

A Literature Synthesis
Optimum Learning for All Students
Implementation of Alberta's 2018 Professional Practice Standards

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Three Professional Practice Standards: A Watershed Moment

February 7, 2018 marked a watershed moment for excellence in Alberta's education system (Himpe, 2018). On that day, Minister of Education, the Honourable David Eggen, signed to Ministerial Order three professional practice standards (Government of Alberta, 2019), reaffirming a mandate to serve all children and youth, and codifying an “ongoing commitment to learning demonstrated by teachers, school leaders, school jurisdiction leaders, and superintendents” (para. 1). The existing *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS) has been updated for the first time in twenty years to reflect contemporary social conditions and our evolving understanding of effective teaching. New to the profession, the *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS) and the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* (SLQS) complete the trilogy. The LQS and SLQS describe the competencies expected of all school and school jurisdiction leaders, and school superintendents, respectively.

These professional practice standards bring to fruition the aspirations of *Every Child Learns. Every Child Succeeds*, the final report and recommendations submitted in 2003 to what was then Alberta Learning by Alberta's Commission on Learning. Whereas the TQS has already been in play for Alberta teachers, recommendations for a “quality practice standard...for principals” (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 122) resulting in “professional certification” (p. 123), and a “targeted program...for preparing superintendents” (p. 127) have been in waiting. More than one iteration of leadership competencies has been proposed since that report, however. Prior to the Ministerial Order these had been taken up, as Bedard and Mombourquette (2016) put it, as “a not yet official policy” (p. 2). Among the variations, the *Alberta School Leadership Framework* of 2005 (Mombourquette, 2013) and the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* of 2009 (Bedard & Mombourquette) have served as orienting devices for some school authorities across the

province. And, outside of Alberta, the previous “unofficial” leadership framework has been legitimated through scholarly scrutiny (e.g. Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019), the three professional practice standards that will come into force this September mandate the competencies and create uniform expectations for excellence among all professionals. By this Order, all teaching professionals in Alberta public school authorities are “accountable for their applicable standard to the Minister” (Government of Alberta, 2019, para. 8). Tying these professional practice standards together is student learning; student learning is the *raison d’être* for what happens not only in the classroom, but at the school and system levels. How these standards unfold, what difference this makes to teaching, and in what ways principals and superintendents become the “learning-centered leaders” (Murphy, 2017, p. 6) that educational standards intend is our concern in this research study. The following synthesis is thus positioned.

The Goals of this Literature Synthesis: Covering the Waterfront

Our ambition in this longitudinal mixed methods study is to gain insights into how and how well the three standards are being put into place, how the standards are impacting practice, and what changes occur over time in teaching and learning. Indeed, our longitudinal design is premised on “uncovering sustained changes and implementation success” (Derrington, 2019, p. 8). Given this, our goals in preparing this manuscript were to (a) synthesize scholarship on policy processes so that we can situate our inquiry into the standards in a process-oriented way; (b) provide a jurisdictional review of standards-based approaches to teaching and leadership and what we know to be effective with respect to this approach so that we can discern how Alberta’s standards and pathways to certification are positioned compared to others who have gone before us; and (c) synthesize scholarship that demonstrates the link between the professional practice standards and quality teaching and leadership so that we are anchored to evidence when

interpreting the forthcoming empirical data. Considering the comprehensiveness of the professional practice standards, we covered the waterfront, so to speak. But though we plumbed many strands and sources of knowledge, we do not claim it to be exhaustive or necessarily complete.

Parameters for the Research Synthesis

Onowuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2011) argue that literature is but one source of information for grounding a study. We partially borrowed from their four-part innovative framework of documents, images, talk and observation to complete our task. While text was our predominant source, we included talk, diagram, and observation in limited fashion because we wanted to provide a narrative of what is known (Baumeister, 2013). Further, some information necessary with respect to standards was not available as an archive, and we felt it was necessary to complete our understanding. Thus, we took up Hart's (2018) poetic description of releasing our research imagination to incorporate peer reviewed empirical studies, theoretical works, meta-syntheses, literature reviews, commissioned studies, grey literature such as professional publications, policies and leadership programs, organizational documents, and, in a small way, information from conversation and interaction with key informants. Given the scope and nature of works consulted, we concur with Onowuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins' argument that research *synthesis* is a more apt description than literature *review*.

As a research team, we agreed to focus primarily on scholarship published within the past ten years in national and international venues. This time frame is coterminous with when the precursor to the LQS and SLQS, the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* of 2009 (Bedard & Mombourquette, 2016), entered educational discourse in Alberta. We assumed examining the state of the field following that year would lead to a valuable update. License was taken to

include scholarship outside of this boundary, however, if it was appraised to be foundational for the topic. Robinson (2010), for example, has been instrumental in providing statistical evidence for principals' impact on student learning. Though dated, her work stands virtually alone in providing a quantitative premise for leadership development.

Electronic subject-based databases and other web-based sources and search engines (e.g. Google Scholar) were used to launch key word searches. We used Boolean operators and other truncations for advanced searching of synonyms and alternatives (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). We reserve specific descriptions of the search strategies for each section; we deemed this positioning most user-friendly considering the range of topics that were pursued.

To organize our synthesis, we begin with the end in mind: optimum learning. Optimum learning is both the organizing principle for and intended outcome of each of the three professional practice standards. Thus, we first synthesize our findings regarding a conceptualization of this term. Then we synthesize research on policy implementation and enactment. Following that, we provide a review of a jurisdictional scan of select educational systems that have adopted a standards-based approach for teachers, school leaders, and system leaders. This is followed by a section focused on implementation of standards, with a central focus on outlining elements of effective leadership development approaches. The final section synthesizes research that captures quality teaching and school and system leadership practices that contribute to student learning. Ending this way brings the synthesis full circle to the reason why these standards have been introduced.

Chapter Two

WHAT IS OPTIMUM LEARNING?

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What is Optimum Learning?

A defining feature of the three professional practice standards is the aim for *optimum* learning for all students:

Quality teaching occurs when the teacher's ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher's decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply, result in optimum learning for all students (*Teaching Quality Standard*). (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 3)

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 (*Leadership Quality Standard*). (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 3)

Quality superintendent leadership occurs when the superintendent's ongoing analysis of the context, and the superintendent's decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality school leadership, quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in the school authority (*Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard*). (Alberta Education, 2018c, p. 3).

Based on our scan of OECD countries' professional practice standards, it appears that Alberta is unique in articulating three standards indicating that the actions of professionals will result in optimum learning.

With these three standards a new regulatory environment has emerged with implications for teachers, school- and system-based leaders, professional associations, faculties of education,

and continuing education providers. Stone (2002) argues, policy decisions like these standards are not made by abstract people in neutral environments, and this means that interpretation and ambiguity shape policy meaning. It is easy for policy aims to get lost because of this. We heed this, and Stone's instruction to "come back to goals" (p. 412) by asking, what is meant by *optimum* learning? Given that the standards hinge on this concept, it was important for us to explore it.

Review Methods

To carry out this review of optimum learning a range of definitional understandings gleaned from peer reviewed empirical and theoretical journal articles, reports, and books from the past ten years were undertaken. Along with manual and Internet searches, we used the following databases: Academic Search Complete, CBCA Education, ERIC, Google Scholar, Education Research Complete, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, University of Calgary databases, and WorldCat.

The terms optimum and optimal derive from the same Latin root, *optimus*, meaning the best or most favourable (Oxford Online English Dictionary, n.d.). Therefore, we cast a wide net of search terms, including optimum learning, optimal learning, optimal learning strategies, and optimal learning environments. At the time of this writing, a Google search of the term *optimum learning* provided 102,000,000 results which provided a range of entries indicating that the term has been used broadly for corporate branding and the branding of learning academies, including international ones, and within the context of computer programming, to name a few. One study guide with the term optimum learning in its title (Robinson, 1993) turned up in our Internet search, with a clear interpretation of optimum learning in terms of efficiency. A search of relevant journals, published research reports, and academic books failed to produce any results

for the search term “optimum learning” in relation to the context in which were interested. While optimal was used in the literature to describe learning, the term optimum was not found.

Therefore, we confined our review to what was located using “optimal learning”, “optimal learning strategies”, and “optimal learning environments”, and excluded materials that related to how optimum learning is used by companies and organizations to brand themselves.

Definitions of Learning

Definitions of learning vary widely across a number of disciplines including education, psychology, neuroscience, behavioral ecology, evolutionary theory, sociology, anthropology, and computer science. In addition to a vast number of articles, the topic of how people learn has been the focus of two seminal books (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Numerous researchers have provided definitions for learning (Illeris, 2009; Jarvis, 2009; Kegan, 2009; Engeström, 2009, Bruner, 2009; Hattie & Yates, 2014; Lave, 2009; Wenger, 2009); unsurprisingly, not all agree.

Barron, Heberts, Cleland, Fitzpatrick, Hauber, and Stevens (2015) claim, “while the specific definitions of learning can vary substantially among fields and even within fields, most contemporary theoretical considerations of learning view it as a structured updating of system properties based on processing of new information” (p. 405). Contained within this definition is the understanding that learning is a process of neurotransmission by which neurons adapt to changes in the environment by releasing chemicals (neurotransmitters) between them. A web tutorial provided to graduate school instructors summarizes a talk by Kaufer (2011), citing “for optimal learning to occur, the brain needs conditions under which it is able to change in response to stimuli (neuroplasticity) and able to produce new neurons (neurogenesis)” (University of California Berkeley, 2019, para. 3). This is consistent with Rudmann’s (2018) research on the

processes involved in learning: the “neurons in turn support learning in one of three ways: through changes in the amount of neurotransmitters that are released between them, by modifying existing dendrites, or by new neuron growth” (p. 66).

Perhaps as Barron et al. (2015) claim about their definition of learning, these definitions provided here “can operate across disciplines” (p. 405), yet from the standpoint of K-12 schooling, a neuroscientific definition may not hit the mark because in the day-to-day enterprise of teaching and learning, educators’ metrics for learning are not physiological. An explanation offered by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in *How People Learn II: Learners, Contexts, and Culture* (2018) perhaps captures the complex interactions of the natural and social worlds:

Learning is a remarkably dynamic process; from before birth and throughout life, learners adapt to experiences and their environment. Factors that are relevant to learning include influences from the microscopic level lead levels in the learner’s blood) up to the macro level (e.g., qualities of the learner’s neighborhood, society, and culture). Even at the most basic individual level, brain development and cognition (and the connectivity between cortical areas) are influenced and organized by cultural, social, emotional, and physiological experiences that contribute to both age-related and individual variability in learning. Different situations, contexts, and pedagogical strategies promote different types of learning. (p. 3)

The researchers documented 21 conclusions across seven key areas related to learning: influences of culture, types and processes of learning, knowledge and reasoning, motivation to learn, implications for learning in school, learning technology, and learning across the life span.

They concluded that the brain develops in ways that impact learning, which is, in turn, shaped by the learner's cultural, social, cognitive, and biological contexts. This definition may align more closely with how educators think about learning.

Other researchers similarly complexify learning. Illeris (2009), a researcher of lifelong learning, defined learning “as any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing” (p. 7). Black and Wiliam (2009) defined learning as “an increase, brought about by experience, in the capacities of an organism to react in valued ways in response to stimuli” (p.10). Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2006) contended “learning is a change in long-term memory” (p. 75). Change in some form seems to be the cornerstone of the definition of learning, although to connect “optimum” to this idea of learning would be to take too much interpretive license on our part.

Perhaps the most recognizable idea of learning among educators today comes from Hattie (2010), whose licensed metaphor, *Visible Learning^{plus}*, has been reported to be in implementation in 23 countries (Knudsen, 2017). Hattie, a New Zealand psychologist who self-identifies as a “measurement researcher” (p. 259) proposes “learning means moving from surface to deep to transfer” (p. 258). With Yates, Hattie explained that learning is “the process of developing sufficient surface knowledge to then move to deep or conceptual understanding” (Hattie & Yates, 2013, p. 26). To arrive at his idea of visible learning, Hattie conducted a meta-meta-analyses—a “double meta-evaluation” (Rømer, 2019, p. 587) so to speak—originally analyzing 800 meta-analyses to generate a list of 138 independent variables that impact upon student learning (Rømer), articulated through effect sizes. He recently reported his ongoing meta-analyses has increased to 1400 (Knudsen, 2017), and according to the Australian Society for Evidence Based Teaching website (2019), the current list of factors exceeds 250. In a published

interview, Danish educational researcher, Hanne Knudsen (2017), asked Hattie to articulate what visibility means. Hattie responded,

The idea in visible learning is, I think, that the child somehow should double himself or herself in order to see ‘do I learn, how do I learn, how could I improve my learning?’ That is what we try with visibility: What does it look like through the students’ eyes? (pp. 257/258)

He shared that in one school teachers were asked to use an app on their iPhones that would generate a script of their teaching in real time so that they could become aware of how much they talked compared to students. Essentially visible learning is a goal for students to be self-aware self-learners, as Rømer describes it, but based on this iPhone app example, visible learning is inherently also about teachers’ ability to become aware of what they do that facilitates or inhibits students’ ability to ‘see’ their own learning. Instructive for our purposes in this study, Hattie explained in the interview with Knudsen (2017), “a key of the VL theory is that we can optimize our impact if we understand the impact of our actions and teaching through understanding how students see learning” (p. 259). From this, we might infer that learning is optimized when teachers can connect what they do with how it is received by students, which offers a different angle from which to view optimum learning. On its own, this does not define optimum learning, but rather, speaks to learning conditions.

Learning is a contested concept and articulating some of the debate is essential for a rigorous synthesis. For example, in his Science and Education blog, psychologist Daniel Willingham (2017) rejected Kirscher, Sweller, and Clark’s (2006) notion of learning as a change in long-term memory, arguing that the definition is insufficient without also a clear definition and explanation of what is long-term memory, what causes it to change, and whether or not

change must be permanent to be considered learning. Willingham (2017) further countered that “the current status of ‘learning’ is that it’s defined (usually narrowly) in the context of specific theories or in the context of specific goals or projects” (para. 10); therefore, rendering attempts at a definition across the various disciplines, contexts, and theories difficult. He points to Hattie (2010) in particular to register this critique. He posits that Hattie’s definition of learning as “first shallow, and then later deep” (para. 5) presupposes a theoretical viewpoint, which he claims does not have a place in definitions. Further, Willingham suggested Hattie’s definition was problematic because the notion of transfer implies goals, leading to a troublesome conclusion that anything that does not “entail the goal is not learning” (para. 4).

Others have critiqued Hattie’s notion of visible learning both methodologically and theoretically. Most recently Rømer (2019) declared that “Visible Learning is not a learning theory in its own right, and in fact it is not a pedagogical theory at all” (p. 588). Rather, he declares visible learning a theory of evaluation, albeit a simplistic one. In commenting on the “theoretical uncertainties” (p. 591) of Hattie’s empirical analysis, Rømer says that there is no clear way to identify whether the learning that supposedly happens is surface or deep understanding because these terms are narrowly conceived in evaluative terms. In his view an “evaluational concept of learning reduces scientific ‘learning’ in such a way that evaluational learning ultimately comes to define the independent variable, i.e. teaching” (p. 592). Thus, intervention and outcome become impossible to distinguish, which is a relationship upon which Hattie’s claim ultimately rests. In the interview with Knudsen (2017), Hattie admitted that he was not prepared for his book on visible learning to have such an impact, but if he “had known that it would go to an audience larger than just researchers, [he] probably would have had a whole lot more theory in it” (p. 259). This suggests that when it comes to learning, one must be

diligent in exploring the theoretical foundation and/or philosophical assumptions upon which an idea is espoused before being seduced by mega data sets.

McKnight and Whitburn (2018) similarly offer a theoretical critique of Hattie's (2010) visible learning, but from a different angle. Their concern is that an outcomes-based conception of learning is complicit with a neoliberal agenda that inevitably corals learning into a rationalist and colonizing paradigm. Social justice is at the heart of their agenda, and they take issue with Hattie's (2010) visible learning as a "masculine orientation of visual culture" (p. 2). While their philosophical arguments exceed the scope of our synthesis, their argument that visible learning oversimplifies learning by defining it in terms of levels to be obtained warrants consideration. This harkens back to Biesta (2015) who poignantly stated that "the point of education is *not* that students learn...the point of education is that students learn *something*, that they learn it for a *reason*, and that they learn it *from someone* (p. 76, italics in original). He argues for an emphasis on purpose and claims that the "learnification of education" has resulted in abstract talk about learning through terms such as "promoting learning, supporting learning, student learning" (p. 76) while ignoring "*for what*" (italics in original). He is known for critiquing best practice rhetoric (Biesta, 2007), arguing that basing professional practice on 'what works' in education implies that "what education is supposed to work for is already assumed, either implicitly or explicitly" (p. 84). Hattie's focus on interventions becomes a point of contention for Biesta in this regard because the cause-effect preoccupation does not attend to a full range of educational purposes.

Methodologically, it is how Hattie (2010) arrived at the causal connections underpinning visible learning that has sparked an academic sparring match (e.g. Bergeron, 2017; Hattie, 2010; Larsen, 2015; Snook, Clark, Harker, O'Neill, & O'Neill, 2010; Snook, O'Neill, Clark, O'Neill,

& Openshaw, 2009). At the base of it, Hattie conflates correlation with causation. Bergeron (2017) in particular, provides a detailed account of what he has identified as methodological errors in relation to how the meta-analyses were calculated and what baseline comparisons were used. For instance, Bergeron points out that Hattie uses effect size as a universal measure, when effect size is a relative measure contingent upon the composition of groups, what is being measured, to name a couple of considerations. To make his point, Bergeron suggests that the factors that impact student learning that Hattie uses (e.g. gender and socioeconomic status) are used indiscriminately and arbitrarily, as if these factors exist in equal proportions among all groups and impact on groups in the same way. Factors must be considered through a weighted approach to more accurately identify the extent of influence, is Bergeron's point. Further, the presence of negative probabilities is overlooked in Hattie's calculations, leading to erroneous interpretations. What cashes out from this is a cautionary tale to discern how evidence is constructed, and whether it is rigorously done so that conceptual claims and proposed practices that emerge from such evidence can be trusted. McKnight and Morgan (2019) emphasize this by pointing out the concerns with evidence-based medicine. They, too, consider "Hattie's 'truth'" (p. 12) to be limited and misapplied because his interpretation of effect sizes ignores complexity.

It is clear that optimum learning is the goal of Alberta's education system; whether and/or how professional practice standards contribute to achieving that goal is a matter of knowing what is the mark. Thus, what is less clear is what educators understand by the term optimum learning. A former chair of the Ministry committee that developed the original competencies for the existing standard shared in conversation with a member of our research team that there was considerable discussion over terminology when the standards were being developed, and that ultimately the stakeholders agreed that schools should be providing the best

learning experience possible for all students while taking into account any contextual constraints. All students, in other words, should be given the opportunity to access opportunities and be given every possible support to give them the best chance for success (R. Garneau, personal communication, March 14, 2019). Optimum learning, then, articulates a sentiment rather than an epistemology. Our research thus holds the potential to provide insights into how optimum learning is understood in the Province of Alberta.

What is Optimal Learning?

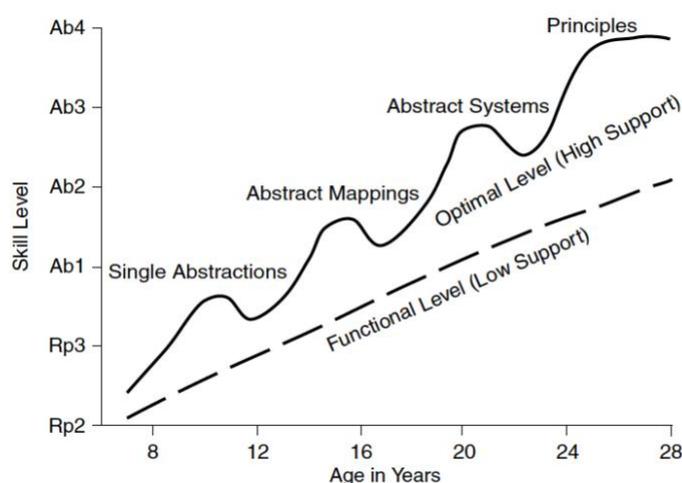
While the term optimum learning was not found in the review of literature, optimal learning was identified, but offered limited insights for our purposes. Crossland (2016, 2017) contended two researchers, in particular have focused on optimal learning, Kurt Fischer and Andreas Demetriou. Fischer (2008, 2009) used the term optimal learning in terms of a skill-based based approach; whereas, Demetriou, Spandoudis, & Mouyi (2011) focused on a semantic approach to the overall development of the mind. For this reason, their work was not particularly informative for this review.

Fischer's (2009s) thesis hinges on a distinction between optimal and functional performance. With Rose, Fischer contended:

Extensive research has shown that each learner's range of development is defined by two upper limits of performance—the functional and optimal levels. Under low-support conditions, students function less skillfully, and their highest competence is their functional level, which is their best performance in most everyday functioning. When they receive high support, their highest competence is their optimal level, their best performance when a person or the context prompts the key components of the task for them. The optimal level develops in spurts during certain age periods, which are related

to growth in neural networks in the brain (Fischer & Rose, 1998), but the functional level develops more slowly and continuously and varies greatly across domains. (p. 8)

Figure 1 demonstrates Fischer's (2008) developmental levels associated with functional and optimal levels of learning. Skill levels are indicated on the y-axis and age in years on the x-axis. The lines on Figure 1 illustrate the difference between optimal learning and functional learning at various ages and skills involved in the processes of representation and abstraction.



(Fischer, 2008, p. 130)

Figure 1. Developmental levels of optimal and functional levels of learning

The functional level of learning is linear and operates at considerably lower level of performance than the optimal level. The optimal level of learning is not linear, rather it varies as the brain makes new connections, adapts, and changes in response to new learning. Fischer (2009) contended “for each skill level, brain activity also reorganizes itself, apparently forming new neural networks to support each still level” (p. 11). The gap between functional levels of learning and optimal levels of learning highlight the years that pass before learners can sustain the same level of learning in low support learning environments as they did in high support learning environments. The gap between functional and optimal learning are evident. What is also

evident are the ways in which periods of growth move the learner to increasingly more advanced thinking and performance:

People's activities vary widely from moment to moment up and down a developmental complexity scale (defined by skill levels) as a function of degree of contextual support, emotional match, and specific task demands of the moment, topping out at an optimal level that appears primarily in situations with strong social-contextual support for complex understanding and acts as a dynamic attractor in skill development. Most activities occur well below that optimal level and show other kinds as limits, such as the functional level—the upper limit on skills in ordinary activity without any contextual support (Fischer & Yan, 2002, p. 292).

The challenge that this seems to suggest for school-based environments is significant. Creating environments that create the conditions for students to have the best learning experiences become an important consideration. What would an optimal learning experience look or feel like? For this, we turned to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of flow.

Optimal Learning as a Flow Experience?

An optimal learning environment is crucial for creating the conditions for optimal learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Schneider, Krajcik, Lavonen, Salmela-Aro, Broda, Spicer, Bruner, Moeller, Linnansaari, Juuti, & Viljaranta, 2016; Shernoff, 2013). We felt Csikszentmihalyi (2014), who coined the concept of flow, may be instructive in this regard.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 2014) indicated optimal experience is particularly important in formal schooling environments at all levels. His concept of flow was originally borne out of his desire to understand creativity, and he has since considered how this might have relevance for

schooling. Importantly, flow does not capture a cognitive dimension of learning because Csikszentmihalyi did not define the problem with children's learning in those terms. He believed poor achievement could be accounted for on "affective, emotional, [and/or] motivational" (2014, p. 130) terms, rather than intellectual. He believed children had to want to learn for learning to happen. In short, his question was one of motivation.

To describe his theory of flow, Csikszentmihalyi describes a flow experience as "what you feel when you're doing things that are so enjoyable that you want to pursue them for their own sake" (p. 132). The conditions of flow include:

- Perceived challenges, or opportunities for action, that stretch (neither over-matching nor underutilizing) existing skills; a sense that one is engaging challenges at a level appropriate to one's capacities.
- Clear proximal goals and immediate feedback about the progress that is being made. (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014)
- Deep concentration such that irrelevant stimuli fade into the background, and the passing of time feels like an instant.
- You forget about yourself (e.g. no inner voices raising concerns, worrying about success), and the activity is "autotelic" – worth it for its own sake.

(Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

The flow model currently shares a number of features of contemporary theories related to interactionism. Interactionism and flow focus on the person-environment interactions. This interaction highlighted and expanded as it relates to the dynamic nature of learning itself in *How People Learn II: Learners, Contexts, and Cultures* (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Similar to the research of Fischer and his colleagues (2009)

Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) reported that inherent in the “flow concept is the notion of skill stretching” (p. 247). An environment that provides minimal opportunities for action do not lead to flow; rather, a learning environment that sponsors the conditions for flow or optimal learning is one in which “the balance of challenges and skills are both above average levels for the individual” (p. 247). This finding is also consistent with that of Fischer (2009):

School learning is based in activity. If learning involved simply acquiring knowledge objects, then students would not need to go to school for a dozen or more years to become literate and knowledge human beings who can be productive members of 21st-century society. (p. 6)

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018) concurs: “Optimal learning environments support productive variation among learners in part by providing room for learners to interpret tasks and assessments in ways that broadly leverage their individual strengths, experiences, and goals” (p. 137). This research is clear that this is not be confused or misconstrued as learning styles (Dembo & Howard, 2007; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Pashler, Bain, Bottge, Graesser, Koedinger, McDaniel, & Metcalfe, 2008).

What is important from an optimal conditions point of view, however, is student engagement. Through the lens of flow theory, Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, and Shernoff (2014) conceptualize engagement as a state involving concentration, interest, and enjoyment. Over 5 years, they statistically measured these among 526 grade 10-12 students, using data from an American longitudinal study database called the *Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development*. Shernoff et al. found that students spent about a third of their time in activities considered to be passive (e.g. listening to lectures, watching videos), which were also

instances of low engagement. Factors that led to engagement included autonomous and group work (not teacher-directed activities, like lecturing), cooperative learning, academic intensity (i.e. how students perceive the level of challenge and relevance of the activity), and enjoyment. In sum, activities where students feel challenged and can connect meaning, where they feel in control and confident, and in which they intrinsically enjoy are ones that lead to engagement. Similarly, Willms, Friesen, and Milton (2009) integrated Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of flow into a measure called instructional challenge in their Canadian study regarding student engagement. In a report of the first year of their study based on data from over 30,000 students from 93 schools across five provinces in Canada, including Alberta, they concluded that students were more likely to be intellectually engaged when there was an appropriate relationship between their skill level and the challenge required to accomplish a task.

Thus, the research on optimal learning and optimal conditions for learning provide a backdrop against which we take up this study. According to the Ministerial Order on Student Learning (Government of Alberta, 2013),

the fundamental goal of education in Alberta is to inspire all students to achieve success and fulfillment and reach their full potential by developing the competencies of Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens with an Entrepreneurial Spirit, who contribute to a strong and prosperous economy and society. (para 1)

This goal statement may provide further insight into how 'optimum learning' might be defined, and whether it can be considered a derivative of optimal learning or optimal conditions for learning; however, after conducting this synthesis, we cannot draw those conclusions. It is important to gain insight into how optimum learning is understood within the context of the professional practice standards, and whether and/or how it shapes putting the standards into

place. Shaping standards into action is the focus of the next section in which we synthesis scholarship regarding what policy is, and what it means to interpret, enact, and/or implement it.

Chapter Three

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION, INTERPRETATION, ENACTMENT, AND

OUTCOMES

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Policy Implementation, Interpretation, Enactment, and Outcomes

At the outset, a key question about the introduction of the three professional practice standards is whether they constitute government policy, or whether the standards statements somehow stand apart from policy as a type of superordinate human creation that transcends government action. Much depends on our definition of policy. Ball (1993) is unyielding in emphasizing this point:

One of the conceptual problems currently lurking within much policy research and policy sociology is that more often than not analysts fail to define conceptually what they mean by policy. The meaning of policy is taken for granted and theoretical and epistemological dry rot is built into the analytical structures they build. (p. 10)

It behooves us, then, to make some sense of this term “policy”.

If we consider policy as a set of principles, which derive from ongoing political processes that are subsequently adopted in programs for implementation in schools, then the TQS, LQS, and SLQS clearly are examples of policy. To substantiate this we can point to the fact that these standards are manifest in documents that have been issued by a provincial government, are subject to legislative promulgation through regulations beginning in September 2019, and indeed they originate in the capital city in the Ministry of Education.

If on the other hand we consider policy to be a broad, all-purpose label that encompasses virtually everything that governments say and do, but especially the matter dealt with in legislative processes and regulations, then standards are normatively involved in all government activity. Policy becomes a vague and ephemeral set of ideas that are wrapped up in political processes, a tainted word that is perhaps even synonymous with power and political forces.

Therefore, so the feeling goes, policy should not be studied in detail because it falls outside the traditional bounds of educational administration. This being the case, policy may remain an *idée fixe* of public administrators, and the domain of public administration.

But surely, to ignore policy studies in educational administration has the effect of relegating educational administrators to the role of brokering plans and adjusting or reacting to new government pronouncements, rather than publicly questioning policies and their usefulness or contributing to policy development itself. This seems counter to the educational enterprise. And indeed, academics have described the introduction of leadership and professional standards in the American context from a policy perspective (Browne-Ferrigno & Fusarelli, 2005; McCarthy, Shelton & Murphy, 2016). Nevertheless, they have remained ambiguous about whether the standards in themselves are state policy, or merely *affect* state policy. In fact, 46 states have adopted or have adapted leadership standards, altering laws, regulations, and certification requirements (Murphy, 2017). Perhaps the most that may be said is that educational leadership, professional standards and jurisdictional policy are North America-wide phenomena that are interrelated.

One way of considering the problems in standards-as-policy is to clearly distinguish between the author, the reader, the actor, and the observer in policy studies. Governance officials create policy and are therefore the authors; bystanders are those who may read policy or more properly interpret the policy for themselves and others, such as university professors or other interested parties among the general public; and actors are those who are charged with acting or enacting the policy in their behaviour and decisions, such as superintendents, school board officials, school leaders and teachers. Observers to policies after their promulgation are sometimes contracted to determine the outcomes or effects of policy. In that sense, observers are

relatively impartial witnesses to what the author has wrought, the reader anticipates, and the performer has or has not accomplished.

Review Methods

The following review aims to summarize a massive literature on policy adoption from these four different standpoints—author (as creator), reader (as interpreter), actor (as performer) and observer (as objective evaluator of outcomes) —as revealed in a range of scholarly journals, books and monographs over the past 25 years. We extended our timeline considerably beyond the 10 years we initially decided for this overall synthesis because we felt the theoretical nature of the policy field would make it impossible to disentangle older works from newer. Although the four roles overlap in important ways, they are substantially distinct in the policy literature: each player brings their own concerns and frames of mind to issues in policy application.

In a Boolean search using the Academic Search database, ‘educational policy and implementation’ revealed 9, 757 publications alone between 1999 and 2019. ‘Interpretive policy analysis in education’ revealed 178 publications covering the same time frame, ‘education policy and enactment’ yielded 587 publications, and ‘education policy and outcomes’ generated 14, 216 publications. Although standards in Alberta embrace both post-secondary and K-12 education, the initiative as policy can be compared across North America, Great Britain and many other parts of the world. Thus, to manage this wieldy corpus of scholarship, library search tools were quickly jettisoned in favour of specific questions that have been raised thus far in the project:

- Are standards as introduced by governments examples of policy statements?
- What is policy implementation in education?
- How should one measure depth of implementation?
- How do people interpret policy?
- How do people enact new policies?

- What is successful policy?

Policy Implementation

As a structured process, policy implementation is conceptually distinct from the sub-processes of political agenda- setting, policy (re)formation, policy (re)formulation, policy transfer, and policy evaluation. Implementation is one phase in a larger cyclical or recursive process dealing with the application or adoption of policy. Although public officials and those concerned with public administration are familiar with and can distinguish between these differing phases and processes, educator practitioners often do not because their world is viewed through rigidly defined cycles in which schools and students reside. Government and its rhythms are often looser but budget and election cycles make it more map-able; policy implementation is often accompanied by dedicated budget allocations in government with accompanying action plans and other strategic thinking. However, implementation efforts involving standards can be considered as one of the most difficult or messier and complex government operations fundamentally because adoption involves the translation of someone’s talk into behaviour by tens of thousands of citizens, and perhaps millions of students when one looks at an entire education system. Thus, in practice, implementing a policy is not a simple matter of “doing” it.

Implementation processes have long been articulated in ideal forms by many writers. Chronologically, these range from Sabatier and Mazmanian (1981) to Pressman and Wildavsky (1984), to Matland (1995), then Howlett, Ramesh & Perl (2009) in Canada, and to Birkland (2016) in the United States. All devote papers or chapters in their introductory textbooks to the public policy process. Hill and Hupe (2014) devote an entire book to the issues involved in operationalizing government policy. Most authors adopt a very concise definition of implementation, which involves turning government intentions into action. For example, Hill and Hupe (2014) ask, “What happens between the establishment of policy and its impact in the world

of action” (p. 2). Elsewhere, they refer to implementation as “little more than a comparison of the expected versus the achieved” (p. 8). While this is a concise definition, it disguises the multiple, often conflicting and sprawling interests engaged in all aspects of implementation efforts.

Students of implementation were once preoccupied with the one-way transmission of a statement from a capital city outward. However, there is now a rich vein of studies which completes the communicative link and focuses on what those charged with adoption have relayed back to the policy maker. Weiss (1979) is often cited in the literature as having pioneered the identification and description of seven models to illustrate how research into implementation efforts can guide the decision-making process in implementation and in new rounds of policy reformation. From those models, authors began defining analytical categories that enable this knowledge to be extended. Trostle, Bronfman, and Langer (1999) summarize these models in three basic approaches. First, the rational approach includes the models that Weiss calls "knowledge-driven" and “problem-solving”. These constitute the conventional assumption that the policy process is inherently rational, with research results being used when they exist and decision-makers calling for research when it is needed. Second, the strategic approach groups the models Weiss calls "political" and "tactical" and views research as a kind of ammunition in support or critical of certain positions, prompting or delaying policy action. Finally, the enlightenment or diffusion approach comprise Weiss' three remaining models: "interactive", "enlightenment", and "intellectual enterprise." In these, the research and decision-making processes take place in parallel with a number of other social processes, and thus research and decision-making play several different roles. The knowledge-driven model assumes that basic research leads to applied research, to development, and finally to application of the results, and

the problem-solving model starts with a problem that needs solving, in turn requiring research, the results of which lead to action being taken. The political and tactical models connect directly to executive action. The last three —interactive, enlightenment, and intellectual enterprise— relate to the production of scientific knowledge in a given line of research, fostering the construction of knowledge that, is it believed, gradually informs action.

In the late 1980s, the concept of use expanded to encompass at least three different types of meaning: (a) instrumental, as an input to decision-making; (b) conceptual, contributing to improved understanding of the subject matter, the related problems, or the political interventions under study; and (c) strategic, serving to persuade other actors or as a means to attain certain aims. But Hupe (2011) in particular points to a central problem in all implementation efforts, what has been called the Pressman and Wildavsky Paradox: ‘The more links can be observed in the vertical line between intentions and results as embodied by a policy process, the smaller the chance will be of a congruent implementation of the public policy concerned’ (p. 63). From a government author’s point of view, the problem may also be called disjointed implementation, meaning that what was sought in Edmonton where policies were made may look very different in Okotoks. Much of the research that dealt with this initially dwelled on whether the problem was:

- the height of the vertical administrative hierarchy in multiple layers of decision-making;
- highly centralized direction or delegated authority;
- a preoccupation with top-down review rather than looking at multiple agencies involved in implementation efforts;
- vague versus clear goals and targets;
- multi-local versus multiple agencies; and,
- the importance of social networks and social interactions which accounted for the mismatch between what was expected and what was achieved.

Regarding these, no clear answer is provided.

Even though the distinctions between how policy analysts and street level bureaucrats view implementation efforts are slowly being erased, persistent issues remain at ground level. Hupe (2014) notes a number of recurrent issues. One is the theory/practice divide, which rests on the assumption that policy makers' models bear little correspondence to quotidian reality. Another, is the multi-layer problem, meaning what district superintendents believe and what teachers actually do remain substantially different. A final issue regards the policy/politics nexus, the fear that acting on policy makes one a political actor, an identity to which some may be averse. These have been unsolved problems that emerge when studying implementation efforts. In fact, there are now so many theories that some wonder whether implementation as a construct has lost its conceptual bite (Nilsen, 2015).

Depth of implementation has been a concern since the 1980s. There are any number of instruments for gauging depth of policy implementation (See Proctor et al., 2011; Scheirer & Rezmovic, 1983 for initial overviews). Hall and Hord's *Levels of Use* (2013) and *Stages of Concern* models (1987) have been used in the Canadian setting (Anderson, 1997), largely when studying curriculum standards. Their work has been questioned but never really refuted (Cheung, Hattie, & Ng, 2001) with respect to their levels. Their instrumentation, rubrics and approach to policy innovation are sufficiently generic that they can be adapted for studying any policy change (Hall, Dirksen, & George 2013). Change theorists such as Michael Fullan and others originally tried to articulate how to effect large system change through implementation efforts. Hall and Hord's studies originated in this North American-wide effort to bring about systemic reform in the 1990s through the adoption of curriculum standards.

Two other recent developments in implementation studies are worthy of consideration in relation to Alberta's professional practice standards. First, implementability studies, which

derive from health care and especially econometrics (Gagliardi et al., 2011), focus less on the implementation process and more on the characteristics of the policy itself, asking whether the policy statement's structure and layout, its timing, and its depth of explanation actually inhibit or assist its adoption. We might emphasize that implementability deals with the properties of the policy, not with the policy's content. Because the professional practice standards have been publicly introduced in an iterative manner over the past decade or longer, and because the content of the standards has evolved over time, it may be particularly worthwhile to look at school district adoption through an implementability lens. For example, one could ask, which professional practice standards are systematically ignored or deemed not worthy of consideration by teachers and school district officials? Is the TQS more widely implemented than the LQS, and why or why not?

A second trend in the past few years has been to focus on multidimensional fidelity rather than on unidimensional depth of implementation. Honig (2006) provides three reasons for this growing concern for fidelity or fit of policy. First, governments are increasingly undertaking more comprehensive and varied policy initiatives in education. Second, there is a growing interest in seeing the impact of interactions and dimensions of policy effects between policy, people, and places. Third, there is a broader epistemological understanding beyond simplistic issues of implementation depth, that enables the examination of important variations in implementation efforts. Accordingly, and especially in health care and at classroom levels, many studies are now under way which look at the fidelity of a particular government program with practitioner competence and practice (See Abry, Hulleman & Rimm-Kaufman, 2015; Carroll et al., 2007; Century, Rudnick, & Freeman, 2010; Century & Cassata, 2016; Schoenwald et al., 2011; Slaughter, Hill, & Snelgrove-Clarke, 2015).

Other influential writers in education such as Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) argue that policy implementation studies must be reframed and refocused to look at cognition, rather than behaviour. The presumption is that once we know what and how people think about the policy, and then once we adjust the policy implementation process based on this, their conforming actions will follow. To demonstrate, Spillane (2009) looked at standards-based reform in instruction in Michigan finding that the standard deviations in test outcomes were so large that it begged the question of impact of that state's curriculum standard. Importantly, observed variation in implementation was the direct result of variation in how district policymakers understood the ideas pressed by the standards. Many local policymakers understood the curriculum standards as primarily entailing changes in content coverage; few understood them as entailing the intended changes in conceptual approach to mathematics and science as subjects. It was difficult to achieve a shift from the former longstanding view of standards, which seemed more practical to many district administrators. For this reason, Spillane has been among the most prominent in saying that implementation as behavioral change will not proceed until we change the mind sets of those responsible for interpreting and thus implementing an educational innovation. This highlights the role of interpretation in policy, which we turn to next.

Policy Interpretation

Interpretive policy focuses not on the government author's concerns, but instead on how a policy text about standards is interpreted by the reader. Invariably, the reader will have their own concerns or critique of the policy, shaping how it is interpreted by other analysts and bystanders. Interpretive approaches to policy research analysis, including methodologies and methods concerned with situated meaning(s), historical context(s), and the importance of human

subjectivity, are experiencing renewed interest in the social sciences broadly. Interpretive approaches to policy analysis often challenge the scientific and positivist biases that they claim characterize much policy development, and cloud the meaning of the author.

Interpretive policy analyses start from the assumption that policies and policy processes do not address ‘real’ societal problems in a planned, rational and coherent way. Instead interpretive policy analysis rests on the presupposition that the societal issues that are addressed in policymaking have different meanings for different groups of people. This leads interpretive policy analysts to ask questions that are often not addressed in other approaches, such as how the different perspectives that people have on an issue affect what they see, how they see it, and how they act with respect to it, as well as the intended and unintended consequences that their perspectives and associated actions may have on others. Interpretive policy analysis thereby gives insight into dimensions of knowledge, lived experience, and power that often remain hidden in other approaches. Some interpretive policy analysts move beyond explanation and engage in a counter-intervention of some sort intended to improve the situation being studied. Affecting change for marginalized actors is one example of this.

Yanow (1993, 1996, 2000, 2006) in the interpretive policy analysis arena has written textbooks in this regard, but there are relatively few studies into teachers ‘or principals’ actual readings of a policy. One exception is Coburn’s (2005) study of how teachers and principals in two California elementary schools interpret reading policy. Based on that study she argued that principals influence teachers’ enactment by shaping access to policy ideas, participating in the social process of interpretation and adaptation, and creating substantively different conditions for teacher learning in schools. These actions, in turn, are influenced by principals’ understandings about reading instruction and teacher learning. Policy is invariably tied up with a social network

that will prevail over the designs of the author (Coburn & Russell, 2008).

As pertains to state curriculum standards, Hill (2001) has described the way in which teachers soften the meaning of terms: where state standards used words like “construct” and “concept” to imply certain mathematics teaching methods, teachers reading these documents imputed more local, and sometimes conventional, definitions to these words. Local agents vetted state-led initiatives according to their predispositions or interests, essentially determining whether to implement policy. Yet, observations of a local curriculum writing committee suggest this process is considerably more complex than a paradigm of subversion, augmentation or compliance suggests. As a result, as Hill (2001) found, state standards lost their force.

The above gives a glimpse into the interpretive nature of policy, but in fact we do not have extensive or detailed studies of what and how educational practitioners actually read or read into policy statements, whether they in fact do read policy, or whether they rely on other’s interpretations such as those of school principals, professional representatives or keynote speakers to convey the information verbally. Because of this shortcoming, or perhaps as an alternative to implementation as a top-down structured process itself, alternate approaches to interpretive policy have arisen in the 1990s. These alternatives may be referred to as dissemination (Cooper, Levin & Campbell, 2009) and diffusion models (Marsh & Sharman, 2009), which relate to a more global phenomenon of knowledge mobilization. The terms knowledge translation, knowledge exchange, knowledge transfer, knowledge integration and research utilization are used to describe overlapping and interrelated research on putting various forms of knowledge, including research, into implementation as use. Implementation is part of a diffusion-dissemination-implementation continuum: diffusion is the passive, untargeted and unplanned spread of new practices; dissemination is the active spread of new practices to the

target audience using planned strategies; and implementation is the process of putting to use or integrating new practices within a setting. Perhaps inevitably, diffusion theorists sometimes confuse research for policy, evidence for policy knowledge, and interpretation for knowledge (Nutley & Webb, 2000).

Interpretation involves reading a policy text, and making inferences about the purposes or intentions of the policy author. There has been some work into looking at the various types of policy instruments and the ways that people may classify policy statements as a way of moving a policy agenda forward (Vedung, 2013). In general, we can classify any policy statement according to whether the policy is prescriptive, permissive, decorative, or propagandist in its wording. Policy analysts with a legal background comprehend the distinctions clearly. Prescriptive educational policy is that which must be followed, and uses the words ‘must’ or ‘shall’ when describing the obligations that are inherent in the policy. Permissive policy on the other hand, sets out options or uses “may” clauses in its statements. Permissive policy differs from decorative or ornamental policy, which invites the reader to participate but does not obligate them to do so. Instead of a set of alternatives, the reader can opt out entirely. Propaganda includes after-dinner speeches, government political platforms, news releases, and a host of other tools designed by communications experts. The intention is to persuade or build support for the government at electoral time, rather than to actually alter the daily behaviour of those who are targets of these efforts. If prescriptive policy and permissive policy is often written by those who have legal training in government, decorative or ornamental policy is often written by policy analysts or educators who have high ideals but not any sense of the legal implications involved in following or not abiding by a policy statement.

One of the difficulties in policy interpretation is that the reader may not have a clear understanding of or trust in the author's intentions. Policy makers and governments themselves may shift in their intentions over time, starting out by making decrees about desirable behaviour in the workplace, then moving toward setting out alternatives within a range of acceptable practices, and eventually moving to set out aspirational ideas but with little expectation that most or all will follow. Small wonder that readers wonder whether any policy is designed primarily to curry favour at election time or build support in public opinion for broad government directions; policies become disposable paper documents that one only turns to in situations of conflict. How one reads the policy, and what one reads into it about the government's intentions can be seen as important for determining the degree to which a policy changes practice as a routinized behaviour.

A focus on interpretation raises questions about its counterfactual: how does one un-interpret a policy or more properly change in one's interpretation over time as new policy is created which supersedes the previous policy? How is policy forgotten? Can a policy be implemented and then become un-implemented through the weight of other, newer and more promising initiatives? In Braun, Ball, McGuire and Hoskin's study of enactment (2011) in British secondary schools, it was not the absence of policy but rather a policy epidemic of contradictory statements which often drowned out the original at the school level. We expand on policy enactment in the next section.

Policy Enactment

As implementation research evolved, two schools of thought developed as to the most effective method for studying and describing implementation top-down and bottom-up (Hill & Hupe, 2014). Top-down theorists see policy designers as the central players, and concentrate their attention on factors that can be manipulated at the central level, that is, government officials in the capital city. Bottom-up theorists emphasize target groups and service deliverers, arguing policy is actually made at the local level. In this scheme, teachers and not just Ministry officials have policies (Hohmann, 2016). Most reviewers now agree that some convergence of these two perspectives, tying the macro-level variables of the top-down models to the micro-level variables "bottom-uppers" consider, is necessary for the field of policy studies to develop, and for policy adoption to actually improve.

Theorists of enactment set out a variety of analytic tools to understand the complexity of what is going on inside schools. Theories of enactment aim to work against “hasty, presumptive and immodest educational research” (Ball, 2006, p. 9). Good theory demands that researchers and policy makers and audiences think carefully about their ‘grasp on the social world.’ Complexity theory is offered as a counterbalance to coherence, and to outright chaos, although it is claimed its proponents are too concerned with Newtonian physics and formulaic thinking (Morçöl, 2005) to offer actual insights into enactment in schools.

There are, however, multiple other theories of enactment. Karl Weick’s theory (1995) revolves around sense-making processes within organizations, and is perhaps the oldest. Sense-making is the organizational theorists’ alternative to significance testing in educational psychology. However, the most complete and well documented theory to date is that offered by Braun et al. (2011).

The term ‘enactment’, as used by Braun et al. (2011), denotes a trio of overlapping processes in policy interpretation, translation and re-contextualization wherein range of actors ‘enact’ a policy across a wide variety of situations. The first process, interpretation, signals an initial reading and making sense or meaning of policy texts. The second process suggests a reconfiguration of standards, literally putting the policy into a different language, in and through talk. School plans, meetings, classroom lessons, data walls, school websites, and the like are processes of translation. The third process, re-contextualization, involves re-framing or applying the policy to an external environment within and across schools. Throughout, educators are transforming words into action.

To appreciate their theory, one must also consider its limitations or ambiguities. For instance, there are difficulties with the word “interpret.” Interpretation implies that there is some form of reading involved, and thus a human reader who must make sense of or meaning with a set of symbols on a page. Because policy texts are most often written in textual or prose form, the presumption is that interpretation is fundamentally a reading process. Reading itself has cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic dimensions which make it among the hardest of subjects to theorize. There are also difficulties with the word “translate”; it involves changing from one language to another, or from one register of language to another, or from one dialect with its associated terminology to another. Additionally, educators have their own buzz phrases and metaphors which reveal different mental maps and ways of expressing their practices as routinized behaviours. We know little about edu-speak on policy matters, and yet this would seem to have implications for how policy is translated and thereby understood. Moreover, “context” is surely one of the most common but abused words in the English language. People will define a context in terms of their stance in the world and according to what serves their

interests. The word itself has a basis in textual analysis and literature, referring to a coherent pattern of symbols on a page or background tableau. Context can alternatively be defined within biology as an ecology or intersecting set of living systems; as circumstantial or happenstance in law which involves a fortuitous set of events or trends, in management as contingent or a set of levers or factors that can be manipulated to effect an event; as catalytic in the biochemical sense of a set of compounds and liquids or gases into which a spark effects titration or release of heat and warmth; as locational or spatial in geographical terms; in psychological terms of habituation as conditional or dependent; in psycho-social terms as a set of interpersonal or social relationships. Small wonder that mathematicians have referred to context as a ‘mumbling judge’ (Kaplan, 2000), since people will define context according to their angle of sight, their interests, or their stance on events. There is an entire branch of cognitive psychology that deals with the different meanings that arise as alternate frames (immediate contexts) as applied to situations and statistics. The point to take from all of this is that policy enactment cannot simply be viewed in terms of transaction: I give the policy to you, and you put it into action.

Another theory proposed by Sheikh and Bagley (2018) is the latest in the enactment arena, and will likely become a burgeoning area of research. They identify aspects of policy enactment in terms of professional and emotional investment, decisional legitimacy, hierarchical trust, system integrity and viability, deprofessionalization, and identity safeguarding. They also believe there needs to be some form of affective disruption for the actor to engage with a policy. Policy that has no perceived impact to an observer falls flat, but if they anticipate a shift in status quo that could be uncomfortable, threatening, or even rewarding, these inspire response.

Singh, Thomas, and Harris’ theory (2013) includes a cognitive element, along with sociological considerations. Their theory relies on the decoding theories of Bernstein (1990,

1996, 2000), and on reading as deciphering a literary text. Singh et al. focus on recontextualization, drawing on Bernstein's theory of decoding and encoding text.

Recontextualization refers to the relational processes of selecting and moving knowledge from one context to another, as well as to the distinctive re-organisation of knowledge as an instructional and regulative or moral discourse. Processes of recontextualization necessitate an analysis of power and control relations, and therefore add to the Foucauldian (Ball, 2013) theorizations of power that currently dominate the critical policy literature. In educational policy making, a process of code elaboration, which involves decoding and recoding, takes place in various re-contextualizing agencies, responsible for the production of professional development materials, teaching guidelines and curriculum resources. Mid-level policy actors such as principals and school district superintendents become crucial to the work of policy interpretation and translation because they are engaged in elaborating the condensed codes of policy texts to an imagined logic of teachers' practical work.

Thus, the archetypical policy actor, as distinct from the policy author, must interpret the policy text, translate the policy, re-contextualize the policy, and act on the policy within a given situation while or before finally making a decision or solving a problem about student learning. The policy reader will draw on a set of experiences when looking at a situation within a given context. Those experiences will be expressed in a disposition as an inclination to believe or behave. Thus, a five-fold model of policy enactment hypothesizes that the actor, whether teacher, principal, or superintendent, will engage in distinct but overlapping and interacting processes when transforming prose words into actions. They will interpret the policy text; they will translate it into a verbal, sometimes a written, often a kinesthetic, or even a pictorial form so that it makes sense according to their dispositions. Moreover, enactment may also involve a

reconfiguration of space (Mulcahy, 2016). All are inherent to enacting policy to apply it to the situation at hand.

Thus far, there appears to be no research which attempts to measure enactment or to depict it quantitatively; researchers in this vein prefer case studies, phenomenological studies and discourse analyses as qualitative techniques because of the presumption that policy is primarily another form of text (Spratt, 2017). Enactment researchers generally view policy as being constructed from the ground up, and offer a counter perspective on implementation processes, which they see as being linear and driven from the top in a centralized government in a downward direction. What theorists overlook is that policies such as the professional practice standards in Alberta developed in extensive consultation with stakeholder representatives of those on the ground, and over an extended period of time. Often, policies are progressively refined in cycles with feedback rather than in a simple, linear, downward fashion. Cyclical and consultative processes render it difficult to say that policy formulation and implementation are unidirectional from the capital city center outward and downward from the top, and consequently, policy outcomes can be similarly complex to identify.

Policy Outcomes

In this final section we shift our optic from the production of policy, which is about implementation, to the product, which is concerned with outcomes. The evaluation of policy outcomes involves looking at a policy from an outsider's perspective and impartially determining its impact. Policy outcomes became a concern in implementation studies because they are ways of testing whether a policy is deemed a success or a failure, or somewhere in between. For our purposes, that we are measuring change in relation to mandated standards suggests that we are implicitly interested in outcomes.

Educational research is replete with studies of individual policies' impact, usually commissioned by Ministries from others such as academics or policy wonks. Actual outcomes from studies of leadership and the enactment of standards are few and far between. In Ontario, a leadership strategy was introduced in the mid-2010s to increase achievement. Findings in a comparative analysis of Ontario policy texts and data from interviews with administrators, teachers, support staff, and parents in the schools demonstrated that the school-based participants defined success as academic learning, a positive school climate, and students' well-being. This definition differed from the definition advanced by Ontario's government: high scores on standardized provincial and international tests. However, principals in the schools enacted leadership practices to supported locally-defined rather than provincially defined notions of success (Winton & Pollock, 2016). These empirical findings emphasize our point from the previous section, namely, that policy is not a neutral object, and therefore, what comes of it is mediated. Likewise, Ball (1993) suggested about the meaning of policy, we "should not [be misled]...into unexamined assumptions about policies as 'things' (p. 11). Outcomes, too, need conceptualization. By far, Allan McConnell's writings (Marsh & McConnell, 2010; McConnell, 2010a, 2010b, 2015) have the most extensive description of policy outcomes in a generic sense. He considers outcomes from three points of view on policy itself: policy as process; policy as program; and policy as politics.

For the introduction of professional practice standards in Alberta's education system, the end point is presumably educational improvement, however improvement is construed. Optimum learning, not just accountability, may be considered as the end point for introducing professional standards in the first place. If we see a standard as a point of educational decisional making and problem-solving, then there is a vast literature on decision making that becomes

germane. There is in fact a long history of studies in optimization, satisficing and incrementalism in policy making, and decision-making that stretches well back into the 1950s in organizational studies. A full account of the corpus exceeds our task here, but Herbert Simon's (1957) work warrants mention. Simon was among the first to conceptualize distinctions in decision making:

- An *optimization* decision is designed to improve overall system performance so that it is at an optimal level.
- A decision which *satisfices* is designed to reach a minimally acceptable level of performance that is satisfactory to the major parties concerned.
- A decision which *maximizes* is designed to achieve a high level of performance in one or two selected areas while ignoring others.

Given this typology and with respect to implementation of the professional practice standards in Alberta, important questions, particularly for the case studies, come to mind:

- How do third party standards impact on the kinds of decisions that are made?
- Do standards lead educational leaders and teachers to make better decisions or solve problems in different ways?
- Do standards for professional educators actually improve student learning?
- Are the standards taken up to optimize, satisfice, or maximize?
- Are there differences among how the standards are applied in terms of optimization, satisficing and maximizing?
- Does the term optimum learning conceptually align with optimization?

In the past, policy makers in Alberta have claimed a concern with optimizing outcomes for students (Cammaert, 1995). Whether this claim holds are among the empirical concerns motivating this study.

Many policy makers will say that policy operates in the long term and will only gradually seek to change outcomes by moving flexibly and cautiously in small steps from previous to current decisions. For example, Canadian scholars argue that optimization is one phase in creative problem-solving (Basadur, 2004; Basadur & Gelade, 2006) for leadership. Ball (1993) is also helpful here as he emphasizes that an important distinction must be made in terms of what he calls policy effects, “first order and second order effects” (p. 16). First order effects are observable in educators’ practice and/or the organizational structures in which they work. These can be found in schools themselves and the system as a whole, and impact changes that could be described broadly as cultural and philosophical. Second order changes are those that might be in line with what is imagined by optimum learning. For example, support for inclusive education in Alberta is a desirable outcome from implementing standards, but the identification and provision of required learning supports for particular children constitutes a specific practice, a first order effect. Committing to the idea that all students can learn is a second order effect. What is problematic for Ball in terms of understanding the effect of policy, however, is the conflation of specific and general. What he means is that it is possible to discern the general effects of policy when there is a clear relationship among the specific policy responses, but policy analyses that isolate policy texts and attempt to gauge an effect on practice are misleading. He argues for more cross-sectional analyses, which is what we believe our study has to offer.

Up to this point we have spent considerable time in conceptual and theoretical scholarship, and empirical studies to understand key terms and processes, such as optimum student learning, and the articulation of policy. To situate Alberta’s professional practice standards among other educational systems’ approaches in Canada and internationally, the

following section provides a selective jurisdictional scan of educational systems that have employed a standards-based approach to teaching and leadership, and the rationale for doing so.

Chapter Four

**WHO USES A STANDARDS-BASED APPROACH TO IMPROVING PROFESSIONAL
PRACTICE, AND WHY?**

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Who Uses a Standards-based Approach to Improving Professional Practice, and Why?

Countries around the world identify standards of practice for teachers and leaders, varying from complex and specific expectations to more generalized guidelines. Likewise, jurisdictions identify a variety of purposes served through the implementation of these standards, including accreditation, professional growth, and student learning. This section of our synthesis includes a definition of a standards-based approach supporting effective practice. This is followed by a summary of select examples of national and international jurisdictions that have adopted professional standards, and a discussion of rationales for the existence of teacher, school leader, and system leader standards of practice.

Review Methods

Websites of ministries and departments of education were the primary resource used to inform this national and international synthesis. Once accessed, various search terms were used: “professional standards”; “teaching standards”; “leadership standards”; “competencies”, and “performance indicators.” We also examined the websites of professional bodies responsible for the creation and/or the implementation of professional standards, if this information was available. By necessity our search was limited to the policies and documents accessible on these websites specifically related to professional teaching and leadership standards. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) website was valuable for locating research and working papers related to professional standards and synopses of OECD member countries’ ministries and departments of education.

Definition of a Standards-Based Approach

An Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Working Paper published by the Centre of Study for Policies and Practices in Education (2013) stated the following about standards regarding teaching and learning:

Standards can be understood as definitions of what someone should know and be able to do to be considered competent in a particular (professional or educational) domain. Standards can be used to describe and communicate what is most worthy or desirable to achieve, what counts as quality learning or as good practice. Standards can also be used as measures or benchmarks, and, thus, as a tool for decision-making, indicating the distance between actual performance and the minimum level of performance required to be considered competent. In other words, standards can be understood as defining the dimensions of performance or the domains of learning that are valued and that are worthy of being promoted, but they can also be used to assess if what is valued is actually being achieved or not. Thus, standards can be used in the sense of a banner or flag and also as a yardstick or as a measuring rod. (p. 14)

Based on the above, standards serve multiple functions that are epistemological, professional, regulatory, evaluative, and philosophical. Writing from the American context, where the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, now the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders [PSEL]) has been in place since 1996, Murphy (2017) is succinct: “[Standards] provide a framework that underscores issues meriting operationalization” (p. 4). For students, standards reflect teachers’ expectations and hopes that students will “do better, learn more, and achieve at a higher level” (Berry, 2018, p. 129). Leadership standards are

similarly aspirational in that they define leadership quality in terms of heightened insights, an extensive knowledge and pedagogical base, and deep understanding of human and social development, to name a few. And while Berry acknowledges such aims as laudable and in line with what we hope schools experience from their leaders, his description of standards is both apt and cautionary: “educational leadership standards are a floor and not a ceiling” (p. 129). Thus, a standards-based approach to teaching and leadership can be described as a jurisdictional framework of competencies to ensure attainment of a minimum level of professional practice (Call, 2018).

Alberta is unique in Canada, and among many education systems internationally, in that all three professional practice documents serve as an umbrella term under which competencies are situated to describe the interrelated sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for teachers. The competencies point to specific aspects of teaching that are developed over time to support student learning. In Alberta, we would say teachers have one standard that describes multiple competencies. In contrast, outside of Alberta and Canada jurisdictions incorporating a standards-based approach to teaching and leading use the term standard to mean a specific metric to guide practice, rather than as an overarching term. What is a standard for others is a competency for Albertans. Some jurisdictions, then, have many standards. For clarity, this literature synthesis will adopt the terminology used most widely: multiple standards for teaching as well as multiple standards for school and system leadership, recognizing that what is described as a standard outside this province most closely correlates with Alberta Education’s definition of a competency.

National and International Jurisdictions with Teaching and Leadership Standards

Citing Sachs (2005), Call (2018) outlines two purposes for teaching standards: developmental and regulatory. A survey of national and international jurisdictions yielded numerous examples of a standards-based approach to teaching and leading, with both developmental and regulatory intentions. We used the terms “teaching standards” and “standards of practice for teachers” to search among Canadian, American, and international jurisdictions. We reviewed online documents including Ministry and professional organization web pages that turned up from this search. This overview highlights teaching standards, school leadership standards, and system leadership standards in Canada, the United States, and select international countries. In our review we were not only interested in who has standards and what they look like, but we were also interested in identifying whether standards serve a developmental or regulatory function.

Standards for Teaching Practice in Canada

A number of jurisdictions in Canada have what they call “teaching standards” which guide certification processes. British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick have standards for teachers. These standards are separate from the specific competencies that drive teacher education programs in these provinces, although there certainly is overlap. Louden (2000) suggests that in order for teaching standards to have a positive impact, they should be brief, clear, specified according to level and discipline, focused on teaching and learning, and contextualized. The standards we reviewed in the five provinces appear to align with these. The number of standards or competency categories ranges, and Alberta’s TQS scheduled for implementation in September 2019 falls in the middle:

- New Brunswick = 3

- Ontario = 5
- Nova Scotia = 6
- **Alberta = 6**
- British Columbia = 8
- Saskatchewan = 10

New Brunswick's *21st Century Standards of Practice for Beginning Teachers in New Brunswick* (Government of New Brunswick, n.d.), has three global standards, but these are expanded with a number of indicators suggesting what teachers should know and do. Saskatchewan's *Standards of Practice* (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2017a), however, is comprised of ten global statements, but no indicators are specified. In general, the standards in these provinces capture the broad categories of teacher knowledge and pedagogical skills, attention to student diversity, and habits of mind and values that include reflection, professionalism, lifelong learning, ethics, and collaboration with stakeholders, such as parents.

No Canadian province specifies standards in relation to a discipline or grade level. Rather, standards outline expectations that teachers are committed, post-baccalaureate, to the values and competencies embedded in their teacher preparation. For example, a foundational document from the Department of Education in the province of Nova Scotia describes "what teachers should know and be able to do, from initial certification and throughout all stages of their careers" (Province of Nova Scotia, 2016, p. 2).

Given that student-centered teaching, professional judgement and lifelong learning are common to these standards, we conclude that they primarily serve a developmental purpose. Teaching standards in these Canadian provinces are ultimately focused on teaching excellence so that all students have positive school experiences and learning outcomes. New Brunswick might

be interpreted as an exception, for in the preamble to their Department of Education (n.d.) document, it states standards “describe the knowledge, skills, competencies, values and personal commitment expected of *beginning* teachers after having completed a teacher preparation program in order to teach in New Brunswick’s inclusive public education system” (emphasis added). Alberta’s current TQS is similarly applied; the TQS is used as an evaluation tool for teachers seeking to be promoted from interim to permanent certification, as well as for contract purposes. In a recent review of the *Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy* (1997), Brandon et al. (2018) found “inconsistent application of the *Teaching Quality Standard* informing Professional Growth Plans” (p. 186). Based on qualitative data collected through focus groups conducted in seven school authorities in that study, early career teachers were most likely to report using the TQS to guide their planning and professional development. Those teachers who had achieved permanent certification reported completing Professional Growth Plans to be compliant, but perceived them to serve “a managerial and accountability function” (p. 187). Furthermore, there was little evidence of teachers specifically documenting how their professional growth planning impacted on student learning. In the revised TQS interim certification has been eliminated. The revised TQS is described as “a framework for the preparation, professional growth, supervision and evaluation of all teachers” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 2). It is a goal of our current study to discern whether and/or how revising the TQS to apply equally to all teachers will lead to changes in how teachers employ it to guide their practice.

Standards for Teaching Practice in the United States

Teaching standards have been in existence in the United States since 1946 when the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards (NCTEPS) was created

(Call, 2018). As such, teaching practice standards are positioned within a relatively intricate architecture compared to Canada. At the macro level in the United States there are standards related to the accreditation of teacher preparation programs, such as those defined by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (2015). In Alberta the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) (2017) may be considered equivalent as an arms-length body overseeing teacher education programs. But while CAQC is the sole mechanism for ensuring quality in teacher education programs in Alberta, the United States has various instruments for public assurance.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (2019), for example, is teacher-comprised and led, and aims to develop “consensus among educators about what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do” (para. 2). The National Board uses the language of “core propositions” rather than standards, suggesting developmental aims. Their five core propositions coalesce around foci that align with other states’ teaching practice standards, and are similar to Alberta’s TQS: student learning, knowledge of content and pedagogy, student assessment, reflective practice, and continual learning. Presumably, the core propositions serve to legitimate National Board certification. Teachers interested in National Board certification can choose from 25 certification areas in 16 content areas and four student development levels. This kind of specificity is in keeping with Louden’s (2000) criterion. Given that National Board certification, however, is characterized as the “gold standard” (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2018, p. 1) of “accomplished teaching” (p. 2), this casts it as a professional credential for those who self-assess to be eligible, rather than as a unifying standard. And though the National Board declares its existence is to ensure all teachers achieve at this level, because it is optional and not intended for beginning teachers, it cannot be viewed in the same light as state-

entrenched teaching practice standards. Saskatchewan's teacher accreditation process parallels National Board certification in this way. Certified teachers in Saskatchewan can become accredited after two years of experience that would qualify them for "determin[ing] the final mark or standing of students in specified Grade 12 (level 30) subjects" (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d., para. 1).

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), a national non-partisan body comprised of heads of state education departments, supports ongoing teacher development through its Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) (2013). The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) somewhat parallels this American body in that it includes pan-Canadian representation from departments of education, but CMEC does not play a role in teaching standards. On the other hand, InTASC promotes the Model Core Teaching Standards, and according to Call (2018), 40 states have adopted these standards. These are the "common core [of] the principles and foundations of teaching practice that cut across all subject areas and grade levels and that all teachers share" (CCSSO, 2013, p. 3).

The CCSSO refers to the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards as policy, although standards are articulated as "progressions" that act as a "support tool for improving instruction" (2013, p. 12). Importantly, the concept of progressions emphasizes development, and the core progressions are set up to guide teachers' development from "basic competence to more complex teaching practice" (p. 12). Further, the standards set up common language for stakeholders such that the progressions can inform curriculum development for teacher preparation providers; they can be a guide for school leaders whose role is to evaluate teachers and plan for professional development; they can be a reference for policy makers tasked with setting up licensure systems; and teachers themselves can use them as an on-going self-assessment and reflection tool.

When InTASC originated in 1992, the standards applied to beginning teachers only, but today they apply to all career stages. The core teaching standards are informed by research regarding student learning and effective teaching, and student learning is unequivocally identified as the driver. The CCSSO emphasizes that the standards not only serve to create a vision and direction for teaching and learning, but they also define a bar for performance and provide direction for school systems to make decisions about resources required to support teachers. This suggests the standards may be taken up to both regulate the profession and emphasize teachers' career-long development.

Given education is a state function, it is not surprising that standards are taken up and applied in varying ways across the United States. In Texas, for example, Angelo State University has "crosswalked" the InTASC standards with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (Angelo State University, n.d.). Based on a comparison between this document and the six Texas Teacher Standards, there seems to be considerable alignment.

We also reviewed websites of other states such as California, Oregon, Washington State, and Virginia to gain insight into how standards were positioned. A clear focus on student learning is evident in the standards for teaching practice from California, Oregon, and Virginia. Unique among them is California's connection between professional standards for teachers and leaders, student learning content standards, and professional learning standards that, "establish an outcome for professional learning, increasing educators' capacity to assist students in reaching expected learning outcomes" (California Department of Education, 2018, para. 1). Teaching excellence in California is guided by two standards: *California Standards for the Teaching Profession* and *Quality Professional Learning Standards* (State of California Department of Education, 2018). The standards are described in developmental terms: "The standards are not

set forth as regulations to control the specific actions of teachers, but rather to guide teachers as they develop, refine, and extend their practice” (State of California Department of Education, 2012, p. 2). Since these are housed on a web page entitled “Educator Evaluation Systems” it is clear, however, that the standards are used for regulatory purposes. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that development is the central goal for California, as a formative evaluation assessment system is emphasized. For example, teachers are encouraged to be reflective and self-assessing, using items such as the *Continuum of Teaching Practice* as “a tool for self reflection, goal setting, and inquiry into practice” (State of California Department of Education, 2012, p. 2).

Oregon adopted the *Model Core Teaching Standards* (n.d.) drawn up by InTASC. The four broad areas of instructional practice “outline the common principles and foundations of teaching practice necessary to improve student learning that encompass all subject areas and grade levels” (Oregon Department of Education, n.d., p. 1). Within these four categories are 10 standards. The standards are described as “the cornerstone” (Oregon Department of Education, 2018, p. 8) of Oregon’s evaluation system. Like California, Oregon emphasizes that evaluation must be more than summative, and standards are used to support a “growth process” (p. 8).

Virginia teachers follow the *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards for Teachers* (2015), which categorizes six performance standards meant to provide a conceptual model for effective teaching, as well as to “establish a foundation upon which all aspects of teacher development from teacher education to induction and ongoing professional development can be aligned” (Virginia Department of Education, n.d., para. 3). Although professional learning is not specifically stated in the seven performance standards, it can be implied. Nonetheless, the Virginia Department of Education explicitly states that the standards are developed in recognition that “the role of a teacher requires a performance evaluation system that

acknowledges the complexities of the job” (2015, p. 1). Indeed, the first line of the document is that “teacher evaluation matters because teaching matters” (2015, p. 1). Notably, 40% of a teacher’s evaluation is also based on “student academic progress, as determined by multiple measures of learning and achievement” (Virginia Department of Education, n.d. para. 1).

Despite variation, standards underpin the goals for teacher excellence in the United States. The content of the standards are reportedly based on educational research. It is unsurprising then, that the content has strong resemblance to Alberta’s TQS.

Select International Standards for Teaching Practice

Our international scan considered both OECD and non-OECD countries. Seven Pan-Pacific countries, including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia. Eight additional countries were included in our European scan: Finland, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Germany, England, Ireland, and Scotland. At the time of this search, few informative online documents were available for South American countries such as Brazil, Argentina, or Venezuela to permit us to make fair interpretations.

Of the Pan-Pacific countries, Hong Kong, Australia, and Singapore have variations of a professional standard for teaching practice. Australia’s *Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018) outline the elements of high quality, effective teaching in a framework comprised of seven descriptors used to:

recognize [teachers’] current and developing capabilities, professional aspirations, and achievements. [The Standards] could also be used as the basis for a professional accountability model, helping ensure that teachers can demonstrate appropriate levels of professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement. (p. 3)

Hong Kong's *T-standard*⁺ (Committee on Professional Development of Teacher and Principals, 2018a) serves as an anchor document for teacher preparation institutions, continuing education and professional development providers, and “other supporting partners” to ensure that the country's teachers are: Caring Cultivators of Students' All-round Growth; Inspirational Co-constructors of Knowledge; and Committed Role Models of Professionalism. The T-standard⁺ is the overarching frame for education in Hong Kong, espousing its goals for students as developing “key competences for adulthood”, “change agility for tomorrow”, and “whole-person wellness” (COTAP, 2015, para. 1). The framework guiding the PST for teachers includes “committed role models”, “inspirational co-constructors”, and “caring cultivators” (para. 1).

Appearing to still be in progress, the Singaporean Teaching Practice Model (Singapore Ministry of Education, n.d.) presents a career stage set of standards illustrated through five desired outcomes of continual learning expected from teachers in the areas of:

- The Ethical Educator
- The Competent Professional
- The Collaborative Learner
- The Transformative Leader and
- The Community Builder

At the time of writing, these standards were not explicated in public policy documents available online.

Of European countries included in the scan, Estonia, England, Ireland, and Scotland articulate versions of standards that outline knowledge, skills, competencies and/or conduct for teachers. While originating from government in the United Kingdom and from the professional standards body for teaching in Ireland, both countries have multiple standards, each with numerous descriptors of what constitutes effective practice. Notably, student learning and success is explicitly linked to teacher practice as outlined in their standards: “Teachers make the

education of their pupils their first concern, and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct (United Kingdom Department of Education, 2013, p. 10). Estonia's professional standards for teachers specify six competencies, however, no indicators or descriptors are provided.

Among the Scandinavian countries reviewed, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark do not articulate standards independent of the post-secondary degree-granting system. Each country references the post-secondary baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate education system as providing a robust standard of teaching practice. This forms the basis of a pre-career certification process.

Like the Canadian and American jurisdictions reviewed, international education systems employ teaching standards in response to research that emphasizes the importance of teaching excellence for student outcomes. And, as indicated in the aforementioned, standards can support the growth of high quality teachers, and be used as part of a regulatory system that ensures standards are implemented in accordance with their intention. Explicating the rationales and purposes of standards as articulated by various systems is what follows.

Teaching Standards: Rationale and Purposes

Reporting on an international study comparing the development, characteristics, and implementation of standards in various OECD countries, the OECD Working Paper (2013) identified four objectives for defining teaching standards: "to support the improvement of teacher performance; to certify teachers who are new to the teaching profession or who have attained a status as teachers; to assess teacher performance; and to evaluate and accredit teacher training institutions" (p. 32). We combine these with what we found in our review of jurisdiction

websites, and outline four themes that reflect the reasons for the implementation of teaching standards:

1. To support student learning and success.
2. To guide teacher professional growth and ensure competence.
3. To credential and evaluate teachers.
4. To uphold the social standing of the teaching profession.

Rationale 1: To Support Student Learning

Numerous jurisdictions reviewed identify student learning and success as a key objective in their development of professional standards for teaching. In Canada, the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2012) states: “The Standards should be a positive for educators that will honour their work and benefit the children of BC through supporting student academic success and social development and by developing an informed citizenry” (p. 3). Prompting reflection about student learning and teaching practice is the first purpose identified by the California Department of Education; it is also evident in Virginia’s rationale that links their professional standards to reflection on teaching practice and student learning. Similarly, the Oregon *Model Core Teaching Standards* (n.d.) document offers the following:

The Model Core Teaching Standards outline what teachers should know and be able to do to help all students improve, grow and learn. The standards outline the common principles and foundations of teaching practice necessary to improve student learning that encompass all subject areas and grade levels. The standards reflect a new vision for teaching and learning critical for preparing all students for success in today’s world and their future. (para. 1)

Hong Kong prefaces its *Professional Standards for Teachers (PST)* (Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals, 2018a) by stating that student development and learning needs are the centre of the *T-standard*⁺, and that the aims of all such documents is to ensure that educators cultivate three essential attributes of students: whole-person wellness, key competencies for adulthood, and change agility for tomorrow. Finally, the Australian *Professional Standards for Teachers* (2018) asserts that their teaching standards “define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st century schools that will improve educational outcomes for students” (p. 3).

Thus, student learning is the key justification for the implementation of standards. This is clearly a research-informed policy decision as every introduction to standards in the documents we reviewed were prefaced with the claim that standards aim to enhance teaching quality, which is directly connected to enhanced student learning.

Rationale 2: To Guide Teacher Professional Growth and Ensure Professional Competence

All jurisdictions examined in this review identify the overall purpose of teaching standards as enhancing teacher professional growth. This objective is described in a variety of ways: as “guiding the professional judgement and actions of the teaching profession” (Ontario College of Teachers, 2018, para. 2); as providing “a common language and a vision of the scope and complexity of the profession by which all teachers can define and develop their practice” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2009, p. 1); and as offering “a conceptual model for effective teaching . . . upon which all aspects of teacher development from teacher education to induction and ongoing profession development can be aligned” (Virginia Department of Education, n.d., para. 3). Standards can be used by teachers, as they are in Hong Kong, to “reflect on their professional roles and as a tool for their professional development

planning” (COTAP, 2018b, Application of the T-standard⁺). Mirroring this, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2018) describes the purpose of teaching standards as informing the development of professional learning goals and providing a framework by which teachers can judge the success of their learning through self-reflection and self-assessment. It states that “the development of the Australian Professional Standards for the teaching profession is integral to ensuring quality learning and teaching in Australian schools” (p. 8). Again, this rationale is derived from an empirical research base that draws a connection between teaching excellence and student performance (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2000, Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011).

Rationale 3: To Credential and Evaluate Teachers

The transition from using jurisdictional standards to guide teacher professional growth toward external evaluation of competence is evident in a key document from the United Kingdom Department of Education (2014):

[The Teachers’ Standards] can be used by individual teachers to review their practice and inform their plans for continuing professional development . . . and set a clear baseline of expectations for the professional practice and conduct of teachers and define the minimum level of practice expected of teachers in England (“Practicing Teachers Use Standards to Support Growth”, para.1, and “What are Teaching Standards?”, para. 1).

Specifically related to credentialing, this document states:

Those involved in training and inducting new teachers must use the Teachers’ Standards to ensure quality of new entrants to the profession [and] must be used by schools to assess the extent to which newly qualified teachers can demonstrate their competence at the end of their induction period (“Those Involved in Training”, para. 2).

And, for teachers in the United Kingdom who already hold a credential: “Headteachers and others should use the Teachers’ Standards to improve standards of teaching in their schools, by setting minimum expectations and assessing performance against them” (para. 1).

The use of teaching standards for the purpose of teacher evaluation is also explicitly evident in three of the American states informing this scan. In the state of Oregon, the standards of practice guide the development of local evaluation systems that “promote professional growth and improved teaching and leadership practice” (Oregon Department of Education, 2018, p. 1). The Virginia *Standards for the Professional Practice of Teachers* forms the basis of a document entitled *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers* (2015). As indicated in the previous section state-wide performance standards are directly tied to teacher evaluation procedures. The guidelines document states:

The uniform performance standards for teachers are used to collect and present data to document performance that is based on well-defined job expectations . . . The goal is to support the continuous growth and development of each teacher by monitoring, analyzing, and applying pertinent data compiled within a system of meaningful feedback.

(p. 7)

By adapting their teaching standards into six performance standards, complete with comprehensive performance indicators, the State of Virginia (2015) provides school divisions “with the information needed to support systems of differentiated compensations or performance-based pay” (p. 5). Finally, in documentation from the state of Texas (n.d.), the six performance standards are to be used “to inform the training, appraisal, and professional development of teachers” (para. 1).

So far it is clear that teaching standards are intended to promote and assess teacher development, learning, and performance. But standards serve a professional function as well in terms of legitimating teaching in society.

Rationale 4: To Uphold the Professional Standing of Teachers Within Society

Numerous jurisdictions in this national and international scan link a development of teaching standards to an increased socio-political awareness of the responsibilities of teachers and, more specifically, to raising the professional standing of teachers within their societal context. In this sense, then, standards are a method of assuring public confidence. For example, the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (2012) states: “Standards are a way of communicating to certificate holders and the public the description of the work of educators - what they know, what they are able to do, and how they comport themselves as they serve the public” (p. 3). Along a similar vein, the Ontario College of Teachers describes their teaching standards as “a collective vision of professionalism” (2018, para. 1). Irish professional teaching standards “may be used by the education community and the wider public to inform their understanding and expectations of the teaching profession in Ireland” (The Teaching Council, 2016, p. 4). The teaching standards in Hong Kong are clearly focused on teacher professionalism:

The T-standard⁺ presents the professional image of the teaching profession and their contribution, which helps to attract and retain talent, sustaining a high-quality teaching profession. [Standards] have been developed with the teaching professional for the growth of the profession. (COTAP, 2018b, Application of the T-standard⁺, para.1)

In Australia, the professional teaching standards are described as a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality. Moreover, “standards contribute to the professionalism of teaching

and raise the status of the profession” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018, p. 3) and provide a common understanding and language for discourse between multiple social groups.

As documents existing in the public domain, teaching standards are viewed by many jurisdictions as influencing awareness of professional responsibilities in addition to supporting student learning, guiding professional growth, and credentialing teachers and evaluating performance. Standards fulfill a legitimating function among other professions that operate within a standards paradigm, such as engineering, medicine, and law.

Standards of Practice for School Leaders

Compared to teaching standards, standards for school and system leaders are a more recent development. In looking at leadership standards in Canada and in select jurisdictions around the world, there is considerable similarity in content and use. In presenting our findings, we follow the same structure as the previous section, outlining standards in Canadian, American, and international jurisdictions, and then discussing the purposes and rationale for standards.

Standards for School Leadership Practice in Canada

Similar to teaching standards, the state of clearly articulated and accessible leadership standards across Canadian provinces and territories is uneven. What is common among those jurisdictions that make reference to standards or competencies for school leaders is that they are research-based and intended to support school leaders’ development with student learning as the ultimate aim.

Following the findings of their 2008 Education Reform, the Yukon Department of Education created the *Yukon Educational Leadership Framework* (2011). The document reflects the regional context by closely aligning responsibilities of formal school leaders with informal

teacher-leaders. The overall aim of the framework is to ensure quality leadership for student success. The framework is built upon two *dimensions*—self-identity and relationship building.

Seven domains of effectiveness are built around the dimensions:

- Developing shared direction
- Leading teaching and learning
- Developing a learning culture
- Developing partnerships with Yukon First Nations communities
- Developing partnerships with parents and school councils
- Developing partnerships with community organizations and agencies
- Managing the school program (p. 5)

These dimensions draw on research by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004). The framework was created collaboratively by educational stakeholders and is meant for principals and vice-principals as a self-assessment tool. The framework document clearly lays out a worksheet for individuals to identify strengths and weaknesses regarding each dimension, and to record reflective questions, actions, and evidence of how their practices are enhancing student learning. Although professional learning and growth is the primary rationale for the dimensions, they are also used as a guide for recruitment of principals and vice-principals. How it informs such processes, however, was not made clear.

Ontario's Department of Education *Leadership Strategy* (2013) specifically distinguishes school leadership as “the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals” (p. 5) that is comprised of five capacities: setting directions; building relationships and developing people; developing the organization to support desired practice; improving the instructional program; and securing accountability. The *Ontario Leadership Framework* (2013) coalesces around five core leadership capacities:

- Setting Goals
- Aligning Resources with Priorities
- Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures
- Using Data
- Engaging in Courageous Conversations (p. 8)

Numerous indicators outline expectations for school leaders' performance. The *Ontario Leadership Framework* outlines practices and personal traits of effective leaders, serves as a guide for professional learning, and is used for recruitment and development of school leaders. Uniquely, Ontario's framework includes a Catholic School-Level Leadership framework that interpret the leadership capacities for that context. Both leadership frameworks are the foundation of the Principal's Qualification Program developed by the Ontario Teachers' College, a program that qualifies teachers for the positions of principal and vice-principal (Ontario Teachers' College, 2017).

The British Columbia Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA) claims that the *Leadership Standards* (2015a) frame personal growth for principals and vice-principals. The framework is described as "generic, context dependent and aspirational" (p. 4). The framework was developed to guide curriculum development and create coherence among leadership development programs at the local and provincial level, and to support mentorship, coaching as well as individual reflection about professional learning and growth. There are four leadership domains: moral stewardship, instructional leadership, relational leadership, and organizational leadership. Standards are listed in each domain, and there are nine in total:

- Values, Vision, and Mission
- Ethical Decision Making
- Super Vision for Learning—Leading for Learning
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

- Intrapersonal Capacity
- Interpersonal Capacity
- Cultural Leadership
- Management and Administration
- Community Building. (p. 8)

Like in the Yukon, B.C.'s *Leadership Standards* is “not intended as an instrument for evaluation or the judgment of the individual performance of principals and vice-principals by districts” (BCVPA, 2015b).

Nova Scotia has a similar, although more formalized set up. The Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Academy (NSILA) Program is a joint program offered by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Nova Scotia Educational Leadership Consortium. The *Instructional Leadership Standards* (2016) are aimed at improving teaching and learning. The program is “designed for all instructional leaders”, however, priority is given to current participants include principals, vice-principals, and “board consultants and coordinators” (p. 3). The *Instructional Leadership Standards* include:

- Vision for Instruction
- Leading and Managing Change
- Collaborative Learning Culture
- Professional Learning
- High Quality Instruction
- Understanding and Using Data to Improve Instruction
- Positive Learning Environment. (p. 2)

As in other jurisdictions, the standards are central to defining curriculum for leadership development. There was no indication that completing the program was a requirement for taking up formal leadership, and in conversation with a NSILA program coordinator, we

learned that leadership development happens at the district level as well. NSILA culminates in a leadership diploma (S. LeBel, personal communication, March 27, 2019).

Saskatchewan employs a “conceptual model” as the foundation for professional learning for principals (Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, 2017b), but there currently is no provincially designed program for principals or vice-principals. The conceptual model is purported to be developed from four dimensions of instructional leadership:

- Vision, Mission and Culture
- Instructional Leadership
- Strategic Resource Allocation
- Effective Relationships and Processes (p. 3)

It is clear in the document that the conceptual model was created in response to a perceived need for a “centrally organized and coherent approach to professional leadership development for principals” (p. 5). In the leadership document, developing a provincial leadership development program was suggested as a next step, and we confirmed with a staff member at the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation that a move towards mandatory professional development and standards for principals have been discussed but no definitive plans have been made (D. Stovin, personal communication, March 27, 2019). Even though there is no official standard, one can see standardization undergirds the Saskatchewan model as coherence among school leadership capacity was a key motivation.

Some provinces impose standards for principals and vice principals through requirements for professional learning and/or certification. Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are two examples. In a 2013 review of professional learning in PEI school systems, one of the findings highlighted the need for principals and vice-principals to be prepared as instructional leaders, not managers (Prince Edward Island Education and Early Childhood Development). The *PEI School*

Administrators' Leadership Program, an accredited university program is the “standard requirement for school leaders” (University of Prince Edward Island, n.d. para. 2). This program is endorsed by the ministry, and although no leadership standard exists, the preparation program “define[s] the expectations of skills, knowledge, and mind-set required by principals and vice-principals, and ensures they are prepared to meet the demands of leading PEI schools” (Prince Edward Island Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013, p. vi). Based on information from the Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, only teachers are certificated; therefore, the leadership program serves as professional learning but is not provincially mandated. On the other hand, New Brunswick requires principals and vice-principals have a certificate to take up formal leadership. In the New Brunswick Department of Education Policy 610 (n.d.) the terms requirements and standards are used interchangeably. Those seeking formal leadership must first obtain an interim principal certificate, which requires the completion of six Minister-approved modules at the district level, and 3 university graduate level courses: Current Administrative Theory, Supervision of Instruction, and Assessment and Evaluation in Education (p. 2). A successful one-year practicum following formal education is required before a principal or vice-principal can apply the Minister for a regular principal’s certificate. Principals and vice-principals must complete a successful year in the role before applying to the Minister to obtain a regular principal’s certificate. We learned that the Council for Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) have tentative plans to develop leadership standards, but like in Saskatchewan, there have been no formal announcements (K. Brien, personal communication, March 27, 2019).

Standards for School Leadership Practice in the United States

Standards for school leaders arose in conjunction with the effective schools movement, a counter movement that developed in response to what educational researchers considered a damning report about schools by Coleman et al. (1966). The Coleman report concluded that home and other out-of-school factors had a stronger influence over children's learning and achievement than schools (Berry, 2018). This spurred educational researchers to demonstrate effects statistically, and to identify inputs that lead to positive student outcomes. School leadership is one factor of school effectiveness.

In the United States the national model for school leadership standards is the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (PSEL, 2015), which is a revised version of its precursor, the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards* (ISLLCS). Murphy (2017) claimed 46 states have adopted these standards, but according to current data provided on the website of the *Education Commission of the States* (2019), all 50 American states have adopted standards for school leadership and use them to guide the development of policy.

The PSEL (2015) includes 10 standards:

- Mission, Vision, and Core Values
- Ethics and Professional Norms
- Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Community of Care and Support for Students
- Professional Capacity of School Personnel
- Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
- Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
- Operations and Management
- School Improvement. (pp. 9 – 18)

Each standard includes indicators which describe leadership effectiveness. Based on our careful review of the PSEL standards, it is clear that Alberta's LQS and SLQS reflect similar competencies.

While the PSEL standards emerged out of empirical evidence regarding the connection between school leadership and student learning, Murphy (2017) emphasizes that the standards also recognize that values, caring, and ethics are critically important to leadership. Murphy also argues the standards were designed to inform professional learning, not simply leadership preparation and evaluation. The standards can be and are, however, used as a measurement of leadership effectiveness, and Murphy suggests that ensuring standards have indicators that are clear, and stipulate "different quality points for principals and superintendents" (p. 4) is important for standards to have the intended results.

As an example, Massachusetts' documents reference the PSEL standards, but scaffolds standards, indicators, elements, and descriptors. Standards are the broad categories of knowledge, skills, and performance of effective practice that are detailed in the regulations. There are four Standards for administrators: Instructional Leadership; Management and Operations; Family and Community Engagement; and Professional Culture. Effective practice in the standards are articulated through indicators, which describe specific knowledge, skills, and performance for each Standard. Indicators are further described through elements, which are more detailed in describing the actions and behaviours related to each indicator. Elements delineate specific aspects of educator practice, and therefore provide a platform for evaluators to offer detailed feedback. And finally, descriptors are statements of observable and measurable action and behavior that align with each element and function as benchmarks for determining a leader's level of performance (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary

Education, 2012). In setting up such a system, Massachusetts seems to have taken Murphy's (2017) advice to heart.

We learned through a staff relations associate at the Education Commission of the States that since the PSEL standards are not mandatory, some states have adopted them in full whereas others have adapted them to meet their educational contexts (D. Scott, personal communication, February 27, 2019). Standards are used to develop leadership preparation programs, which may fall under the purview of universities, colleges, and other approved preparation programs.

Select International Standards for School Leadership Practice

Berry (2018) notes that standards for leaders are not only adopted to ensure leadership quality and student achievement, but they also are a mechanism by which educational jurisdictions position themselves in the global order. Speaking from the Chinese context, Wei (2017) argues that the desire to establish legitimacy among competitors is a strong motivator for adopting leadership standards. For this reason, China and other countries participate in policy borrowing; the implementation of standards signals to the world that the Chinese education system values quality and rigor. For this section we scanned by continent, including Asia, Australia, Europe, and to a limited extent, South America.

In 2013, the Chinese Ministry of Education established national *Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals* (Wei, 2017). As part of this plan the Ministry requires newly-appointed principals to undertake 300 hours of leadership training with the first six months of their tenure and an additional minimum of 360 hours every five years thereafter. No other information about the composition or nature of these standards was described on the website.

In 1970 Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH) was established with the principal mission to identify educational development needs in Southeast Asian countries. In 2003, SEAMEO INNOTECH created an overarching competency framework that is applied to all School Heads throughout Southeast Asia. This has since been updated, and the *Competency Framework for Southeast Asian School Heads* (2014) now includes five competency domains, 16 general competencies, 42 enabling competencies, and 170 indicators. The five competencies are ranked to consider order of importance, as well as “frequency of performance, and amount of training school heads would need the most:

1. Strategic Thinking and Innovation
2. Managerial Leadership
3. Instructional Leadership
4. Personal Excellence
5. Stakeholder Engagement” (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2014, para. 2).

The competency framework is the launch point for initiatives to support the development of Southeast Asian school heads. From our reading of the website, the competency framework is not mandatory, and it complements other regional or national standards in the Southeast Asian countries.

With the exception of Hong Kong, no other Asian countries in our scan led us to leadership standards. Hong Kong is not a member of SEAMEO INNOTECH. Hong Kong’s approach to standards has a stronger aesthetic appeal compared to the managerial emphasis of SEAMEO INNOTECH. Hong Kong’s *Professional Standards for Principals* (PSP) (COTAP, 2015) emerge from the same guiding principles that drive the *Professional Standards for Teachers* (PST), the T-standard + framework. In Hong Kong, leaders strive to be “Ethical Enablers of All-Round Growth and Balanced Advancement; Versatile Architects of Vibrant

Learning Organizations, and Visionary Entrepreneurs of Educational Transformation”

(Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals [COTAP], 2015, para. 2).

The COTAP website claims that extensive research was conducted to ensure that the guiding principles align with research and other jurisdictions around the world. COTAP invokes the metaphor of a journey to describe the application of the T-standard⁺, which includes both the teaching and principal standards. With a focus on growth, the PST bears resemblance to the developmental aims of Alberta’s LQS.

On another continent, the Australian *Professional Standard for Principals* defines three competencies that, in conjunction with the *Professional Teaching Standards* (2018), constitute the profile of a school leader as: leading the development of the vision of the school; understanding the practice and theory of contemporary leadership and applying that to school improvement; and recognizing the importance of emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience, and personal wellbeing in managing the school and the community. Each of the requirements are further integrated with five professional practices that include:

- Leading teaching and learning
- Developing self and others
- Leading improvement, innovation, and change
- Leading the management of the school
- Engaging and working with the community. (p. 10)

Scotland adopts a comprehensive model of leadership for four levels of educational leaders: teacher-leaders, middle-leaders (defined as those with a specified leadership role such as learning support teachers, deputy head teachers, or principal teachers), school leaders, and system leaders. Education Scotland alludes to the characteristics to be demonstrated by school leaders:

As lead learners, school leaders ensure that a strong and consistent focus is placed on

learning and teaching in their schools. They have, and outline, clear and high expectations regarding the standard of learning and teaching which they expect to see throughout their school and drive improvements in attainment and achievement. They are adept in motivating teachers to meet these standards and work closely with middle leaders to provide effective on-going support and challenge for teachers to ensure excellence in learning and teaching. (Scottish College for Educational Leadership, 2019, para.1)

In collaboration with the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (2019), a branch of Education Scotland, principals (or 'Heads') must achieve certification in the *Into Headship* qualification. This qualification focuses on building skills in six domains: leading for change, leading through collaboration, leading self-evaluation, leading culture, leading learning of self and others.

England has adopted a *National Standards for School Leadership* (n.d.) framework, created in partnership with the National College for School Leadership, that outlines five key competencies to be achieved by school leaders, including: leading strategically with vision; leading teaching and learning; leading the organization, people, and resources; leading people through effective relationships; and leading the community. Nine professional attributes are woven throughout these competencies:

- a positive, enthusiastic outlook, embracing risk and innovation
- commitment and dedication to social justice, equality and excellence
- engagement in collaborative partnership working, within and beyond the school
- integrity in relation to their own and the school's practice
- courage and conviction to achieve the best outcomes
- respect and empathy towards others
- resilience, perseverance and optimism in the face of difficulties and challenges

- decisiveness, consistency and focus on solutions
- drive for improvement and challenging underperformance
- capacity to be flexible, adaptable and creative. (para. 4)

Austria has cooperated with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden, to create *The Central European Competency Framework for School Leaders* that "defines the knowledge, skills and attitudes a school leader is expected to possess in order to be successful in a turbulent and fast-changing world" (Schratz, Laiminger, MacKay, Křížková, Kirkham, Baráth, ... Soderberg, 2013, p. 7). Five Domains, and multiple key descriptors and competencies, establish a School Leader Standard in:

- leading and managing learning and teaching
- leading and managing change
- leading and managing self
- leading and managing others
- leading and managing the institution. (p. 7)

Based on further searches Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, and Germany do not have leadership standards, although it appears that Scandinavian countries adopt a post-secondary certification approach to identifying and instilling leadership competencies. This approach is similar to New Brunswick and Saskatchewan where certification of school leaders is linked to completion of a set of post-secondary graduate courses in combination with professional development modules or courses sponsored by individual school authorities.

Finally, on the African continent, South Africa outlines eight key interdependent areas of school leadership that constitute the core purpose of the principal: to enable learners "to attain the highest levels of achievement for their own good, the good of their community and the good of the country as a whole" (Department of Basic Education: Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 5). Across the Atlantic our search of South American countries was similarly limited. At the time

of our search, no informative online documents were available for countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, or Paraguay. We did learn that in 2012 Ecuador developed school leader professional performance standards to: guide, reflect, evaluate, and self-evaluate; design and implement strategies for improvement; make decisions regarding assessment, support and advice, certification, merit, and opposition for entry into teaching, initial training, continuing education, and professional development education. (Ecuador Ministerio de Educación, 2012, p. 11)

In summary, school leadership standards exist in varying degrees of specificity in many countries; some have linked the creation and content of standards to post-secondary and private partners' credentialing, others to aspirational standards that provide the content for cyclical evaluation, and others still to the sustained professional learning goals of principals and vice-principals. How standards are used is contingent upon why they exist in the first place. We discuss the rationales and purposes underlying school leadership standards in the following section.

School Leadership Standards: Rationale and Purpose

Our national and international overview identified three dominant rationales for developing and implementing professional standards for school leaders. In addition to the broad and universal rationale of clarifying and delineating the role and function of school leaders, a number of jurisdictions couple this purpose with the unambiguous aim to support student success. Second, leadership standards are identified as a means to guide and facilitate continuous professional learning for leaders. An essential distinction emerging from our scan lies in the use of leadership standards either solely for the planning of individual professional learning or, ultimately, for the purpose of school leader evaluation. Thus, while leadership standards are

viewed as supporting the professional growth of leaders they are, in some jurisdictions, also used to measure performance in an exacting manner. This section explores all three purposes for the development and implementation of professional leadership standards.

Rationale 1: To Support Student Learning and Well-Being

Based on its international study, the OECD Working Paper (2013) reported that a key rationale offered by educational authorities for developing school leadership standards is to clarify and focus leaders' responsibilities and actions with respect to student success and achievement:

Standards for principals define what they must know and be able to do in the realms of their competence, hence guiding their work and outlining the goals that principals are expected to reach. Most countries perceive performance standards for school principals as a strategic tool for the improvement of quality of education. (p. 49)

Our present overview aligns closely with the findings of the OECD study. For example, leadership standards in Ontario are defined as the “competencies and practices that have been shown to be effective in improving student achievement” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019, para. 2). Similarly, the state of California (2014) offered this rationale for linking quality leadership with students' academic success:

To reach every student and support every teacher in meeting increasingly complex outcomes demands a cadre of increasingly committed and effective administrators. Transforming our state's system for developing and supporting administrators to become excellent education leaders requires consensus about high expectations that are attainable over time with quality preparation, induction, and ongoing professional learning. The CPSEL (California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders) serve as broadly

supported leadership criteria that are a critical component of a coherent system of leadership development and support that ensures excellent education leaders throughout California. (p. 3)

The centrality of student learning and wellness is explicit in the professional standards for principals in Hong Kong (COTAP, 2015). Maintaining students' developmental and learning needs are the core of their standards. Principals are expected to focus on whole-person wellness, the competencies required for adulthood, as well as nurturing change agility for the future.

Finally, the key document outlining Australian professional standards for school leaders states that:

The most effective leaders see learning as central to their professional lives. This document, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles, guides school leaders on their learning pathway. It will empower school leaders across the country to develop and support teaching that maximises impact on student learning. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015, p. 3)

While all jurisdictions surveyed in this scan maintain that leadership standards are meant to clarify and delineate the role and function of school leaders, some have purposely connected their standards to the overall aim of enhancing student learning and well-being.

Rationale 2: To Guide and Facilitate Continuous Professional Learning

The second rationale explicitly or implicitly offered by educational authorities for implementing school leadership standards is to guide and facilitate professional growth and continuous learning. *The Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia* (2016) states: "The purpose of the document is to foster continuous professional learning in working towards effective leadership" (p. 4). Ontario's *Leadership Framework*

(2013) identifies its purpose “to guide the design and implementation of professional learning and development for school and system leaders” (p. 5). Moreover, the core capacities that comprise the leadership standards are strategically infused into provincial professional learning opportunities and resources:

For the purpose of professional development, the ministry has identified five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) that the research suggests are key to making progress toward the province’s current educational goals. These five CLCs, described below, are embedded in all provincially-sponsored professional learning and resources for school and system leaders. (p. 8)

In Canada, a theme weaved throughout many leadership framework documents is the desire to ensure coherence in leaders’ capacity. With or without mandatory standards, a goal of standardizing leadership capacity is a goal that undergirds leadership development approaches.

In Hong Kong, their rationale for the recent development of unified teacher and principal standards (T-standard⁺) is described as follows:

- The T-standard presents the professional image of the teaching profession and their contribution, which helps to attract and retain talent, sustaining a high-quality teaching profession.
- Teachers and principals can use the T-standard to reflect on their professional roles and as a tool for their professional development planning.
- The T-standard serves as a direction for initial teacher education and CPD of serving teachers and school leaders. (COTAP, 2018b, “Application of the T-standard⁺”).

Australia describes professional learning as a key attribute of leadership, and believes their standard to be instrumental in guiding this learning:

The most effective leaders see learning as central to their professional lives. This

document, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles, guides school leaders on their learning pathway. It will empower school leaders across the country to develop and support teaching that maximises impact on student learning. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015, p. 3)

In addition, our scan revealed that some jurisdictions, most notably Australia and Hong Kong, have translated these expectations into on-line tools for self-reflection, complete with rubrics and stage descriptors. This developmental scope and sequence for each standard, readily available electronically, provides a framework for school leaders to identify professional needs and plan their learning accordingly. Additionally, as with professional standards for teaching, leadership standards can also provide a structure to direct the evaluation of school leaders.

Rationale 3: To Evaluate the Performance of Leaders

The use of professional standards as a framework for the on-going evaluation of leaders is identified as an explicit purpose in most American states, although this is up to the local board or state department (D. Scott, personal communication, February 27, 2019). The California *Professional Standards for Education Leaders* (2014) are described as “a set of broad policy standards that are the foundation for administrator preparation, induction, development, professional learning and evaluation in California” (p 1). Grounded in state and federal legislation, the Oregon *Framework for Teacher and Administrator Evaluation and Support Systems* (2018) describes the relationship between their professional standards and evaluation in this way:

Based on the standards of professional practice, the Oregon Framework guides the development of local evaluation systems that promote professional growth and improved teaching and leadership practice. Implementation of a sound evaluation system is critical

to producing equitable outcomes where student success is no longer predictable based on race, socio-economics, language, and family background. (p. 1)

The State of Washington (2019) bases their principal evaluation and growth program on the five core principles that include:

- High quality teaching and leading are key to student success.
- Growth in practice is developmental in nature.
- Growth occurs best when there are clear standards of practice supported by quality professional learning and learning-focused feedback.
- Evaluation systems should reflect and address the career continuum.
- The focus for teacher and principal growth should be driven by student learning needs. (para.1)

Described as benchmarks, Washington’s evaluation structure incorporates three levels of a career continuum for each strand in their six leadership standards. Virginia’s standard for principals are explicitly called performance standards, so there is no question that it is intended to evaluate principals. The performance standards are used to guide the development of various evaluation sources, including self-evaluation, observations and site visits, portfolios, teacher/staff surveys, and goal setting, which are intended to demonstrate comprehensively that a leader is performing at the expected standard (Virginia Department of Education, 2015).

In Texas, the Texas Principal Standards provide the foundation for the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS (Texas Education Agency, 2019), which is described as a four-part, growth-oriented rubric upon which principals are evaluated. The rubric includes the performance standard itself (e.g. instructional leadership), an indicator, a performance level (ranging from distinguished to not demonstrated/needs improvement), and a performance descriptor for each performance level. In addition, a detailed document called “Research-Based Responsibilities & Practices” outlines 21 “specific leadership responsibilities and 66 associated

practices that demonstrate a statistically significant link between principal leadership and student achievement” (para. 6). For example, the first responsibility listed is affirmation, described as the “extent to which the principal recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures” (para. 7). A statistical measure indicating its impact on student learning, and associated practices are also included. This particular framework is intended to guide principals in “selecting the right work....to improve student outcomes” (para. 6). This is perhaps among the most prescriptive evaluation schemes we reviewed.

In Canada, jurisdictions emphasize leadership competencies as guides for practice. In Ontario, for example, it is proposed “leaders’ enactment of the practices will evolve as they move through various career stages, specialized assignments, and unique educational environments” (Ontario Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, p. 7). BC’s *Dimensions of Practice* (BCSSA, 2018) specifically states, “The Dimensions of Practice is not prescriptive and is not intended to serve as an evaluation instrument” (para. 3). Similarly, Yukon’s *Educational Leadership Framework* is “not intended to be prescriptive in nature, but rather to be used to support the individuals reflecting on their own learning needs” (2011, p. 2). In reviewing their principal evaluation process document, there is resemblance between Yukon’s leadership framework dimensions and the behavioural indicators; however, a framework adapted from Cooper, Fusarelli, and Randall (2004) guides the evaluation process for Yukon principals and vice-principals (Yukon Education, 2012). Leadership frameworks in Canada appear to be less high stakes than some of its American counterparts; however, Alberta’s move to require principal certification based on the LQS reflects stronger accountability.

Thus, leadership standards fulfill a number of purposes. At the most essential level, professional standards clarify and delineate a jurisdiction’s expectations for the knowledge,

skills, attributes, and competencies of its school leaders. All jurisdictions reviewed for this national and international scan describe their standards as supporting and facilitating the continuous professional learning of leaders, with student outcomes being the ultimate end point. Importantly, standards are also a mechanism of accountability, and are used to guide evaluation and certification/licensure of principals, and accreditation of leadership preparation programs.

Standards of Practice for System Leaders

Factors such as culture and politics impact the governance structures and expectations for school system leadership; thus, there can be considerable variation in how the role is conceptualized, eligibility qualifications, and to whom the system leader is accountable. Among Canadian provinces and territories, the practice of identifying system leadership standards often appears to align with school leader standards, if standards exist. In provinces where there is no official standard, performance models reflect competencies that align with standards elsewhere. Overall, however, if teaching and school leadership standards are articulated, system leadership standards also appear in either a policy or framework. In this final section we point out some of the ways system leadership is situated.

Standards for System Leadership Practice in Canada

The Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA), a national organization of school system leaders, emphasizes the importance of system leadership for student excellence. While this body provides a unifying message, it supports system leader learning and development without any reference to standards. As with teachers and school-based leaders, therefore, the state of standards for school system leaders varies across the country.

In British Columbia, the British Columbia School Superintendent Association (BCSSA) outlines seven *Dimensions of Practice* (2014) that align with the British Columbia Principals and

Vice-Principals Association (BCPVPA) school leader *Dimensions of Practice*. Seven dimensions and 21 descriptors outline the competencies of effective system leaders, which apply to superintendents, assistant superintendents, and directors of instruction or those in similar roles.

The seven dimensions include:

- Leadership & District Culture
- Policy & Governance
- Communications & Community Relations
- Organizational Leadership
- Leading Learning
- Human Resources Development & Management
- Accountability

The *Dimensions of Practice* are described as a framework to support system leaders' continuous learning, and like the framework for principals and vice-principals, is not intended to be descriptive. We explored BC school board policies to discern whether there is a relationship between the *Dimensions of Practice* and board policies. Superintendent evaluation is locally defined, and therefore varies. The *Superintendent Performance Assessment Guide* appended to the policy handbook for Vancouver School Board (2018), for example, has indicators that reflect the sentiment of the *Dimensions of Practice*, but the dimensions are not specifically referenced.

In Ontario, district leadership is provided by supervisory officers whose role is set within a regulatory framework that incorporates leadership standards into a qualification program. The *Ontario Leadership Framework* (2013) outlines a comprehensive *District Effectiveness Framework* that provides senior district leaders with “what should be the immediate goals for their work, with student achievement and well-being as the schools and classrooms to do their school improvement work effectively” (Ontario Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, pp. 16 – 17). The five core competencies that constitute the School-Level Leadership framework are

briefly referenced at the system level; however, the System-Level Leadership framework is based on characteristics deemed to reflect strong districts:

- A broadly shared mission, vision and goals founded on aspirational images of the educated person
- A coherent instructional guidance system
- Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions
- Learning-oriented organizational improvement processes
- Job-embedded professional learning for all members of the organization
- Budgets, structures, time and personnel policies/procedures aligned with the district's mission, vision and goals
- A comprehensive approach to leadership development
- A policy-oriented board of trustees
- Productive working relationships with staff and stakeholders (pp. 16 – 17.)

Mirroring the framework for principals and vice-principals there is an accompanying Catholic System-Level Leadership framework. These three frameworks form the basis of the Supervisory Officer's Qualification Program (2017), whose guidelines are developed by Ontario Teachers' College. This program is completed by those seeking a supervisory office if they have a master's degree, five years of teaching experience, and have obtained the principals' qualification or have at least two years of administrative experience in education (Ontario Teachers' College, 2019).

The importance of system leadership for district effectiveness is recognized even if standards do not exist. In such cases, the developmental intentions of standards or competencies may be evident in evaluation processes although it is clear that the aim of continual professional learning is markedly different than the aim of evaluation. Manitoba, for instance, uses a framework by McGettrick (2004) to capture three broad elements, including vision and values, governance and policies, and professional practices and board operations (Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). *A Framework for Superintendent and Board Evaluation*

(MASS, 2008) is decidedly regulatory in that its focus is on the managerial elements, and school boards are evaluated according to the same criteria. The framework seeks evidence that superintendents and boards are performing according to descriptive indicators in the three broad categories. As in British Columbia, this framework is locally interpreted. For example, Hanover School Division policy describes duties and responsibilities for the Chief Executive Officer and Superintendent of Schools correspond to a long list of competencies: establishing and maintaining a focus on creating and maintaining a learning environment that enriches the lives of every student; promoting the safety, welfare, learning and inclusion of all students and staff within the diverse and multicultural context of a public education system and its communities; leading the development, monitoring, assessment, and revision of a framework for teaching and learning that meets the needs of all students and staff within the division; ensuring that the division operates in a fiscally responsible manner; dealing with personnel-related issues including the selection, promotion, tenure and termination of senior administrative personnel, professional education staff, paraprofessionals, and support staff; and interpreting Board policy to the staff of the school division and to members of the community.

As a final Canadian example, directors of education and superintendents of Saskatchewan school authorities are members of the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents of Saskatchewan (LEADS). LEADS became a statutory body in 1991 (LEADS Act, 1991), and expectations for system leaders are outlined in its accreditation policy (LEADS, 2010). These are articulated as “core leadership commitments: leader of leaders, servant of leaders, professional advocate, and steward of high quality education” (p. 3). Further, LEADS members are expected to “embrace and strive to understand and practice the six fundamental

commitments” (p. 3), which are stated as emerging from a research paper about leadership. The fundamental commitments include

- Personal conscience
- Professional convictions
- Professional constraints
- Common ethical principles
- Moral imagination
- Relational reciprocity. (p. 3)

While the language of standards is not invoked, there is clearly an expectation that system leaders engage in continuous professional learning, and that they must “[place] the needs of the student above all other considerations” (p. 4). While there are specific procedures for evaluation of the directors of education by the school board, evaluation procedures were the discretion of the board, and we found no direct reference to these professional commitments in the evaluation procedures.

Standards for System Leadership Practice in the United States

American superintendents are guided by an over-arching national governing body, the American Association of School System Administrators (AASA). On its website AASA lists eight key competencies that characterize effective system leadership. These competencies focus on transformation, school board relations, equity, navigating politics, budgeting, instructional leadership, communication, and serving the community (2019). Various states appear to take up these competencies in various ways with different paths to achievement. System leaders must be licensed through an accredited program.

Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2019) requires superintendents to achieve four accreditation requirements in one of two ways: (1) through completion of a preparation program at one of 135 certified institutions, or (2) through an accredited private agency, after which they

must pass an exam, presumably based on the eight competencies, to assess system level leadership readiness. Rhode Island (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018) has customized the AASA standards in order to reflect a nine-competency list that integrates school and system leadership indicators of effectiveness in order to allow principals to transition into system leadership roles. California, in 2014, created the California *Professional Standards for Education Leaders* (CPSEL) that is a comprehensive standards-based document to “serve as broadly supported leadership criteria that are critical components of a coherent system of leadership development and support that ensures excellent education leaders throughout California” (p. 3). Accordingly, the six standards for school superintendents reflect a close alignment with those for the school principal, namely to:

- Develop and implement a shared vision
- Provide instructional leadership
- Manage the learning environment
- Engage family and community
- Act with ethics and integrity
- Understanding the external context and policies (p. 3-11)

Washington State identifies six-nearly identical standards of effectiveness that are described through ‘strands’ in a multi-layered document for system leader evaluation (State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board, 2019).

Leadership standards or competencies for system leaders generally align with those expected of school leaders. And as is the case for school leaders, standards are articulated at the state level.

Select International Standards for School Leadership Practice

Given that system level leadership differs in scope and expectation depending on international contexts, there is interesting variability among the countries we examined. The

application of standards for system leaders in some cases falls outside a strict educational scope, which reflects differences in the labor/contract context for superintendents.

For example, Australia takes a unique approach to superintendent standards. The *New South Wales Public Sector Capability Framework* outlines five overarching skill sets that guide the work of all public employees, including those at the level of superintendent (or ‘Director’). Categorized as personal attributes, relationships, people management, results, and business enablers, each skill set is further comprised of four subsets that, taken together, form the basis for a generic profile of the system leader in a larger environment of other public employees (New South Wales Government, 2019).

Our Pan-Pacific scan was mostly unsuccessful in locating informative publicly-articulated standards or frameworks of system leadership effectiveness. Of note in many of these former British colonies or Commonwealth countries, however, is that reference to the role of *superintendent* usually assumes those tasks associated with military responsibilities and system leadership positions in education are often made by appointment of the state or national government.

In many European countries, education is centralized, controlled through a Ministry of Education, and operated under the auspices of provincial or municipal government structures. In some countries such as Denmark, the organizational equivalent of the school authority is the *municipality*. In terms of system leadership, then, administration is undertaken by a board or political committee with responsibility for the whole municipality i.e. the school district. There is wide variation in the title of these positions, and little information about a standards-based approach to leadership effectiveness available on ministry websites.

In a notable exception, Education Scotland (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2019) explicitly defines the superintendent's role is to "provide the administrative leadership to all school personnel in carrying out the goals and objectives of the local school system". The functions are described in a four-pronged set of responsibilities that include:

- **Developing Plans** - The superintendent conceptualizes the broad goals of the school systems, translates goals into plans, plans an organization structure capable of accomplishing the goals, assesses the degree to which policies and practices are attained and plans responses to assessed needs.
- **Developing and Maintaining the Educational Program** - The superintendent assures that the system's goals are represented by the educational goals in a manner consistent with legal, fiscal, organizational and community demands. This responsibility involves organizing and implementing an appropriate instructional program, evaluating the program, communicating support system needs to the board; maintaining appropriate working relationships with the board, staff, and community; and complying with the various demands placed on the school system.
- **Establishing and Maintaining the Program Infrastructure** - The superintendent assures that the system's goals are represented by infrastructure objectives pertaining to facilities, personnel, support services, and information management. The superintendent assures that board goals are translated into plans for the infrastructure, that plans are implemented and information is collected, maintained and communicated in an effective manner.
- **Developing and Maintaining Administrative Procedures** - The superintendent creates the administrative procedures necessary for implementing personnel and fiscal policies consistent with: system policies; assessed needs; and applicable laws, rules and

regulations. Once developed, the superintendent assures that administrative procedures are implemented appropriately.

Locating information about standards for school system leaders was admittedly a challenge.

There is, however, research on the role of system leaders in both supporting school-based leaders as instructional leaders, and the impact that system leaders have on student achievement has been developing over the last decade (e.g. Hutchinson, 2017). Honig's work in the United States has been particularly influential in this regard (e.g. Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2015; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lortin, & Newton, 2010). Canadian researchers, too, have paid more attention to system level leadership (e.g. Leithwood & Azah, 2016). Most recently, Handford and Leithwood (2019) completed a mixed methods study in British Columbia that concluded school district leadership and characteristics made a difference to math and language achievement. Our study will therefore advance the conversation about how standards for system leaders impact upon excellence in teaching and school leadership, and whether and/or how this makes a positive difference to students.

Thus, based on our review of standards for teachers and leaders, it is clear that forward thinking and high performing systems are using standards and other educational policies to improve student achievement. As Darling-Hammond (2012) warns about teaching standards, however, rigorous standards that are weakly applied will not have the intended effect. A central factor in implementing standards is whether professional learning opportunities and supports are readily available for educators to develop and grow. This is the primary concern of the next section.

Chapter Five

SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDS

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Supporting the Implementation of Standards

There are various ways standards-based policies can improve an educational system. Standards can serve as benchmarks for performance, to judge whether teachers and leaders meet mandated requirements, to certify and/or license teachers and school leaders, and to accredit institutions who provide teacher and leadership preparation programs. The OECD (2013) report, *Learning Standards, Teaching Standards, and Standards for School Principals: A Comparative Study*, emphasizes, however, that standards-based policies cannot in isolation lead to improvement of teaching, leadership, or student outcomes. Further,

standards-based policies...require that adequate resources are allocated in order to achieve them and, in so doing, improve the learning opportunities offered to students, including through capacity building activities aimed at teachers and other actors whose performance have an impact on student learning. (p. 6)

This section of our report sought insights into two questions: (a)What is required for successful implementation of standards for teachers and leaders? (b)What conclusions can be drawn from the research about building capacity vis-à-vis standards?

Review Methods

Several search terms were employed to locate academic, professional, and grey literature related to implementation of standards for teachers and leaders. Search terms such as “implementation + teaching standards”, “teacher preparation + standards”, “principal standards + implementation”, “superintendent standards + implementation”, “school leadership preparation”, “principal preparation”, “principal preparation programs”, “superintendent preparation”, “superintendent preparation programs”, and “educational leadership development” were initially used in Google Scholar to identify key writers and venues. Additionally, we searched for

published literature reviews on educational leadership preparation. Crow and Whiteman's (2016) review of literature on effective preparation of school leaders, for example, was identified as valuable for mining the bibliography. Based on our initial search we generated a list of 12 peer reviewed and three professional journals that published research on these topics. Further, we consulted the *Handbook of Research in the Education of School Leaders* (Young & Crow, 2016) and *The Wiley Handbook of Educational Policy* (Papa & Armfield, 2018). Finally, we searched professional organizations' websites, such as the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Council of Ministers of Education. With the exception of research regarding Ontario's Leadership Framework (e.g. Winton & Pollock, 2013; Riveros, Verret, & Wei, 2016), American scholarship dominates this topic. This suggests that our study will contribute to knowledge about the implementation of standards and leadership development in a standards-based reform context that is not driven by national expectations.

The Implementation of Teaching Standards

As Finland has demonstrated, teaching standards are not a sine qua non for ensuring excellence in teaching (OECD, 2013) or excellence across an educational system. Nonetheless, for many OECD countries, teaching standards are used to certify teachers at the beginning of their careers, to accredit institutions who provide teacher education and training, and to assess teachers' performance. Based on OECD's review of various member countries, most countries reviewed implemented standards in a high-stakes manner; the consequence for not meeting the standard is the inability to practice. Some countries and American states require teachers to take exams (e.g. Chile, England, California, Texas), and others use a variety of instruments to gather evidence of teaching excellence (e.g. Mexico, New Zealand). The OECD report cites Invargson's (2009) work to emphasize that what is critical for assuring teaching quality is that standards be

complemented by accredited teacher preparation programs based on standards, rigorous admission to teacher preparation programs, and consequences when standards are not met. In their review of Alberta's *Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy*, Brandon et al. (2018) concluded in their literature review that high-stakes tests and incentives such as merit pay may disenfranchise teachers from their professional development, and therefore are not necessarily ideal for all educational systems enforcing teaching standards. Teaching standards can be effective when they are meaningful for teachers within their teaching assignments and contexts, are incorporated into their professional growth planning, and guide professional conversations among teachers and school leaders.

A study of implementation of teaching standards in Australia between 2013 and 2016 emphasizes the above points. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2016) reported that since standards for teachers have been implemented, teachers get more feedback and appraisal about their practice. It also found, however, that teachers did not perceive the standard to be useful. Teachers in rural Australia, for instance, considered some standards not useful, and teachers in other contexts reported that developing the skills to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as the standards dictate would be difficult because their schools did not have many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island students. This speaks to the importance of standards that reflect professional requirements in a way that allows for local interpretation.

Although it was too early in the implementation of Australia's teaching standard to measure the impact it had on student learning, there were positive impacts on teachers, including enhanced professionalism and collaboration, the creation of a shared language for teaching, and enhanced emphasis on professional growth rather than compliance. The report also emphasized

that in the early stages of implementation much of the discussion was about creating awareness of the elements of the standard, but over time the discussion changed to deeper questions of implementation. Considering new elements of Alberta's TQS to be introduced this fall, perhaps a similar implementation pattern can be expected. In Australia, approximately three years were required to move teachers from an awareness and knowledge stage, to one in which they understood standards as something useful to improve their practice. Critical to this evolution was that teachers had a positive attitude about the standards. When teachers see standards as informing their practice, they were more likely to have a positive attitude. But teachers developed negative attitudes when they perceived the standards as a compliance and surveillance mechanism, or if standards resulted in heavier workloads.

The Australian study is instrumental for understanding factors that might improve the implementation of teaching standards. These include (a) leadership that inspires teachers about the standards and establishes a clear pathway for implementation; (b) investment in implementation through such avenues as resources, financial support, or mentoring programs; (c) high teacher engagement; (d) coordinated and consistent communication about the standards from all levels of leadership so that shared vision and understanding emerges; and (e) alignment of standards with existing practices early in the process to deflect and manage change resistance and reaction.

The Implementation of Leader Standards

Our review focused primarily on school-based leaders because research attention here has been considerable compared to system leaders, who have been virtually ignored. Although we know that system leaders are subject to standards in jurisdictions across Canada and internationally, research on implementation and impact for this group is wanting, except for

some research on superintendent preparation. We are not surprised that school-system leaders are understudied given that principals have been identified as the second most important factor next to classroom teaching to impact student outcomes. While this is a limitation in our synthesis, it is at the same time an argument for conducting this study. We have an opportunity to provide insights into the implementation of standards for leaders at the system level.

In the often cited 2007 McKinsey Report (as cited in OECD, 2013), *How the World Best-Performing Systems Come Out on Top*, the authors claim that establishing standards for principals is a key policy strategy for improving student learning outcomes. The OECD Report cited above characterizes principal standards as the “most relevant” (2013, p. 48) for improving schools. As with teachers, standards for principals and other school-based leaders can serve various purposes, are enforced in different ways, and have different impact. In Texas as noted in the above, meeting the standards is a precondition for eligibility for a principalship. On the other hand, in Chile, standards are a guide, but are inconsequential to one’s career as a school leader (OECD). Across Canada, school and system leaders may require certification through accredited programs and/or post-secondary institutions (e.g. Ontario, New Brunswick), or professional development through a professional organization (e.g. Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia). As we demonstrated in the previous section, however, many provinces and territories claim the standards are not to be used in a prescriptive manner. This does not reflect an international trend that OECD has identified; namely, that more jurisdictions are moving toward increased regulation in the implementation of standards. Indeed, reporting on licensing requirements among all 50 American states, Adams and Copland (2007) long ago suggested American school leaders were caught in a “performance imperative” (p. 154). The trend reflects a growing concern with global positioning and a perceived need for leverage in a competitive educational

environment, a consequence of public assurance mechanisms such as PISA and school choice.

But Adams and Copland's study (2007) was also cautionary and is worth considering today. For instance, they describe the growth of a "super principal" as a "troubling side effect" (p. 155) of performance expectations. For example, licensing requirements for principals based on the former Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) includes 196 expectations, and these are adopted and/or adapted at the state level. They found that regulatory expectations ranged from one requirement in Hawaii to 435 in Arkansas. The median was 18. Their point is that while regulation can be effective, one must question at what number of expectations in the form of competencies, indicators, or specific skills or behaviours will a system face diminishing returns? And more importantly, what can we realistically expect principals – or teachers and system leaders for that matter—to achieve without compromising their personal and professional well-being? Interestingly, Lambert and Bouchamma's (2019) comparison of leadership standards in Alberta, Quebec, Australia, and the United States pointed out that Alberta's former leadership framework was the only one among the four jurisdictions studied that did not include a standard for principals regarding maintaining a balanced personal and professional life, and ensuring this among their staff. While there is no intention for Alberta's professional practice standards to serve as a checklist, audit and accountability characterize educational systems today, and it will be an aim of our study to discern whether and to what extent the standards are interpreted within such a zeitgeist.

One final note from Adams and Copland's (2007) study that is useful for providing a balanced perspective in this synthesis is that while standards can be useful for licensing and assessing a leader's managerial competency, leadership is not a technical performance. Citing Hart & Bredeson (1996) they write: "Leadership...is a social process...it's authority must be

socially and morally earned. . . .no one licenses “leadership”” (p. 157). While managerial functions cannot be isolated from educational leadership, our study will give us insight into how Alberta educators position themselves and approach their practice with respect to management, administration, and leadership.

As Adams and Copland (2007) noted, “while [jurisdictions] may anchor leadership development in licensing, the emergence of real capacity requires additional investments and a conscious, purposeful plan” (p. 158). Indeed, there has been considerable research about leadership development, especially with respect to principals’ preparation. Given that this is a critical aspect of implementation of standards-based policies, we provide an overview of the research on leadership development programs for school and system leaders in the next sections.

Research on Effective Leadership Development for Principals

Principal effectiveness is mediated by many variables, so drawing a direct link between school leadership and student learning is a precarious enterprise. What we do know, however, is that leaders impact upon student achievement by the work they do with their teachers. Building trust among teachers, for example, motivates teachers to improve their teaching practice (May, Huff, & Goldring, 2012). Overall, the literature suggests key activities in which principals engage that influences student achievement include:

- framing and sustaining a vision for school improvement;
- analyzing student data;
- supporting teachers’ growth and professional learning;
- establishing organizational structures that enable teacher leadership and collaboration;
- cultivating a culture of high expectations; and,
- investing in hiring and retaining qualified teachers.

These factors shape conditions for teachers to excel, so that students can excel (May, Huff, & Goldring). These factors are reflected in the standards that we reviewed. The concern then, is how can principals be supported to develop capacity in these areas?

In the past eight years two prominent journals in the area of educational leadership have published special issues on leadership preparation, which is testimony to the rising importance of this as a research topic in its own right. These include the 2011 special issue in *Educational Administration Quarterly*, and the 2016 and 2019 special issues in the *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*. Both of these journals are sponsored by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), a “consortium of higher education institutions committed to advancing the preparation and practice of educational leaders for the benefit of schools and children” (n.d. para. 1) since 1954. UCEA has been extensively involved in evaluating and acknowledging excellent leadership programs, and it is no wonder that it has been a key player in advancing scholarship on the topic. There is convergence in the literature that effective principals emerge from effective leadership development programs, and so much research has been concerned with examining the effectiveness of principal preparation programs.

LaPointe, Darling-Hammond, and Meyerson (2007) distinguish between pre-service and in-service leadership development programs. In the American context from which they write, pre-service programs are provided by universities, and in-service programs are provided by school districts. This seems to align with Alberta practice as many school authorities have developed leadership pathways to support the development of aspiring and practicing school leaders, using the previous leadership framework or other organizing concepts. LaPointe et al. suggest a continuum of practices can be beneficial. There are many providers of leadership programs in the American context, and in some provincial cases in Canada, too. In Ontario, for

example, providers of the Principals' Qualification Program include universities, Ontario Principals' Council, Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, and a teachers' union (Winton & Pollock, 2013). In their literature review about effective programs, Crow and Whiteman (2016) claimed that university-sponsored programs have been the focus of research despite the existence of other providers. Our review focused here for this reason.

Important Features of Effective School Leadership Development Programs

There is a relationship between how leaders are prepared and how they lead (Orr, 2011). Because our study is concerned with implementation of professional practice standards, we were most interested in the research findings espousing the important features of leadership development programs. Leadership development is the conduit for supporting school leaders in achieving professional standards. There are a number of important features of effective leadership programs: research-based standards, curriculum coherence, field-based internships, problem-based learning, cohort structure, mentoring coaching, and university-school district partnerships (LaPointe et al., 2007; Orr, 2011; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Perez, Uline, Johnson, & James-Ward, 2011). We discuss these, along with examples of exemplary practice and programs.

Standards grounded in empirical research. Standards are what Smylie (2010) calls an improvement technology, part of the infrastructure of supporting school leaders in continuous learning. Leadership standards are powerful tools for setting expectations for leadership practice, reflecting on one's practice, and targeting professional growth (Cosner, 2019; Forde, McMahon, Hamilton, & Murray, 2016). Effective leadership development programs are framed by professional standards that are grounded in empirical research (LaPointe et al., 2007). In our review of standards across various jurisdictions, we noted consistent reference to research claims regarding the role of school principals in impacting student achievement outcomes.

Instructional leadership is the primary focus of leadership standards for principals. Filippi & Hackmann (2019) suggest there are five dimensions of instructional leadership, or what they call leadership for learning, and these provide the rationale for principals to integrate current research as a way of developing excellence and meeting leadership standards. One dimension they mention is that whatever principals do should be focused on student learning. The standards we found are geared towards that goal. This means that principals must situate themselves at the site of learning, and understand from research what promotes student learning.

A second dimension related to standards has to do with theory. In citing research on effective leadership development, Orr (2011) and Orr and Orphanos (2011) state that a well-defined theory for school improvement is necessary to frame a leadership program. This is important so that leaders' practice is based on principles that are empirical, rather than ideological, or based on belief, personal preference, experience, and prescription (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). The challenge, of course, is that educational leadership is not understood through one grand theory, and so principals must become adept at synthesizing a large body of theory to understand what will work in their context (Roegman & Woulfin, 2019). A set of standards that corresponds to research findings about excellent teaching, nonetheless, is an important foundation for principal development.

Curriculum coherence. Effective leadership preparation and practice depends on a coherent relationship among a leader's professional learning goals (as related to standards), learning activities in the program, and how the learning is assessed. Recent research on programs designated as "exemplary" in the United States, a designation given under the UCEA's Educational Leadership Preparation Program (ELPP) suggest effective leadership development programs have an impact logic—a focus on ensuring that leadership development leads to

positive changes in leadership practice—rather than a response logic, which results in programs that are simply a response to an external accountability expectation (Cosner, 2019).

In a review of 60 studies on leadership practices, Gonzalez, Glasman, & Glasman (2002) found that principals' impact on student achievement was connected to the work they did around culture, organizational management and collaboration. These are elements in standards that we reviewed in various jurisdictions, and this speaks to the importance of establishing a curriculum connection to what is known empirically about how principals can make a difference to student achievement. It is also important that curriculum evolve. Knowledge and skills in education are constantly developing, and principals are expected to engage in continuous learning for this very reason (Hackmann, 2016).

A key question for leadership program developers—whether at a district or university level—is should the program hinge on a set of courses or topics, or a set of skills and knowledge? A report by the Wallace Foundation (2016) found a mismatch between topics taught in leadership development programs, and the job that principals have to do, thus recommending that curriculum develop to align with practice. When the University of Denver was revising its leadership development program, one that has been acknowledged by UCEA as an exemplary program, it did not start out with a list of courses. Rather, curriculum development launched from a vision of the type of leader that was needed for schools and that they wanted to graduate from their program. Based on this, school contexts were explored, common descriptions of graduates were drawn up, and the Colorado Principal Standards, the then ISLLC standards, and district needs were the guide to creating curriculum (Korach et al., 2019). Thus, standards have a central role in the development of coherent curriculum in leadership development programs. Following from this, participants and programs themselves are effective when they focus in

terms of how well participants achieve the competencies rather than simply considering a principal “prepared” because they have completed courses (Wallace Foundation, 2016).

Field-based internships. Practice is the work of practitioners, and it is how leadership is enacted. Use of internships has broad support in the research (Christian, 2011; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Duncan, Range, & Scherz, 2011), and is most effective when principal candidates are paired with experienced mentors – practicing principals and/or faculty mentor when possible. Orr also suggests that internships are the single most important determinant for whether aspirants actually pursue a principal position.

Internships can be effective as they provide opportunity for enhanced problem-solving, application of knowledge, and reflection. There is a social benefit as well, including reducing principals’ sense of isolation, and increasing their confidence (Crow & Whiteman, 2016). Importantly field work must align with the standards, and if done well, field-based inquiry and practice can help leaders understand more fully the complexity of the role (Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2011). In a study exploring whether internships had an impact on acquisition of skills related to leadership standards, Ringer, Rouse, and St. Clair (2012) used program student assessments and surveys of supervising principals and university faculty to find that instructional leadership and managerial leadership were most often enacted during internships. This highlights the importance of internships. Further, whereas in-class preparation offers participants a chance to engage in productive inquiry and authentic inquiry, field-based inquiry supports teachers’ transition to leadership. Specifically, through field-based internship, uncertainty is reduced, and teachers become more confident and goal-oriented (Perez et al., 2011).

Another benefit of field-based internships is that it supports participants' understanding of the link between theory and practice. As Roegman and Woulfin (2019) report, students tend to be critical when a leadership program focuses on theoretical ideas that are seemingly disconnected from "real-time challenges" (p. 5). Intensive field-based internships create a bridge between theory and practice. It is thus critically important that what principal candidates do during an internship is mapped to leadership standards (LaPointe et al. 2007).

Most of the American principal preparation programs that are deemed effective include paid internships for a prolonged period. Delta State University's program is state-funded, allowing participants to spend a full year's worth of time at an elementary, junior, and senior high school, and two weeks at central office. Candidates have opportunities to observe teacher evaluation processes, conferences with teachers, and other events or tasks involving instructional leadership. Similarly, the University of San Diego received money from a foundation grant to pair interns with administrators. The grant was used to release principal candidates from teaching. Without funding, LaPointe et al. (2007) reported that some programs create internships for those who are in an assistant principalship, or use teachers' vacation time over a two-year time span. Paid internships, however, seems to be the hallmark of principal development programs that are deemed exemplary.

Problem-based learning. Byrne-Jimenez, Gooden, and Tucker (2017) advocate for leadership development programs for principals that incorporate active pedagogies such as problem-based learning, simulations, and case-based learning. Problem-based learning affords participants an opportunity to identify problems from within their job context, thus designing their learning around an exploration of the problem (Taylor, Cordeiro, & Chrispells, 2009). Case-based learning and simulations similarly draw upon principals' real-world contexts by

either replicating or creating work-related situations around which learning occurs (Cosner, De Voto, & Rah'man, 2018).

Such approaches align with the philosophical foundations of adult learning (e.g. Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Mezirow, 1997). Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, for example, suggests that experience is an important platform upon which adults' learning takes place. Situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is relevant here, too, as it emphasizes that learning is a social event, and heeds the social and environmental conditions that shape learning situations. Considering this, it makes sense that the most effective leadership development programs are developed around problem-oriented courses, rather than subject-centered courses. Starting with issues and developing content around that heeds adult learning theory in terms of linking to learners' existing knowledge, scaffolding new knowledge onto existing knowledge, providing opportunities to reply and continually reflect (LaPointe et al., 2007).

Learning in cohorts. Principals' leadership development happens best in cohorts (Crow & Whiteman, 2016; LaPointe et al., 2007). Teamwork and collaboration are modelled in cohorts, and learners develop a supportive social and professional network. Huang et al. (2012) found that cohorts strengthen professional skills, increase participants' sense of readiness to take on leadership roles, and increase the likelihood of program completion.

The relational approach to leadership development also supports reciprocal learning; everyone is a learner, including faculty. In the University of Denver's acclaimed program, all cohorts are led by a faculty member and an instructor. Each cohort is composed of eight students, so that access to and interaction with the faculty member leading the cohort is easy (Korach et al., 2019).

Mentoring and coaching. Mentoring and coaching are important features of effective leadership development because mentors and coaches model effective questioning about practice, and they provide supervision and feedback necessary to promote professional growth. Mentors and coaches are critical to successful internships; careful pairing of mentors that include faculty as well as school-based and district-leaders is essential for reinforcing research-informed, critical reflection on leadership practice. Clayton, Sanzo, and Myran (2013) also found that mentoring is more effective if the mentor and protégé are focused on a project, as this provides a focus for discussion, reflection, and planning of supports. Fusarelli, Fusarelli, and Drake (2019), reporting on North Carolina State University’s UCEA recognized exemplary stated, “If the preparation of school leaders is to be a transformative experience, it must be grounded in a set of contemplative, rigorous, interactive experiences that enhance personal growth and development” (p. 12).

Throughout the one-year certificate program for principals at the University of Denver, students are mentored. The mentorship team is composed of a faculty member, the cohort instructor, and a mentor principal. The benefit, as reported by Korach et al. (2019) is that “students leave the program with a network of cohort members, faculty, mentor principals, and program alumni who serve as critical friends and supports as they navigate their roles as leaders” (p. 40). Mentorship and coaching, then, transcend the program itself because of the relationships that have been developed not only through the mentorship partnering, but through the cohort model as well.

University-school district partnerships. Korach et al. (2019) argue that conventional university programs do not have the same level of impact on the advancement of educational leaders as those programs that are co-created between universities and school districts.

Partnerships are more effective for a variety of reasons. First there is better bridging of theory and practice, and students have more opportunities to work on context-specific problems. Second, “co-construction allows districts to share current practice and build contextual understanding while university faculty ensure theoretical and conceptual anchors and promote critical thinking” (p. 32). Third, according to the Wallace Foundation (2016) strong university-district partnerships ensure that quality field experiences are embedded into the leadership program, ensuring that the program is not limited to courses, and reflects the reality of the job. For example, the University of Denver’s program is considered exemplary because it works “across institutional boundaries [such as] universities, districts, and states” (Korach et al. 2019, p. 31). All courses in Denver’s program are codesigned and co-led by a team that has at least a school or district leader and a faculty member.

In addition to the above factors, there are other features that contribute to the effectiveness of leadership development. With respect to university partnerships, it matters that the right faculty are engaged with leadership preparation programs. Cosner (2019) describes the value of faculty collaboration, but acknowledges that standards for tenure and promotion devalue collective work such as program development for school leaders compared to research and publishing. Furthermore, she argues that faculty require a durable funding source to support collaboration. Crow and Whiteman (2016) also found that faculty professional development is a significant gap in the development of leadership development. Given that schools and reform trends change at a rapid rate, professional development for faculty seems critical, yet it tends to be overlooked. Another feature that seems common among what are deemed exemplary principal preparation programs is that school leadership candidates are recruited to participate,

they do not self-select to enter a leadership program (Lapointe et al., 2007; The Wallace Foundation, 2016).

On an interesting final note, some of the above findings correspond with what is noted in the business literature. For example, in an article in the *McKinsey Quarterly* (2014), Gurdjian, Halbeisen, and Lane (2014) listed four reasons why leadership development programs fail in the corporate sector. First, programs overlook context and assume that a leader who is successful in one context can be successful in others. This point suggests that those jurisdictions whose leadership development considers the needs of rural or Catholic leaders, as in the case of the University of Denver's (Korach et al., 2019) and Ontario's leadership development, respectively, are on the right track. A second reason why leadership development programs fails is that the leadership training is decoupled from the leadership job itself. Internships, job-embedded inquiry, and action research are ways that educational leadership programs have created relevance and continuity between learning and practice. A third reason why leadership programs fail according to Gurdjian et al. (2014), is that they focus on trying to change behaviour without addressing mindsets. Leaders should feel 'stretched' and uncomfortable when learning, as learning requires accessing and examining one's assumptions and beliefs, and understanding how assumptions drive practice. Reflection then, is a key component for effective leadership development. And finally, leadership programs fail because results are not measured. In the education arena, improved student learning is the end goal, and so it matters not simply that principals participate in leadership development through formal education or professional development, but school systems must attend to whether and/or how leadership development influences excellence in teaching, and ultimately, excellence in student learning. Our study is specifically designed to gain insights into this.

An Exemplar: North Carolina State Principal Preparation Program

Much of the research cited in the above section emerges from a growing interest in the United States about what makes an exemplary program. “Exemplary” is a formal designation that UCEA has coined through its Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation Program Award. Programs such as those offered by the University of Denver and Washington State University have been mentioned, and in this final section we highlight North Carolina State’s Principal Preparation Program. On its website it claims that of 774 principal preparation programs in the United States, only five earn the distinction of exemplary by UCEA (North Carolina State University (n.d.). We highlight this program because it is reported that over 80% of first year principals who completed the program exceed growth in high needs schools. This compares to 75% of experienced principals. NELA, for example, is one cohort of the program that targets principal preparation for rural, high needs, hard-to-staff schools.

At the end of the two-year program, participants receive a principal license and a Masters in School Administration. Following graduation, principals must commit to serving for three years in a high-needs school. There is a financial incentive for this. Graduates sign a promissory note for the amount of the principal development fellowship, and a third is forgiven at the end of each year that they serve.

A key reason for NC’s success is its rigorous selection process. Candidates undergo a one-on-one chat with a high school student in the form of a role play. They also must draft a letter to parents in response to a crisis that has been manufactured for them. After watching teaching videos, candidates have a discussion with teachers, which is an assessment of their ability to communicate constructive feedback. They additionally are asked to respond to question

prompts in a video booth, and then are individually interviewed by separate members of the admissions committee. Finally, candidates complete the GRIT scale (Duckworth, 2016).

NC students are supported by principal mentors in schools where they complete a residency at a school. Residency may involve attending class a couple of days a week as well. Principal mentors are assigned to each resident, and are paid a stipend of \$500 per semester. Students also have the support of an executive coach, who has a non-supervisory role and serves as an external support during residency. The executive coach could be a retired educational leader with a proven track record. During the program students are focused on a Personal Leadership Development Plan that connects to the leadership standard, and they complete weekly and monthly logs, and collect evidence for each standard in an electronic portfolio. NC employs a cohort model, with fewer than 20 students. NC is regarded as a comprehensive program and leadership succession plan that is founded on research, and attentive to specific contextual conditions. This latter feature is perhaps why it is considered innovative, and therefore highly regarded. It is clear that NC's Principal Preparation Program has the features of successful leadership preparation programs that we have outlined above.

Research on Effective Leadership Development for System Leaders

There is considerably less documentation of how standards for system leaders are used, or what are their effects on student outcomes. Our review included literature on superintendent training programs, as well as evaluations of superintendents, in connection with the implementation of standards. Much of what we found regarding principal preparation and what constitutes effective superintendent preparation aligns.

Important Features of Effective System Leadership Development Programs

Five critical features of effective superintendent preparation programs are evident in the literature, and they have implications for creating and evaluating programs to prepare system leaders. The first noted feature has to do with congruence between program content and what superintendents actually do, as is the case for principals. Dufour (2016), for example, gathered perceptions from participants of preparation programs in New York State and found that superintendents perceived their programs to be misaligned with practical problems, and did not reflect the depth and complexity of superintendents' decision-making. Superintendents felt the programs lacked in quality, rigour and relevance to their particular contexts.

A second related important feature of system leader development programs is the need for a balanced combination of both theory and practical application as noted by Tripses, Hunt and Watkins (2013), and Denecker (2016). This may include problem-based explorations, simulations, and case analysis (Dufour, 2016). In Pennsylvania, Fowler and Cowden (2015) reported how a cohort program turned their courses into practicums. The course design was rooted in the former Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards in order to best prepare those seeking to write the superintendent's exam for licencing. The program used mentors and university faculty, and had a heavy emphasis on practical application. This approach has been shown to give participants not only theory grounded in research, but insight into and understanding of how theory relates to practice. Rigorous and relevant practical internships and mentorships (Dufour, 2016; Johnson, 2016) are considered essential in order for system leaders to keep abreast of rapid changes and challenges within their school districts (Tripses, Hunt & Watkins, 2013).

A third aspect critical for program effectiveness is flexibility and creativity in delivery. In Kansas, Augustine-Shaw (2013) reported on the state's Educational Leadership Institute (KELI), a program created through collaboration with professional leadership organizations with the aim towards a more meaningful licensure process. The program included mentoring for all superintendents, resources to support their work, opportunities to build networks with colleagues, and reflective learning activities. The program was committed to the notion that active engagement in learning through providing learning support and practice with theory within the context of their school districts, and this was positively received by superintendents. Although the program has not undergone formal evaluation, a principal preparation program is being developed to align with the features of the superintendent program.

Fourth, superintendent preparation programs need to be grounded in standards of practice. In the American context, Tripses et al. (2013) report that superintendents deem knowledge and application of standards is critical for superintendent preparation programs. Without a national evaluation system, individual states, districts and professional organizations have created a nested set of standards to direct, support and evaluate district leaders and inform training programs. The drawback is these various standards sometimes only implicitly guide training, and some superintendent preparation programs are simply an extension of principal preparation programs (Johnson, 2016). The programs sometimes meet legal requirements, but do not focus on the moral, ethical or professional expectations for system leaders (Brigham, 2017). Thus, the connection between standards and the content of superintendent preparation programs is not always transparent, and in some cases appear not to be the foundation of superintendents' program experiences.

Lastly, a critical feature of effective leadership preparation programs for system leaders is the opportunity to discuss knowledge with colleagues and hone skills alongside a wide range of colleagues who lead school systems in varying contexts. Learning how to lead diverse groups and to engage people in a collaborative manner when opinions differ is imperative for leadership (Tripses, Hunt, Kim, & Watkins, 2015). This speaks to the values that undergird leadership. Approaching leadership from an asset base was highlighted by Murphy, Louis and Smylie (2017). They refer to the essential need for superintendents to exude integrity and trustworthiness in their personal relationships and interactions. Given the diversity that system leaders face, especially in larger school district, superintendents require highly developed interpersonal skills (Tripses et al., 2015); therefore, while it is important that a leadership program for system leaders support the development of their managerial roles, such as negotiating and understanding contract law (Ellis, 2016), the ability to promote among school leaders and teachers generative conversations and collaboration, and to inspire team leadership throughout a school division ultimately defines effective system leadership(Adams, 2016) and should therefore be the focus of school system's leadership development.

Standards as a Benchmark for Evaluating System Leaders

We considered research that focused on the evaluation of system leaders because Alberta is embarking on uncharted territory in this regard with the SLQS implementation in September 2019. Multiple interacting factors have created uncertainty in the evaluative process of superintendent roles, and is a key concern in the literature. For example, in the United States, a national evaluation system does not exist for system leaders, and so there is unclear or questionable alignment between standards for superintendents and how superintendents are evaluated. To exacerbate the situation, little research in this area is available. For example,

Powers (2017) found there is little new research on evaluating superintendents in New York State. In 71 of this state's school districts, the standards are not explicitly stated in the evaluation procedures, creating a process of evaluation that is not well understood and one that does not clearly depart from agreed-upon standards. In the state of Missouri, the situation is similar and complicated by the huge learning curve required by school board members to understand the content and depth of standards in applying them to superintendent evaluations (Brigham, 2017).

To take a Canadian perspective, Saskatchewan directors of education undergo evaluation by their school boards. And although LEADS has established informal standards for directors and superintendents, and prescribes modules to support their development, nowhere in the evaluation policy are the standards mentioned. It is up to the board to decide on the evaluation processes. Evaluation is one of the key questions that Alberta faces. In the Alberta study of teacher growth, supervision and evaluation, Brandon et al. (2018) asked participants, including teachers, school and system leaders, whether they believed a standard for principals and superintendents was a good idea. While the qualitative data showed a positive response to the idea, one of the uncertainties was around who was best positioned to evaluate superintendents.

Research by Adams (2016), and Leithwood & Azah (2016) suggest that it is the collective leadership of a school system that determines its performance and outcomes. This is also apparent in the Alberta Teachers' Association (2016) report on the role of superintendents. This sentiment is shared internationally as well. Based on research from Kuwait, Aldaihani (2017) argues for partnership synergy, a focus on cooperation and compatibility across multiple layers of administration to ensure quality implementation of standards for school and district leaders. Training programs for superintendents can capitalize on this synergy by promoting coordination of the implementation of standards across levels of leadership. Adams' (2016) work

with school districts is informative here. By including all district staff in professional learning, using an inquiry-based model and generative communication professional learning, systems create a common expectation for how leadership is understood and developed. Also important is that system leaders have a regular and sustained presence in schools so that they have continuous, real-time understanding of school contexts. Alberta is positioned for this kind of synergy because there is closed alignment in the LQS and SLQS competencies.

There is also caution in the literature that professional development programs for system leaders not solely focus on performance standards, but also consider how leaders develop dispositions of leadership over time. Based on a district leadership competency model in Georgia, Welch and Hodge (2018) suggest a core set of dispositions, as well as skills and competencies. Additionally, system leaders, like teachers and principals, need to follow a model of sustained professional learning.

An Exemplar: University of Washington Leadership for Learning L4L Education Doctorate

The University of Washington's Leadership for Learning L4L Education Doctorate is considered an exemplary program, according to UCEA standards. Honig and Walsh's (2019) study about the revisions that the program underwent highlight what system leadership development effectiveness looks like. After 20 years in operation, L4L transformed from a program that was incoherent, to one that was focused around key areas in alignment with the state's leadership standards for superintendents and the former ISLLC standards.

L4L is a three-year program that incorporates class instruction on Fridays and Saturdays for nine months, and a week-long summer residency. It follows a cohort model, with cohorts ranging in size from 25 to 35 students. It is self-sustaining through tuition. Those pursuing and

Ed D have the option to pursue superintendent certification if they complied with the state regulation to complete 360 internship hours with a superintendent.

In its original inception L4L culminated in a capstone project, which was deemed to have no or negligible impact on leadership practice. The program was revised to focus on instructional leadership action that was specific and measurable. For example, an action that students could take would be to lead a conversation about educational equity with stakeholders and colleagues. All courses were developed around a conceptual framework of four strands that aligned with the standards, but standards were not ‘covered’ individually throughout the program; L4L employees an integrated approach. Assignments were “authentic products from their leadership” (p. 62) rather than academic papers or reading reflections. This ensured a theory-to-practice link was established, and that students reflected on how their academic learning could inform their leadership practice. In the first two years, students are also expected to engage in extended projects using what Honig and Walsh (2019) call a cycle-of-inquiry that connects their learning to the job reality. Students annually contributed to a portfolio that contained their active learning, and evidence of achievement in terms of the leadership standards. Course assignments could constitute evidence of achievement, but on-the-job learning and action were also considered.

The success of the program relates to the features of principal programs; programs that connect learning to the actual work of superintendents, encourages application of learning to practice, is supported by mentorship and colleagues in a cohort structure, and is aligned with research-based rigorous standards supports superintendents’ capacity building.

To summarize, though there are distinct roles and responsibilities for school and system leaders, developing leadership capacity is not fundamentally different. Though the literature on system leaders is nascent, strong parallels can be drawn between what we know about

effectiveness in principal preparation and the way system leader capacity can be developed. At the heart of our study is the question of how the LQS and SLQS will be operationalized, how this will impact upon leaders' effectiveness, and how this will translate into improvements at the classroom level. This study holds the potential to fill a noticeable gap in the area of system leadership, and will broaden scholarship on school leadership by including the perspective of a Canadian province.

Chapter Six

WHAT IS QUALITY TEACHING?

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What is Quality Teaching?

The current conception of teaching conveyed in the 2018 revision of the Alberta *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS) is the product of ongoing research, professional dialogue, and stakeholder engagement about teaching that began in the mid-1980s and has continued through ongoing stakeholder involvement and related document development into the present (Alberta Education, 1984, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2006). Over this time, notions of good teaching evolved from a technical-rational list of 44 discreet characteristics of effective teaching into the more coherent context-based, informed professional judgement construct of quality teaching with one *Standard* and two sets of *Descriptors of Knowledge, Skills and Attributes* (Brandon, 2005) and into its present single standard with six competencies form.

Our review of historical and contemporary research on teaching and learning focuses on two guiding questions: What quality teaching practices contribute to optimum student learning? How do those identified in the research compare and contrast with those outlined in the 2018 revision of the Alberta TQS? We start with short clarification of terminology, then progress through the evolution of the study of teaching over the past 50 years. The third subsection moves into more contemporary studies the construct teaching as the design of learning environments. This draft of the review concludes with an exploration of the linkages between the research literature the 2018 TQS.

Teaching Quality, Quality Teaching, and Effective Teaching

As the competency framework that details the expectations for all teachers in Alberta, the revised TQS (Alberta Education, 2018c) is similar to other professional practice standard documents widely used in the English-speaking world. The distinction between *effective teaching* and *effective teachers* is important to keep in mind. *Teacher quality* involves “the

bundle of personal traits, skills, and understandings an individual brings to teaching, including dispositions to behave in certain ways,” whereas, *teaching quality* (effective teaching) focuses on providing instruction that “meets the demands of the discipline, the goals of instruction, and the needs of students in a particular context” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 3). Teaching quality is a might be thought of as a subset of teacher quality. All Alberta teachers are expected to meet the expectations of TQS, the provincial standard of *teaching quality*, throughout their careers. The Teaching Quality Standard is stated as follows

Quality teaching occurs when the teacher’s ongoing analysis of context, and the teacher’s decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply, result in optimum learning for all students. (Alberta Education, 2018c, p. 3)

Studies of Teaching – Historical Notes

Process and Product Research

The final three decades of the twentieth century witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of academic inquiries into the nature of quality teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2001, 1999, 1990; Porter, Youngs, and Odden, 2001; Darling-Hammond, Wise and Pease, 1983; Medley, 1982; Knapp, 1982; Centra and Porter, 1980). During this period of extensive research many studies were structured within a conceptual framework first advanced by Mitzel (1960). Mitzel categorized effective teaching variables into four groupings: (1) presage variables, (2) process variables, (3) context variables and (4) product variables. Much of the educational literature on quality teaching written before the 1970s emphasized *presage* variables –teacher traits such as voice, appearance, warmth and enthusiasm.

Through the 1970s and 1980s an increased focus on the "science" of teaching was evident through a series of studies known collectively as "teacher effectiveness" research. These studies

concentrated on the relationships between *process* and *product* variables and later came to be known as "research on teacher effects" (Danielson and McGreal, 2000, p. 13). Several of these "process-product" studies sought to establish "context-free generalizations about what leads to or constitutes effective teaching" (Darling-Hammond, Wise and Pease, 1983, p. 293). While much was learned about many aspects of teaching through these studies, their conversion into teacher evaluation checklists in many North American jurisdictions contributed to an overly simplistic, mechanistic, and technical view of the nature of good teaching (Stronge, 2002; Danielson and McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1999, 1994, 1993; Danielson, 1996).

Another vein of inquiry into the nature of quality teaching moved in a slightly different direction. "Exploratory research using ethnographic, ethnomethodological, phenomenological and cognitive information processing methods" sought to describe "classroom phenomena with a view to increasing understanding rather than producing generalizable statements about process-product correlations (Grimmett, 1982, p. 66). More complex and nuanced views of the nature of good teaching began to dominate the research literature of the 1990s. Danielson and McGreal (2000) attribute this shift to "richer views of good teaching" to changes in the way we understand student learning from "the behaviorist perspective" to a view derived from cognitive learning theory (p. 14).

Professional Conceptions of Teaching

During the period in which the 1997 Teaching Quality Standard was developed, a trend toward the establishment of professional teaching standards was emerging. Darling-Hammond (1999) emphasised the need for "performance based" standards to define teaching as a "collegial, professional activity" and to be developed by professionals themselves such that they

reflect knowledge about teaching and learning that supports a view of teaching as complex, contingent on students' needs and instructional goals, and reciprocal—that is, continually shaped and reshaped by students' responses to learning events (p. 14).

Darling-Hammond (1994) underlined the importance of teaching standards to provide a research-informed basis for the profession to develop “a clear conception of what teachers must know and be able to do” (p. 9). The point of such standards was

not just to get them somehow written down but to use them as a lens for assessing teaching in schools and schools of education—for examining practices and programs, for reflecting on goals and strategies, for questioning what we are doing and how it is working, and, ultimately for growing and changing and revising standards themselves. They are dynamic and living. (p. 17)

Stigler and Hiebert (1999) contended true professionalism in teaching must recognize the complex, contextualized and individual nature of current North American teaching practice. To go forward the profession must focus on achieving improvements in student learning over time and “disseminate into standard practice the improvements in teaching that are responsible” (p. 178). To improve the “the practice of the profession, it is the standard, common practice that must improve steady, continuing effort to gradually improve the standard ways in which we teach” (p. 175).

Like several other professional frameworks of quality teaching, the National Board standards are grouped into a small number of larger conceptual categories. The standards are organized around the following five major propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.

2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities. (Darling-Hammond, 1999, pp. 7-8)

Related to each of these propositions are more specific statements. For example, in this case subsumed within proposition number 2, is the expectation that “Their instructional repertoire allows them to create multiple paths to knowledge, and they are adept at teaching students how to pose and solve their own problems” (p. 7).

Danielson (1996) argued that the idea of organizing key components of professional practice into a framework is useful to both members of the public and to members of the profession. Other professions – medicine, accounting and architecture, for instance – “have well-established definitions of expertise and procedures to certify novice and advanced practitioners” (p. 2). From a professional perspective Danielson contends that:

A framework for professional practice can be used for a wide range of purposes, from meeting novices’ needs to enhancing veterans’ skills. Because teaching is complex, it is helpful to have a roadmap through the territory, structured around a shared understanding of teaching. (p. 2)

A number of commonalities were evident in these teaching conceptions. Five categories were noted in the NBPTS framework. Danielson’s framework was organized into four similar domains: (1) planning and preparation, (2) classroom environment, (3) instruction and (4) professional responsibilities. Within the four domains were twenty-two components in

comparison to the twenty-three NBPTS descriptors. Porter, Youngs and Odden (2000) found that professional conceptions such as these emphasized “advanced content, deep understanding, reasoning and applications over a strong focus on basic facts” (p. 293).

Complexity, Context and Continuing Improvement

As professionally oriented studies and frameworks evolved through the 1990s and into the first decades of this century, conceptions of teaching is a complex, contingent and professional undertaking became more prevalent (Brandon, 2005). The need for teachers to have “a deep understanding of complexity” and to “have sufficient knowledge of content, of pedagogy, of context, and of students to appreciate the intricacies that are bound up in the teaching and learning process” was emphasized in Stronge’s (2002) synthesis of research on teacher effectiveness.

Darling-Hammond (1994) indicated that the National Board Standards reflected a radically different image of teaching taking into account “aspects of the complexity of teaching, the balancing of goals, and the simultaneity of ongoing tasks” and that “teaching is intense activity, that it requires juggling of subject matter, cognitive goals, social goals; management of time, materials and equipment; and the needs and responses of individual students” (p. 18). To Darling-Hammond, the promise of professional standards was their ability to “reflect the complex, reciprocal nature of teaching work. Their potential value lies partly in their authenticity—their ability to capture the important interactions between teachers, students, content and contexts that influence learning” (1999, p. 39).

Stronge (2002) called for “collegial, challenging and socially oriented” learning activities “tailored to the individual teachers within a particular school to support both the individual and

the organizational needs as they exist within a particular context” so that “teacher effectiveness is not an end product; rather, it is an ongoing, deliberate process” (p. 64).

Bennett and Rolheiser (2001) emphasized the need for quality teaching to be understood as constantly improving. They call for dialogue and extended professional learning founded on the need for teachers to

consciously understand the language (the concepts, skills, tactics, strategies, organizers etc.) of their profession. They must do it in order to respond to the feedback about how students learn. Their decisions must be made by choice not by default; by intuition informed by experience combined with the experience and research of others. We encourage a collectively conscious instructional intelligence. (p. 46)

Fullan (2003) advocated a system of teaching characterized by “collective deliberations focusing on continuous improvement” (p. 6). What is required in his view is movement from *uninformed professional judgment* or *permissive individualism* toward “ongoing informedness” through collective *informed professional judgment* “driven by best knowledge, which must be pursued continually through cultures of interaction inside and outside the school” (p. 7).

Quality Teaching Contributions to Optimum Student Learning

Teachers as Designers of Learning Environments

Recent studies of learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; OECD, 2001, 2007, 2008; Sawyer, 2006, 2008) seek to better understand the cognitive, emotional and social processes that result in the most effective learning and to use this knowledge within the design of curriculum, teaching and assessment so that people learn more deeply and effectively. These approaches to learning are not only different in degrees, but also significantly different in kind. It is important for teachers to keep abreast of new advances in learning, as the task of

teaching is to sponsor learning. Research from the learning sciences, an interdisciplinary field which includes cognitive science, educational psychology, computer science, anthropology, sociology, information sciences, neurosciences, education, design studies, and instructional design, is yielding new insights into learning as well as the implications for designing more effective learning environments, including school classrooms.

Learning environments emerging from contemporary research recognize learners as core participants, requiring active engagement and developing in them an understanding of their own activity as learners. These learning environments recognize that learning is not merely a solo activity, rather a distributed activity, social in nature, through the processes of interaction, negotiation, cooperation, collaboration and participation. They are highly attuned to the inextricably entwined nature of the emotional and cognitive dimensions of learning. Learning within these environments is organized to sponsor deep conceptual understanding rooted in disciplinary ways of knowing, doing and being connected both vertically within the discipline and horizontally across disciplines. Such learning environments are learner-focused and acutely sensitive to the fact that students differ in many ways, including their prior knowledge. Learning within these environments is maximized when each learner is sufficiently challenged and supported to reach just above their existing level and capacity. Assessment and instruction work together in these environments to ensure that learning goals are transparent and learners receive substantial, regular, timely, specific, meaningful feedback to improve learning.

Design for a knowledge creating system. Contemporary learning environments are often referred to as knowledge creating systems (Chen & Hong, 2016; Guerriero, 2017; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006). This places design at the center of the system with the assumption that everyone in the system is working towards knowledge creation. In other words,

in a school all students and adults are working together towards advancing knowledge instead of simply transmitting or receiving knowledge and disciplinary understanding. When design is at the center of the work in schools, the teacher is the designer of learning. The student is an important member of the knowledge building community (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006). Learning designs require engaging students in a design-mode as this is a critical mindset to undertake creative work with ideas (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2008). Contemporary or quality learning environments shift the role of teacher from teaching what is already known to designing learning for the unknown or what is not yet understood; the role of student shifts from a recipient of learning to a contributing member of the learning community. Teachers are designing knowledge creating systems with opportunities for everyone to be contributing members in the learning community.

Design for deep learning. Researchers argue for models of teaching and learning that develop deep learning or dispositions that young people need to create new knowledge (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Deep learning is considered a process and not an achievement at the end of a learning experience (Mayer, 2010; Pellegrino, 2017). Flow theory is often used to describe the deep absorption or learning that can occur during intellectually demanding experiences that are also enjoyable (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). “Through deeper learning, individuals not only develop expertise in a particular discipline, they also understand when, how and why to apply that they know. They recognize when new problems or situations are related to what they have previously learned, and they can apply their knowledge and skills to solve them” (Pellegrino, 2017, p. 229). Through flow experiences, students are engaged in learning and can develop competencies commonly referred to as 21st century skills, standards, or essential learning outcomes. Studies show both academic intensity (not too easy) and a positive emotional response are needed to

experience deep learning (Jacobsen, Friesen & Brown, 2017; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003). For example, in a study with high school students in the U.S., Shernoff et al. (2003) found learners were more engaged when provided with an appropriate level of challenge for their skill level in both individual and group work activities. Teachers are designing engaging learning experiences with opportunities for deep learning to occur.

Teachers as Engaged Professionals

Friesen (2009) indicated that “for too long, teachers have worked in isolated classrooms with only brief interludes in the staffroom to discuss professional learning. Research is clear, however, that teachers improve their practice and hence, their effectiveness, in the company of their peers” (p. 6).

Professional learning in the company of peers. As engaged professionals, teachers shift their thinking from professional development to professional learning (Timperley, 2011). In a culture of professional learning, teachers work together and interact with their colleagues in meaningful ways. This supports teachers learning not only when they attend one-off workshops but embeds professional learning in the workplace (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010). Such a culture also promotes the work of continuous improvement into teaching practice (Earl, 2008; Wiliam, 2011). Moving from classrooms with isolated practices, teachers form collaborative professional relationships where they develop interdependence (Johnson, 2012) which fosters a shared responsibility and collective ownership (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012) for student learning. Furthermore, this can help limit the barrier of within-school variability (Hattie & Yates, 2014) that can impact student learning and maximize high quality teaching. Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom (2015) found that when teachers engaged in quality collaboration in teams this had positive impacts on both teacher performance and improvements

in student learning. Likewise, critical reflective practice can be leveraged in professional learning communities where research is embedded and time is provided for teachers to engage in an iterative design process to inform their practice (Benade, 2015). Teachers are engaging in critical reflective practice in networked professional learning communities and utilizing technology to access educator expertise beyond the local community (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). *Teachers are engaging in professional learning in the company of peers in physical and digital learning spaces.*

Professional learning centered on student learning through cycles of inquiry. The nature of these collaborative professional relationships should reflect both focus and depth with a critical examination of teaching practices (Yuang & Zhang, 2016). Keeping students as their central focus, teachers work with colleagues and leaders to engage in ongoing cycles of teacher inquiry and in evidence-informed conversations (Earl, 2008; Timperley, 2011). These cycles of teacher inquiry involve identifying student needs, designing strategies/activities to meet needs, and then evaluating the impact on student learning (Timperley, 2011).

In their role as teacher as designer of learning (Friesen, 2009), these cycles of inquiry provide teachers with evidence to support their instructional decision making, allow for intentional design to engage learners, and alignment to balanced assessment practices (Stiggins, 2017). Research findings show that teachers who were engaged more readily in critical reflective practice, individually and collaboratively, were more likely to intentionally maintain approaches that worked well and change other approaches that could be improved (Benade, 2015). The engaged professional puts students at the center of their collaborative professional relationships in order to sharpen their professional practice and ensure that all students are successful. *Teachers are engaging in professional learning involving cycles of inquiry.*

Teachers as Expert in Pedagogical Knowledge

Learning designs require deep disciplinary understanding so teachers can make connections between the complexities of the real-world to existing bodies of disciplinary understanding (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006; Chen & Hong, 2016). Learning designs also require expertise in pedagogical knowledge. Shulman (1986, 1987) proposed the concept of pedagogical content knowledge as an integration of disciplinary or content knowledge with pedagogical knowledge of the discipline. Research demonstrates there is a positive relationship between pedagogical knowledge and improved student learning outcomes (Guerriero, 2017). For purposes of this review, we will use the OECD definition of pedagogical knowledge as the “body of knowledge of teachers for creating effective teaching and learning environments for their students” (Guerriero, 2017, p. 13) with the understanding that pedagogical knowledge includes deep disciplinary understanding.

Intentional curricular planning. Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) argue that student success does not just happen organically; teachers’ knowledge of the disciplines in which they instruct is critical to knowing how to craft authentic and meaningful learning opportunities for students. Pedagogically, having an awareness of how students learn, their interests, and potential areas for growth can help teachers craft and employ targeted approaches to teaching and learning (Robinson, 2011; Marzano, 2009). Thomas and Brown (2011) assert effective planning for teachers includes not only knowing the curricular outcomes and having a level of mastery within their own disciplines to which they instruct, but also organizing the curriculum into meaningful themes or manageable learning opportunities. The latter can support teachers as they design learning and attempt to implement different instructional methodologies such as problem based learning, discipline based inquiry, cooperative learning, deeper learning, and

other similar approaches (Thomas & Brown, 2011). *Teachers design learning intentionally integrating content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of the discipline.*

Purposeful assessment. The competencies embedded in the Ministerial Order (Alberta Education, 2013a) as well as the Framework for Student Learning (Alberta Education, 2011) all reinforce the importance for teachers to design assessment-for-learning as part of day-to-day practice. Teachers may also utilize other types of assessments, such as benchmarks, to provide a baseline to approach instruction and assessment in a strength based way as well as support students more intentionally in working with new knowledge (Stiggins, 2006; Marzano, 2009; Timperley, 2008; Wiliam, 2011). It is important to know how, when, and why to embed assessment strategies to help move the learning forward for students and to help inform the next steps for the teacher (Davies, 2007; Stiggins, 2006; Wiliam, 2011).

Designing assessments should rely on evidence collected from multiple sources working together to inform decisions that both support and verify student learning (Davies, 2007; Wiliam, 2011). Discerning a student's prior knowledge or using baseline diagnostics to ascertain grade level functioning can aid in supporting instruction planning as well as more targeted assessment practices (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Stiggins, 2006). Embedded assessment that involves ensuring students know the learning goals by making outcomes visible in the classroom can help support learning; the development and usage of a common language around assessment can help students become stewards of their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wiliam, 2011).

The following five research-informed strategies are key to designing formative assessment as part of day-to-day practice:

1. Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success

2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning
3. Providing feedback that move learning forward
4. Activating learners as instructional resources for one another
5. Activating learners as owners of their own learning. (Wiliam, 2011)

Teachers as Cultivator of Quality Learning Environments

Culturally responsive instruction. Today's classrooms are increasingly diverse and it is important for teachers to consider student diversity by providing culturally responsive instruction. Culturally responsive instruction is defined as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). Authors recognize culturally responsive instruction is not about using different teaching methods for students with different backgrounds (Routman, 2014). Culturally responsive instruction calls on teachers to pay attention to the classroom culture and attend to student differences by making instructional decisions that are responsive to the learners (Ritchhart, Church & Morrison, 2011; Tomlinson, 2014). This view aligns with Dewey's earlier arguments of basing work on students' interests and connecting instruction to students' lives. In other words, teachers need to include student perspectives for culturally responsive instruction and need to anticipate and be responsive to student learning needs (Tomlinson, 2014). *Teachers design learning with attention to providing culturally responsive instruction.*

Positive classroom culture. As a designer of learning, the physical, socio-emotional, and structures within the classroom are all a part of cultivating a positive classroom culture (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). Classrooms are learning spaces; their essence needs to reflect the purpose(s)

as well as the consideration of how students learn in relation to the space they need (Barrett, Zhang, Davies & Barrett, 2015; Robinson, 2011). A classroom should reflect active learning, areas for collaboration, multiple furnishing mediums for sitting and standing, quiet spaces as well as elements of the external environment (Barrett et al., 2015; Robinson, 2011). Learning designs that promote exploration and collaboration can occur in this type of learning space (Anderson, Hamilton & Hattie, 2004; Robinson, 2011).

In accordance with the physical classroom, teachers can mindfully construct a positive culture by co-creating classroom norms with students which reflect positive citizenship, respect, a positive communication, and collaborative environment as well as constructs that help students see the classroom as a true learning community (Borba, 2001; Marzano & Pickering, 2011). Hansen and Ringdal (2018) identified principles that should help shape a positive classroom culture and instruction which included considerations of student engagement in the learning process, supporting emotional connections when learning (i.e. empathy), and the importance of building in opportunities for students to understand other perspectives in accordance with academic processes. Furthermore, social learning is an important construct for teachers to consider as they create learning environments in their classrooms and throughout the school (Borba, 2001; Anderson et al., 2004). Social learning can also correspond to student resilience: the ability for students to weather setbacks, failure, and personal challenges (Masten, 2011; Shanker, 2013) and building moral capabilities, such as empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness (Borba, 2001). Classroom cultures which focus on relationship development, confidence building, trust, safety, and positivity can provide the needed supports for students that would otherwise feel marginalized (Shanker, 2013). This type of environment can also provide a culture where students can learn from mistakes and see failure

as an opportunity to develop as a learner (Dweck, 2008; Lee et al. 2013; Long, 2012; Masten, 2011). This also connects to the district's continued focus on supporting Indigenous populations (NGPS, 2017). *Teachers design learning to promote a positive classroom culture and safety in taking risks for learning.*

Research on Quality Teaching that Undergirds the TQS.

Section Summary: The Literature on Quality Teaching

This section of our systematic literature review addressed two questions: What quality teaching practices contribute to optimum student learning? How do those identified in the research compare and contrast with those outlined in the 2018 revision of the Alberta TQS? We traced the evolution of studies of teaching over the past five decades, identified key aspects of quality teaching practice through an emerging conception of “Teachers as Designers of Learning Environments”. Our appraisal and synthesis of the research evidence identified the following four dimensions of teaching practice

Chapter Seven

WHAT IS QUALITY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP?

June 30, 2019

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What is Quality School Leadership?

For this section, our review pursued two overarching questions: Which aspects of educational leadership does contemporary and foundational scholarship associate with quality teaching and optimum learning for all school students? To what extent are those aspects of educational leadership represented in the *Leadership Quality Standard*?

Review Methods

Education and other social science databases were searched for large scale and meta-analytical studies, as well as systematic reviews germane to the question of what and how leadership practices influence the quality of teaching and student learning. A host of criteria guided the search for contemporary literature. Keyword searches with Boolean parameters were used. Because this is an area of study with significant history, we felt it appropriate to extend our search back to 2000. Search terms included “education leadership”, “educational leadership”, “school leadership”, “principalship”, “headteacher”, and “principal”. To locate research regarding the principal’s influence on student learning we also searched with the following terms: “school effectiveness”, “school outcomes”, “school performance”, “student learning”, “student achievement”, “academic achievement”, and “academic outcomes”. We had limited success by combining these searches with genre-specific terms such as “meta-analysis”, “executive summary”, “systematic review”, “comprehensive review”, “large scale”, and “state-of-the-art”. When available, the related records function of databases was also used to expand subject terms in our searches. Finally, current books and reviews of books on school leadership and school effectiveness were considered.

Combined with the above strategies, we also applied ancestral search strategies, meaning reference lists from large-scale and comprehensive meta-analytical studies created a trail of both historical and contemporary research, and international scholarship. There are various accounts of successful leadership in the literature, and sometimes there are overlapping categories of practices, actions, and behaviours articulated in seemingly new ways. The trend of leadership-by-adjective models or styles, however, are sometimes “more distinct than the practices they include” (Leithwood, Sun, and Pollock (2017, p. 12). Our aim was to synthesize empirical findings with theoretical and conceptual ideas. To do so, we organized the synthesis using the competencies in the LQS. In practice, principals’ responsibilities span a spectrum of administrative, managerial, and leadership functions, including establishing and sustaining external and internal relations with various stakeholders, and being involved in instruction and learning (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Sebastian, Huang, & Allensworth, 2017). The nine competencies of the LQS constitute an interdependent and holistic system, informed by the contextual variables and processes of schools and their respective communities. We acknowledge that addressing the competencies individually sets up a false picture of separation.

Fostering Effective Relationships

The quality of relationships among members of the school community constitute and are constituted by climate and culture, which make a difference to students’ experiences and learning outcomes. Trust is a central concept that has been examined, and is the bedrock for relationship building. Tschannen-Moran is often cited in this area, but Canadian scholars Kutsyuruba and Walker have contributed substantially to this area (e.g. 2011, 2015, 2016; Kutsyuruba, Walker, & Noonan, 2011).

Trust is widely recognized as a complex, multi-dimensional social construct (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; R. Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998), representative of a dispositional attitude or state of mind developed by individuals and organizations over time, and resulting from experiences and interactions with others (Kwan, 2016). Trust implies a person's willingness to be vulnerable to the influence of another, based on the belief that the latter possesses the qualities of being honest, reliable, open, concerned, competent, and benevolent (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

International research findings point to the degree to which principals are respected and trusted by the members of their school communities as a defining characteristic of successful schools (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Day et al., 2009; Moos, 2014; Pashiardis & Savvides, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2017; Wang, Gurr, & Drysdale, 2014). Principals can build teacher trust by fostering professional collaboration (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010), providing opportunities to learn (Leithwood, 2012), supporting, buffering, and recognizing individuals (Fancera & Bliss, 2011), forming communities of practice (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008), and promoting responsibility for learning (Leithwood, 2012).

Teachers' sense of trust in principals relates to three key aspects of school culture: academic press, collective teacher efficacy, and teacher professionalism (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2017). Teacher trust in colleagues and principals have been linked to school effectiveness (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002), positive school climate (Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998), and student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Day et al., 2009; Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Of the four paths delineated by Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010), trust played a role in each. The

emotions path, for example, has been recognized as a powerful influencer of three key dispositions of teachers, namely: teacher trust, collective teacher efficacy and teacher commitment (Leithwood & Mccullough, 2017). Teacher trust in others is also a significant determining factor on student learning (Bolam et al., 2005; Day et al., 2016; Day et al., 2009; Leithwood et al., 2010; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Sebastian et al., 2017; Wahlstrom & Seashore-Louis, 2008).

The relationship among trust, leadership, and student learning is indirect; however, empirical evidence suggests the learning climate of the school is the only organizational factor linking principal and teacher leadership with student achievement (Sebastian et al., 2017). This is where trust comes into play. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) surmised that principals who are reliable elicit trust across time and settings, and are “more likely to earn and maintain the trust of their faculty than those who do not” (p. 70). Research by Robinson et al. (2008) promoted the inductive conceptualization of five dimensions of educational leadership: establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. Their conceptualization eschewed traditional task-relationship distinctions between leading through tasks and organization and leading through relationships and people because of an emerging awareness that relationship skills were embedded within all five dimensions. Sun and Leithwood (2015) also recognized that effective principals distinguish their positional, evaluative responsibilities from the collaborative, formative work of eliciting creative expertise from teachers in ways that can influence desired changes.

The *Fostering Effective Relationships* competency also recognizes the potential for conflict within the school community, and the accompanying need for educational leaders to engage in ways that can resolve conflicts and improve working conditions and relationships for all members of the school community. Trust is recognized as an integral aspect of human relationships and, when broken, must be restored through the time and concerted efforts of the principal to communicate and resolve issues in a timely and effective manner (Kutsyuruba, Walker, & Noonan, 2011, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2017). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2017) emphasized that, “the challenge of cultivating high trust environments may be one of the most important tasks facing school leaders in the times in which we live” (p. 170).

Academic optimism is an emerging concept in the literature on effective schools (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). The driving idea behind academic optimism is that collective efficacy (R. Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Woolfolk Hoy, 2012), faculty trust in students and parents (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998), and academic emphasis (Hoy & Feldman, 1987; Hoy et al., 1990) combine into a unitary element of school culture, ultimately predicting student achievement (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012). Academic optimism is a derivative of research on efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Goddard et al., 2001), positive psychology (Seligman & Peterson, 2003), and school climate and culture (Hoy et al., 1998; W. Hoy et al., 2002; Hoy et al., 1990). For more than thirty years, empirical studies have demonstrated that collective efficacy, faculty trust in clients, and academic emphasis are individually predictive of student achievement. More recent studies confirm when efficacy, trust, and academic emphasis are combined into the latent construct of academic optimism (Mitchell & Tarter, 2017), they are also predictive of student achievement (Kirby & DiPaola, 2011; Mitchell & Tarter, 2017; Wu, 2013). Further, the only leadership pattern known

to have a positive and significant correlation to academic optimism, and the components that blend to support student learning gains, is that of purposefully aligned distributed leadership (Malloy & Leithwood, 2017). As argued by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2017), “few other variables examined by educational researchers come close the level of predictive power of trust on student achievement” (p. 155).

Modelling Commitment to Professional Learning

By virtue of their formal leadership roles, principals’ practices are often on display for others to notice. The literature reflects an emerging awareness that as important as it is for school leaders to communicate effectively in the pursuit of organizational goals and priorities, it is imperative that leaders deliberately embed preferred changes within their own professional practices so that teachers see and experience desired changes in action (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Day & Sammons, 2013; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009).

To model commitment to professional learning, effective educational leaders demonstrate the qualities of self-leadership. Self-leadership refers to the process of influencing oneself to establish the self-direction and self-motivation needed to perform the complex work of school leadership (Neck & Manz, 2010). Australian researchers Drysdale and Gurr (2011) recognized that principals engage in self-leadership when they take responsibility for self-development, reframe and open up their and others’ minds to new possibilities, and question their assumptions. In this way, effective school leaders accept that they are ultimately responsible for their own professional learning (Drysdale & Gurr, 2017). Gurr and Drysdale (2015) described how leadership development relies on self-development within a framework of expanded resources and opportunities at system and service levels. Self-leaders are proactive in their own growth and

development and dedicated to the pursuit of new ideas. They understand that leadership involves influencing the behaviours in intentional and purposeful ways to bring about change.

Understanding and responding to the complex contexts in which their schools exist is an important aspect of this.

The concepts of capacity, and capacity building, are also central to modelling professional learning. Elmore (2008) defined capacity as the “fund of skill and knowledge that the organization can bring to bear in responding to external pressures” (p. 43). Drawn from the research of King and Newmann (2001) and Mitchell and Sackney (2001), capacity building typically refers to a leader’s efforts to support advancements in the knowledge, skills, and abilities of others. Results of meta-analytical research by Robinson et al. (2008) found that the principal’s support for, and participation in, the professional learning of staff generated the largest effect on the learning outcomes of students. Principals can support the efforts of teachers to improve teaching and learning by providing and/or arranging for relevant opportunities for staff development and encouraging staff development that is closely linked to the goals of the school (Day et al., 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Robinson, 2010)

Ultimately, to model a commitment to professional learning a principal must be focused on developing capacity in the school. Conceptualized as a function of teachers’ knowledge, skills and dispositions, professional community, program coherence, technical resources, and principal leadership, ‘school capacity’ was defined by Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) as “the collective power of the full staff to improve student achievement schoolwide” (p. 261). Building school capacity involves continually bolstering of an array of resources to support schools in responding to the dynamic contextual demands of their respective communities.

School capacity-building efforts have traditionally emphasized the development of teachers' pedagogical capacities as a strategy for increasing student learning (Newmann et al., 2000). More recent conceptualizations of school capacity-building recognize the importance of individual learning and organizational learning (King & Newmann, 2001; Louis & Marks, 1998; Newmann et al., 2000). The concept of capacity building has expanded to include items such as: personal, professional, organizational, and community (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011). In this way, efficacious leaders willfully model efforts to establish those conditions capable of fostering teacher learning within communities of practice, engaging teachers in decision-making processes, promoting school-community connections that enhance collective participation, and aligning school goals and priorities with contextually-specific conditions and demands (Lai, 2015).

There is also an emerging awareness of the importance of the professional growth, learning, and development of educational leaders themselves (Gurr, 2017). As noted by Ylimaki and Jacobson (2011), the characteristics, dispositions, and qualities of effective educational leaders develop over time. Evidence from large scale and international research suggest that a combination of on-the-job learning, formal and informal professional learning, mentoring and sponsorship by significant others, and even serendipity on principals' leadership journeys contribute to principals' effectiveness (Gurr, 2017).

Embodying Visionary Leadership

Vision is widely recognized as a cornerstone of educational leadership; knowing where you are going is central to the success of individuals and organizations (Bush & Glover, 2014; Day et al., 2016; Gurr, 2017; Marzano et al., 2005; Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2006; Robinson et al., 2008; Seashore Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Southworth, 1993; Sun &

Leithwood, 2015). Strong values, a sense of moral purpose, and a desire to raise standards for pupils have long been recognized as qualities of effective school leaders. Contemporary literature emphasizes shared, or collective, expressions of visionary leadership in the pursuit of learning for all students.

Most definitions of educational leadership include notions of vision, setting the direction, core values, defining and communicating mission, strategic orientation (Murphy, 2017; Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006) and establishing goals and expectations (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Murphy et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2009; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003). Early conceptions of visionary leadership suggested that the complex work of school principals was motivated by the pursuit of their individual visions (Southworth, 1993). A major study of improving schools in England conducted by Barber, Whelan, and Clark (2010) determined that “there are statistically significant empirical and qualitatively robust associations between heads’ educational values, qualities, and their strategic actions and improvement in school conditions leading to improvements in student outcomes” (p. 5). Visionary leaders seek the input of others only after having already developed a preliminary vision of the school in isolation (Sebring et al., 2006).

Contemporary literature is increasingly cognizant that it would be largely inadequate for individual principals to determine the vision, direction, and goals of the school in isolation. It is now widely accepted that, in addition to the directions themselves, the methods and processes by which those directions get determined stand to influence the success of schools (Bush & Glover, 2014; Drysdale & Gurr, 2011, 2017). Effective principals consider the internal organization and the external community as valuable contributors to the vision of schools, and they make a point

of communicating the vision with the extended school community on a regular basis (Leithwood, 2012).

Meta-analytical research by Robinson et al. (2008) and Robinson & Gray (2019) identified the development of goals and expectations as one of five key dimensions of effective school leadership. Informed by research traditions in social psychology, goals are deemed important for their ability to establish a sense of purpose and priority in environments where a multitude of tasks can seem equally important and subsequently overwhelming. The clarity of goals focuses attention and effort to enable individuals and groups within an organization to use feedback to regulate their performance. Goal setting is known to exert indirect influence on students by focusing and coordinating the work of teachers and, in some instances, parents. Goal setting also signals priorities to teachers. As argued by Robinson et al. (2008), “Without clear goals, staff effort and initiatives can be dissipated in multiple agendas and conflicting priorities, which, over time, can produce burnout, cynicism, and disengagement” (p. 666).

The role of the contextual, or situational, awareness of school leaders (Marzano et al., 2005) also impacts principals’ effectiveness. Importantly, as Ylimaki and Jacobson (2011) argue, successful school leadership is context *sensitive*, but not context *driven*. Principals of successful schools apply a range of core leadership practices, such as those recognized by a report prepared for The Wallace Foundation by Murphy et al. (2006): provision of appropriate resources, development of enabling systems, delegation of responsibility and accountability, development of consensus and buy-in from staff toward policies and goals, supervision of faculty and committees tasked with identifying staff and resource requirements, supervision of the analysis and development of system requirements required to achieve teaching and learning goals, and encouraging the development of new policies and practices capable of supporting the

achievement of goals. These leadership practices are thought to promote success in most contexts, but contemporary research emphasizes the responsibility of educational leaders to refine and adapt their responses to reflect the specific contexts and cultures of their own school communities to optimize opportunities for success (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr, 2014; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2011). As noted by Day (2007), successful principals demonstrated the ability to not be overly confined by the contexts in which they work; rather “they actively mediate and moderate within a set of core values and practices which transcend narrowly conceived improvement agendas” (p. 68).

Leading a Learning Community

The *Leading a Learning Community* competency reflects an emerging awareness of educational and societal priorities associated with the rights and needs of diverse populations. Principles of inclusion, belonging, shared responsibility, and collaboration amongst a community of stakeholders inform much of the purpose and rationale of contemporary public education. Accordingly, the indicators associated with the *Leading a Learning Community* competency reflect themes located in educational leadership literature, such as leveraging diversity, anchoring schools in the community, evidence-informed and collaborative decision-making, and optimizing school culture (Hitt & Player, 2018; Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

As argued by Murphy et al. (2006), “effective leaders demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to the benefits diversity offers the school” (p. 30). Effective principals approach the diversity of people and ideas within school communities as strengths, and model an inclusive mindset by actively demonstrating their commitment to divergent and varying cultures, views, and people (Sebring et al., 2006). Through purposeful, frequent, and ongoing communications with stakeholders throughout the school community, principals exercise multi-directional

communications and collaborative decision-making to both inform and achieve the school's collective sense of mission and vision (Murphy et al., 2006).

It is widely recognized that principals can and should establish important bridges between families and the school. Large scale Canadian research conducted by Leithwood (2012) concluded that principals play an important role in helping families connect with community agencies, and in establishing inter-agency collaboration to better meet the needs of all students. Leithwood (2012) found that effective principals engaged parents by designing welcoming and inclusive environments, developing multiple ways to involve parents and caregivers, and supporting teachers' understanding and commitment of the importance of parent and community participation. Research by Sebring et al. (2006) and Murphy et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of school leaders facilitating the faculty's understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds, building trusting relationships with parents, and mobilizing existing community resources to establish partnerships capable of supporting the needs of every student.

Considerable research evidence supports that principals can foster teacher commitment to the needs of individual students through the purposeful application of collaborative decision-making, modification of existing organizational structures, and focus on developing teacher trust (Murphy et al., 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2004, 2014). The intentional sharing of decision making and purposeful building of capacities of those who may have previously existed as passive followers can exert positive influence on student achievement (Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood & Azah, 2016).

Principals of learning communities focus on developing working conditions throughout the school that attend to the needs and concerns of everyone in the organization and enable various stakeholders to achieve agreed-upon goals (Murphy et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2008).

The norms and values of schools can be shaped by principals in ways that support positive and professional learning communities. Research by Hulpia, Devos, and Rosseel (2009) found that the presence of authentic professional learning communities, openness, transparency, efficacy, trust, and conflict resolution served to meet the affective needs of teachers and helped maintain their commitment to the aims of the school organization. Fancera and Bliss (2011) found that, out of ten leadership practices studied, protecting teachers' time was the only one with significant effects on student achievement and the collective efficacy of teachers. Further, effective principals are known to recognize and celebrate high-quality teaching and improved student performance through various social incentives and rewards (Leithwood, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006).

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

Due to a paucity of large scale and/or meta-analytical evidence of principal behaviour and impacts on Indigenous students' learning outcomes, this section was informed primarily by grey literature at the international, national, and provincial levels. Research on social justice and cultural diversity was also informative.

Canada has committed to a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples, rooted in the principles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2007). As a representation of political commitment, this declaration articulated the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples around the world, including culture, identity, religion, language, health, community, and education. Resultant from this human rights movement, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, representing the largest class-action lawsuit in Canadian history, informed the development of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRC) and subsequent mandate. In June of 2015, the TRC presented its

executive summary of findings, including 94 recommendations referred to as *Calls to Action*. In response to the 94 Calls to Action, the Government of Canada continues to advance its efforts in an array of operations. Competency five of the LQS is informed by the intention for the educational community to attend to Calls to Action 62 through 65 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

In a study for *Centre for the Study of Living Standards*, Sharpe, Arsenault, & Lapointe, (2007) reported that, in general, people with higher educational attainment experience lower unemployment, participate at a higher rate in the labour market, stand a higher chance of being employed, and earn more. The report found that a major divide existed between people who finish high school and those who do not, which is relevant when considering the school completion rate for Indigenous students is lower than non-Indigenous students' completion rates. Sharpe et al. (2007) argued that the impact of improving the educational attainment of Indigenous peoples would be two-fold: not only would it significantly contribute to increasing the personal well-being of Indigenous Canadians, but it would address slower labour force growth and lackluster labour productivity growth. A follow-up study by Calver (2015) found little improvement in the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people participating in the labor market between 2001 and 2011, asserting that the potential benefits associated with improving Indigenous education is significant, and that "the pursuit of cost-effective strategies to improve Aboriginal education should remain a top priority for policymakers" (p. xv).

In a comprehensive review of 16 *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)* projects focused on FNMI education, Gunn, Pomahac, Good Striker, and Tailfeathers (2011) found that by involving Aboriginal parents, caregivers, and Elders in meaningful ways in the school, and by focusing on Aboriginal language, culture, and history as integral aspects of

Canadian history and culture, Indigenous students were more likely to remain in school. Schools created a sense of belonging and enhancing cultural awareness throughout their communities by purposefully increasing communications with and involvement of Indigenous caregivers.

Effective schools implemented the use of: Aboriginal liaison officers; cultural events; Elder visits; in-services for school personnel toward First Nations, Métis and Inuit history, language, and culture; and Aboriginal language, history, and culture classes, among other strategies. The study recommended that in order to promote the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, schools should offer comprehensive Aboriginal history, language, and culture courses, adopt teaching approaches that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, and create a sense of belonging and cultural pride through mentorship programs, liaison officers, and counseling services (Gunn et al., 2011). Gunn et al. also recognized the grassroots, needs-based nature of these initiatives, noting that key to success is the engagement of stakeholders who are “fiercely committed to the best education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike” (p. 343).

Kanu’s (2002, 2005, 2007, 2011) studies in Manitoba provide important insights. Over the course of a six-year investigation, Kanu examined the rationale and context for integrating Indigenous perspectives in schools, theories of human development, cultural mediators of learning, integration methods, elements of success, challenges to integration, and both students’ and teachers’ perceptions of infusion. The central purpose behind infusion is to affect the high rates of underachievement and non-completion among Indigenous students. Some of the factors of school failure for Aboriginal students that Kanu identified in the literature include a lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge in curriculum and among teachers, as well as conflicting culturally embedded styles of interaction between teachers and students. Kanu found that underlying assumption of infusion is that integrating Aboriginal socialization processes will

create connections between students' home cultures and that of the school, thereby motivating them to learn and reducing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. This is part of cultural discontinuity theory, which argues that compatibility between curriculum, teaching and learning processes increases the chances for academic success and, conversely, that a lack of cultural continuity contributes to school failure (Kanu, 2011).

The work of supporting the application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit will need to include extensive and ongoing work with teachers, a primary role of how the competencies with the LQS are meant to be viewed within the whole of the standard. Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions are critical factors in the success of curricular reforms and innovations in teacher practice (Kanu, 2005). In an investigation of Manitoba teachers' perceptions on infusing Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum, Kanu (2005) reported some of the issues that teachers considered challenging to meaningfully integrating Indigenous perspectives and content. She documented teachers' lack of knowledge of Indigenous cultures, non-Indigenous teachers' racist attitudes, and incompatibility between school structures and Indigenous cultural values as the greatest challenges to infusion (p. 57). Kanu's findings on teachers' perceptions support the need to work with non-Indigenous teachers to infuse Indigenous perspectives into school curricula while also paying considerable attention to how the work will also impact non-Indigenous students. Internationally, supporting teachers to develop inclusive practices has been fundamental to New Zealand's Te Kotahitanga project, led by Russell Bishop and Mere Berryman. This project is renowned for making an impact on Maori student achievement (Te Tahuho O Te Me Matauranga Ministry of Education, n.d.). In fact, the success of this project inspired an initiative by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, *Following their Voices*, which has demonstrated improvements for First Nations, Metis and Inuit

students (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2019). Research that was conducted to support the development of *Following their Voices* highlighted the centrality of relationships; Indigenous parents and students who participated in the study emphasized a need to feel included and respected, and to be equal among their non-Indigenous peers (Berryman, ... Steeves, 2014). Furthermore, in focus groups with over 70 Indigenous students who participated in that study, racism, unfair treatment, and low expectations were thematic among the concerns that students reported (Stelmach, Kovach, & Steeves, 2017).

The substance of this competency also reflects the tenets of social justice. Appreciating that social justice encompasses a broad range of concepts (Lewis, 2016) that can be understood differently by people in pluralistic societies (Taysum & Gunter, 2008), Furman (2012) recognized that social justice focuses on “the experiences of marginalized groups and inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes” (p. 194). For Theoharis (2007), the leaders of social justice are expected to make issues of race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and other marginalized peoples the core of their “advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision” (p. 223).

To address issues of social justice and marginalization, educational leaders are encouraged to create more inclusive practices within their schools (Lewis, 2016; Ryan, 2006; Shields & Mohan, 2008; Theoharis & Causton, 2014). The landscape of inclusive leadership includes: advocating for inclusion; educating participants; developing critical consciousness; nurturing dialogue; emphasizing the qualities of classroom practices and student learning; adopting inclusive decision- and policy-making strategies; and incorporating whole-school approaches. Furman (2012) posited a nested leadership framework centered on five dimensions for social justice leadership as praxis: personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and

ecological. Like social justice leadership, inclusive leadership actively addresses the inequities of the current school system (Lewis, 2016).

This field of literature recognizes inconsistencies between traditional conceptualizations of school leadership, where terms such as “success”, “improvement”, and “effectiveness” have been associated most closely with the academic achievement of students on external, norm-referenced examinations (Reynolds et al., 2014), and that of inclusion, which prioritizes equity, emancipation, empowerment, and self-determination (Capper & Young, 2014; Lewis, 2016; Rodela & Bertrand, 2018; Theoharis, 2007). For Shields (2014), a social justice education teaches students about the world in which they live, prepares them to become fully participating citizens in that world, and helps them to take proactive positions for justice, equity, dignity, and human rights. As asserted by Shields and Mohan (2008), “Overcoming the dichotomy that separates notions of social justice and academic excellence will not necessarily solve all of our educational or societal problems, but we are convinced it is an essential first step” (p. 298). Moving forward, it may be helpful to view effective educational leadership as inherently inclusive, and inclusive leadership as inherently educative (Ryan, 2006).

Providing Instructional Leadership

Blase and Blase (1998) asserted, “the facilitation of learning and growth should be the number one responsibility of an educational leader” (p. 14). This has now become unquestioned wisdom and perhaps explains why instructional leadership is extensively studied in educational research. In relation to the indicator statements associated with the instructional leadership competency, the literature offers a series of related themes, such as: content knowledge of school leaders; levels of leadership influence; capacity building of teachers; and the sharing and distribution of *leadership*.

Instructional leadership is founded upon a chain of fundamental assertions. First, the quality of teaching matters most in student learning (Day & Sammons, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016), and secondly, school leaders can directly support the advancement of teachers' professional capacities. Third, advancements in the professional capacities of teachers inform sustained changes in the pedagogical practices of teachers, and, in turn, these informed pedagogical changes exert positive influence on student outcomes (Day et al., 2016). This is perhaps why instructional leadership is widely regarded as the most effective approach leaders can take to exert positive influence on student learning (Barber et al., 2010; Day & Sammons, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Murphy et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2009; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, et al., 2010).

Stein and Nelson (2003) espoused that effective instructional leaders have an understanding of curriculum content in ways that differ from that of classroom teachers. Contemporary literature continues to reinforce the expectation that school leaders will possess a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to support their ability to develop and monitor the alignment of these fundamental school operations (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2008; Roegman, Perkins-Williams, Maeda, & Greenan, 2018; Stark, McGhee, & Jimerson, 2017). Large scale research has determined that the planning, coordinating, and evaluation of teaching and curriculum exerted appreciable influence on student learning, and involved essential leadership actions such as collegial discussions of teaching and its impact on student achievement, direct observations of in-class teaching and subsequent provision of feedback, and the systematic monitoring of student progress (Robinson et al., 2009). As argued by Drysdale and Gurr (2017), "Successful school leaders know about

good curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and how to help improve teaching and learning in their school” (p. 135).

The instructional leadership literature is also replete with considerations for the levels, or direct-ness, of influence that exist between principal leadership, teacher practice, and student learning. Much of the scholarship reflects an indirect model of instructional leadership, where the actions of the principal are known to influence the practices of classroom teachers, as opposed to the direct model of instructional leadership that attempts to correlate leadership directly to student achievement (Hallinger, 2003, 2005, 2011).

More recent scholarship approaches the concept of instructional leadership more holistically, decentering authority and influence from the principal to a network of others throughout the school community (Brandon, Hollweck, Donlevy, & Whalen, 2018; Day & Sammons, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2017). Distributive and collaborative instructional leadership practices can provide targeted assistance toward pedagogy, data analysis, or assessment strategies. Iterations of peer coaching and teacher leadership have become increasingly commonplace in schools. Research is finding evidence of indirect leadership influence on student achievement in those instances where some instructional leadership tasks are delegated to informal leadership roles of various designations, such as academic deans, department heads, instructional coaches, and curriculum specialists, among others (Stark et al., 2017).

The principal’s analysis and subsequent use of data to support teachers are intended to drive the instructional decision-making of classroom teachers with the expressed purpose of increasing student achievement. Mandinach and Gummer (2013) recognized data as any information, quantitative or qualitative, standardized or informal, formative or summative, that

educators use to inform instructional decisions. Marsh (2012) described data utilization as a progression of adaptive stages: access; analysis and action. Each step involved any combination of test-based accountability, and/or dynamic socio-cultural networks of people, technologies, and policies associated with respective school communities (Grissom et al., 2017). Data literacy can be understood as a component of data literacy that focuses on educators' abilities to recognize sound assessment, evaluation, and communication practices that contribute to student learning and achievement (Roegman et al., 2018). For Roegman et al. (2018), the notion of data leadership is a central component of instructional leadership. Data leadership is defined by two primary components: the principal's data literacy and data use, and the principals' support of teachers' data literacy and data use. Effective instructional leaders encouraged and expected teachers to collaboratively examine data through the organization of various job-embedded opportunities, including departmental meetings, subject- and grade-level teams, professional learning communities, and individual exchanges, among others (Murphy et al., 2006; Roegman et al., 2018).

In addition to collaboration and professional development, the instructional leadership literature also recognizes the role that teacher supervision plays in ensuring that quality teaching and optimum learning opportunities are provided to all students (Blase & Blase, 1998; Brandon et al., 2018; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2017; Timperley, 2011; Zepeda, 2017). In Alberta, the roles associated with teacher supervision and evaluation are reserved solely for the formal leader of school; namely, the principal.

Zepeda's (2017) instructional supervision model is premised on the assumption that teachers should receive opportunities to transfer information, and to construct deeper understanding of their own practices within a capacity-building learning community. The

developmental supervision model posited by Glickman et al. (2017) established a continuum of potential supervisory behaviours, including directive control, directive informational, collaborative, and non-directive. Such conceptualizations of teacher supervision support processes of professional reciprocity that are capable of providing differentiated supports to meet the developmental needs of novice and veteran teachers alike (Brandon et al., 2018). Adams, Mombourquette, and Townsend's (in press; Mombourquette & Adams, 2018) work on instructional supervision extends the collaborative inquiry work of Glickman, bringing teachers, groups of teachers, and school leaders into direct and ongoing conversations, called 'generative dialogues' about teacher driven quests for their own growth as optimizers of student learning.

Developing Leadership Capacity

Leadership theory continues to evolve and generate increasingly inclusive and pluriversal models where principals are no longer perceived as the sole source of leadership in the school (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Some of the most significant discussions associated with the development of leadership capacities in schools have involved distributive leadership (Bush, 2013; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2007; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) and teacher collaboration (Glazier, Boyd, Bell Hughes, Able, & Mallous, 2017; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015).

Distributed leadership first emerged as a pragmatic tool that allowed educational leaders to share their workload with others. More recently, distributed leadership has been applied to the leadership influence of other actors within the school community (Robinson et al., 2008; Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016). Conceptualizations of distributive, delegated, democratic, dispersed, shared, collective, and collaborative leadership each consider the potential associated with multiple sources of leadership throughout the community for promoting and sustaining the

success of the school program as evidenced increasing measures associated with student learning (Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2003; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Tian et al., 2016).

Meta-analytical research by Tian et al. (2016) defined and studied distributed leadership as a process comprised of organizational and individual scopes, regarding leadership as both a resource and an agency, emerging and co-existing at all levels of the school community.

Leithwood, Mascal, and Strauss (2009) recognized distributed leadership as a tool for collecting dispersed expertise and as a means of further cultivating the potential of individuals and organizations. As noted by Harris (2013), distributed leadership implies “actively brokering, facilitating and supporting the leadership of others” (p. 547). All of these factors require professional agency from both the formal and informal leaders of a school (Tian et al., 2016). It is widely accepted that distributed leadership can positively impact student outcomes (Gurr, 2017; Leithwood & Azah, 2016; Malloy & Leithwood, 2017; Tamtik, 2018).

According to Glazier et al. (2017), an essential characteristic of collaboration is its task-related focus, including working and reflecting together for job-related purposes. The results of a meta-analytical review of the teacher collaboration literature indicated that the majority of advantages associated with teacher collaboration are situated at the teacher level: increased motivation, decreased workload, improved sense of morale, greater efficiency, increased communication, improved technological skills, reduced personal isolation, as well as the uptake of increasingly student-centred teaching practices (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Efforts to increase opportunities for teacher collaboration are also known to exert benefits at the organizational level, including a positive influence in the perception that the school climate is more adaptive and supportive of innovation, increasingly attentive to the needs of students, and capable of fostering a professional culture of intellectual inquiry (Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010;

Westheimer, 2008). A construct for teacher collaboration posited by Little (1990) distinguished between four different types situated on a continuum ranging from independence to interdependence, including: storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing, and joint work.

A systematic literature review of contemporary leadership frameworks by Hitt and Tucker (2016) highlighted several key aspects of shared, collective, and distributed decision-making that require consideration by educational leaders, such as: building collaborative processes for decision-making, sharing and distributing leadership, tending to and building on diversity, and strengthening and optimizing school culture. In each category, the meta-analysis recognized specific leadership strategies and actions that resulted in improved student learning; its findings generally supported that the overall organizational health and performance of schools improved when leaders shared authority and responsibility and, by so doing, increased leadership ability and agency in others (Murphy et al., 2006). Similarly, in an executive summary of the largest and most extensive study of contemporary educational leadership in England to date, researchers Day et al. (2016) concluded that effective school leaders “improve teaching and learning and thus pupil outcomes indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, teaching practices and through developing teachers’ capacities for leadership” (p. 2).

Managing Operations and Resources

While leadership is en vogue, management is still a fundamental aspect of the principalship. The concept of management in education is referred to by many labels, including: managing the teaching and learning programme (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008); organizational path (Leithwood et al., 2010); resourcing strategically (Day & Sammons, 2013;

Robinson et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2008); and managing people, data, and processes (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, et al., 2010) among others. Educational leadership research findings consistently recognize the importance of aligning managerial decisions with the overarching vision and priorities of the organization (Bush & Glover, 2014).

Hitt and Tucker (2016) highlighted the importance of considering the context to maximize organizational functioning, and the strategic acquisition and allocation of resources that align with the mission and vision of the school community. Principals who promoted improvements in student achievement were able to adapt to context and maximize the strengths of the school community (Leithwood, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006). Leaders approached their organizations from a strengths-based perspective, saw the best in people and situations, and allowed for development and growth in themselves and school stakeholders (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2017). Research by Robinson et al. (2008; Robinson & Gray, 2019) found that strategic resourcing had an appreciable effect on student learning, and addressed the practices necessary for principals to align resources with optimal program delivery. Effective principals carefully allocated available budget to professional learning for teachers and program supports for students in ways that further supported the vision of their schools (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Day and Sammons (2013) recognized the overlap between the previously distinct concepts of leadership, management, and administration, particularly in those schools where principals actively prioritized student care, well-being, and achievement in their daily interactions throughout the school community, and in all of their professional decisions.

Larger Societal Context

Successful leaders have a high degree of sensitivity to the contexts in which they work. Braun, Ball, Maguire, and Hoskins (2011) examined the role of context in shaping policy

enactments in schools, conceptualizing a variety of interrelated and overlapping site-based conditions as situated, material, professional, and external dimensions. The four sets of contexts should be seen as constituting a heuristic device, rather than discrete entities, and, according to British researchers Clarke and O'Donoghue (2017), can be applied to "a diversity of educational contexts in order to reveal some of the exigencies that can be brought to bear on school leadership in accordance with the specific setting in question" (p. 175).

As another example, Clarke and O'Donoghue (2017) generated five key elements to guide leadership practice in diverse contexts, including the importance of acknowledging the complexity of context, being sensitive to context, and being flexible. Ylimaki and Jacobson (2011) also found that successful leadership was context-sensitive, but beyond the local Global, national, and local, contexts need to be considered to fully understand the behaviour of principals, whose work is best thought of as layered and multidimensional. Finally, Lovett, Dempster, and Flückiger (2015) advocated for leaders to focus on learning the contexts of pedagogy (learning about teaching and learning), people (learning about those with whom leaders work), place (leaders learning about the educational context), system (leaders learning about the education system), and self (leaders learning about 'me' the leader).

A review of the international literature by Day and Sammons (2013) confirmed that school leaders improved teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions. The ways in which successful leaders applied these leadership practices, rather than the practices themselves, were indicative of their responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they worked. While sensitive to the contexts in which they worked, successful leaders applied contextually sensitive combinations of the core leadership practices articulated within the review. Hitt and

Tucker (2016) recognized that school leaders served as connectors for families of their students with necessary community agencies and participated in networks with other school leaders in the broader community to share and discuss ways to meld home, community, and school efforts.

While not exhaustive, this section of our synthesis demonstrates that Alberta's LQS is empirically and theoretically supported by foundational and current literature. The competencies and their accompanying indicator statements capture the appreciable depth, breadth, and complexity of responsibilities entrusted to principals as part of their daily work in schools.

Chapter Eight

WHAT IS QUALITY SYSTEM LEADERSHIP?

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What is Quality System Leadership?

Two overarching questions drove our review of the school district leadership literature: What quality school district leadership practices contribute to optimum student learning? How do those identified in the research compare and contrast with those outlined in the Alberta *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS)*? In contrast to the preceding teaching and school leadership sections, the sources of evidence considered here do not add up to a very large database. However, even though school districts are “largely invisible and of little interest to the public, at large” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 9), and “the nature of the link between districts and student achievement is difficult to delineate” (Anderson & Young, 2018, p. 1), there is a growing body of research that substantiates the important characteristics and associated leadership practices enacted in high quality school systems that contribute to the learning and well-being of all students. Evidence in this portion of literature review is presented in two subsections. Building on the short history of research on school district contributions to student learning, in the first subsection we trace the emergence of four similar sets of quality school district characteristics and leadership practices since the late 1980s. In the second subsection, the focus is on studies of quality system leadership in Alberta. Themes from the bodies of district leadership knowledge are compared to and contrasted with the seven competencies and key indicators outlined in the Alberta SLQS.

Quality District Leadership’s Contributions to Student Learning

While England diminished the powers of Local Educational Authorities in the 1980s and other English speaking countries, such as New Zealand and Australia, turned to school based management; Canada and the U.S. began to view districts as “key agents in the chains of accountability for student learning between governments and classrooms” (Leithwood, 2013, p.

10). For this reason, the district leadership literature included in our review is entirely from North America. In the three decades since the publication of the first major studies of district effectiveness by Murphy and Hallinger (1988) and LaRoque and Coleman (1990), hundreds of journal articles have provided insight into school district leadership practice. Given the significant “reliability among key findings related to the characteristics of district structures and practices” (Anderson & Young , 2018, p. 2) in this literature, we rely on three benchmark reviews (Anderson & Young, 2018; Leithwood, 2010; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988) and the sole comprehensive meta-analysis in the field (Waters & Marzano, 2006) to explore of the pattern of key findings.

Instructionally Effective School Districts (1988)

In their exploratory study, “Characteristics of Instructionally Effective School Districts”, Murphy and Hallinger (1988) interviewed superintendents and reviewed documents 12 high performing California school districts. Effectiveness in these instructionally effective school districts (IESD) was determined to have the following characteristics:

1. strong instructionally-focused leadership from the superintendent and administrative team,
2. an emphasis on student achievement and improvement in teaching and learning,
3. the establishment and enforcement of district goals for improvement,
4. district-wide curriculum and textbook adoption
5. district advocacy and support for use of specific instructional strategies,
6. deliberate selection of principals with curriculum knowledge and interpersonal skills,
7. systematic monitoring of the consistency between district goals and expectations and school goals

8. implementation through principal accountability processes.
9. direct, personal, involvement of superintendents in monitoring performance through school visits and meetings with principals,
10. alignment of district resources for professional development with district goals for curriculum and instruction,
11. systematic use of student testing and other data for district planning, goal setting, and tracking school performance, and
12. generally positive relations between the central office, the school board, and local communities.

LaRoque and Coleman's (1990) study of ten British Columbia school districts reported similar findings. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom's (2004) review of the school and district leadership literature found "that other studies from this time period suggested that strong district influence on instructional decisions and practices in the classroom was not typical in most districts" (p. 38).

Setting and Keeping Districts Focused on Teaching and Learning Goals (2006)

Waters and Marzano's (2006) meta-analysis of school district leadership provided substantive evidence that district leadership matters and "that when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected" (p. 5). Key among their findings was the overall statistically significant relationship (a positive correlation of .24) between district leadership and student achievement. Listed below are the five strategies identified as the having "a statistically significant correlation with average student academic achievement. All four of these responsibilities relate to setting and keeping districts focused on teaching and learning goals" (p. 3).

1. Collaborative goal-setting
2. Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction
4. Broad alignment and support of district goals

Based on this meta-analysis, Marzano and Waters (2009) combined findings on district effects on student achievement with their analysis of “research and theory on high reliability organizations and the research regarding the highest-performing school systems in the world” (p. 22) in what they believed to be “a new view of district leadership—one that assumes district leadership can be a critical component of effective schooling” (p. 13). Their new conception was comprised of four components. First, nonnegotiable instructional goals are established at the district level. Second, leadership at every level of the district supports these goals. Third, resources are dedicated to professional development that ensures high-quality instruction, strong and knowledgeable instructional leadership, ongoing monitoring of instructional quality, and the impact of instruction on learning. Fourth, despite this tight coupling, there is sufficient autonomy and flexibility at the school level to respond quickly and effectively to early indications of error and individual student failure (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 21).

Strong Districts Exceptionally Effective at Closing the Achievement Gap (2010)

Leithwood’s (2010) extensive review developed a similar set of characteristics as Murphy and Hallinger (1988). These characteristics were (a) having a district-wide focus on student achievement; (b) using proven approaches to curriculum and instruction; (c) using evidence for planning, organizational learning, and accountability; (d) fostering a district-wide sense of efficacy; (e) building and maintaining good communications and relations, learning communities, and district culture; (f) investing in instructional leadership; (g) targeting and

phasing in an orientation to school improvement beginning with interventions on low-performing schools and students; and (h) facilitating infrastructure alignment. In addition to (i) implementing district-wide, job-embedded professional development; and (j) engaging strategically with the government's agenda.

From his knowledge mobilization efforts supporting district improvement initiatives and developing leadership frameworks in Alberta (2008) and Ontario (2012) in combination with further analysis of findings from an extensive longitudinal study with colleagues (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Louis, Leithwood, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2010), Leithwood (2013) generated nine research-informed critical features of strong districts. Leadership practices in such districts are guided by:

1. a broadly shared mission, vision and goals founded on ambitious images of the educated person;
2. a coherent instructional guidance system;
3. deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions;
4. learning-oriented organizational improvement processes;
5. job-embedded professional development for all members;
6. budgets, structures, personnel policies and procedures, and uses of time aligned with the district's mission, vision and goals;
7. a comprehensive approach to leadership development;
8. a policy-oriented board of trustees;
9. productive working relationships with staff and other stakeholders.

Translating the nine district characteristics into more specific senior leadership practices is the paper's second major contribution. Emphasizing the importance of proactivity and "System Two

Thinking” (Kahneman, 2013) provided additional pathways for district leaders to better navigate the high levels of complexity and uncertainty that characterize their professional worlds. The benefits of Senge’s (1990) constructs of system thinking and team leadership are underlined in the following manner:

Members of the district leadership team acting together potentially have much greater systems thinking capacity than do any one of its members acting alone. Improving the systems thinking capacity of district leaders is a function of improving both individual and collective capacity. (Leithwood, 2013, p. 29)

A Research-Based Framework for District Effectiveness (2018)

The stated intention of the final and most recent review included in this section, Anderson and Young (2018), was “to examine the body of research on effective district practices published over the last 30 years and develop a framework for district effectiveness that reflects that research” (p. 2). Their review of 97 sources, including 55 peer-reviewed journal articles, 32 reports, and 7 books, was anchored by and drew upon several common themes from “two seminal pieces of research: Murphy and Hallinger (1988) and Leithwood (2010)” (Anderson & Young, 2018, p. 3). The review identified three additional district effectiveness themes with significant empirical evidence: (a) focusing the district on equity, (b) placing importance on the individual, and (c) having an openness and capacity to change (Anderson & Young, 2018, p. 3-4). The 13 district practices were categorized within three domains. This review indicated that the more closely aligned a district’s practices are with the Framework for District Effectiveness, the more likely the district is to have effective schools and strong student learning outcomes (Anderson & Young, 2018, p. 7).

Literature Undergirding the Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard

In carrying out their dual professional roles of chief executive officer of the board and chief education officer of the school authority, school superintendents play vitally important roles in the success of the provincial school system. Though the challenges and complexities associated with the role of the Canadian superintendent have been quite well documented (e.g. ATA, 2016; Hetherington, 2014; Leithwood, 2013; Parsons, 2015; Parsons & Brandon, 2017), it is also recognized that “quality leadership occurs best when superintendents collaborate with teachers, principals, school councils, and parents in enabling all students to achieve their potential” and that “superintendents must be informed by current, relevant educational research, with a focus on career-long improvement” (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 3). Research from a variety of sources, (Brandon, Hanna, Morrow, Rhyason, & Schmold, 2013; Brandon, Hanna, & Negropontes, 2015; Leithwood, 2008, 2010, Leithwood & McCullough, 2016; Louis, Leithwood, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Waters & Marzano, 2006; Ottmann, 2017) provide evidence that undergird district leadership practices in relation to the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard*:

Quality superintendent leadership occurs when the superintendent’s ongoing analysis of the context, and the superintendent’s decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality school leadership, quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in the school authority. (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 3)

These seven professional practice competencies required of Alberta school superintendents within the SLQS are used to frame this section of the review: (a) building effective relationships, (b) modelling commitment to professional learning, (c) visionary leadership, (d) leading learning, (e) ensuring First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education for all students, (f) school

authority operations and resources, and (g) supporting effective governance. Following an overview of the provincial context, these key competencies are addressed in separate sections to illustrate ways that superintendents strive to overcome the challenges and complexities inherent in their unique and significant roles within the education system. By no means is it suggested that these seven competencies should be thought of as separate and distinct areas of endeavour. In fact, professionals generally practice in more integrated and fluid ways (Brandon, McKinnon, & Bischoff, 2014; Kahneman, 2013; Schoen, 1983). However, it is helpful to mindfully think one's way forward through the guidance of research informed images of coherent and impactful practice.

Each of the seven subsections begins with the competency description along with selected indicators of practice as stated in the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* document (Alberta Education, 2018b). Evidence informed approaches to overcoming related challenges faced by superintendents in the demanding and complex area of practice are then described. Though not offered as magic bullets, these *best evidence practices* enable superintendents to more consistently overcome the legions of challenges encountered in their complex contemporary contexts.

Competency One: Building Effective Relationships

A superintendent establishes a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment by building positive and productive relationships with members of the school community and the local community. (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 4)

Of the six optional indicators which describe superintendent practice under this competency, the following three are well supported by the research evidence.

- Modeling ethical leadership practices, based on integrity, and objectivity.

- Establishing constructive relationships with students, staff, school councils, parents/guardians, employee organizations, the education ministry, and other stakeholder organizations.
- Facilitating the meaningful participation of members of the school community and local community in decision-making.

Related research. Those who rise to top of the school district leadership hierarchy are generally good at working with people. While connections among the superintendent, principals, and teachers form one complex web of relationships (ATA, 2016, p. 4), the ability to build relationships with a wide array of stakeholder groups is a key challenge for leaders in this role (Hetherington, 2014, p. 2). Living in the middle is a new experience for superintendents. They are pulled upward by government officials, and the board of trustees. They feel morally responsible downward to the needs of teachers and students; while at the same time they are often pulled sideways by pressure from parents, the broader community, and the media (ATA, 2016; Hetherington, 2014; Parsons, 2015). Despite a vast array of relational interactions in a typical workday, superintendents frequently report a sense of isolation and vulnerability (Parsons & Brandon, 2017).

The interpersonal skills and collaborative orientations of effective superintendents are foundational contributors to their success and, more significantly, to the success of their school systems. Relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Honig 2003, 2006, &2008), ethical conduct, and integrity contribute to a productive, safe, and secure school system culture. The importance of paying attention to the cultivation of professional relationships within schools and within communities is well established in the district leadership literature (Gordon & Louis, 2012;

Leithwood; 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2016; Robinson, 2011; Ryan, 2006; Steele, 2010; Timperley, 2011, Whelan, 2009).

Bryk and Schneider (2002) claimed that trust, in particular *relational trust* (as distinct from *contractual* trust), should be considered foundational to the building of productive relationships. Relational trust is formed when “each party in a role relationship maintains an understanding of his or her obligations and holds some expectations around the role obligations of the other” (p. 20).

The significance of the senior leadership group working as a team in their collective efforts to lead educator and student learning was identified as highly significant by Brandon et al. (2015). These superintendency leadership teams had a strong, shared faith in the importance of team leadership and team learning grounded in the literature by Senge (1990). In addition to what school principal and middle level jurisdiction leader participants shared about the team-oriented ways in which their senior leadership groups worked together, the researchers observed a number of characteristics that ran across the cases.

These focus group conversations were consistently free flowing and dynamic. Members supported each other’s comments, added examples to illuminate points introduced by another colleague and enthusiastically engaged in the dialogue. Their pride and passion for their work together was readily apparent. Participation of non-educator members of the five leadership teams was extensive. Their contributions to our learning focused conversations were articulate and well informed. It was readily evident that they both understood and supported the learning agendas undertaken by educator colleagues.

(Brandon et al., 2015, pp. 81-82)

Competency Two: Modelling Commitment to Professional Learning

A superintendent engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection, identifying and acting on research-informed opportunities for enhancing leadership, teaching, and learning. (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 4)

Four of the six optional indicators of Modelling Commitment to Professional Learning are clearly rooted in the research evidence. The four research informed indicators are as follows:

- collaborating with teachers, principals and other superintendents to build professional capacities and expertise;
- actively seeking out feedback and information from a variety of sources to enhance leadership practice;
- seeking and critically-reviewing educational research and applying it to decisions and practices, as appropriate;
- engaging the members of the school authority to establish a shared understanding of current trends and priorities in the education system.

Related research. A major theme of this review is that the contemporary school superintendent's role is increasingly complex and incredibly demanding (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016; Hetherington, 2014; Leithwood, 2010; Parsons, 2015, Parsons & Brandon, 2017). It is not uncommon for senior leaders to be pulled in multiple directions at any one time. What is distinct about the practices of superintendents who maintain their focus on their moral imperatives and educative purposes as they work through the myriad daily demands, distractions, and steady parade of external and internal pressures, is that they consistently convey that their work as part of a leadership team that leads learning in an action oriented and research informed manner. They purposefully model their commitment to professional learning. The jurisdiction

leaders in recent Alberta study “did more than just read and conceptualize research – they thoughtfully utilized what they were learning to implement change and to lead learning” (Brandon et. al, 2015, p. 82).

There is considerable evidence that superintendents and principals in highly successful districts convey a strong belief in their own and their colleague’s capacities to accomplish good things for all students. Educational leaders "who see themselves as working collaboratively towards clear, common goals with district personnel, other principals, and teachers are more confident in their leadership" (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood and Anderson, 2010, p. 30). The study further indicated that district leadership provided extensive opportunities for educators to develop expertise relevant to achieving the district's goals and created organizational structures and settings that supported and enhanced staff's work and learning.

Anderson and Louis (2012) observed, “district policies and practices around instruction are sufficiently powerful that they can be felt, indirectly, by teachers as stronger and more directed leadership behaviors by principals” (p. 181). Among the most import findings, were the benefits of focusing central office efforts on teaching and learning through practices such as these:

- Communicating a strong belief in the capacity of teachers and principals to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and in the district’s capacity to develop the organizational conditions needed for that to happen (high collective efficacy).
- Building consensus about core expectations for professional practice (curriculum, teaching, leadership).
- Differentiating support to schools in relation to evidence of implementing these core expectations, with flexibility for school-based innovation.

- Setting clear expectations for school leadership practices and establishing leadership-development systems to select, train, and assist principals and teacher leaders consistent with district expectations.
- Providing organized opportunities for teachers and principals to engage in school-to-school communication, focusing on the challenges of improving student learning and program implementation.
- Coordinating district support for school improvement across organizational units in relation to district priorities, expectations for professional practice, and a shared understanding of the goals and needs of specific schools. (p. 181-182)

Leithwood, Anderson, and Louis (2012) found that the district contribution to school leaders' sense of efficacy is most powerful through five strategies: (a) unambiguously assigning priority to the improvement of student achievement and instruction; (b) investing in the development of instructional leadership; (c) ensuring that personnel policies support the selection and maintenance of the best people for each school; (d) emphasizing teamwork and professional community; and (e) providing worthwhile programs of professional learning, aimed at strengthening educator capacity to achieve shared purposes (p. 119).

Competency Three: Visionary Leadership

A superintendent engages with the school community in implementing a vision of a preferred future for student success, based on common values and beliefs. (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 5)

Of the four indicators that describe superintendent practice related to the *Visionary Leadership* competency, the following three are well in the research literature that underlines the critical importance of the superintendent's attention to establishing a widely shared vision:

- ensuring that the vision is informed by research on effective learning, teaching and leadership:
- promoting innovation and continuous improvement by building structures and developing strategies to support staff in professional collaboration; and
- promoting in the school community a common understanding of and support for the school authority's goals, priorities, and strategic initiatives.

Related research. At least two challenges leap out from the research informed lesson that visionary leadership practices aimed at creating a widely shared sense of purpose that focuses jurisdiction energy and efforts on teaching and learning can have a significantly positive impact (Fullan, 2011; Leithwood; 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2016; Leithwood, Strauss, & Anderson, 2007; Louis et al., 2010; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Ryan, 2006; Schmold, 2008; Steele, 2010, Whelan, 2009). The first challenge is achieving a focused vision that is, in fact, widely shared and implemented. The four *significantly improving* Alberta systems examined by Maguire (2003) had vision statements “that were more sharply focused on student learning and more widely promulgated and internalized at all levels” than other jurisdictions (p. 10).

Focusing on a few clear, widely understood priorities on teaching and learning can lead to powerful results for the learning and welfare of all children. Focused school authorities have a limited number of defined priorities that are clearly articulated, collaboratively developed, and effectively communicated. Such jurisdictions avoid the “Christmas tree” glitter of numerous innovations and initiatives that invariably lead to “initiative fatigue” and lack of coherence (Fullan, 2001). Participants in all six settings recently studied by Brandon, Hanna, and Negropontes (2015) “articulated that their jurisdictions were highly focused on student success:

learning, engagement, and well-being. Educators at every level indicated that their work was guided and, in many cases, inspired, by a clear learning vision that was understandable, attainable, and forward looking” (p. 66).

A third challenge is how to operationalize such a widely shared sense of educational purpose. An Alberta study conducted by Davis, Sumara, and D’Amour (2012) concluded that: “Dynamic learning systems cannot be forced or legislated into existence. The best one can do is to create the conditions that will permit their emergence” (p. 374). Highly centralized networks do not appear to foster organizational learning; on the other hand, fragmented systems can have pockets of strength that are never shared or leveraged outside of their own networks (ATA, 2016, p.12)

Competency Four: Leading Learning

A superintendent establishes and sustains a learning culture in the school community that promotes ongoing critical reflection on practice, shared responsibility for student success and continuous improvement. (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 5)

The three following indicators, which are particularly well established in the research literature, describe superintendent practice related to the Leading Learning competency.

- Providing learning opportunities, based on research-informed principles of effective teaching, learning and leadership, to build the capacity of all members of the school community to fulfill their educational roles;
- Ensuring that all instruction in the school authority addresses learning outcomes and goals outlined in provincial legislation and programs of study;

- Building principals' capacities and holding them accountable for providing instructional leadership through effective support, supervision and evaluation practices.

Related research. Two enduring obstacles to enacting effective instructional leadership are described as the *complexity challenge* and the *learning challenge* (Brandon, 2005, 2006, 2008; Brandon et al., 2015). Inadequate time to provide instructional leadership and supervision is a consistently identified impediment by school administrators (Brandon, 2006, 2008; Canadian Association of Principals & Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014; Fullan, 2014; Opfer, Pedder, & Lavicza, 2011; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2015; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Attending to such matters as budgeting, student and parent concerns, preparing reports, other bureaucratic requirements, and more immediate organizational tasks often take precedence over the more complex work to support instruction. Such management concerns are frequently cited as inhibitors to having sufficient time to adequately provide instructional leadership. Issues associated with the interpersonal politics of teacher supervision, expectation ambiguity for school administrators, along with the intellectual and interpersonal demands related to understanding and supporting quality teaching and teacher growth further contribute to this first enduring obstacle (Brandon, 2005, 2006, 2008; Brandon et al., 2015).

The absence of ongoing attention to the development of instructional leadership knowledge and skills has been a major obstacle to effective instructional leadership. Insufficient attention has been devoted to the development of supervisory knowledge and skills in many schools and districts, creating *the learning challenge* (Brandon, 2005, 2006, 2008).

An increasing number of research studies illustrate how persistent senior leader commitment to the development of instructional leadership is impacting leadership and teaching

quality (Anderson & Louis, 2012; Barber et al., 2010; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2012; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Wahlstrom, 2012). Effective superintendents are committed to ongoing and sustained educator learning – both their own learning and the learning of all members of the wider school authority community. Evidence supporting the importance of professional learning was claimed in 21 of the 33 studies reported in Leithwood's (2008, 2010b) review of high performing school districts. This was the largest number of studies reporting evidence about any of the 12 dimensions of high-performing districts. Several studies support the benefits of evidence based professional learning (Brandon et al., 2015; Campbell, Fullan, Glaze, 2006; Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Leithwood 2008, 2010; Pritchard & Marshall, 2002; Timperley, 2011; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). An important component of this research is the notion that when leaders publicly engage in ongoing learning with other educators, the impact is strengthened.

Brandon et al. (2015) found that 95% of the principals and middle level jurisdiction leaders surveyed indicated that senior leaders were both focused on instructional leadership and have similar expectations for school leaders. The expectation that principals must be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction was universally understood and applied in all six of the study's jurisdictions. Many principals saw their work as part of instructional leadership teams within and beyond their schools. Vice-principals, learning coaches, and learning leaders were working together in distributed and shared forms of leadership in many of the systems. The case-by-case qualitative data suggested that ongoing support of jurisdiction based instructional leaders added to this sense of team leadership.

A challenge reported by many principals and jurisdiction leaders was the desire for more ongoing and connected ways to develop instructional leadership capacity. Developing

instructional leadership through sustained, job embedded, and evidence based approaches is considerably more impactful than attendance at conferences and one-shot presentations by headline speakers (Brandon et al. 2015).

Competency Five: Ensuring First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education for All Students

A superintendent establishes the structures and provides the resources necessary for the school community to acquire and apply foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students. (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 6)

The five following indicators describe superintendent practice related to the Ensuring First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education for All Students competency.

- supporting staff in accessing the professional learning and capacity-building needed to meet the learning needs of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and all other students;
- engaging and collaborating with neighbouring First Nations and Métis leaders, organizations and communities to optimize learning success and development of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and all other students;
- understanding historical, social, economic, and political implications of:
 - treaties and agreements with First Nations;
 - agreements with Métis; and
 - residential schools and their legacy;
- aligning school authority resources and building organizational capacity to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit student achievement; and
- pursuing opportunities and engaging in practices to facilitate reconciliation within the school community.

Related research. This new competency presents a number of challenges to superintendency practice identified by Alberta School Superintendents in relation to this standard are outlined the CASS Needs Assessment Survey Findings report (March 26, 2017). They include:

1. Opportunities for quality professional development and training; building capacity, awareness, understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Knowledges and cultures.
2. Making connections, developing relationships and trust, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and collaborating with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, leaders, and Elders to develop an inclusive vision and models of working relationships. Working together to discuss applicable knowledge systems, culturally appropriate/responsive resources and supports. Determining how to respectfully implement foundational Indigenous Knowledges, and outlining how this work aligns to other work.
3. Increasing the sharing of, and access to, resources, successful, promising and wise practices and strategies; online and otherwise.
4. Lack of prioritization, and/or competing priorities and initiatives.
5. Lack of time to engage in the complexity of this work. (p. 37)

This study also revealed number of helpful suggestions that superintendents are well advised to take into account. The Report noted that “time and prioritization should be given to the following prominent learning goals for the First Nations, Métis and Inuit competencies, which includes the building of capacity, awareness, understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Knowledges and cultures” (p. 37):

- Learning programs should begin by making connections, developing trust and relationships, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and collaboration with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, leaders, Elders to develop an inclusive vision of foundational

knowledge and relationship, and models of working relationships. The survey respondents suggested that it was important to work together to discuss knowledge systems application, how to respectfully implement foundational Indigenous Knowledges, determine culturally appropriate/responsive resources and supports, and to outline how this work aligns with other work.

- Ensure that the learning include exemplars of resources, successful, promising and wise practices and strategies, which is accessible and shared online. (p. 37)

Finally, the Report recommended the following professional learning strategies, which would meet this competency's intention:

- Draw from the leadership, wisdom, expertise, experience and knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, educators and Elders to create a learning program that is respectful of foundational Indigenous Knowledges, to determine culturally appropriate/responsive resources and supports, and to outline how this work aligns to other work – perhaps the other leadership competencies.
- Ensure that the leadership learning include exemplars of resources, successful, promising and wise practices and strategies, which is accessible and shared online. (p. 37)

The findings from this needs assessment survey, particularly in relation to the authentic inclusion of Indigenous people, is supported by Indigenous authors, research studies, and governing documents (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, Accord on Indigenous Education, 2010; Battiste, 2013; Ottmann, 2017; Truth and Reconciliation, 2015; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2008; Universities Canada, 2015). The complexity is increased by the volume of knowledge that needs to be learned by superintendents

if they are to achieve this competency. Becoming educated is only the beginning to gaining competency.

As this study, and others have shown (Ottmann, 2010), education is powerful if it informs, challenges and shifts misconceptions, stereotypes, and perhaps racist attitudes towards Indigenous peoples. Hence, the importance of leadership learning that covers the affective (i.e., individual and collective belief and value systems) and cognitive domains (i.e., knowledge and skills) – the heart and mind.

Competency Six: School Authority Operations and Resources

A superintendent directs school authority operations and strategically allocates resources in the interests of all students and in alignment with the school authority's goals and priorities. (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 6)

The three following indicators describe superintendent practice related to the School Authority Operations and Resources competency. They are well supported by the research evidence, but are also areas of potential conflict, tension, and challenge in superintendent practice.

- Providing direction on fiscal and resource management in accordance with all statutory, regulatory, and school authority requirements.
- Delegating responsibility to staff, where appropriate, to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness.
- Providing for the support, ongoing supervision and evaluation of all staff members in relation to their respective professional responsibilities.

Related research. Evidence from several studies suggests that highly successful school systems align their infrastructural and organizational practices in support of their student-focused missions (Brandon et al., 2013; Brandon et al., 2015; Leithwood, 2008, 2010; Louis et al., 2010;

Waters & Marzano, 2006). Despite this, the infrastructure in many school jurisdictions has evolved in response to the needs of staff rather than to support of improvements in teaching and learning. Though the evidence is quite clear and makes a great deal of common sense, the idea of aligning budgets, personnel policies, and procedures with the jurisdiction mission, vision, and values is not consistently enacted.

This is particularly challenging when the demonstrated benefits of providing additional resources to schools in areas with lower socio-economic characteristics and more diverse student needs are taken into account. Politics and privilege are often obstacles to broadening instructional benefits to disadvantaged populations. As one superintendent in Brandon, Turner, Parsons, and Donlevy (2017) observed:

I have a strong belief in democracy, the important role of citizens, and the abilities of trustees to represent their communities. Though our processes of purposeful, collective inquiry are sometimes messy, we almost always come to a decision that is good for our kids. My role is to guide conversations and to help bring the views of the entire community – including under-represented minorities – to bear on matters of importance to student learning. (p. 1)

The management of increasingly scarce resources in the context of growing demands is often contentious and frequently laden with political risk for trustees and administrators. While trustees will often support the superintendent in such situations, their support can dissolve in the face of public resistance to school closures or bussing changes (ATA, 2016).

Competency Seven: Supporting Effective Governance

A superintendent of schools as referred to in the School Act, as chief executive officer of the board and chief education officer of the school authority, provides the board with

information, advice and support required for the fulfillment of its governance role, and reports to the Minister on all matters required of the superintendent as identified in the School Act and other provincial legislation. (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 7)

The five following research informed indicators describe superintendent practice related to the Supporting Effective Governance competency.

- Establishing and sustaining a productive working relationship with the board, based on mutual trust, respect and integrity.
- Ensuring that the board's plans, resource allocations, strategies and procedures lead to the achievement of its goals and priorities.
- Supporting the board in the fulfillment of its governance functions in the fiduciary, strategic and generative realms.
- Implementing board policies and supporting the regular review and evaluation of their impact.
- Promoting constructive relations between the board and staff, as well as provincial authorities, post-secondary institutions, and education stakeholder organizations.

Related research. Recent studies of educational governance in Canada (Brandon, 2016; Galway, Sheppard, Wiens, & Brown, 2013; Leithwood, 2010, 2013; Leithwood & McCullough, 2016; Seel & Gibbons, 2011; Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009) remind us that governance by an elected board is not *corporate* governance. This literature informs us of the importance of adopting a policy governance model well suited to the local context. No governance model is the one size that fits all. Ongoing education for both elected board members and jurisdiction leaders can foster collaboration, reciprocity, and interdependency among professionals, trustees, and the wider community. Effective governance models call for trustee participation in assessing

community values and interests and incorporating these into the school authority's beliefs and vision for student learning and well-being. In effective board governance systems, trustees play a vital role in mobilizing parents and the wider community in supporting the vision and helping to create a culture of excellence that makes achieving the vision possible.

Effective school and school system leaders understand that school councils do important work and make a variety of significant contributions to school and division learning cultures. Through two-way connections – partnerships – school councils help educators and school trustees to better understand community contexts and, at the same time, take steps to help schools maintain

Section Summary: The Literature on Quality System Leadership

This section of our systematic literature review addressed two questions: What quality school district leadership practices contribute to optimum student learning? How do those identified in the research compare and contrast with those outlined in the Alberta SLQS? We traced the evolution of district leadership research over the past three decades, identified key aspects of practice as determined by the best available evidence, and described tensions within this complex leadership field. Our appraisal and synthesis of the research evidence identified the following four dimensions of effective district leadership practice with strongest support across all the studies examined:

1. Establishing a widely shared, district-wide focus on the student achievement and well-being.
2. Facilitating infrastructure alignment so that budgets, structures, personnel policies and procedures, and uses of time aligned with the district's mission, vision and goals;

3. Building and maintaining good communications and relations, learning communities, and district culture; and
4. Using multiple forms of evidence for planning, organizational learning, and accountability.

This review illustrates how Alberta superintendents may conduct their professional practice within a single standard and seven competencies *framed through leadership research in action*. As “most fields informed by the social sciences have imperfect evidence available to inform their practices” and, as such, “judgments are rightly based on the best available evidence, along with the practical wisdom of those actually working in the field (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 9).

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