to learn new strategies on their own. BRSD's senior administrators can encourage and stimulate administrators to take ownership of their learning and their practice so that administrators are self-motivated and self-reliant.

This summary of findings completes Chapter 4 of this thesis. Chapter Five which follows presents the study's final conclusions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Five presents the conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. This chapter first addresses the four subordinate research questions of the study and then answers the central research question: "In what ways, as instructional leaders, do assistant principals support high quality teaching and optimum student learning?" A discussion of ramifications for other jurisdictions then follows and the chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

Subordinate Questions

In order to ascertain the ways in which assistant principals support high quality teaching and optimum student learning, the researcher first set out to answer the following subordinate questions:

1. What roles are currently assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?

2. How are instructional leadership roles assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?

3. What are the instructional leadership roles assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?

4. What are the main opportunities and challenges for assistant principals in BRSD?

The following section sets out each of the subordinate questions and presents the conclusions drawn from the data.

Question 1: What roles are currently assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?

There are currently six roles assigned to each assistant principal in BRSD. These roles include the following: instructional leader, teacher, school manager, student disciplinarian, Occupational Health and Safety officer, and principal-in-waiting (Kwan, 2013; Sun 2012; Armstrong, 2009). The two most important roles of the assistant principal are those of instructional leader and teacher as they directly affect teacher practice and student learning. As instructional leaders, assistant principals do classroom visitations, engage in professional

conversations regarding practice and pedagogy, and provide feedback to teachers to enhance their instructional practices (Minihan & Towns, 2015; Armstrong, 2009). As teachers, assistant principals model sound instructional practices and build relational trust with their teaching colleagues and with their students.

In addition to their roles as instructional leaders and teachers, assistant principals are also school managers, disciplinarians, and safety officers. As managers, assistant principals create supervision schedules for busses and school breaks, coordinate the timetables of educational assistants, work on awards (criteria, donations, recipients, programs), contribute to school communication pieces, and help prepare budgets. The role of student disciplinarian overlaps with the roles of instructional leader and school manager. However, as assistant principals build relationships with students and support the building of a positive learning environment, the role of disciplinarian should be minimized. Moreover, assistant principals are also Occupational Health and Safety officers who contribute to the overall safety of the physical building and the people within it. As safety officers, assistant principals must inspect classrooms, complete hazard assessments, conduct drills (fire, lock-down, hold-and-secure).

The role of principal-in-waiting encompasses all of the fore-mentioned roles of assistant principals. In BRSD, assistant principals are heirs apparent to principalships and must embrace every aspect of every role in order to become successful principals and instructional leaders.

Question 2: How are instructional leadership roles assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?

Schools in BRSD are characterized by authoritarian and collaborative cultures and the strength of these cultures determines the extent to which a distributed model of leadership is practiced. In collaborative schools where distributed leadership is practised, the principal and the

assistant principal sometimes jointly decide on the instructional leadership tasks to be assigned to the assistant principal. At other times, assistant principals themselves choose which tasks they are responsible for. According to the data gathered in this study, it is commonly the case that assistant principals are assigned duties that match their existing skills and interests. Even in collaborative schools, it is also commonly the case that some roles such as OHS safety officer and disciplinarian are assigned by the principal. In schools where the overall culture is more authoritarian, distributed leadership is less evident and the principal usually assigns roles (including OHS officer and student disciplinarian) to the assistant principal.

The ways in which instructional leadership roles for assistant principals are currently assigned do not meet senior leader expectations and therefore changes to the assignation of tasks will have to occur. BRSD's senior administrators have (perhaps with limited success) promoted a collaborative culture characterized by distributed leadership. Schools that are not currently employing this approach to the delivery of education must move towards more cooperation and collaboration and must also practise distributed leadership. In addition, the assignation of leadership roles within schools must ensure that all assistant principals are given every opportunity to experience all aspects of instructional leadership. This means that tasks should be matched not just to individual skills or interests, but also to areas of inexperience or insecurity. Personal interests should not interfere with the successful preparation of assistant principals to assume principalships. To address this issue, the division's senior administrators will provide a definitive role description for both principals and for assistant principals. These role descriptions will outline the most important roles of each position.

3. What are the instructional leadership roles assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?

Currently there are four main instructional leadership roles assigned to assistant

principals in BRSD: practitioner, facilitator, mentor, communicator. Every assistant principal has the important instructional leadership role of being a classroom teacher. In their teaching role, assistant principals demonstrate the many competencies of effective teaching, including effective instructional strategies and data-based student assessment. In addition to being practitioners, assistant principals are facilitators of learning, teaching, and safe and caring environments that are conducive to learning. As facilitators, assistant principals collaborate with teachers to support students and to improve instructional capacity. Some assistant principals facilitate the analysis of student data to support teacher reflection on instruction and assessment. Assistant principals also help create safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environments. They facilitate the smooth operation of the school by supporting the principal in creating a school culture that fosters effective relationships between all stakeholders.

A third role, that of mentor, is another important instructional leadership role of assistant principals in BRSD. As mentors, assistant principals foster effective relationships with all stakeholders: students, staff, and parents. Mentors create meaningful and collaborative learning opportunities for their students and staff. They model a commitment to continuous, lifelong learning and provide constructive criticism and instructional strategies to teachers. Mentors hold high expectations of themselves, their colleagues, and their students and they inspire teachers and students to have high expectations of themselves and to endeavour to do their best. In addition, the fourth main instructional leadership role that assistant principals currently have in BRSD is the role of communicator. This role pervades all school activities. Assistant principals communicate with teachers to assess and improve pedagogy and practice. They communicate with all students to build relationships and transmit and acquire knowledge, and they communicate to parents and other agencies the goals and aims of Alberta Education and BRSD

so that all stakeholders can support student learning and achievement.

However, in addition to the above-mentioned roles, effective instructional leaders must also embrace many more roles. BRSD's senior leadership team expects assistant principals to assume all roles of instructional leadership. Many assistant principals in BRSD currently have limited experience in the following essential roles of the instructional leader: problem solver, organizer, researcher, supplier, and innovator. As problem solvers, assistant principals must work with stakeholders to address problems related to student learning, teacher practice, student discipline and any other of the myriad of issues or concerns that can arise in a school. Assistant principals must also be organizers who can create effective timetables, schedules, and budgets. As researchers, assistant principals must study and apply educational research to inform their own practice and that of the other teachers in their building by engaging in data analysis and using it to enhance their practice and pedagogy and that of their colleagues. As suppliers, assistant principals must procure educational resources (educational research, technological support, experts) to assist their teachers in enhancing their instructional strategies to improve student learning. As innovators, they must embrace constructive and effective change and be open to new and better ways of doing things.

Thus, BRSD's senior leaders need to ensure that all instructional leaders recognize the importance of and gain experience in all instructional roles so that every assistant principal can build his or her instructional leadership capacity and adequately prepare to assume the role of principal.

4.What are the main opportunities and challenges for assistant principals in BRSD?

In BRSD, the position of assistant principal provides both opportunities and challenges for the individuals who have this role. Opportunities include personal growth and learning,

professional learning opportunities, and career advancement. Assistant principals have many professional learning opportunities, which provide them with access to research-based knowledge and practice in leadership competencies. These opportunities help them to grow as individual teachers and to improve their personal teaching practice at the same time that they gain experience and competence as instructional leaders. These opportunities to train and practise their skills help prepare them for their future roles as principals. In BRSD, most assistant principals transition to principalships within a five-year period of first becoming a school administrator. Assistant principals indicate that they value the professional learning opportunities the division provides.

In addition to the opportunities of the assistant principal role, there are also many challenges: district budgetary constraints, insufficient time, efficacy issues, and, sometimes, a lack of confidence and personal initiative. Budget constraints impact every aspect of school operation, and the assistant principal is affected both directly and indirectly. The most significant direct effect is on the amount of administrative time that is assigned to assistant principals. The full-time equivalency fluctuates depending on the overall budget. At the current time, the FTEs for assistant principals are below desirable levels because the district cannot afford to hire more teachers to cover classes while assistant principals engage in administrative work. As well, financial constraints limit the number of collaboration and professional learning days that are built into the school calendar. Without regularly scheduled days set aside, the assistant principal struggles to find adequate time to collaborate with teachers on instructional strategies and student learning. In addition, when school funds are limited, the number and quality of available resources decreases. The assistant principal is indirectly affected in a negative way because it then becomes more difficult to fulfill the obligation to support teachers with needed professional

resources.

Time, efficacy, and initiative are also major challenges for the assistant principal. With limited FTEs (ranging from 0.3 to 0.75), the assistant principals in BRSD always struggle to balance their teaching loads with instructional leadership and managerial tasks. Time constraints also have a negative impact on efficacy. Insufficient time reduces the ability of assistant principals to gain and practise the skills they need to build teacher capacity and to support student learning. Many assistant principals thus lack the necessary skills and experience that help them to be confident and effective in their instructional leadership roles. The final challenge is that of initiative, which is heavily dependent on time, efficacy, and confidence. Many assistant principals in BRSD demonstrate a willingness to learn, but they appear to lack the initiative to find their own learning opportunities and supports in instructional leadership. Instead, they rely on the district to identify and address the needs of instructional leaders. BRSD's senior administrators must continue to build efficacy and confidence so that instructional leaders become more successful at self-assessment and so that they begin to pursue opportunities that will enhance their personal practice. This, again, is a challenge for district office staff because of financial constraints and available time.

Central Research Question: In what ways, as instructional leaders, do assistant principals support high quality teaching and optimum student learning?

Assistant principals support high quality teaching and optimum student learning in several ways. These include the following: direct delivery, analysis and exploration, modelling, risk-taking, problem-solving, collaboration and communication, relationship building, organization, and innovation. As practitioners, assistant principals directly deliver information and learning strategies to the students they teach. In a similar way, they directly deliver to

teachers information, strategies, and priorities with respect to sound instructional and assessment practices. This direct delivery can occur in conversations, in physical demonstrations, or in written materials. The second way in which assistant principals impact teaching and learning is through analysis and exploration. Assistant principals in BRSD frequently visit classrooms to explore teacher practice and student learning within their schools. They analyse provincial, division, and school data to better inform their personal decisions and practice and those of the teachers they supervise. Nevertheless, assistant principals in BRSD need to visit classrooms more regularly and to focus more intensely on data analysis as a means of assessing teacher efficacy and success. Thirdly, in addition to direct delivery and analysis and exploration, assistant principals model several practices, including self-reflection, risk-taking, and problem-solving. As classroom teachers, assistant principals self-reflect on their own practice and pedagogy. They assess their strengths and weaknesses and devise new ways to solve problems. They then model their ideas to other teachers. The example they set (modelling) encourages their colleagues to think about their own lessons and to reflect on their strengths and areas for growth.

A fourth way in which BRSD's assistant principals support high quality teaching and optimal student learning is by taking risks--trying new strategies and inventing new methods to support student learning. They are then able to share with their colleagues what they tried, how they needed to modify it, and how it supported student learning or improved their instructional practice. A fifth way assistant principals support high quality teaching and optimal student learning is problem-solving. When they are faced with a challenge in their own practice, they analyse, experiment, assess, modify, apply, and ultimately share with their colleagues various solutions to the problem. Assistant principals also find ways to address the myriad of problems (from discipline to parental concerns) that arise on a daily basis in schools.

In addition to direct delivery, exploration and analysis, modelling, risk-taking, and problem-solving, BRSD's assistant principals support teaching and learning through collaboration, communication, and relationship-building. Assistant principals facilitate collaboration with their staff in both formal and informal settings. Many assistant principals will collaborate as teaching colleagues and as mentor teachers. Examples of formal collaboration include written reports and assessment and the collaboration days which are built into the school calendar. During these days, all staff participate in formal sessions and activities designed to address issues of pedagogy and practice and include conversations and coaching sessions to help improve teaching. Examples of informal collaboration include casual conversation amongst staff and the sharing of resources and ideas.

Relationship-building, which encompasses both collaboration and communication, is another way in which BRSD's assistant principals support high quality teaching and optimal student learning. Assistant principals build effective relationships with all stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, community) by clearly communicating the importance of learning and school goals and expectations. Assistant principals communicate both verbally and in written form that all students are equally valued members of the school community and they set out the expectations of student behaviour and the disciplinary consequences that will result should breaches occur. Similarly, they work to create through kind, considerate words, actions and deeds a trusting, healthy (mentally and physically) collaborative relationship with their colleagues to build their trust and confidence. After classroom visits, assistant principals provide to teachers appropriate oral and written feedback that is related to the competencies in the *Teaching Quality Standard*.

The last two ways in which BRSD's assistant principals support high quality teaching and optimal student learning are organization and innovation. Assistant principals organize schools by constructing timetables, schedules, and budgets so that the school environment is conducive to student learning. It is imperative that the division pay careful attention to ensure that school timetables utilize teacher strengths and support student needs. Finally, at least some assistant principals in BRSD innovate to support teaching and learning. These assistant principals use research-based knowledge to identify new educational practice and pedagogy. By keeping abreast of educational research, these assistant principals are able to build on and create new and more effective ways of teaching. Their acquired knowledge base also enables them to initiate appropriate change where it is needed throughout the school. BRSD's senior administrators try to encourage innovation by sharing educational research with all school administrators, but must direct more attention towards stimulating the district's assistant principals to seek out their own professional readings and learning opportunities in order to become more innovative in their teaching practice and in instructional leadership.

Position Descriptions

The instructional leadership role of the assistant principal is essential to support high quality teaching and optimum student learning. While there is no disagreement on this point, it is evident that the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal is unclear to many in BRSD, resulting in great inconsistency throughout the district in how instructional leadership tasks are assigned to administrators, which tasks are pertinent to instructional leadership and which pertain to managerial leadership, how to build competency and increase capacity in instructional leadership tasks, the amount of time to be devoted to instructional leadership tasks, the best ways in which to implement instructional leadership throughout the school, and how to

assess the success or failure of instructional leadership activities. To address this lack of clarity, it is thus necessary to develop for BRSD definitive role descriptions for both the assistant principal (Appendix I) and the principal (Appendix J).

Ramifications for School Divisions

This study has clarified for Battle River School Division the following approach for the implementation of an instructional leadership model mandated by the Alberta Department of Education. Other school jurisdictions throughout the province might also draw on this approach as each develops its individual model of instructional leadership as a tool for supporting high quality teaching and optimal student learning.

The BRSD Instructional Leadership Model

Building on this research study, to successfully implement an instructional leadership model that supports high quality teaching and optimal student learning, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. It is advisable for the division to assess:

    a) the culture of school improvement

    First, the division should assess the extent to which each school is committed to improving its culture, its goals, its practices, and its provincial achievement results.

    b) the level of instructional leadership competency

    Specific areas of instructional leadership competency to be addressed include the following: the level of understanding of instructional leadership, the competencies and strategies contained within the standard, the comfort level of assistant principals (and principals) in performing instructional leadership tasks, the extent

to which research-based knowledge and data analysis are in use, and the amount
of time devoted to instructional leadership.

c) school practices and policies

The division should, on an ongoing basis, review and assess school practices and
policies to identify areas of strength and weakness in the distributed leadership
and instructional leadership models. The division can then assist administrators to
fulfill all instructional leadership responsibilities by addressing any perceived
gaps in current practice and policy.

2. It is advisable for the division to define:

a) Instructional leadership for use with school administrators

All leaders should work from the same premise and foundational understanding
when referring to instructional leadership.

b) the instructional leadership role of assistant principals and principals.

The division should not assume that all school leaders understand the expectation
of instructional leadership. The division should therefore create a definitive role
description for principals and for assistant principals.

3. It is advisable for the division to implement:

a) a distributed leadership model of collaboration

The work of instructional leadership is all encompassing and should be
accomplished through the participation of all school leaders.

b) strategies and policies to assist school administrators in supporting teacher growth
and understanding

Administrators can address problems of practice by implementing instructional

leadership strategies based on division policies.

4. It is advisable for the division to build:

a) The instructional leadership capacity of all school administrators

The Principal Academy should continue to focus on building the instructional

leadership capabilities of principals, and the division should also institute an

Assistant Principal Academy to build similar skills in assistant principals. This is

essential work to prepare assistant principals for successful principalships and to

ensure that both principals and assistant principals gain the skills they need to

inform teacher practice.

Summary

To summarize, the purpose of this study was to determine the ways in which assistant principals, as instructional leaders, support high quality teaching and optimal student learning. The study has revealed that assistant principals provide this support by embracing and implementing the policies and practices of an instructional leadership model with the following characteristics:

1. a collaborative, non-authoritarian culture where administrative leadership is

   distributed between the principal and the assistant principal and both share duties in

   all aspects of school administration;

2. collaboration, communication, and constructive relationship-building between all

   stakeholders pervade all aspects of school life with the intention of building safe,

   healthy, and inclusive environments that support teaching and learning;

3. research-based knowledge and data analysis constitute the reasons and means for

embracing new or different instructional strategies to support teacher practice and student learning;

4. a focus on healthy, safe, inclusive learning environments in which all students are equally valued and equally encouraged to develop their talents to the best of their abilities;

5. a calm, cooperative environment which values teachers and seeks to support them in their practice so they embrace life-long learning and continuously strive to improve their practice and increase student learning;

6. a dynamic approach to teaching and learning which encourages innovation and self-directed learning, both for students and for teachers and which embraces constructive change.

Moreover, the study has illuminated specific ways in which the division's central office staff can assist assistant principals and principals and help them to increase their instructional leadership capacity in order to support high-quality teaching and optimum student learning in the division. Finally, the study has also revealed areas for future study. These recommendations, which are listed below, conclude this dissertation.

<div align="center">**Conclusion and Recommendations**</div>

To conclude, this study aimed to fill a perceived gap in the academic literature. An examination of the published body of educational writings revealed a dearth of material directed at defining the distinct role of the assistant principal as instructional leaders or as school managers. No published work focused specifically on the assistant principal as an administrative position that is distinct from that of the principal. There was no research on the assistant principal's role as an instructional leader or the necessary skill sets, duties, opportunities, or

challenges associated with that position. The current study has provided some insights into the role of the assistant principal and has delineated a specific role description that is distinct from that of the principal. In the process, the study has shown that there is a dynamic interplay between educational theory and practice, with theory informing experience and experience generating ideas for research. Ultimately, theory and practice work together to identify needs and provide the reasons for and the ways in which to implement necessary and constructive change that will enhance teacher practice and increase student learning. In the case of BRSD, the research has provided the basis for a new role description and the development of new activities and supports so that assistant principals can fulfill their responsibilities as instructional leaders.

The research into the assistant principal role in Battle River School Division has also generated the following suggestions for further research:

1. A multi-jurisdictional study to determine the instructional leadership role of assistant principals in a larger context;

2. An action-research study of the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal to allow assistant principals to engage deeply in the study and to provide iterative cycles to implement change;

3. A study to determine the most effective role of the assistant principal;

4. A comparative study of high-achievement schools and low-achievement schools to determine how instructional leadership strategies compare and contrast and affect school achievement outcomes;

5. A study that compares a school in Alberta with a similar school in another country to determine similarities and differences in how instructional leadership is applied in different settings and how it affects outcomes;

6.   A study to determine the reasons why principals are reluctant to share authority and power within their schools.

It is to be hoped that such studies will further improve administrative leadership skills and enable administrators to identify, address, and provide appropriate solutions for areas in need of change in order to enhance teacher practice and to improve student learning in all schools.

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY INFORMATION/ INFORMED CONSENT

</div>

TITLE OF PROJECT:

Ambiguity in Leadership: Perceptions of the Instructional Leadership Role of the Assistant
Principal

SPONSOR:

All costs incurred are the responsibility of the doctoral student, Rita Marler.

INVESTIGATORS:

Dr. Jim Brandon, Primary Investigator, Associate Dean, Werklund School of Education, (403)
862-3090 jbrandon@ucalgary.ca

Rita Marler, Doctoral student, Werklund School of Education, (780) 608-9990
rita.marler@ucalgary.ca

This information sheet is only part of the process of implied consent. It should give you the basic
idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like
more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please ask. Take
the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

BACKGROUND

A thorough review of BRSD leadership practices has revealed that no two assistant principals
within BRSD have the same role definition. The assistant principal in a smaller, rural school is
usually required to support the principal by taking on many and varied responsibilities. In
contrast, the assistant principal in a larger, urban setting might only deal with a certain group of
students and staff or focus solely on specific duties, such as, for example, Occupational Health
and Safety regulations. This diversity in roles throughout BRSD is problematic because the
district requires consistency in the skill sets of assistant principals. All assistant principals need
to gain experience in all areas of leadership to broaden their instructional leadership capacity and
to assist with district-wide school improvement efforts. The lack of consistency within BRSD
hinders the ability of district office to slot assistant principals throughout the district because it
cannot be assumed that all assistant principals possess the same leadership skills and goals. The
lack of consistency also hinders the professional development of assistant principals. Those who

do not possess the required instructional leadership skills are relegated to managerial tasks and are less likely to be promoted to principalships. Many assistant principals experience frustration at not receiving the job-embedded mentorship that they require to build their own capacity to become instructional leaders within our school system.

Thus, from a practical point of view as superintendent, I believe that it is imperative to clearly define the assistant principal's role in terms of instructional leadership. To create some standardization and sustainability in our school leadership positions, we need to set clear expectations for the mentorship and training of assistant principals to build their capacity as current school leaders and as future principals. Once assistant principals have acquired the necessary skills, they will be able to participate fully in the instructional leadership practices that directly affect teachers and students. This will ultimately enhance student learning and stimulate system improvement.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of my research study is to therefore fill a perceived gap in my school division's current practice and in the theoretical research relating to instructional leadership. In BRSD, the duties of the assistant principal are determined at the school level. Consequently, the responsibilities vary significantly (from managerial to instructional) across the division. An intended practical consequence of the proposed research is therefore to define the exclusive role of the assistant principal so that the definition can be applied equitably across the division. By doing so, our division will be better equipped to provide appropriate mentorship and professional learning opportunities for assistant principals. An intended theoretical consequence of the proposed research is to fill a comparable gap in the research literature, where the role of the assistant principal is rarely dissociated from that of the principal. The proposed study will address this omission in the literature by initiating a theoretical discussion about the distinct role of assistant principals in educational leadership.

Research Questions

The specific research question to be addressed in the proposed research is as follows: "In what ways, as instructional leaders, do assistant principals support high-quality teaching and optimal student learning?" The subordinating questions are as follows:

       1. What roles are currently assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?
       2. How are instructional leadership roles assigned to assistant principals in BRSD?
       3. What are the main challenges and supports for assistant principals in BRSD?
       4. What are the instructional leadership roles of the assistant principal in BRSD?

WHAT WOULD I HAVE TO DO?

Should you agree to participate, the primary investigator, Dr. Brandon, will request assistant principals and principals within Battle River Regional Division #31 (BRSD) to participate in a questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 40 minutes to complete.

He will also request all participating assistant principals from BRSD to complete an activity log for a period of six weeks to identify the dimensions of the *Leadership Quality Standard* where most of their time is spent. The log should require approximately 10 minutes per week to complete. The questionnaire and activity log will focus on the role of the assistant principal, how that role was decided, and what activities and responsibilities should be part of the assigned role.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

There are no anticipated risks in taking part in this research study. Privacy will be protected by ensuring that all communication regarding the study will be provided by the Primary Investigator, Dr. Jim Brandon. The questionnaire and the activity log will be submitted online through Qualtrics to Dr. Brandon. Dr. Brandon will scrutinize the data and remove any identifiers so I will not be able to identify responses or whether a particular individual participated in the study. No one is being hired, paid or promoted for their participation; conversely, no one will be punished with demotion or loss of employment or wages if he or she declines to participate.

WILL I BENEFIT IF I TAKE PART?

If you agree to participate in this study, there might or might not be a direct benefit to you. Your professional capacity might improve from participation because the study might encourage you to reflect upon your leadership practices and to share your leadership practices. You might also benefit from changes that enhance your role as instructional leader. There is also the possibility that student learning will benefit from better practices as a division.

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

Participation in this study is voluntary and any individual may refuse to participate altogether, refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any and all questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which she or he is otherwise entitled.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING, OR DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR ANYTHING?

There are no costs incurred or payments received for participation in this study.

WILL MY RECORDS BE KEPT PRIVATE?

To ensure confidentiality of your data, all raw data will be stored electronically on secured and encrypted computers. Only the primary investigator, Dr. Jim Brandon, can gain access to the raw data. All data will be held for five years and will be subsequently destroyed.

Qualtrics Software is hosted by a web-survey company located in Canada and as such is subject to Canadian laws. This survey or questionnaire does not ask for personal identifiers or any information that may be used to identify you. The web-survey company servers record incoming IP addresses of the computer that you use to access the questionnaire, but no connection is made

between your data and your computer's IP address. If you choose to participate in the survey, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be stored and accessed on Canadian servers.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

Your decision to complete the questionnaire and will be interpreted as an indication of your agreement to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact:

<div align="center">

Dr. Jim Brandon (403) 862-3090
jbrandon@ucalgary.ca

</div>

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a possible participant in this research, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services, University of Calgary at (403) 220-4283/220-6289; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca

APPENDIX B

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL/PRINCIPAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your participation in this action research study which aims to define the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal in school leadership. Your participation in completing the questionnaire (principals) or the questionnaire and activity log (assistant principals) implies your understanding and consent to the following:

1. Participation in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw up to the close of submissions on December 21, 2018. No submissions will be accepted after December 21, 2018.
2. Confidentiality will be maintained. All data will be securely stored and deleted after completion of the research study.
3. Each perspective will be respected. The findings will accurately represent the perspective of each participant.
4. Only the primary investigator, Dr. Brandon, will have access to information that might link any participant to the information provided in the survey.
5. There will be no negative repercussions for choosing not to be involved in the study or for withdrawing early from the research project.
6. There will be no perks or rewards for opting to be involved in the study.
7. Participation (or lack thereof) in this study has no bearing on the professional evaluation of or the employment status of individuals.
8. Every effort will be made to ensure trustworthiness and validity of results.
9. Publication of results will be shared in my final dissertation and may be shared at conferences.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this action research study is to elucidate the role of the assistant principal in school leadership. Using Battle River School Division as an example, this study has the following aims: to identify the major and minor responsibilities of the assistant principal; to understand how the assistant principal role is defined; to describe how the assistant principal role is determined; to identify the challenges associated with the assistant principal position; to identify the opportunities associated with the assistant principal position.

Questionnaire

The following questionnaire consists of 10 sections for a total of 50 questions. There are both short-answer and long-answer questions. Please answer each question as completely as possible. The survey should take approximately 40 minutes. All questionnaires will remain anonymous.

Qualtrics software will be used for the collection of data. This questionnaire does not ask for personal identifiers or any information that may be used to identify you. Qualtrics software company allows researchers to turn off collection of IP addresses of the computer that you use. If you choose to participate in the survey and/or the activity log, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be encrypted and stored on Canadian soil and subject to Canadian laws. The security and privacy policy for the web-survey company can be found at the following link:
https://www.qualtrics.com/security-statement/

The due dates for this research study are as follows:

Questionnaire – November 30, 2018
Activity Log – December 13, 2018

Questionnaire

Please answer every question unless you are instructed otherwise.

A. Demographic Information.

1. What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?

    _____ Bachelor degree (1)

    _____ Master's degree (2)

    _____ Doctoral degree (3)

2. Which of the following best describes you?

    _____ Principal (1)

    _____ Assistant Principal (2)

_____ Other, please specify (3)

3. How many years have you held your current position?

_____ This is my first year (1)

_____ 1 to 2 years (2)

_____ 3 to 5 years (3)

_____ 6 to 10 years (4)

_____ 11 to 15 years (5)

_____ 16 to 20 years (6)

_____ More than 20 years (7)

4. Which of the following best describes your administrative full-time equivalency?
_____ 0.4 fte

_____ 0.5 fte

_____ 0.6 fte

_____ 0.75 fte

_____ 1.0 fte

B. **Responsibilities of the Assistant Principal. Answer this section ONLY if you are an assistant principal. Please indicate the percentage of time for each of questions 1 through 4. The total obtained by adding together the answers for each question in the section should be 100%. Please ensure that the section total is 100%.**

5. What percentage of your administrative time is spent dealing with student discipline?

6. What percentage of your administrative time is spent dealing with managerial tasks such as supervision schedules, Occupational Health and Safety paperwork?

7. What percentage of your administrative time is spent doing classroom visitations?

8. What percentage of your administrative time is spent discussing practice and pedagogy with teachers?

9. What percentage of your administrative time is spent on other items? Please specify the activities as well as the percentage of time spent.

Please add up the percentages you have recorded. They should total 100%.

C. **Responsibilities of the Principal. Answer this section ONLY if you are a principal. Please indicate the percentage of your time for each of questions 1 through 4. The total obtained by adding together the answers for each question in the section should be 100%. Please ensure that the section total is 100%.**

10. What percentage of your administrative time is spent dealing with student discipline?

11. What percentage of your administrative time is spent dealing with managerial tasks such as supervision schedules, Occupational Health and Safety paperwork?

12. What percentage of your administrative time is spent doing classroom visitations?

13. What percentage of your administrative time is spent discussing practice and pedagogy with teachers?

14. What percentage of your administrative time is spent on other items? Please specify the activities as well as the percentage of time spent.

Please add up the percentages you have recorded. They should total 100%.

D. **How assistant principal responsibilities are determined.**

15. The principal determines the responsibilities of the assistant principal.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

16. The assistant principal and principal decide together what the responsibilities of the assistant principal are.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

17. The assistant principal is able to choose the responsibilities he/she is responsible for.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

18. The responsibilities of the assistant principal are assigned based on the strengths of the individual.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

19. All duties of administration are shared by the principal and the assistant principal.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

20. More duties should be shared between the principal and the assistant principal.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

E. Supporting Quality Teaching and Optimal Student Learning. Answer this section ONLY if you are an assistant principal.

21. I am confident in my abilities to support student learning.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

22. I am confident in my abilities to build teacher capacity.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

23. I have received mentorship/training to build my capacity in supporting student learning.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

24. I have received mentorship/training to grow in how I in help teachers build capacity.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

25. I would benefit from further mentorship/training in my instructional leadership role.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

F. Opportunities and Challenges of the Assistant Principal Role. Answer this section ONLY if you are an Assistant Principal.

26. In retrospect, I feel that I need(ed) more experience/training in timetabling during my time as an assistant principal.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

27. In retrospect, I feel that I need(ed) more experience/training in budgeting during my time as an assistant principal.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

28. In retrospect, I feel that I need(ed) more experience/training in strategies to support student learning during my time as an assistant principal.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

29. In retrospect, I feel that I need(ed) more experience/training in strategies to build teacher capacity during my time as an assistant principal.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

30. There are opportunities to grow and learn as an assistant principal.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

31. There are opportunities to advance my career.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

G. **Opportunities and Challenges of the Assistant Principal Role. Answer this section ONLY if you are a principal.**

32. When I was an assistant principal, I needed more training/experience in timetabling.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

33. When I was an assistant principal, I needed more experience/training in budgeting.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

34. When I was an assistant principal, I needed more experience/training in strategies to support student learning.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

35. When I was an assistant principal, I needed more experience/training in strategies to build teacher capacity.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

36. There are opportunities to grow and learn as an assistant principal.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

37. There are opportunities for assistant principals to advance in their careers.

_____ Strongly disagree

_____ Disagree

_____ Somewhat disagree

_____ Neither Agree Nor Disagree

_____ Somewhat Agree

_____ Agree

_____ Strongly Agree

H. **Teacher Supervision. Please do not include any detail that could lead to identification of you, your colleagues, and/or your school.**

38. What does *teacher supervision* mean to you?

39. List the strategies that you use for ongoing supervision to provide support and guidance to teachers in your school.

40. How do you keep informed about the quality of teaching in your school?

41. How do you and other leaders in the school work together to support teacher learning?

42. What instructional leadership roles should be shared between the principal and the assistant principal?

I. **Instructional Leadership Practice. Please do not include any detail that could lead to identification of you, your colleagues, and/or your school.**

43. What instructional leadership strengths are important to have to support teachers' pedagogical practices?

44. List the areas you are focusing on to support teachers in their pedagogical practices.

45. Describe in detail the instructional leadership roles and responsibilities you have within the school community.

46. Provide and discuss an example of one of the challenges you have encountered in your instructional leadership role.

47. What changes have you seen in your instructional leadership practice over the past three years? Please provide specific examples.

48. In what ways, if any, have the last three years of professional learning impacted your instructional leadership practice?

J. Further Comments. Please do not include any detail that could lead to identification of you, your colleagues, and/or your school.

WERKLUND SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Graduate Division of Educational Research
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 1N4
ucalgary.ca

APPENDIX C

ACTIVITY LOG

Please indicate the percentage (%) of your time spent on each competency for the week. Please make sure your weekly total equals 100%. The Activity Log should take approximately 10 minutes per week for the 6-week period.

Descriptors:

Dimension 4: Leading a Learning Community. A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning.

Examples: creating Professional Learning opportunities; ensuring safe and ethical use of technology; collaborating to provide wrap-around services; recognizing staff and student accomplishments.

Dimension 6: Providing Instructional Leadership. A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences.

Examples: teacher supervision and evaluation; mentorship; using data to inform decisions; aligning instruction to learning outcomes.

Dimension 7: Developing 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.

Examples: consultative and collaborative decision-making; empowering teachers in leadership roles; promoting parent involvement; shared leadership.

Dimension 2: 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.

Examples include: seeking feedback and information to enhance leadership practice; applying educational research to inform practice; engaging with others to build personal and professional capacities and expertise.

Dimension 8: Managing School Operations and Resources. A leader effectively directs operations and manages resources.
Examples: budgeting; Occupational Health and Safety; identifying and planning for areas of need; identifying building deficiencies; supervision schedules.

Other: All other administrative time devoted to working with students (outside of teaching) or parents.

Examples: parent meetings; student activities outside of the classroom.

WEEK 1 – Oct 30 – Nov 2, 2018

Leading a Learning Community	Providing Instructional Leadership	Developing Leadership Capacity	Managing School Operations and Resources	Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning	Other (please specify tasks)	TOTAL %

WEEK 2 – Nov 5 – 9, 2018

Leading a Learning Community	Providing Instructional Leadership	Developing Leadership Capacity	Managing School Operations and Resources	Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning	Other (please specify tasks)	TOTAL %

WEEK 3 – Nov 12 – 16, 2018

Leading a Learning Community	Providing Instructional Leadership	Developing Leadership Capacity	Managing School Operations and Resources	Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning	Other (Please specify tasks)	TOTAL %

WEEK 4 – Nov 19 – 23, 2018

TOTAL %

Leading a Learning Community	Providing Instructional Leadership	Developing Leadership Capacity	Managing School Operations and Resources	Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning	Other (Please specify tasks)

WEEK 5 – Nov 25 – Nov 30, 2018   **TOTAL %**

Leading a Learning Community	Providing Instructional Leadership	Developing Leadership Capacity	Managing School Operations and Resources	Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning	Other (Please specify tasks

WEEK 6 – Dec 3 - 7, 2018   **TOTAL %**

Leading a Learning Community	Providing Instructional Leadership	Developing Leadership Capacity	Managing School Operations and Resources	Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning	Other (please specify tasks)

APPENDIX D

CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW

Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board
Research Services Office
2500 University Drive, NW
Calgary AB T2N 1N4
Telephone: (403) 220-4283/6289
cfreb@ucalgary.ca

UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW

The Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB), University of Calgary has reviewed and approved the below research. The CFREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS).

Ethics ID: REB18-1219

Principal Investigator: James Brandon

Co-Investigator(s): There are no items to display

Student Co-Investigator(s): Rita Marler

Study Title: Ambiguity in Leadership: Perceptions of the Instructional Leadership Role of the Assistant Principal

Sponsor:

Effective: Tuesday, September 25, 2018   **Expires:** Wednesday, September 25, 2019

Restrictions:

This Certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to the CFREB for approval.
3. An annual application for renewal of ethics certification must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
4. A closure request must be sent to the CFREB when the research is complete or terminated.

Approved By: **Date:**

John H. Ellard, PhD, Chair , CFREB   Tuesday, September 25, 2018

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE ONE-YEAR TERM ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL CONTRACT LETTER

June 22, 2020

Name
School

Dear:

Re: One-Year Term Assistant Principal Contract

Enclosed please find two copies of your One-Year Term Assistant Principal Contract to provide service as an Assistant Principal for Battle River School Division. If you accept this offer, one of the two enclosed contracts must be signed and returned no later than fifteen days from the date hereof, in which case the return of the signed contract shall be conclusive of your acceptance of this offer on the terms and conditions set out in the said contract. Failure to return the signed contract by the deadline will result in this offer being null and void.

Your assignment runs from August 28, 2020 to June 30, 2021. Placement for the school year is at School.

Continuation of your administrative contract and designation is contingent on your successful completion of a Master's Degree program within five years (June 2025). When you have completed your Master's Degree Program, please notify Natasha Wilm and forward a copy of your certificate to her once you have received it.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Natasha Wilm, Shannon Melin, or myself.

Sincerely,

Rita Marler
Superintendent of Schools

SM:kd

Enclosed

ec: Natasha Wilm, Assistant Superintendent, System Supports
         Shannon Melin, Director, Human Resources
         Jodie Wilson, Payroll/Benefits Officer
         Personnel File

APPENDIX F

BRSD 2020-2021 STAFFING INFORMATION SHEET

2020 - 2021 Staffing Info

School	School Student #s			Staffing Request							
	FTE (Eng)	FTE (FI)	FTE Total	P	AP	ECS	Clrm	Central	Other	Notes	Approved Total
Unallocated		0	0								4.000
Allan Johnstone		0	0								-
Bashaw	235	0	235	0.680	0.360	0.530	11.870				13.440
Battle River Online*/COS	26	0	26	0.640	0.360		4.640				5.640
Bawlf	330.5	0	330.5	0.680	0.450	0.530	14.210				15.870
C.W. Sears	266	0	266	0.750	0.500	1.530	12.660				15.440
Camrose Composite	649	63	712	1.000	2.250		30.030	1.000	3.000	Complex	37.280
Camrose Outreach	133	0	133								-
Central High Sedgewick (w AJS)	446	0	446	1.000	0.600		20.800				22.400
Charlie Killam	444	86	530	1.000	1.200		23.100	1.050	1.000	Learning Support	27.350
Chester Ronning	269	0	269	0.750	0.500	1.530	13.700				16.480
Daysland	204	0	204	0.680	0.360	0.530	11.310				12.880
Forestburg	192	0	192	0.680	0.360	0.530	10.170				11.740
Hay Lakes	215	0	215	0.680	0.360	-	11.860				12.900
Holden			0								-
Jack Stuart	249	0	249	0.750	0.500	1.060	11.370	1.000			14.680
Killam Public	173	0	173	0.680	0.300	0.530	8.470				9.980
New Norway	233.5	0	233.5	0.680	0.360	0.530	11.870				13.440
Round Hill	85.5	0	85.5	0.500	0.300	0.530	4.360				5.390
Ryley	161.5	0	161.5	0.680	0.300	0.530	8.400				9.910
Sifton	114.5	168.5	283	0.750	0.500	1.530	13.710				16.490
Sparling	137.5	0	137.5	0.750	0.400	1.060	6.300				8.510
Tofield	409	0	409	1.000	0.600		20.530	1.000			23.130
Viking	238	0	238	0.680	0.360	0.530	11.870				13.440
* .1 Home ED Admin time is addn'l				15.01	10.92	11.48	261.23	4.05	4		310.390

pdf to excel 7/29/2020

APPENDIX G

SCHOOL REVIEW DOCUMENT – INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP INDICATORS

A leader ensures that every student has access to [high] quality teaching and optimum student learning experiences, (*LQS*, 2018, p. 6)

The following table lists the indicators from Competency 6 of the *LQS*. Please review each indicator and indicate your detailed plans to deepen your instructional leadership for the 2019/2020 school year.

Indicator	Detailed Plans	Evidence
(a) **Building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of ALL students;**		
(b) **Implementing professional growth, supervision, and evaluation processes to ensure that all teachers meet the *Teaching Quality Standard;***		
(c) **Ensuring that student instruction addresses learning outcomes outlined in the program of study;**		
(d) **Facilitating mentorship and induction supports for teachers and [assistant] principals as required;**		
(e) **Demonstrating a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and curriculum;**		
(f) **Facilitating the use of a variety of technologies to**		

support learning for all students;		
(g) Ensuring that student assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate, and evidence-informed;		
(h) Interpreting a wide range of data to inform school practice and enable success for all students;		
(i) Facilitating access to resources, agencies, and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development.		
Additional indicators:		

APPENDIX H

ACCOUNTABILITY PILLAR OVERALL SUMMARY – OCTOBER 2019

Accountability Pillar Overall Summary
Annual Education Results Reports - Oct 2019
Authority: 2285 The Battle River School Division

Alberta Government

Measure Category	Measure	Battle River School Division			Alberta			Measure Evaluation		
		Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 Year Average	Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 Year Average	Achievement	Improvement	Overall
Safe and Caring Schools	Safe and Caring	85.8	86.6	87.1	89.0	89.0	89.3	High	Declined	Acceptable
Student Learning Opportunities	Program of Studies	76.4	76.5	77.6	82.2	81.8	81.9	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
	Education Quality	87.3	87.6	88.1	90.2	90.0	90.1	High	Maintained	Good
	Drop Out Rate	2.3	1.7	2.0	2.6	2.3	2.9	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
	High School Completion Rate (3 yr)	76.8	79.5	78.0	79.1	78.0	77.5	High	Maintained	Good
Student Learning Achievement (Grades K-9)	PAT: Acceptable	70.3	70.1	74.0	73.8	73.6	73.6	Intermediate	Declined	Issue
	PAT: Excellence	14.6	13.7	16.6	20.6	19.9	19.6	Intermediate	Declined	Issue
Student Learning Achievement (Grades 10-12)	Diploma: Acceptable	78.0	74.9	76.6	83.6	83.7	83.1	Low	Maintained	Issue
	Diploma: Excellence	12.9	12.8	13.8	24.0	24.2	22.5	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
	Diploma Exam Participation Rate (4+ Exams)	53.4	55.7	53.6	56.3	55.7	55.1	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
	Rutherford Scholarship Eligibility Rate	61.2	59.9	59.3	64.8	63.4	62.2	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
Preparation for Lifelong Learning, World of Work, Citizenship	Transition Rate (6 yr)	58.4	59.3	57.2	59.0	58.7	58.7	High	Maintained	Good
	Work Preparation	78.1	78.5	79.0	83.0	82.4	82.6	High	Maintained	Good
	Citizenship	77.3	78.2	79.2	82.9	83.0	83.5	Intermediate	Declined	Issue
Parental Involvement	Parental Involvement	75.8	75.6	76.9	81.3	81.2	81.1	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
Continuous Improvement	School Improvement	74.8	75.7	77.1	81.0	80.3	81.0	Intermediate	Declined Significantly	Issue

Notes:
1. Data values have been suppressed where the number of respondents/students is fewer than 6. Suppression is marked with an asterisk (*).
2. Overall evaluations can only be calculated if both improvement and achievement evaluations are available.
3. Results for the ACOL measures are available in the detailed report: see "ACOL Measures" in the Table of Contents.
4. Student participation in the survey was impacted between 2014 and 2017 due to the number of students responding through the OurSCHOOL/TTFM (Tell Them From Me) survey tool.
5. Aggregated PAT results are based upon a weighted average of percent meeting standards (Acceptable, Excellence). The weights are the number of students enrolled in each course. Courses included: English Language Arts (Grades 6, 9, 9 KAE), Français (6e et 9e année), French Language Arts (6e et 9e année), Mathematics (Grades 6, 9, 9 KAE), Science (Grades 6, 9, 9 KAE), Social Studies (Grades 6, 9, 9 KAE).
6. Participation in Provincial Achievement Tests was impacted by the fires in May to June 2016 and May to June 2019. Caution should be used when interpreting trends over time for the province and those school authorities affected by these events.
7. Aggregated Diploma results are a weighted average of percent meeting standards (Acceptable, Excellence) on Diploma Examinations. The weights are the number of students writing the Diploma Examination for each course. Courses included: English Language Arts 30-1, English Language Arts 30-2, French Language Arts 30-1, Français 30-1, Mathematics 30-1, Mathematics 30-2, Chemistry 30, Physics 30, Biology 30, Science 30, Social Studies 30-1, Social Studies 30-2.
8. Caution should be used when interpreting evaluations and results over time for Mathematics 30-1/30-2, as equating was not in place until the 2016/17 school year. Alberta Education does not comment on province wide trends until it has five years of equated examination data.
9. Participation in Diploma Examinations was impacted by the fires in May to June 2016 and May to June 2019. Caution should be used when interpreting trends over time for the province and those school authorities affected by these events.
10. Weighting of school-awarded marks in diploma courses increased from 50% to 70% in the 2015/16 school year. Caution should be used when interpreting trends over time.
11. 2016 results for the 3-year High School Completion and Diploma Examination Participation Rates have been adjusted to reflect the correction of the Grade 10 cohort.

Report Generated: Sep 19, 2019
Locked with Suppression for Oct 2019

Report Version 1.0
Data Current as of Aug 23, 2019

APPENDIX I

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL ROLE DESCRIPTION

POSITION TITLE: Assistant Principal

POSITION SUMMARY: This position is responsible for the instructional leadership and managerial aspects of school leadership. Instructional leadership should encompass 80% of administrative time and managing operations and resources the remaining 20%. This position is responsible to the principal.

POSITION REQUIREMENTS (QUALIFICATIONS):

- Possess a Bachelor of Education Degree; a Master of Education Degree in Educational Leadership (or its equivalent) or a commitment to completion of one within 5 years
- Recognize the importance of high-quality teaching and optimum student learning
- Demonstrate an understanding of the competencies of instructional leadership
- Demonstrate ability to give effective verbal and written feedback
- Be flexible and adaptable
- Excellent organizational, communication, interpersonal, analytical and time management skills
- Successful experience as a classroom teacher
- Ability to maintain confidentiality
- Ability to speak French would be considered an asset

GENERAL DUTIES:

- Administrative time is 0.3 – 0.75 F.T.E.
- Collaborate with the principal to build teacher capacity and support student learning
- Collaborate with the principal to ensure all aspects of instructional leadership are embedded into administrative time
- Provide instructional leadership support to teachers and support staff
- Conduct classroom visits on a daily basis and provide oral/written feedback to teachers
- Engage in professional conversations with teachers regarding their practice and pedagogy, including discussions on the teacher's Professional Growth and Development Plan
- Review teacher's long range, unit and daily plans and student assessment practices
- Develop positive relationships with all stakeholders in BRSD
- Model a commitment to lifelong, professional learning
- Create and implement a shared vision for student success
- Use data to inform decisions about teacher effectiveness, instructional practices, and student learning
- Create and sustain a positive, inclusive learning environment
- Collaborate to create and implement a behaviour matrix for staff and students
- Support the acquisition and application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

- Provide and support leadership opportunities for others
- Manage school operations and resources
- Collaborate to prepare the school budget and staffing proposals
- Understand and comply with practices within the guidelines, legislation, regulations and reporting requirements of the provincial government, including but not limited to: the *Education Act,* Alberta's *Leadership Quality* Standard, Division Administrative Procedures and Policies, the Alberta Teachers' Association Collective Agreement and Professional Code of Conduct
- Prepare for and participate in the school review process
- Collaborate to prepare the school's annual report and learning plan
- Communicate and enforce organization values
- Perform other related duties as assigned by the principal or Division Office personnel

APPENDIX J

PRINCIPAL ROLE DESCRIPTION

POSITION TITLE: Principal

POSITION SUMMARY: This position is responsible for the instructional leadership and managerial aspects of school leadership. Instructional leadership should encompass 80% of administrative time and managing school operations and resources the remaining 20%. This position is responsible to the Superintendent of Schools.

POSITION REQUIREMENTS (QUALIFICATIONS):

- Possess a Bachelor of Education Degree; a Master of Education degree in Educational Leadership (or its equivalent) or a commitment to completion of one within 5 years
- Recognize the importance of high-quality teaching and optimum student learning
- Demonstrate an understanding of the competencies of instructional leadership
- Demonstrate ability to give effective verbal and written feedback
- Be flexible and adaptable
- Excellent organizational, communication, interpersonal, analytical and time management skills
- Successful experience as a classroom teacher
- Ability to maintain confidentiality
- Ability to speak French would be considered an asset

GENERAL DUTIES:

- Administrative time is 0.5 – 1.0 F.T.E.
- Provide instructional leadership support to teachers and support staff
- Collaborate with the assistant principal to build teacher capacity and support student learning
- Conduct classroom visits on a daily basis and provide oral/written feedback to teachers on a regular basis
- Engage in professional conversations with teachers regarding their practice and pedagogy, including discussions on the teacher's Professional Growth and Development Plan
- Review teacher's long range, unit and daily plans and student assessment practices
- Provide mentorship and guidance to the assistant principal
- Develop positive relationships with all stakeholders in BRSD
- Model a commitment to lifelong, professional learning
- Create and implement a shared vision for student success
- Use data to inform decisions about teacher effectiveness, instructional practices, and student learning
- Create and sustain a positive, inclusive learning environment
- Collaborate to create and implement a behaviour matrix for staff and students
- Support the acquisition and application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit

- Provide and support leadership opportunities for others
- Manage school operations and resources
- Collaborate to prepare the school budget and staffing proposals
- Understand and comply with practices within the guidelines, legislation, regulations and reporting requirements of the provincial government, including but not limited to: the *Education Act,* Alberta's *Leadership Quality Standard*, Division Administrative Procedures and Policies and the Alberta Teachers' Association's Collective Agreement and Professional Code of Conduct
- Prepare for and participate in the school review process
- Collaborate to prepare the school's annual report and learning plan
- Communicate and enforce organization values

Perform other related duties as assigned by the principal or Division Office personnel