DEFINING THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY COMPARING THE DUAL
PERSPECTIVES OF INSIDERS (PRINCIPALS) AND OUTSIDERS
(PARTICIPANT OBSERVERS)

by

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Abstract

This research is a qualitative study that described the lived experiences of school principals in a specific context (New Brunswick, Canada) from the dual perspectives of internal (principals) and external (school improvement consultant/lead school reviewer) participants in order to better define the practical role(s) of the principal.

Through this qualitative research study, I used an autoethnographic methodology supported by a social constructivist perspective and will focus on the principalship in the Anglophone New Brunswick context (Palincsar, 1998). Autoethnography naturally allows for the voice of self. I will use Anderson’s (2006) analytic autoethnographic methodological approach, which allows for the voice of others to further inform the study, beyond the perceptions of the participant researcher (Ellis, 2004). Research methods, including time and motion tracking, reflective journaling, interviews of self and others in the principal role, and thematic analysis, were used to triangulate data.

The time and motion analysis and reflective journaling were used to ensure the voice of self is documented and accurate. Interviews of self included two separate interviews of the participant researcher, who has been the principal of a small rural school for eight years as well as the external lead school reviewer for the province of New Brunswick over a three-year period. I conducted 12 interviews with principals serving in the Anglophone New Brunswick context. The interviews of others were used to apply components of analytic autoethnography, which aims to include informants beyond the self.

My research was also informed by a comprehensive literature review focused on leadership theories, as well as the contextual factors associated with leadership in modern...
schools, as observed by me, the participant researcher, during my practice as principal and lead school reviewer. I utilized thematic analysis (Seidman, 2006), to identify trends in the data sets, and the analysis was used to inform the generation of narratives used to explain the role of the principal from three distinct but interrelated perspectives: participant researcher as principal, participant researcher as lead school reviewer, and the voices of 12 other principals working in the role. These perspectives were combined in the form of a final narradigm, which was used to synthesize the three perspectives and define the amorphous role of the principal in the 21st century, thereby informing both aspirants to this role and those currently practising this role.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family for their guidance and support. My parents taught and modelled a positive work ethic. Their no quit approach to work and life has helped me achieve in life and has also been integral in ensuring that I had the resolve to work through the thesis writing process.

I also want to ensure that this dedication recognizes my wife and children. They have sacrificed and supported me through this process. This includes tolerating the frenetic writing sessions that occurred any time that the inspiration struck me, the lost vacations, and the times when I was simply unavailable. You, my family, will always be the most important aspect of my life and I hope that this dedication is illustrative of this fact.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge all of the individuals who supported me throughout the thesis writing process. It is especially important to recognize my committee members Amanda Benjamin, Ray Williams, and especially the chair of my committee, Ken Brien, who spent countless hours working with me to ensure that this thesis was organized, clear, and informative. Your leadership is greatly appreciated!

To those who offered editorial suggestions and support, you know who you are, thank you! I recognize that I often debated many of the suggestions that were made. I can’t say I enjoyed all of the debates. Although, in retrospect, I must admit that these debates stretched me academically and added great value to this work. Despite the fact that I did not always show my gratitude in the moment, I want to be abundantly clear when I say that your guidance, support, and even the critiques, are sincerely appreciated.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

While no one has effectively defined the principal’s role in the 21st century, most would agree that, over time, shifting societal dynamics have dramatically changed it. These dynamics include improvements in transportation and advances in technology and communication systems (Haughey, 2006). To illustrate the changing dynamics, Williams and Brien (2010) note that “the model of public education and the leadership patterns being used in schools today trace their origins to the early 1900s” (p. 2). Historically, the role of the principal was that of a principal teacher who had minimal duties in addition to those of a classroom teacher. Changes in society, including improvements in transportation, have led to an increase in access to schools and, through amalgamation, in school size, which led to a concomitant increase in obligations on principals. Williams and Brien go on to note how the amalgamation of schools and districts in the 1960s and 1970s, and further restructuring in the 1990s, were seminal changes that dramatically changed how schools are administered or led, and they also argue that “by failing to fully understand education as a complex system, educational leaders not only limited the success of these two reforms [the effective school and school restructuring movements], but they also prevented educators from improving Canadian education” (pp. 13-14).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to use analytic autoethnography as a methodological approach to describe the practical role of the principal in a 21st-century New Brunswick context from both insider (principal) and outsider (external observer) perspectives. My main research question is this: What is the role of the principal in the modern era? The study will use narratives to describe the role of the principal from
perspectives of the three participant groups. This will culminate in the establishment of a “narradigm” (Dhunpath, 2000), which will be informed by data that include interviews of self and others. Dhunpath (2000) describes the narradigm as a way to re-represent experience narratively. For him it is a form of life writing that can help educators to reconstruct and interpret meaningful and critical episodes. Narradigms provide a way for the autoethnographer to be able use their experience and knowledge as a valid form of ethnographic data. Narradigms utilize a narrative to describe the existing paradigm surrounding a culture. In this text, the narradigm synthesizes the diverse perspectives of each set of participants and will be used to define the role of the principal. The results of this study may be used both to inform aspirant principals of the realities of the role and, further, to inform the perspectives of those currently operating in this role. As one group of researchers noted, the role of the principal, and its associated demands, are constantly changing; this makes establishing a definition challenging (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010). The term principalship simply means the head or director of a school. This includes holding responsibility for the leadership and managerial functions within the school. Many authors have delved into the components of principalship, examining, among other things, how geography (urban and rural), size (small and large), and transitions between schools influence the principalship. Even Waters, Marzano, and McNulty’s (2003) seminal meta-analysis simply outlines the principal’s 21 key leadership responsibilities without delving into the practicalities of the role (see Appendix A for an elaboration of these 21 key leadership responsibilities).

When posting principal vacancies, districts attempt to outline the role by identifying the job requirements, but the institutional definitions listed in job postings
often do not match the practical requirements of the everyday principalship. Many individuals, both inside and beyond the education system, do not understand the role. One colleague, who replaced me for the short term while I was on leave, has often noted that “anyone who hasn’t worked as a principal would have no understanding of the role” (personal communication, January 27, 2012). Another colleague, employed at the district level who worked with me on an external review team, once noted, “I have been at the district so long I have forgotten what it is like to be on the ground. The school review allowed me to see how things really function. I need to be in schools more” (personal communication, October 9, 2013). Similar sentiments, noting a lack of comprehension of the current reality at schools, were often shared by district and departmental members working on external school review teams. Many of these individuals had been working away from schools for extended periods of time, but were charged with advising principals in a variety of areas. Simply put, we need to have a clearer picture of the duties and expectations of principals in the modern era.

**Statement of the Problem**

In the past 20 years, there have been dramatic changes in society prompted by rapid technological growth that influence the principalship (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Improvements in technology and associated advances in communication networks have increased access to information by stakeholders, including students and parents. These changes have also led to accumulating demands on teachers and principals to communicate with diverse stakeholders, including increased teacher and principal accountability to parents, supervisors, and the general public (Diosdado & Gamage, 2007b).
Advances in communication systems have led to several other changes. These include a focus on openness, increased demands for access to information, and an amplified public focus on large-scale testing. From an educational perspective, the changes have also been cumulative. For instance, regarding instructional practice, Chall (1967, cited by Ravitch, 2000) states, “Every school that introduces a new method still retains a good deal of the old one” (p. 355). Ravitch (2000) notes that, with each iteration of change, there is an accumulation of duties, noting “resounding calls for more efficiency, more surveys, and more curricular differentiation (p. 115). As this increase in obligations accumulates in schools, there are concomitant impacts on the breadth and depth of expectations placed upon the principal.

An emerging expectation is that principals are responsible for the collaborative development and implementation of policies and the documentation associated with these extra duties. For example, in New Brunswick these duties include the generation of a variety of documents and plans – such as vision and mission statements, and formal plans for school improvement, positive learning environment, technology (maintenance, advancement, and use), and crisis response – to ensure that the school is providing for and supporting the diverse and expanding needs of students. While examining the New Zealand context, Brooking, Collins, Court, and O’Neill (2003) identified challenges associated with the recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of principals. My observations and experience support similar concerns in the New Brunswick context. It is my experience that principal training programs do not effectively prepare principals for the broad and dynamic nature of the role.
Researchers in the area of educational leadership have focused on the principal rather than on the role of the principal. For instance, some (McEwan, 2003; Stogdill, 1970, 1974) have focused on the traits of leaders and how these traits contribute to effective school leadership. By contrast, a few (Erlauer, 2003; Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, & Collarbone, 2003; Whitaker, 2003, 2010) have examined the role and provided an external view as to what principals do within the school context. Others have attempted to offer an insider’s perspective into the role. Mundell (2011) used autoethnography to examine his own practice within a specific school configuration – in this case, a middle school. Similarly, Dethloff (2005) used an autoethnographic approach to examine his role as principal while transitioning between schools. While these autoethnographic studies examine the principal from an insider perspective, they are limited, given that they focus only on an individual’s singular experience, and the dynamics surrounding the role rather than the role itself. We need to identify the actual requirements of the role, a task that would be greatly enhanced by using both the internal participant’s and external observer’s insights in the same context.

**Significance of the Study**

As a participant researcher, I have a broad expanse of experience in the study setting. I have worked in the New Brunswick public school system for the past 18 years, including as a vice-principal for four years, a principal for seven years, and a school improvement consultant and lead school reviewer (LSR) for three years. These diverse professional experiences have afforded me the opportunity to view the role from both an insider’s and outsider’s perspective. They have also afforded me the opportunity for dialogue with many others operating in the role. Often these conversations have
confirmed that the changes in the broader social and cultural environment have altered the dynamics for schools, making the role increasingly challenging for school principals. We need to know, from the viewpoint of the practitioner, what these challenges are, the extent to which the role is tenable, and whether aspirant principals understand the role.

From an autoethnographic standpoint, I have found the principal role to be expansive during my tenure in the position. At the most challenging times, I have found the role to be so stressful as to be almost untenable. Having considered leaving the principalship during some of these more challenging times, I thought it best to examine the role from a more objective viewpoint to ensure that my perceptions were based on challenges inherent to the role itself and not due to issues with my own personal practice. I decided to collect data by tracking my daily work obligations (through time and motion tracking) and reflective journaling in order to examine my personal concerns to see if they were supported by evidence and analysis. Subsequently, in my role as LSR, my own perceptions were often confirmed through observations within several schools and through dialogue with others operating in the role. It became clear that these concerns were valid and needed to be studied in order to determine whether the role is tenable and if changes in institutional expectations are unrealistic. To this end, this study focused on the actual role of the principal in daily practice, including the obligations and diverse dynamics surrounding the role.

Throughout my review of the literature, I could not locate any study that examines principalship from an autoethnographic standpoint, using dual (internal and external) perspectives. In this study both perspectives will be provided – that of the internal
principal practitioners and external LSR. The addition of these dual perspectives will thus provide a much-needed addition to the research literature.

The principalship has changed dramatically from that of principal teacher. This study will examine the principalship from the perspective of two participant groups offering three perspectives. These perspectives include principal as participant researcher, LSR as participant researcher, and others practising in the role. Chapter 2 will present a review of the relevant literature, and chapter 3 will present the proposed research design for my study. The remaining chapters will be used to report the perspectives of each participant group. Chapter 4 will focus on my perspective as principal, chapter 5 my perspective as LSR, and chapter 6 the perspective of others working in the role. Chapter 7 will be used to summarize the findings and present the discussion. Chapter 8 will synthesize the perspectives through the use of a narradigm. Finally, in chapter 9, I will offer my definition of the role of the principal and present recommendations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines the relevant research in the field of leadership as it applies to the role of the principal. As Torraco (2005) notes, literature reviews can result in “fresh, new understandings and, in most cases, significant reconceptualization of the mature topics reviewed. A … literature review addresses new or emerging topics that would benefit from a holistic conceptualization and synthesis of literature to date” (p. 357). This literature review will move from a broad examination of leadership theories to those pertaining to educational leadership, and then, more specifically, to the role of the principal. Sections will include the evolution of leadership and its definition, educational leadership theories, the role of principals in the modern era, and gaps in the literature.

Leadership: Evolution and Definition

In order to fully understand the role of the principal in a school, it is important to first define leadership in general. Using this knowledge, we will be able to delve deeper into educational leadership – specifically the role of the principal and the ways in which it has evolved in recent decades. Among the various theories about leadership, three themes seem to be prevalent in the literature: power, performance, and people.

Power

The study of leadership has a long and vibrant history, the earliest of which was focused on power. Sun Tzu’s (2001) *The Art of War*, originally written as early as 2500 BCE, is a text focused on military leadership and describes the most effective leaders as those who can subdue the enemy without battle. Similarly, in order to get back in the good graces of the ruling Medici family, Machiavelli authored *The Prince* in the 16th century (Machiavelli, Skinner, & Price, 1988) as a recipe to gain and maintain power.
Although some of these early militaristic power-focused conceptions of leadership may seem far removed from the current day, some of the tenets from these early texts transfer easily to the modern era. For example, Richard Nixon is purported to have carried a copy of *The Prince* with him and slept with it on his nightstand (Crowley, 1998). His biographer Crowley (1998) noted that during a meeting on January 14, 1993, Nixon opened his briefcase and removed a copy of *The Prince*, stating, “‘The ends justify the means’ – that’s all most people see in Machiavelli” (p. 346). Nixon used some of the principles outlined in *The Prince* to help him gain presidential power in the United States, although, as history has recorded, his approach did not help him maintain it. Similarly, some of the tenets outlined in *The Art of War* (Tzu, 2001), like winning without overt conflict, can be applied by modern leaders to effectively manage people.

**Performance**

Although it could be argued historically that power and power relations often play a key role in leadership dynamics, with the advent of capitalist society more recent studies of leadership have focused on the economic concepts of performance and productivity. Early 20th-century conceptions of organizational leadership focused on the behaviour of managers and their ability to maximize worker performance and therefore enhance productivity (e.g., Taylor, 1923). Trends in leadership and business management, including the trend toward Management by Objectives (MBO) originally proposed by Drucker (1954), were often focused on meeting objectives and the production targets that accompanied them. As is often the case, many of the principles established in the business world trickle down, or across, into the field of education. Although public education does not exist for a financial profit, it does include a strong
focus on targets, the analysis and use of data, and the use of specific language that is Strategic, Measureable, Action-Oriented, Realistic, and Time-bound (S.M.A.R.T.) to identify and achieve goals (Doran, 1981; Sun, Johnson, & Przybylski, 2016). If we are truly going to influence education in a positive way, we need to understand the roles of those working in the field. According to Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008), one of the most important roles is that of the formal school leader, the principal. Drucker (1946, cited by Williamson, 1986) said that “the best way to predict the future is to create it” (p. 149). One is inclined to ask, how can we create the future of education if we don’t understand one of the most important roles within the discipline?

MBO, which focuses almost exclusively on targets, has been similarly criticized due to its lack of consideration for, and focus on, people. Deming (1986) notes that a major limitation in the MBO approach is a lack of understanding of, and collaboration with, workers. He encourages managers to prioritize leadership over targets, because he feels that a leader with an understanding of systems is more likely to guide workers to increased productivity, which is the ultimate goal of the MBO approach.

Williams (personal communications, November 16, 2015), noting the work of Senge, offers a contrasting view, arguing that “performance in complex organizations depends on the interrelationships between people which is based on trust and respect.” Further we hope that most public educational institutions would function on these fundamental principles although even Senge’s work notes exceptions. Feldman (2013) referencing the work of Senge et al. (2000) notes that, “historically little trust exists between stakeholders in education – teachers, parents, administration, and local business officials” (p. 23). I would offer that it is hard to ensure a culture of trust and respect
between principals and district officials if aspirants to the principal role are not aware of the specific obligations associated with the role when applying, which, as Drea and O’Brien (2003) note, are quite different depending on the context.

**People**

The criticisms associated with a concentration on performance and meeting targets lead us to the next prevalent development in leadership theories, which focuses on people. The focus on people operates on two levels. The first level focuses solely on the leaders and their traits. Historically, researchers such as Carlyle (1849) and Cowley (1931) examined the traits of leaders and how these traits affected organizations. Carlyle claimed that “the history of the world is but a biography of great men” (p. 127). Following Carlyle’s conception, some of these approaches came to be known as “great man” theories. Although these trait theories have utility, proponents often found their theories lacking when the social and political contexts of the leader changed. This approach was subsequently criticized by a variety of researchers, including Herbert Spencer (1969), who felt that society created the conditions for great leaders to be made. Critics often note that the great man theories do not consider other factors, such as the environment, social structures, and the institutional constraints within which the leaders work. Consequently, these theories are noted as being limited in their ability to generalize from one context to another.

The second level, which may be considered a more evolved approach, is raised by Stogdill (1970). He is skeptical of the dominance of trait theory and prefers to include consideration of the complex interactions of social and personal factors contributing to the emergence of leaders. He conducted a meta-analysis and examined 124 research
papers to attempt to determine the validity of trait studies of leaders. He found that although there were correlations between certain traits and leadership effectiveness, these correlations were weak. His research confirmed that traits alone do not guarantee the emergence of leaders. Further, it led to the development of other, more complex theories of leadership, which focused more on social factors within organizations. Other theorists have offered a variety of perspectives. Some believe that leadership traits are fixed and, consequently, they are more skeptical of a leader’s ability to change their approach as circumstances change (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Others have proposed that leaders are able to adapt their approach if circumstances afford them the opportunity (Reddin, 1970; Sergiovanni, 1991). Sergiovanni (1979) proposed that contingency models, à la Fiedler (1967), which considered the particular leader and the ability of that leader to influence followers, were an improvement over those that describe a single leadership style as being most effective. He went on to propose that, although this approach is an improvement over others, we still need to adopt a broader perspective that links “the more managerial aspects of leadership … with the more substantive aspects” (p. 394). Much of the recent literature notes that a singular focus on trait theories of leadership is not sufficient and has generally gone by the wayside (Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002).

Researchers like Fidler and Atton (2004) offer a goodness-of-fit argument, noting the importance of selecting the best fit for the circumstances, rather than selecting the person with the best general leadership skills. MacBeath (2006) also advocates the goodness-of-fit argument, stating that “all searches need to be guided by a recognition of the specific context and culture … and a consideration of best fit” (p. 195). This goodness of fit often
includes the leader’s ability to collaborate and distribute responsibility in order to maximize the output of workers (Leithwood et al., 2007).

Others note similar argumentation, proposing that the behaviour of the leader and their ability to build trust and promote collective efficacy will help establish a goodness of fit (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). If there are so many factors at work – traits of leaders, contexts, fit between the leader and the followers, and others – what can we definitively say about leadership? Or, more appropriately, how does the literature define leadership?

**Defining Leadership**

John Dewey (1916) once noted that “society is one word but many things” (pp. 81–82). The same can be said for leadership. Given that all leaders are different, possessing various traits and encountering various circumstances, it would be hard to find a universally accepted definition of leadership. In fact, Hoy and Miskel (2005) state that “definitions of the concept are almost as numerous as the scholars engaged in the study” (p. 375). These numerous conceptions of leadership have concurrently provided us with a variety of definitions. Burns (1979) defines leadership as the ability to induce “followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers” (p. 381). Similarly, Patterson (1993) defines leadership as “the process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed-upon purposes for the organization” (p. 3). Chemers (1997) offers the following: “Leadership is a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task” (p. 1). Hoy and Miskel identify a common element among such definitions: “The only
assumption shared by this and most definitions is that leadership involves social influence … in which one individual exerts intentional influence over others to structure activities and relationships in a group or organization” (p. 375). One early and often cited definition by Newell (1978) says that it “is useful to think of leadership as a generic term which refers to the processes characterized by the interrelationships among people as they work together in the formulation and achievement of shared goals” (p. 221). This definition accommodates the dynamic nature of institutions, but fails to define who the leader is. A better definition, and the most acceptable one for the purposes of this research, comes from Morphet, Johns, and Recker (1959), who note that leadership is established when a leader “(a) helps define tasks, goals and purposes, (b) helps the group to attain its tasks, goals and purposes, and (c) helps to maintain the group by assisting in providing for group and individual needs” (p. 87). This definition accommodates the unification of purpose, integration of activities, and provision of support needed to lead schools, which are complex organizations.

**Educational Leadership Theories**

In this section, we will briefly examine some of the developments in educational leadership theory, with a focus on the concepts of performance, people, process, and permanence. Just as there have been numerous definitions of leadership and an abundance of leadership theories, there are also a growing number of perspectives associated specifically with educational leadership. As stated previously, trends in educational leadership development have somewhat paralleled those in the world of business management. The focus on power, performance, and people, as discussed above, has developed similarly (see Appendix B for an elaboration of leadership theories).
Leadership, as it applies to public education, however, is often considered even more complicated than leadership in other contexts because of the complex relationships that exist between students, teachers, parents and guardians, and school administrators.

It must be recognized that although power and power relations are always intertwined with leadership, power, as it pertains to school leadership, will not be the dominant focus here. Rather, the focus will be on performance, people, and two additional concepts, specifically, process and permanence.

**Performance**

Much of the study of educational leadership is focused on performance. Several developments in educational leadership theory came out of the desire for improved performance. Performance can be measured in many different ways, including analyses of student achievement results, teacher efficacy, and principal leadership. In practice, the main measure of performance at the school level is often student academic achievement. Two of the more notable approaches associated with performance are the effective schools movement and the instructional leadership approach.

**Effective schools.** The effective schools movement, which began in the 1970s, was established in reaction to a federally commissioned study in the United States called *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, which is more commonly known as the Coleman Report (1966). This report proposed that student socioeconomic status was a prime determinant of academic achievement. More importantly, they added that, despite efforts, schools did little to positively influence outcomes for students who came from challenging socioeconomic situations. According to the report,
Schools bring little influence to bear on a child’s achievement that is independent of his background and general social context … This very lack of an independent effect means that the inequality imposed on children by their home, neighborhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. (p. 325)

Proponents of the effective schools movement, including Lezotte (1989, 1993, 1994), disagree with the conclusions of the Coleman Report. Lezotte (1991) felt that if the proper structures were in place, schools could positively change outcomes for students, regardless of their economic circumstances. These structures are often described as “correlates of effective schools.” Lezotte’s original “Seven Correlates of Effective Schools” include the following: (1) instructional leadership, (2) a clear and focused mission, (3) a safe and orderly environment, (4) a climate of high expectations, (5) frequent monitoring of student progress, (6) positive home-school relations, and (7) opportunity to learn and student time on task (Lezotte & Jacoby, 1991). There are several different iterations of these correlates, many of which have been modified in number. For example, Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore (1995), who conducted a literature review of effective schools research, outline 11 key correlates of effectiveness: (1) professional leadership, (2) shared vision and goals, (3) a learning environment, (4) concentration on teaching and learning, (5) purposeful teaching, (6) high expectations, (7) positive reinforcement, (8) monitoring progress, (9) pupil rights and responsibilities, (10) home-school partnership, and (11) a learning organization. Regardless of the number of correlates, the focus of the movement is on individual schools and their ability to provide equitable opportunities for students despite individual student circumstances.
In general terms, the effective schools movement focuses on individual schools and their ability to plan and use data to provide measurable evidence of improved student achievement despite student socioeconomic status. Lezotte (1993) succinctly defines an effective school as “one that can demonstrate the joint presence of quality (acceptably high levels of achievement) and equity (no differences in the distribution of that achievement among the major subsets of the student population)” (p. 2). Regarding the link between the effective schools movement and leadership, it is important to point out that Lezotte’s first correlate is that of instructional leadership. The efficacy of the applied correlates is contingent on the leader ensuring the application of the correlates in practice.

**Instructional leadership.** As the effective schools movement evolved, there was a continued focus on the use of measurable evidence to improve student achievement (Lezotte, 1995). This also led to a further focus on how school leaders could help support improved student achievement. The term that was used to describe this offshoot of the effective schools movement was *instructional leadership*. The most commonly accepted conceptualization of instructional leadership is proposed by Hallinger (2003), who broadly defines instructional leadership as focusing “predominantly on the role of the school principal in coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing curriculum and instruction in the school” (p. 331). More specifically, Hallinger proposes three dimensions of instructional leadership practice, namely, “defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate” (p. 332). Underlying the principles of the instructional leadership approach is the focus on the individual leader who would be able to provide expertise and foster growth in all three broad areas. Each area requires the leader to have an extensive range of skills. As
early as 1946, researchers like Drucker criticized approaches relying too much on individual leaders, stating that “no institution can survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized to get along under a leadership of average human beings” (p. 124). As the study of instructional leadership evolved, it was recognized that the sole focus on the principal as leader was unrealistic and established expectations few leaders could meet (Purkey & Smith, 1983).

It is also important to understand that Drucker’s (1946) criticism holds if we accept the premise that very little can be accomplished by a leader toiling on his or her own without the support of followers. The applied correlates need strong leadership as well as the participation of others to lead to positive outcomes and goal accomplishment (Donaldson, 2001). This is what Linda Lambert (2005) would call leadership capacity, which she defines as “as an organizational concept meaning broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership that leads to lasting school improvement” (p. 38).

**People**

Although further developments in educational leadership theory did not preclude a focus on performance, the recognition that leadership was not the sole responsibility of the principal changed the dynamics for practitioners. This evolution naturally leads us directly to leaders and their ability to engage and work with others in the educational environment – the people.

The earlier discussion that focused on people was situated on two levels. The first level addressed trait theory and the importance of leaders having certain characteristics to function effectively. Trait theories led by individuals like Stogdill (1970, 1974) were prevalent and focused on the traits of individual leaders as being predictive of their
success as leaders. Traits such as intelligence, responsibility, problem-solving ability, and personality were considered indicative of whether an individual would be successful as a leader (Zaccaro, 2007).

Critics led us to consider the weakness of relying solely on trait theory and the skills of one person, the designated leader, when discussing leadership (Huckaby, 1980; Sergiovanni, 1979). Hoy and Miskel (2005) proffer that the use of trait or situational models provide for an “unduly narrow and counterproductive” approach (p. 386). These types of criticisms prompted theorists to consider a second level on which to consider also the distinct social and political contexts surrounding the leader when examining leadership.

Early elaborations of these models that attempted to link trait and contextual factors were known as contingency models. A prominent model of this type is Fiedler’s (1967) contingency model, which focuses on the fit between the leader’s style, which is fixed, and the situational favourableness. Situational favourableness includes leader-member relations, task structure, and the leader’s position of power. If the style fits well with the situational factors, then the leader is deemed effective. In educational leadership theory, these types of models are often termed “situational approaches.” These approaches take into consideration the appropriateness of the leader’s style for the situation in which they would be working. Others, like Hersey and Blanchard (1982), outline four integrated factors to consider when integrating the leader and the situation: people, role, task, and organization. The most important component of their approach links one of four leadership styles with the ability and willingness of followers. They prescribe a telling style when followers are unable and unwilling, a participating style
when followers are unable but willing, a *selling* style when followers are able but unwilling, and a *delegating* style when followers are willing and able. The amount of responsibility and autonomy the leader provides, and the degree of sharing, is based on the skills of the followers. Their model, originally proposed in 1969, may still be the most effective approximation of the situational approach.

One criticism of this approach is that it is hard to determine which type of leader would be most effective in each specific context (Sousa, 2003). Another critique is that researchers attempt to restrict their analysis to a few manageable and comprehensible factors to facilitate understanding (Sergiovanni, 1979). This approach has been noted as limiting. With each of these criticisms in mind, it is important to note that this approach constitutes a major development in the evolution of leadership theory in that it recognizes the reciprocal contributions of leaders and followers and how these reciprocal relationships are integral in leading to positive outcomes. This recognition has led researchers to a heightened focus on the necessity of sharing leadership opportunities with colleagues or distributing these among them. Lambert (2003) and other researchers (Senese, 1999; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) recognize the need to install skillful leaders in principal positions to help teachers to “form a team of professionals that invites parents and students into the work of leadership” (Lambert, 2003, p. 6).

**Process**

The recognition of the reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers, and the necessity of leaders to foster these relationships, has led to other developments. The literature stresses the understanding of how performance and people are linked to process. Specifically, leaders are most effective when they work collaboratively with
followers to establish processes and procedures to foster relationships with people, leading to positive improved performance (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) identify four broad categories by which leaders exert positive influences. These include (1) building vision and setting directions, (2) understanding and developing people, (3) redesigning the organization, and (4) managing the teaching and learning programme. All of these categories require that processes be established, responsibility be delegated to staff members, and established processes and procedures be adhered to. The accountability and monitoring components ensure that performance standards are adhered to and that feedback is provided to staff when policies are disregarded. Monitoring also ensures that supports are provided when staff members are struggling with implementing a new initiative.

Similar to the concept of Gestalt (Koffka, 1935), where the sum of the parts is greater than the whole, the literature suggests that effectively sharing leadership opportunities may expand the capacity of school and advance student outcomes. This sharing is accomplished by the leader relying on the skills of other leaders, de jure and de facto, in the school environment (Leithwood et al., 2007). Sharing leadership requires that the designated or assigned leader ensure that processes are established and procedures developed and implemented to facilitate positive change. In a public school setting positive change is often measured by improved student outcomes as measured by standardized testing scores (Reynolds & Warfield, 2010) and increases in subject scores and overall averages (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Silins & Mulford, 2004).

The necessity to share leadership opportunities has led to several developments in educational leadership theory, with a number of different names provided to describe this
approach, including Lambert’s (1998, 2003, 2005) expression *building leadership capacity*. Hoy and Miskel (2005) note that this type of approach “occurs when the formally appointed leader shares the leader behaviours with members of the work group” (p. 395) and go on to assert that “collaboratively sharing responsibility for performing leader behaviours will enhance the work unit cohesiveness and performance” (p. 395).

This focus on shared leadership has to do with maximizing the skill and involvement of all people in the work environment, leading to positive outcomes. In this approach, the focus on people includes the leader; the leader’s relationship with colleagues, workers, or teams; and the ability to utilize the skills of all to achieve the established goals of the institution.

Roland Barth (1988) was one of the early educational writers to put forward the formal idea of shared leadership. In his conception, shared leadership consists of a community that includes staff, students, and parents acting “as a community of leaders” (p. 131). Barth (1988) outlines the steps a leader must take to effectively teach leadership skills and share leadership: collaboratively establish and articulate the goal, entrust staff with providing informed input into decision making, assign responsibility wisely, and allow teachers to actually make decisions. Furthermore, he emphasizes the leader admitting ignorance, sharing responsibility for failure, and attributing success to the teacher (pp. 639–642). Barth (1980) felt that this approach would lead to a community of leaders. It is important to recognize the complex dynamics associated with Barth’s conception of shared leadership. This type of leadership requires knowledge and confidence on behalf of the leader, as well as a level of trust between the designated leader and staff. A goal of the leader is the promotion of learning as well as the ongoing
provision of leadership opportunities to facilitate the continued growth of leadership capacity on staff.

A particular thread in the area of shared leadership is called *distributive leadership*. Proponents of this approach “argue that leadership activity is constituted … in the interaction of the leaders, the followers, and their situation in the execution of particular leadership tasks” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004, p. 10). Rather than seeing leadership solely as a function of one person whose traits, skill, or charisma allow them to achieve the goals of the institution, leadership is more a function of the leader’s ability to effectively distribute leadership opportunities and share tasks with followers within a given context to accomplish goals. Daresh (2007) offers a similar description, stating that distributive leadership “is a much more ‘organic’ and free flowing form of ongoing engagement by stakeholders …. It … honors the input and capabilities of all who have a stake in the affairs of the school” (p. 123). All iterations of shared leadership involve a greater degree of distributing power, information, and decision-making authority to individuals within the system.

Stringfield (1995) also recognizes the link with the leader’s need to be process oriented in order to advance positive outcomes for students. He states that enhancing student learning requires effective implementation techniques, monitoring, and established processes and procedures to ensure that the desired goals are met. In the absence of established processes and embedded practices, schools often falter when the leadership changes. The necessity for established processes to ensure continuity of promising practices, and the effective functioning of schools when leadership changes, leads directly to the next P – that of permanence.
Permanence

The quest for permanence could be considered the next evolution of leadership development. The literature associated with permanence flows from our understanding of performance, people, and processes. Schools are complex organizations and each year, as the clientele (student population) changes, so do the needs of the school. Changes beyond the school environment also exert an influence the ability of principals to effectively lead. Hermosilla, Anderson and Mundy (2014) identify managing change as one of the major components associated with effective school leadership. They state that “changes in school governance associated with decentralization of education to local authorities and with privatization in many developing countries involve significant change in expectations (p.3). This is also true in the New Brunswick context where each iterative change in government brings with it new initiatives which puts added pressure on schools and principals. Sahlberg (2011) noted that the majority of policy changes implemented as part of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) have had unintended negative consequences. Speaking of the policy influences on school leaders Roach, Smith and Boutin (2014) note how “changes in the workplace and state policy are affecting the supply and quality of school leaders” (p.73). They go on to specify some of the challenges faced by school leaders including “incoherent and disjointed state policies on curriculum, instruction, and resource allocation through which school leaders must sift” (p.73). Williams (1995) notes similarly that “not all of these [policy] changes are well thought out” and many amount to what can be considered a “fragmented approach used in education” (p. 2). As a result of these policy factors and the dynamic nature of schools permanence, in a school context, is complex. Permanence, in this context, is
associated with the identification, establishment, and maintenance of a sustainable culture of learning in the school system in the face of constant change.

**Sustainable leadership.** Fullan (2005) describes sustainability as “the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose” (p. ix). Specific to leadership, Davies (2007) states that sustainability is “characterized by depth of learning and real achievement rather than superficially tested performance” (p. 51). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) describe sustainable leadership as promoting “cohesive diversity” (p. 226) and avoiding aligned standardization of policy, curriculum, assessment, and staff development and training in teaching and learning. This description supports the notion that leaders’ and followers’ beliefs and actions need to be aligned in order to be functional, effective, and sustainable. It also supports the need for the leader to promote ongoing professional growth while honouring the diversity of skill at the school level, leading to the aforementioned Gestalt.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) focus on two fundamental components of sustainable leadership: (1) leadership continuity, including succession planning, and (2) capacity building of all individuals in the school community to ensure practices are current, effective, and well-established. They go on to describe how these two components interact. By developing the skills of others, a leader is concurrently increasing the capacity of others to lead. Also, when capacity is developed, the sustainability of initiatives is not dependent on one leader, and therefore that leader is more apt to last should the leadership change.

**Transformational leadership.** The literature often draws associations between sustainable leadership and transformational leadership. While Bass (1985) describes
transformational leadership as the ability of a leader to motivate and influence followers toward positive outcomes, Leithwood (1992) describes transformational leadership as having three main components: (1) helping staff members to develop a collaborative, professional environment, (2) fostering staff development, and (3) helping colleagues solve problems more effectively.

Similar to sustainable leadership, transformational leadership includes a strong focus on staff development and capacity building. The major difference lies in the fact that sustainable leadership often focuses on making incremental first-order changes, which allow for adjustments within existing structures. Transformational leadership is different in that it is more often associated with a moral imperative to make larger, second-order changes (Leithwood, 1992). These second-order changes often include redefining the values of the institution.

Similar to shared leadership, in a transformational model, educational leaders are asked to abandon control-oriented modes of leadership and attempt instead to develop collaborative, professional processes to facilitate growth. This relies on leaders and followers working collaboratively to facilitate enduring change. It is important to note that transformational leadership requires the leader to foster trust and facilitate positive interactions with staff to ensure ongoing growth, advancing both teacher skill and student outcomes (Bush & Bell, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Leithwood, 1992; Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Irrespective of the approach, any attempt at establishing permanence requires the complex interaction of performance, people, and processes to ensure success. We will now turn our attention to what the literature says about the role of the principal.
The Role of the Principal

In this section of the chapter, I will present the following findings from the literature associated with the role of the principal: principal impact on student outcomes, evolving roles through history, and expanding duties and expectations.

Principal Impact on Student Outcomes

The Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966) suggested that schools did not make a difference in student outcomes. Proponents of the effective schools movement responded by establishing correlates to ensure that students were afforded equitable opportunities for success regardless of their socioeconomic status. A similar question has been asked about school leadership: Given the complex dynamics at the school level, and the need for the leader to have the support of followers in order to promote positive change (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2014; Church, 2014), do principals actually make a difference?

The literature on this question is abundant and clear. Day, Harris, and Hadfield (2001) note specifically that leaders who are perceived as effective “take responsibility for consequences of their decisions … were adaptive … and were able to manage conflict in a way that achieved positive outcomes” (p. 35). In a landmark study entitled “How Leadership Influences Student Learning,” Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) assert that leadership is the second most important school-based factor in children’s academic achievement, and note that there are very few cases, if any, where a struggling school turns around in the absence of effective leadership. In another study, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) note specifically that “school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (p. 27). While not
discounting the role of the leader, this study reinforces the idea that principals and teacher leaders need to work collaboratively to ensure that skills are accessed at all levels within the school to ensure the maximization of positive outcomes for students.

One thing that is consistently mentioned in much of the principal-specific literature is that effective leadership, while not a component that guarantees an effective school, if absent, is a strong indicator of a school’s ineffectiveness (Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2001; Fullan, 2010, 2011; Nottingham, 1977; Pierce & Stapleton, 2003; Smith & Andrews, 1989). As Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) note, “School leaders are capable of having significant positive effects on student learning and other important outcomes … Enough evidence is now at hand to justify claims about significant leadership effects on students” (p. 672).

Finally, Von Frank (2009) makes a definitive statement linking results and leadership, noting that “we no longer need to debate whether instructional leadership is an essential component of high-performing schools – it is” (p. 3). Having established that principals have strong effects on student outcomes, we need to next examine what the literature says about how the role has evolved.

**Evolving Roles throughout History**

In order to understand the role of the principal as it is, we need to briefly examine what the role was. Historically, the role of the principal evolved from that of the principal teacher. Early in the 20th century the principal teacher was “the member of a staff who, as schools became larger and school districts were amalgamated, was charged with completing the paperwork for the school” (Williams & Brien, 2010, p. 16). According to Gidney and Millar (2012) the responsibilities of the principal teacher, as outlined in 1910
by the London, Ontario, Board of Education, were not only “to teach continuously a large class preparing for Entrance examination” (p. 312), but also to “take charge of a large school plant; look after the admission of new pupils, consult with parents, receive and distribute school supplies” (p. 312). In this context, a principal was viewed as first among equals – a teacher with some added responsibilities. In a small schoolhouse, this could be as simple as looking after the physical plant (ensuring the chimney was clean and the coal or wood stove was operational when students arrived). Principals were not expected to provide a more substantial leadership role, nor were they given the time to do so. As Mombourquette (2013) notes, “the average Alberta principal in 1900 had less than one hour per day free from teaching in which to attend to school administration matters” (p. 2).

In the modern era, the role of the principal is more expansive than the one that operated in the one-room schoolhouse with the pot-bellied stove. Population growth and simple developments, like improvements in transportation, have eliminated the utility of one-room schoolhouses, replacing them with larger consolidated schools. Johnson (1968, cited by Mombourquette, 2013) outlines how that role has changed: “As a result of the increasing bureaucratization of school districts, the principal’s role grew in stature and importance, as well as in influence over the teachers in schools” (p. 2). As schools grew in size, so did the school districts. “The expansion of school size and districts marked the beginning of principal as authority” (R. Williams, personal communication, June 17, 2013).

As a result of these changes, the principalship has now evolved into what can be considered a dual role, including responsibilities as both organizational manager and
educational leader (Barty, Thomson, Blackmore, & Sachs, 2005; Brooking, Collins, Court, & O’Neill, 2003; Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN), 2005; McBer, 2000; Mulford, 2003; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). As managers, principals oversee and coordinate a diversity of individuals and activities. In this capacity, they act as site manager, supervise teachers and support staff, participate in the hiring process, and are responsible for budgets, bussing, and a host of co- and extra-curricular activities.

The principal is also charged with understanding and navigating the multiple institutional layers of schools, districts, and governmental departments, and liaising with external support agencies. This adds greatly to the already complex institutional dynamics (Williams & Brien, 2010). As leader, the principal must act as mentor, model, advocate, and supervisor (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Goodwin, Cunningham, and Eagle (2005) effectively describe the duality, positing that “the contemporary principal faces increased expectations for school improvement, demanding social pressures, and conflict between the roles of instructional leader, organizational leader, community leader, and strategic leader” (p. 7).

In order to address these numerous obligations, many principals work excessively long hours, beyond what is considered normal. In one national study conducted in the United States, Sparks (2016) noted, “On average, principals work nearly 60 hours a week, with leaders of high-poverty schools racking up even more time” (p. 10). The exorbitant number of hours, rapid pace, and lack of respite for the principal is not often recognized in studies associated with the role. The temporal demands also reflect on the assessment of the principal’s performance.
As noted previously, the perceived success of a principal is focused on performance. Numerous studies identify an increased focus on performance, specifically a focus on improving student achievement (Beaudin, Thompson, & Jacobson, 2002; Duke, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Murphy & Beck, 1994; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2015; Portin, Shen & Williams, 1998; Reeves, 2007; Winter & Morgenthal, 2003). When leading a school, an examination of performance is not limited to the leader simply focusing on positive student results on large-scale assessments. In examining the literature, we are able to discern that positive results are accomplished by the leader working with colleagues to establish a shared vision; maintain a safe and orderly environment; facilitate professional learning opportunities for teachers and support ongoing professional growth; ensure that monitoring occurs and accountability mechanisms are in place; and facilitate ongoing school-to-home and -community relations. Many of these factors require the leader to work with a diversity of individuals to facilitate improved student outcomes (performance).

In many jurisdictions, including New Brunswick, principals are not only responsible for ensuring that they work to improve the performance of teachers (Daresh, 2007). This includes directly administering, or providing access to, opportunities for ongoing professional growth (Cooper, Ehrensal, & Bromme, 2005). They are also responsible for supervising the performance of educational support staff, custodians, and bus drivers. Furthermore, in the New Brunswick context the focus on performance is not limited to simply providing professional learning opportunities; it includes providing support, monitoring, evaluation, and feedback for a diversity of staff. The New Brunswick School Review instrument noted the need for school principals to ensure that
staff members new to a school or a position were provided with support and assistance. (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014b)

The support requirements can be highly variable between teachers. Freedman and DiCecco (2013) concur, identifying “detrimental variations in teacher practice even among teachers in the same building” (p. 9). One of the most arduous expectations on principals is the provision of support. Under the best of circumstances, this includes the provision of feedback and support for willing but struggling staff members. Under the worst circumstances, principals are required to monitor and document the performance of those who are either incapable or unwilling, and are potentially on the path to dismissal (Sugrue, 2015). These are only a few examples of what the role entails.

**Expanding Duties and Expectations**

The introduction of “new” theoretical models of school leadership has brought with them an accompanying growth in the obligations and complexity associated with the role of the principal. As early as 1985, Wood, Nicholson, and Findley predicted that the principal’s role would become increasingly complex, noting the need to negotiate, assess faculty and staff performance, attend to student discipline, address technology and funding concerns, deal with increased accountability, and coordinate activities with groups and individuals interested in working with or at the school. More recently, Pollock (2016) identifies high-stakes accountability initiatives, national and international competitiveness drives, and standardised curriculum as significantly influencing the work of principals.

Today’s expectations for sustainable and proactive leadership (Daresh, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) come with the added obligation of training and grooming
potential successors and building leadership capacity within the school. The extended
need for communication and the focus on moral leadership come with the added
obligations of modelling behaviours within specific cultural and institutional guidelines.
Strike (2007) makes the argument that there is a tension between increased institutional
demands and the pressure to maintain an ethical stance while dealing with the numerous
and often conflicting demands within the system. Finally, a shared leadership approach is
accompanied by a host of associated obligations. Barth (1988) notes that effectively
sharing leadership requires the leaders to (1) articulate the goals, (2) entrust staff to
provide informed input into decision making, (3) involve teachers in the actual decisions,
(4) assign responsibility wisely, (5) empower them to actually make decisions, (6) share
responsibility for failure, (7) attribute successes to others, (8) believe in teachers’ ability,
and (9) admit ignorance (pp. 639–642). Addressing any one of these obligations is a
challenge because each requires the leader to communicate, consult, and share decision
making with numerous other stakeholders. It seems that each new iteration of leadership
development is accompanied by an increase in duties for the principal.

Gaps in the Literature

With a large breadth and scope of research specific to principalship, it is
incumbent on researchers to ask the following question: What is missing from the
literature? It is clear from the examination of the literature that the principalship has been
examined from diverse theoretical viewpoints. Numerous studies have focused on the
traits of leaders – including those by DuFour (2002), Hargreaves and Fink (2008),
McEwan (2003), Jantzi and Leithwood (1996), Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008),
Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), Stogdill (1970, 1974) – and how these traits are important
for school leaders in facilitating positive outcomes for students. As Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) offer, these studies have weak correlations and do not take into consideration other factors that may influence school leadership in the modern era. Literature concentrating on the practical realities of the role has been limited to how a principal transitions between schools (Dethloff, 2005, 2007) or operates within a single school culture (Mundell, 2011). Other studies focus on the conditions under which the school leader operates (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Studies which focus on conditions are often very narrow. For example, Howley and Pendarvis (2002) focus specifically on the challenges of school leadership in schools of small sizes and remote geographic locations, as does Bush (2011), whose study focuses on England and South Africa, as well as Pajanowski, Hewitt, and Brady (2009), who focus on rural and high-needs schools in the United States. Other studies focus on singular aspects of the principalship, such as Sun et al. (2016), who focus on data-driven leadership. Closer to home, authors like Wallin (2001, 2003, 2008) have identified some of the challenges with rural, small, and remote schools in the Canadian context, and Pollock (2016) examined principals’ work in Ontario while considering the influences of technological advances in information technology on the health and well-being of principals.

The propensity for researchers to have a narrow focus leads to potential issues within the literature examining educational leadership. The first concern lies in the fact that researchers often oversimplify the complex factors at play at the school level in order to provide simple and manageable models that are understandable and coherent to the consumer. The second problem is that researchers tend to defend their own models at the expense of others. Huckaby (1980) specifically named the problem, suggesting that
theorists often gravitate to their preferred approach while “avoiding introducing elements” of other models “that do not fit neatly into their models” (p. 613). This approach limits the ability of researchers to define the broader role of principalship.

The reality is that the complexity of schools, including human and institutional dynamics, may not allow for the use of one model that provides a panacea or prescription for all leaders, schools, or circumstances. Further, the dynamic, evolving, and expansive demands of the role create challenges for researchers looking to precisely define it. In a December 4, 2016, letter to the editor of the LocalExpress.ca, Donna Joan Rutledge, a retired principal from Harbour View School in Nova Scotia, encapsulated the expansive nature of the role, which, she says, has “created the perfect storm in education.” She said that policy changes have served to increase the obligations placed on schools, teachers, and principals, without the appropriate provision of support necessary to address the increasing obligations. Similar results were found in Hong Kong where principals identified struggles associated with the expanding the scope of their work which was attributed to changes in education policy (Yan-Ni Cheng & Szeto, 2016). Thus, there is the need for an autoethnographer to examine the role through the eyes of a practising principal.

Having established the importance of the role, and the increasing obligations associated with it, we are obligated to inquire whether the practical role is manageable. In order to answer this question, we first need to first examine and define the role itself. Waters et al. (2003) attempted to accomplish this through a meta-analysis in which they identified the 21 leadership responsibilities of the principal and underlying duties. Simply mapping these leadership responsibilities to the previously identified broad areas of
performance, process, people, and permanence provides us with insight into the complexity of leadership in a school context (see Appendix C for an elaboration). When identifying leadership responsibilities, Waters and colleagues note that a failure of the leader to attend to any one of these responsibilities could detrimentally impact a school and the student population it served. Given the interrelatedness of the four Ps, failure to attend to one area could have adverse effects on other areas as well. We have noted Drucker’s (1946) concern that “no institution can survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it” (p. 124). With these dynamics at play, we may be inclined to ask if we are requiring principals to be superwomen and supermen. In order to answer this, we need to first examine the practical role; despite the breadth of the literature in the area, however, there are few, if any, studies that focus on that from the principal’s standpoint. The existing research has identified the complexity of school leadership and the numerous responsibilities inherent in the role (Waters et al., 2003). It has shown how the complexity of school dynamics and the multidimensional nature of principalship make it

Summary

This chapter examined the literature associated with leadership and defined leadership for the purposes of this dissertation, as it applies to educational contexts. Further, it examined many of the theoretical developments in educational leadership and discussed how these developments have influenced the role of the principal. The existing research has identified the complexity of school leadership and the numerous responsibilities inherent in the role (Waters et al., 2003). It has shown how the complexity of school dynamics and the multidimensional nature of principalship make it
challenging for researchers to define the role and why, consequently, no one has effectively done so. In this chapter, I have identified significant gaps in the current research, which this study aims to fill.

Despite the fact that there are numerous studies focused on educational leadership, there are few, if any, that focus on the modern role from the principal’s standpoint and none that consider, compare, and attempt to weave the insider (principal) and outsider (external observer) viewpoints in order to define this role in practical terms. Using this approach, I will address the question: What is the role of the principal in the modern era? In the following chapter I will discuss the applied methodology and the methods that will be used to study the role of the principal in the modern era.
Chapter 3: Methods and Research Design

This chapter outlines the methodology, research design, and methods chosen for the study and explains how they will be used to answer the research question: What is the role of the principal from both internal (principal’s) and external (school improvement consultant/lead school reviewer) perspectives? Providing a practical definition of this role will fill a gap in the research of educational leadership and will better inform aspirants as well as practitioners about the realities of the role. This chapter will begin with a discussion of autoethnography as a qualitative research methodology. This will include a discussion of analytic autoethnography, which Anderson (2006) identifies as an evolved form of autoethnography due to the use of other participants known as “informants beyond the self” to further inform the perspectives of the participant researcher.

I will also describe the five fundamental components or “key features” of analytic autoethnography that set it apart from classic or evocative autoethnography (Anderson, 2006). Following this, I will present the research design, including a description of the data sources used for this study and the methods of data collection and analysis.

Autoethnography

There are two overarching types of studies: quantitative and qualitative. Crotty (2004) describes these two approaches as “the great divide” (p. 14). Quantitative studies claim to be more objective, often focusing on the use of the scientific method, statistical analysis, or hard data to attempt to discern some form of objective reality. Qualitative analysis is considered more subjective, focusing on individuals or groups, and using methods such as interviews to gather data and interpret results. Crotty notes that this divide is “far from justified” (p. 15). In research it is often appropriate to use data as well
as the subjective interpretation of participants to further the understanding of a culture. This study will be qualitative in design and will use autoethnography – specifically, analytic autoethnography – as a methodological approach to defining the role of the principal in the modern era.

The autoethnographic component of the study will focus on the self and how the participant researcher’s experiences can be used to inform the role of principalship. Autoethnography, historically, comes out of the ethnographic tradition (Spradley, 1979; van Manen, 1988). Ethnography can be defined simply as the systematic study of people and culture in order to further understanding of, or unearth hidden insights about, the individual or group under study (McMillan, 2008). Autoethnography utilizes ethnographic methods, although there is one important difference between the two. As Fetterman (1989) offers, when an ethnographic approach is used, the focus is the systematic study of a group or culture. In an autoethnography, however, the focus is generally on the “self” or the “participant researcher” within a sociocultural context (Fine, 2003).

Autoethnography has been defined many different ways. The best definition, for the purposes of this study, is a methodological “approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273). When discussing applied autoethnography, Ellis (2004), among others, often refers to insights or unearthed understandings that come to light in the process of administering an autoethnographic study as “epiphanies.” Others have called these “revelations,” “gems,” or “insights” (Bochner & Ellis, 1995, 2002; Chang, 2008; Denzin, 1989). These gems are
used to provide insight into a culture or group and use the individual’s connection with, or understanding of, that group to create a deeper shared understanding. The autoethnographer, searching for Ellis’s epiphanies, revelations, or hidden gems, may not know whether the “tale” that they write is going to be realistic, confessional, or impressionistic until the data have been gathered and the process completed. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the approach as follows:

The qualitative researcher uses inductive analysis, which means that categories, themes and patterns emerge from the data. Although a familiarity with the culture is used to extend the analysis, the categories that emerge from field notes, documents, and interviews are not imposed prior to data collection. (p. 389)

Autoethnography is generally divided into two main categories: (1) classic or evocative autoethnography and (2) analytic autoethnography (Ellis & Ellingson, 2000). There are a number of differences between the evocative and analytic approaches. Gubrium and Holstein (2002) note that “analytic autoethnographers focus on developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena, whereas evocative autoethnographers focus on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses” (p. 445). This identifies one of the primary differences between classic autoethnography and analytic autoethnography, but there are also similarities. Analytic autoethnographers can use components of classic, evocative or interpretive autoethnography to help share their stories. These include the use of performative arts, including constructing narratives, by which this study proposes to inform the reader. In this study, I will use components of interpretive autoethnography to share the stories of the participants. Interpretive autoethnography is described as

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a brave writing, sometimes painful, connected with the being and the self, that breaks the trend in the most classic psychology, which seeks the particular over the general, something that can portray in words, audiovisual resources, or artistic representation a precise significant moment in the investigation that allows the audience to understand the meaning of what is being shared as if the viewer could connect. (Ramírez-Pereiral, Espinoza-Lobos, & Zapata-Sepúlveda, 2016, p. 7)

Some of the narratives will be fictional and some factual. The use of personal narratives in classic autoethnography often results in the methodology being maligned for a number of reasons including: (1) the use of the participant researcher as the primary source of data (Buzard, 2003; Delamont, 2009); Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Fine, 2003; Sparkes, 2000); (2) arrogance or narcissistic tendencies on the part of the participant researcher (Soyini, 2006); (3) a lack of transferability (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 2001); and (4) a lack of objectivity (Ellis, 2004).

Anderson’s (2006) analytic autoethnography includes a number of processes and practices that are different from, and negate many of the aforementioned criticisms of, classic autoethnography. Analytic autoethnography operates on five fundamental components or “key features”: (1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) a commitment to theoretical analysis. I will describe each in turn.

**Complete Member Researcher (CMR) Status**

To be able to generalize beyond the self, Anderson (2006) suggests that the participant researcher should have personal experience of the situation in which she or he
is the subject. Legitimization is accomplished through the participation of the participant researchers within the specific shared context. Unlike classic ethnography, analytic autoethnography does not remove the researcher from the context; rather, analytic autoethnography emphasizes the researcher’s shared social connections relating to the culture or topic. Membership status therefore legitimizes the researcher’s insider perspective and values the insights and knowledge provided through their intimate knowledge of the culture or environment. As Buzard (2003) notes, no two participant researchers will share the exact same background or experience, which broadens the perspective and adds to the richness of the data.

**Analytic Reflexivity**

Anderson (2006) describes analytic reflexivity as a procedure that involves an awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants. It entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one’s actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others. (p. 382).

In its simplest terms, analytic reflexivity is the process of examining the researcher’s relationship to the research and how this relationship, including any experience and preconceived notions, can influence results (Davies, 1999).

Irrespective of the methodological approach, attempting to eliminate researcher bias from the research can be challenging (Anderson, 2006; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Atkinson (2006) identifies how ethnographers work to recognize how their experiences may influence their understandings. Analytic autoethnography’s commitment to reflexivity goes beyond that which is applied in evocative autoethnography. In fact,
evocative autoethnography intentionally discounts analytic reflexivity, leaving the narrative or performance to resonate with the audience. This allows consumers to develop their own individual response to the narrative. Similarly, analytic autoethnography allows the reader to accept or reject the conclusions proposed by the study. The difference lies in the fact that analytic autoethnography limits researcher bias by incorporating the voice of “others” to inform the conclusions and perspective of the participant researcher. Further, it allows for the use of other perspectives (participants/informants) to support or refute the preconceptions of the participant researcher.

Narrative Visibility of the Researcher’s Self

Narratives focused on the self, established through the use of autoethnography, describe the nuances and emotional aspects of the participant researcher’s lived experiences. Analytic autoethnographers have a dual role: as complete member researchers, they are active participants in the culture under study and they are participant researchers studying the culture. Anderson (2006) notes that this duality “demands enhanced textual visibility of the researcher’s self” (p. 384). The experiences of the participant researcher are shared through the devices and methods chosen to share the research. Rather than providing generalized claims, analytic autoethnography researchers describe their own and others’ lived experiences (Anderson, 2006). It is important for the participant researchers to describe their role and what devices they use to examine their role. It is also essential for analytic autoethnographers to explain the process used to unearth previously undiscovered learning and provide proof of their own experiences and how these experiences are used to inform their conclusions (Vryan, 2006). This
guarantees the researcher’s visibility as a social actor and ensures that the perspectives of self and others are visible within the text, thus providing visibility within the narrative.

**Dialogue with Informants beyond the Self**

Anderson (2006) discusses dialogue with informants beyond the self, noting “no ethnographic work – not even Autoethnography – is a warrant to generalize from an ‘N of one’” (p. 386). Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003) further support the argument: “We must not lose sight of the ethnographic imperative that we are seeking to understand and make sense of complex social worlds of which we are only a part (but a part of nevertheless)” (p. 57). The utilization of multiple methods, which can include, but are not limited to, participant observation, focus groups, formal and informal interviews, and document analysis, ensure that all voices are represented.

**Commitment to Theoretical Analysis**

Analytic autoethnography goes beyond simply providing the insider perspective; it provides a framework from which to analyze the voice of others to counterbalance and inform the perspective of the autoethnographer. Anderson (2006) describes the “use of empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves” [emphasis added] (p. 387). The goal of analytic autoethnography is to utilize the data gathered from self and others to obtain insights about the culture under study and share these insights with others within, and potentially beyond, the culture under study. Participant researchers adopting autoethnographic methodological approaches have used a variety of methods to unearth insights about a diversity of topics. Examples include studies on death and dying (Hoppes, 2005; Warne & Hoppes, 2009), gender identity (Adams, 2011), principalship (Erlandson & Dethloff,
2007), and, interestingly, writing an autoethnography (Wall, 2006). The participant researcher has flexibility in what methods will be used to gather data. The process and method of theoretical analysis is dependent on the methods chosen and the topic of the inquiry. The flexibility to explore using a diversity of methods and to share results through a variety of representations stimulated enthusiasm for qualitative researchers to develop autoethnography (Denzin, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). With this flexibility to consider, it is incumbent on the researcher to establish a conceptual framework, identify the methods, and establish the processes used to examine the individual, group, or culture and ensure that they are rigorous when structuring the research design.

Establishing a process that utilizes multiple methods and includes triangulation of data adds to the likelihood that the consumer will accept the results of the study (Vaterlaus & Higginbotham, 2011). The aforementioned flexibility in methods allows opportunity for access to a breadth of data. The concurrent breadth of information, themes, and conclusions that can be gleaned from the data can be used to inform the practices of others and expand the dialogue.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) succinctly summarize the applied methodology, offering that it includes many components and encourages the use of multiple methods and diverse forms of data, including field texts, thus adding greater dimensionality to the researcher’s analysis and further informs the participant researcher’s perspective. Wall (2006) notes that the process encourages utilizing the voices of others in concert with that of the participant researcher. The use of others addresses the dual concerns – that of the “N of one” and the potential for studies to be perceived as narcissistic. The use of others
adds to the richness of data as well as increasing the trustworthiness of the applied methodology.

**Research Design and Methods**

When conducting an autoethnographic study, the researcher as a participant is the topic of study. Analytic autoethnography includes the additional use of others to inform the results. This analytical autoethnographic study is structured to include two components: the use of self (autoethnography) and others (analytic autoethnography). As a principal and LSR, I am immersed in the environment – hence the autoethnographic component. The others include 12 other principals who work in New Brunswick, Canada, accommodating the analytic autoethnographic component. I used a time and motion study and associated journal entries as field notes to support my personal insights and conclusions as a participant researcher and principal as well as external LSR. The research design ensures narrative visibility in that the voice of the participant researcher, my background experience, and how these factors may influence the research will be identified. The research includes narratives to describe the various perspectives of each respective participant group. A synthesis of these perspectives will culminate in a narradigm which will be established to inform the reader about the role. As with all autoethnographic studies, the readers will determine whether the narrative speaks to them.

**Interviewing Self: Autoethnography**

The main research question is multi-faceted: What is the role of the principal from the internal (principal) and external (school improvement consultant/lead school reviewer) perspectives? To answer the first part of the question, I will use insights from
my eight years as principal of a rural, Grade 6 to 12 school in New Brunswick to inform the role. My external perspective is informed by my three years of experience as LSR. As participant researcher, I utilized an autoethnographic approach to inform both perspectives of the role. There will be two interview components for these aspects of the study: an interview of the participant researcher as principal and an interview of the participant researcher as LSR. The initial 15 questions were adapted from the Administrator Forum Questions used in the school review process (see Appendix D). A final interview question was added, associated with the job role and how perceptions of the role compare to the job posting. Questions were vetted by principals who participated in the school reviews and the feedback provided was used to ensure the questions provided rich data to inform the research question (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). To that end, the process and its associated questions were piloted with two principals (one from a large, urban school and one from a small, rural school), and their feedback was used to ensure that both process and questions would be effective to inform the role. It was determined that no major adjustments were needed to ensure access to robust data.

Documentation includes two time and motion studies. The first more elaborative study was authored while I was working as a principal and includes extensive reflective journaling. The second was authored while I was working as LSR. Time and motion studies, used first by Gilbreth (1915) and later by Taylor (1923), were focused on examining the workplace, and worker behaviours in order to build efficiencies for workers and systems and to maximize productivity. Although these ends are not the goals of this study, in this case the time and motion studies were used to record the tasks I needed to complete in each respective role as well as the time taken to complete them.
This information reinforced my perceptions as a participant researcher. Over the long term, this information may be used to provide insights into how to build efficiencies.

Each set of time and motion documentation was used to establish the context and mindset for each of the participant researcher’s respective self-reflective interviews, both as principal and as LSR, and helped support the subsequent analysis.

**Interview of the participant researcher as principal.** Over the course of a six-month period I completed a time and motion study outlining my tasks and daily obligations while working as a principal. As the semester progressed, the obligations were grouped into categories. The accompanying reflective journaling included my mindset and perceptions of the role over the same time frame.

Prior to being interviewed, I reviewed the content of the time and motion study conducted from January to June 2012 and associated reflective journaling. As discussed above, analytic reflexivity is important for an autoethnographic researcher. Davies (1999) explains the concept by stating that “reflexivity expresses researchers’ awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it” (p. 7). It was incumbent on me as participant researcher to take steps to ensure that the results spoke for themselves and that I did not allow my experiences and preconceptions to influence the results of the study. In order to ensure analytic reflexivity, I had another person (another participant principal) ask the established structured interview questions from the established script, and the responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded for the participant researcher as the principal interview. A fellow principal was used as interviewer because of her knowledge and experience in the role; this experience allowed her to identify the need for any follow-up or clarification questions. Only the notes
provided by this independent party were used when referencing the participant researcher’s interview data or establishing results for this component of the study.

When clarification of interview content was deemed necessary, subsequent follow-up interviews were conducted to provide further clarification and answer any outstanding questions. Following the interviews, the texts were transcribed and Seidman’s (2006) process for identifying trends, establishing categories, and detecting themes – including links between the categories – was used to establish themes to inform the overall study. As was noted, the interview content and context were also informed by the actual job posting, published when I was interviewed for my original principal position (see Appendix E for the posting). Excerpts from the New Brunswick Education Act (1997) [see Appendix H for sections 28(1) and 28(2), Duties of the Principal] are also used to inform the institutional definition of the principal.

**Interview of the participant researcher as lead school reviewer (LSR).** I examined school leadership from the “external” LSR standpoint (2012–2015). This examination occurred at 39 different Anglophone schools in New Brunswick (Year 1 at 11 schools, Year 2 at 14 schools, and Year 3 at 14 schools). After reviewing the content of all the formal school review reports authored by the participant researcher, a second interview was administered. In a manner analogous to the one used in authoring my reflective journaling while acting as principal, I also documented my actions as LSR. This occurred over the course of one review. This time and motion information, along with an examination of the school review report content, was used to establish the context and inform the participant researcher’s views while I was acting as LSR.
For a two-week period prior to the interview, as participant researcher LSR, I read and examined the content from the time and motion study as well as the reports authored during my tenure as LSR. This review was completed in order to establish the context for my perceptions of the principal role as external LSR. I had the same principal (participant interviewer) ask me the same series of structured interview questions, modified to accommodate the external perspective. For example, the question which reads “How do you, as principal, accomplish certain tasks?” would be rephrased as “How should principals accomplish certain tasks?” This approach accommodated the different role of LSR and my perceptions of the role.

A similar process for transcription and thematic analysis followed. Themes were identified through the threshing process, results were recorded and tabulated, and the content of each of interview was examined for similarities and differences. This analysis was used to determine how my perceptions of the role had changed from an active complete member researcher (eight years as principal) to an external observer (three years as LSR).

**Interviewing Others: Analytic Autoethnography**

In addition to using myself as participant researcher, I conducted interviews with 12 principals from schools of differing sizes and configurations in New Brunswick. I did this to accommodate the component of analytic autoethnography which included the perspective of informants beyond the self (Anderson, 2006). This also ensured that my perceptions were congruent with that of others operating in the role. Prior to the administration of the study, permissions were sought from the University of New Brunswick (UNB) Research Ethics Board. Once this was completed, permission for
principals’ participation in the study was requested from the four respective district superintendents. Participant selection was limited to principals from the four Anglophone school districts who had previously participated in the school review process.

Twelve principals were invited to participate in the study via formal letter. All 12 of the invited principals agreed to participate. Following the initial selection process, one participant dropped out. The next potential participant from that tiered group was sent a request and agreed to participate in the study. The final group of participants included three principals from each of the four Anglophone School Districts, with equal gender representation established for the overall study. School size was also considered in the selection process. Schools were separated into small (less than 250 students), medium (250–500 students), and large (more than 500 students) categories, with equal representation (four from each category).

Configuration was the final major factor in the selection process. Groups were established with respect to elementary, middle, high school, and multi-grade configurations. Totals, by configuration, were as follows: three elementary; four elementary/middle; two middle; one middle/high; two high. In keeping with the ethical guidelines set by the UNB Research Ethics Board, all participants were provided the opportunity to opt out at any time during the study, without prejudice or consequence. None of the 12 remaining participants chose this option. District representation was also recorded, but not shared. The four Districts were delineated as Anglophone School District North (ASD-N), Anglophone School District South (ASD-S), Anglophone School District East (ASD-E), and Anglophone School District West (ASD-W) respectively.
Participant confidentiality was promised; consequently, each district was assigned a random identification number to prevent the potential identification of participants. Participation was voluntary and, as Creswell (2007) notes, voluntary participation includes “the right of the participants to withdraw at any time” (p. 123). Table 3.1, inserted below, outlines the grade levels, sizes, and configurations of the participating school principals.

Table 3.1: Participant School Grid: Schools by District, Gender, Size, and Configurations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Female/ Male</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1/ Middle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>6–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2/ High</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>9–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3/ Elementary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>K–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4/ Middle</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>6–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5/ Elementary/Middle</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>K–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6/ Elementary/Middle</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>K–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7/ Elementary/Middle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>K–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8/ Elementary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>K–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9/ High</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>9–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10/ Middle/High</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>6–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11/ Elementary/Middle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>K–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12/ Elementary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>K–5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totals by Configuration</th>
<th>Total by Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary – 3</td>
<td>Small – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary/Middle – 4</td>
<td>Medium – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle – 2</td>
<td>Large – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/High – 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High – 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals from the Participant Pool

- 39 reviewed schools
- 29 total eligible schools
- 1 refusal
- 12 Participants
- 6 Female and 6 Male Participants

The group of participants is considered to be a convenience sample, as participant selection was limited to principals from any of the 39 schools that were reviewed by the participant researcher while operating as LSR for the province.
I took into account a diversity of factors when analyzing the data. A demographic breakdown of the participants was established to ensure that all factors were considered during data analysis. If identifiable trends in the data occurred – for example, dissimilar responses from male and female respondents – then these differences were identified. Any variability in the obligations of principals in schools of different sizes and configurations was also identified in the results section, as were any other differences. The data helped identify trends, including commonalities and differences within and between schools. No conclusions were drawn until the interviews were completed, the data analyzed, and the themes developed for each data set. Participant confidentiality was maintained and no school was identified by name.

The interview content and context were informed by the actual job postings that were published when each respective principal applied for his or her job. These job postings were sourced through the principals themselves. When the principals were unable to source their personal postings, samples obtained by me from the human resource department of each school district were offered. Access to these postings occurred after I had received permission from each of the four respective superintendents. It was necessary to provide these ads to four of the participants prior to the administration of the interviews. These were used to establish the institutional obligations, specific to the principal role, as outlined in the job postings. Interviews began with the 15 questions used for the administrator forums from the school review process. These questions (see Appendix D) were field tested and revised based on feedback from participants in the school review process. They were deemed effective in examining the principal role as it pertains to the school review process and transfer well to the proposed study. One final
open-ended question followed: “How does your role, as principal, compare with what was described in the job posting?” Interview data provided by the principals was collated, documented and transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher using Seidman’s (2006) process for thematic analysis.

**Method of Data Analysis**

Several research methods were used to provide for triangulation of data. As King and Horrocks (2010) note, “Qualitative research does not pretend to objectivity; rather researchers should present sufficient detail of the process of their data collection and analysis so the reader can see how they might reasonably have reached the conclusions they did” (p. 161). The methods chosen were used to accommodate Anderson’s (2006) component of analytic autoethnography and included information from informants beyond the self. McMillan (2008) notes that in qualitative research, “multiple realities are rooted in the subjects' perceptions” (p. 11). Interviews were conducted to identify these multiple realities. Once all interviews were completed, both of self and others, Seidman’s (2006) process for interview analysis was used to identify trends in the data in the following order: (a) the self as principal, (b) the self as lead school reviewer, and (3) others.

Results for each set of interviews were coded individually, and themes developed for each data set. Once all interview data were gathered and analyzed, both of self and others, and thematic analysis completed, the overall themes within the data were recoded and analyzed and themes developed for the greater, combined data set. The same threshing process was used for all data sets, which were ultimately combined into one and used to inform the definition of the principal’s role, as it exists in the modern New
Brunswick context. For the benefit of the reader, a chart outlining the sources of data for each of the respective participant groups is inserted below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Data for Each Participant Group</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Participant Researcher as Principal</td>
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<td>NB Education Act: The Duties of Principals</td>
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<td>Interview Data</td>
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<td>Time and Motion Study and Reflective Journaling</td>
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The Data Coding Process

During the establishment of the study’s parameters, a tri-level coding process was selected for all interview data to ensure trustworthiness (King & Horrocks, 2010; Seidman, 2006). To further add to the trustworthiness the use of the same participant principal was used as the interviewer for both participant researcher interviews. This ensured that there was little variation between these interviews. The coding process included thematic identification based on a three-stage coding system: (a) descriptive coding, (b) interpretive coding, and (c) coding for the development of overarching themes. Following the participant principal interviews, individual transcripts were examined for data to inform the research question. During stage one, descriptive codes were developed and recorded. Transcripts were examined and re-examined for
clarification of content, identification of recurring content and, ultimately, the establishment of themes. Three participants were contacted for follow-up questions and clarification.

During the second stage (interpretive coding), interview transcripts and the associated coding were analyzed for more than just pure description. Transcripts from all interviews were analyzed for overlapping content and recurring statements. This overlapping content was clustered and recoded. This second stage went beyond simple descriptive coding and was used by the researcher to examine the content for meaning.

The third stage was used to identify overarching themes. Stake (1995) recommends that the researcher focus on the overarching themes that emerge from the data. Because there would be three data sets and associated themes at the culmination of the data collection and analysis, the following matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were used to compare the data sets: participant researcher as principal; participant researcher as external LSR; and external principal participants. These matrices were used to ensure that trends in the data were visible to the participant researcher and that key concepts were easily identified. When the initial textual analysis produced too many themes, matrices were used to further identify trends and overlapping themes. An example of this occurred in the examination of data from the participant researcher as principal. Initially, 18 minor themes emerged from the interview of the participant researcher as principal. Through the threshing process, items that were associated were grouped together under three umbrella themes. It must be noted that dominant themes emerged naturally as part of the process. It is also important to note that the process for thematic coding was repeated three times. This was completed in order to ensure trustworthiness.
This portion of the research was used to compare the various available perspectives and identify similarities and differences between the data sets; the resultant identified themes were used to inform the definition of the role of the principal as it exists in the New Brunswick context. As participant researcher, I also examined how my own perspectives had changed through having operated as an insider (principal) for eight years and an outsider (external reviewer) for three years. Much of this information will be shared through the use of narratives, culminating in the presentation of a narradigm in the final chapter, which will be used to provide a definition of the role.

**Narradigms**

Eisner (1981) suggests that in order to facilitate the acquisition of self-knowledge, education must go beyond an empirical or historical-hermeneutical analysis. Narradigms – a combination of narratives and paradigms – accomplish this. Information gathered from the various participants will be used to establish narratives. The perspectives established through these narratives will be synthesized and collectively will be used to create a narradigm.

A narradigm, like a paradigm, focuses on a whole culture or belief system, whereas the narratives are used to discuss or describe the perception of the culture from the perspective of each individual or group. In autoethnography, narratives are effective in advancing self-understanding or the understanding of an individual or group within a culture. Given their broader scope, narradigms are effective in furthering the understanding of a culture within a larger community, hence the association with the concept of the paradigm (Dhunpath, 2000).
In Kuhn’s (1962) original conception of the paradigm, there is a period of normal science when there is a general societal consensus of what defines, or constitutes a culture or phenomenon. A paradigmatic shift occurs when information comes to the fore to change the overall societal understanding of a culture or phenomenon. Narradigms function in a similar manner. The voices of each participant group are added together to formulate the broader narradigm about the culture. This will either support the current definition of the role or change the societal perception of the culture - in this study the principalship.

In summary, for the purposes of the study, information gathered from each individual or group within the study was used to establish the narrative content for one chapter; each chapter explains the individual’s or group’s (participant principals’) perception of the culture. One narrative explains my role as principal, one my role as LSR, and the third narrative represents the voices of other principal participants working in the role. The perceptions of all participants, as presented through the narrative content in chapters 4 to 6, are combined, leading to one narradigm in chapter 7 to describe the overall culture of the principalship, answer the research question, and help define the role of the principal. A graphical summary is inserted below.

Table 3.3: Narratives Leading to the Narradigm

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<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Existing Paradigm</th>
<th>Narratives</th>
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<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Information from the participant researcher as principal</td>
<td>Narratives</td>
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Narrative components can be used to provide descriptions of both phenomena and cultures, as narradigms speak to the idea “that our lives are intrinsically narrative in quality. We experience the world and re-present our experience narratively” (Dhunpath, 2000, p. 545). By working to help individuals become more aware of the origins of their self-understanding, they are able to unearth previously concealed tentative views of the world (Dhunpath, 2000; Eisner, 1981). An autoethnographic approach allows the participant researcher to share, through the use of narratives and the associated narradigm, those previously mentioned revelations or new understandings (Bochner & Ellis, 1995; Chang, 2008; Denzin, 1989). Dhunpath (2000) suggests that “biographies and other forms of life writing enable the reconstruction and interpretation of subjectively meaningful features and critical episodes of a teacher educator’s life, allowing us to see the unities, continuities, and discontinuities, images and rhythms” (p. 545). It is incumbent on any researcher to ensure that the research design allows for results that are legitimate; similarly, the participant researcher must ensure that the type of narradigms used effectively communicates the overall results to the reader.

Following an analytic autoethnographic approach affords me, as participant researcher, the opportunity to share my story, and the stories of others, through the use of narratives. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) propose that storytelling is the primary means
by which human existence is rendered meaningful and also indicate that we all lead storied lives. Each of us has a story, all of which are worth sharing. Storytelling allows the narradigms to unfold in such a way as to allow the storyteller to share not necessarily all factors, but rather their general interpretation or construction of the story, culture, or event. This aligns with the constructivist approach, outlined at the outset, whereby the story is established by analyzing and sharing meaning as constructed by the participant researcher (Ball & Goodson, 1986).

As a teacher and school reviewer, I have used storytelling to engage learners and peers in a dialogue toward ongoing learning and growth. Autoethnography allows the participant researcher to adopt their preferred method of communicating the results. For some, the preferred method is poetry; for others, it is artwork. For this participant researcher, the preferred approach is storytelling. Having experience in the role, I am immersed in the context. By utilizing the voices of others, I am able to temper any preconceptions and incorporate the voices and experiences of those others into the narrative. Goodson (1992) describes this approach as a story of action within a theory of context. Dhunpath (2000) probably best summarizes the utility of this approach by stating that “narrative research is dedicated to celebrating the voices of the silenced. But more than that, it celebrates biography as an authentic reflection of the human spirit, a mirror to reflect visions of our other selves” (p. 550). I use fictional narratives to capture the findings of this study and share my and others’ perspectives on the role of the principal, while also allowing me as an analytic autoethnographer to maintain the client confidentiality we are professionally bound by. Results are grounded in my theory and practice and are informed by others operating in the role. Further, analysis is used to
illustrate the practicalities of the role from the practitioners’ perspectives. One of the strengths of this methodology is that it allows the participant researcher the opportunity to examine themes that emerge from the data and turn these themes into something that can be used to define the practicalities of the role.

In summary, narratives were established to outline three perspectives: those of Francis as principal, Francis as LSR, and other principals. These narratives were used to describe the obligations associated with the role of principalship to better inform our understanding of the role through the use of a narradigm.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

As with any research study, there are several limitations that should be noted. The concern about the “N of one,” which is often criticized and is inherent in many autoethnographic studies, has been addressed by the use of interviews with 12 principals to inform the study. The use of an independent person to act as interviewer for the participant researcher is another means of diminishing the potential for the participant researcher’s biases to influence results. This being said, as participant researcher I was charged with coding the interview data and interpreting the results. Similarly, the selection and generation of the narratives and final narradigm are the sole responsibility of the participant researcher.

The use of analytic autoethnography alleviates a number of the concerns associated with classic or evocative autoethnography. By adopting multiple methods, including autoethnographic (self) and interview (other) components, the researcher is still present in the research as a complete member researcher (CMR). The use of others leads to the establishment of results that are more easily accepted as valid and reliable.
Another limitation lies in the fact that my practical experience working as a principal is limited to one school. Although the contributions of other participants address Anderson’s (2006) criticism that “no ethnographic work – not even autoethnography – is a warrant to generalize from an ‘N of one’” (p. 386), it has been noted that every researcher, no matter how well intentioned, will suffer from biases. With the limits associated with my practical experiences as principal illuminated, the research design, which included my perception of the principalship from the external perspective of LSR and the use of other participants, was established to mitigate any potential biases. My work as LSR for the province of New Brunswick (2012–2015) afforded me the opportunity to formally dialogue with principals from 39 Anglophone schools in New Brunswick. These dialogues with informants beyond the self, provided me with improved insight into the role of the principal.

It is important to add that, as with any study, delimitations must be established. The delimitations established for this study include limiting the potential pool of participants to principals from the 39 schools I had worked with through the school review process. Another delimitation is associated with the fact that New Brunswick has two distinct linguistic school populations – Anglophone and Francophone. Given the participant researcher’s limited skill with the French language and lack of familiarity with the Francophone sector, the study was limited to principals from the Anglophone sector.

In summary, analytic autoethnography as the chosen methodological approach afforded me the opportunity to adopt two distinct but interrelated roles, that of participant observer as well as researcher. Acting as both subjective participant and objective observer, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of, and familiarity with, the topic of
study – the principalship (Coffey, Atkinson, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). Further understandings are generated by the analysis of others, in conjunction with self-analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Analytic autoethnography affords me the opportunity to use my own perspectives, as well as a dialogue with others working in the role, as data sources, to inform the role of the principal.

**Summary**

Throughout this research, my analytic role was dynamic and threefold. First, I was an objective observer as a school reviewer, with a bird’s-eye view of dynamics, but no practical influence on the practice. Second, as principal, using my experience – the time and motion recording of my activities and journaling regarding the nuances of the daily role – I was the ultimate participant and complete member researcher (CMR). Finally, as the author of the descriptive narratives outlining the role of the principal, I was a performer, using my experience, observations, and analysis of self and others in the role, to author a realistic description of the role of the principal. Each role variation allowed for a measure of reflexivity, given that I operated in subjective, objective, and narrative roles respectively.

For this study, narratives were established to outline the role of the principal from a variety of perspectives. A final narradigm was used to mesh these perspectives and further define the role. Ellis and Bochner (2006) note that autoethnography can be used in a multitude of ways and, as with all good research, should extend or add to the current research and dialogue. Proponents of autoethnography agree that the methodology allows
the participant researcher the flexibility to adopt different roles depending on the research topic.

Autoethnographers note that the evaluation of the results is dependent on the reader and, therefore, they can choose to accept or reject the researcher’s perspective or conclusions. As Ellis (2004) describes it, the interpretation is on the reader, “determining if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know” (p. 22). Even if the reader rejects the conclusions drawn by the participant researcher, there is utility in extending the dialogue.
Chapter 4: Participant Researcher as Principal

This chapter examines my autoethnographic perceptions of the principalship from an insider (principal practitioner) perspective. In order for this to be effectively accomplished, a fundamental component of autoethnography needs to be accommodated: that of establishing narrative visibility (Anderson, 2006, p. 378). The purpose of establishing narrative visibility in any ethnographic research is to ensure that the participant researcher’s personal experiences and their context are clear to the reader. By sharing my lived experiences as participant researcher, I will establish “narrative visibility,” which in this instance includes identifying the academic and professional backgrounds of me as participant researcher and outlining how I came to study the principalship.

The first section will outline my personal history, which will be shared chronologically. A chronological approach ensures a logical progression through the material, provides insight into me as participant researcher, while also accomplishing narrative visibility. This section will include an explanation of my path to the principalship, my experience as vice-principal, and how I came to understand the institutional requirements of the role.

Two brief narratives will also be shared. The first narrative will outline the circumstances that prompted me to become a participant (principal) researcher. This will include an explanation of the impetus for one of the main data sources for this chapter – my time and motion study (Gilbreth, 1915) – and will outline how it became a catalyst for the larger study, examining and defining the role of the principal. The second
narrative will outline how I operated as principal and provides insight into my practice as it functions in my small, rural school context.

In the next section, the role of the principal as described by school district job postings and the New Brunswick *Education Act* (1997) will be discussed. These two data sources will be used to help outline the institutional requirements of the role. Following this discussion, I will share the results of my time and motion study and participant researcher as principal interview data and will outline the themes that emerged from each of these respective data sets.

In the third section, I will share a fictional narrative, which is designed to mesh the themes and provide an overall picture of the role from my perspectives as both a participant researcher and a principal. The chapter will culminate in a *final word* which will include some of the autoethnographic insights gained by me as both participant researcher and principal.

**Personal History**

I began working as a teacher when I was 31 years old, bringing with me extensive previous education and work experience, which I believe assisted me in my roles as teacher and principal. Prior to beginning my teaching career, I had already completed an apprenticeship in mechanics, a bachelor of arts with a double major in political science and psychology from the former University College of Cape Breton (now Cape Breton University), a Master of Arts in public policy and administration from McMaster University, and a Bachelor of Education (BEd) from the University of New Brunswick (UNB). I also had a diversity of work experiences prior to beginning my teaching career, including working as a tour guide, automotive mechanic, service advisor, legal secretary,
accounting clerk, research associate, fitness instructor, gym manager, and tire-store manager. I also garnered prior work experience in education, having worked as a teaching assistant at two different universities while completing my various academic studies. My education-related work experience is augmented by 25 years of coaching in the public school system.

Before I began my research, I had already worked as an administrator for 10 years, completed the School District 18 Leadership Development Program, and earned my New Brunswick Principal’s Certificate. Of these 10 years as an administrator, four were spent working as a vice-principal alongside two different principals, and six subsequent years working as principal without the support of a vice-principal on staff. As a potential limitation, it is also important to note that the whole of my administrative experience was at the same small, rural, Grade 6–12 school in New Brunswick.

**My Path to the Principalship**

Before I begin examining my perception of the role and what I have learned through my experiences, it is important to explain how I came to assume the role of principal. Early in life, I had no intention toward the principalship or becoming a teacher. My intention was to earn my master of arts in public policy and administration and then assume a governmental position in the area of policy development. However, in 1996, right around the time of my graduation, there were large cuts in federal positions. These cuts limited my job prospects, and I was forced to re-evaluate my career path. I had been working as a teaching assistant while earning this degree, and several positive experiences pointed to an interest in, and aptitude for, teaching. These experiences prompted me to enroll in the BEd program at UNB.
After graduating from UNB, my journey led me to McAdam High School (MHS) where I began work first as a long-term supply teacher and then as a D contract teacher. The D contract position provided me with recall rights, but no guarantee of ongoing employment. At the end of my second year at MHS, the principal approached me about the prospect of applying for the position of vice-principal. I was somewhat shocked at the overture because several other staff members held vastly more teaching experience. He told me that I had the appropriate skill set and noted that my previous education, in public policy and administration, would serve me well in the role. At this point in my career, I had no intention of assuming any administrative position. I felt that others on staff might be resentful of a less experienced person holding a position of authority over them. I was also very new to teaching and was skeptical of my ability to live up to the obligations associated with the role of school administrator.

Despite these factors, I had other things to consider. I had one young child at home and another due in December. With recall rights but no guarantee of ongoing employment, and my familial obligations in mind, I asked one other question: “Does the position guarantee a B contract?” The principal, who was skilled as well as wise, had anticipated my question and, prior to our discussion, had confirmed with the District Human Resources Department that the position did guarantee a permanent contract. This made my decision easier. I told him I would apply. After attending to the application process and completing the interview, I was awarded the vice-principal’s position beginning September 2000.
Learning the Principalship: Experiential Learning

I was a vice-principal for four years. For the first two years, I worked under the tutelage of my first principal and mentor, who taught me many valuable lessons. During one of our first meetings, he said, “You won’t have any problems with the students. You have a great rapport with them.” He went on to say, “The kids don’t cause the major problems; the adults do.” My look must have given me away, because he followed up directly with, “You don’t believe me … you’ll see.” When I left this meeting, I was still skeptical. As was often the case, time helped prove his sage advice correct. After about two “smooth” weeks as vice-principal, I entertained a particularly irate and, in my opinion, unreasonable parent in my office. After a long, stressful, and unusually irrational dialogue, the parent departed and I immediately walked into the principal’s office. I fell into the chair across from my mentor. He smiled. Without any words being spoken, he had conveyed his message. I smiled and said, “Yes, you are right!” I learned volumes from this person. Among the many things he taught me, some of the most notable were to always adopt a humanistic approach when addressing issues; always act in the best interests of the students; make sure to get both sides of a story before acting; and keep trust and integrity at the forefront of all actions.

During my second year as vice-principal, he informed me that he had decided to retire. I pleaded for him to stay, noting that I had still had much to learn. Interestingly, he named one of the institutional requirements, communications, as one of the major catalysts to his retirement (personal correspondence, June, 2000). Despite a passion for education and excellent communication skills, he found one aspect of communication
untenable: he said that the sheer volume of emails had directly contributed to his decision.

Before retiring, the principal offered one last vote of confidence: he encouraged me to apply for the principal’s position. When the suggestion was offered, the only thing going through my mind was, “Going into my fourth year?” Despite my apprehension, I decided to apply. My decision was primarily due to his confidence in me and his ongoing encouragement. After participating in the application and interview processes, I was not awarded the position. I did not perceive this as a setback because it afforded me the opportunity to work under the tutelage of a second principal.

I also learned volumes working with my second principal. She made it a point to study and know her content, and she was always organized and prepared for meetings. Most importantly, we worked collaboratively and she honoured my request to have a voice. We always respected each other, whether we agreed or not, and worked collaboratively to improve outcomes for students through improved planning and instruction. After we had worked together for two years, she applied for, and was awarded, a position at a city elementary school. Following another application and interview process, I was awarded the principal position for my home school.

I appreciated having had the opportunity to learn under two skilled, but distinctly different, leaders. Working with them afforded me the opportunity to observe the principalship and further understand the nuances of the role. One of the most important things I learned through my observations was that, as principal, you need to recognize your own strengths, weaknesses, and the goodness of fit between you and the school community.
Another important requirement of the role was understanding and dealing with the institutional obligations of the organization. I learned this from my second principal, who always attended well to all district and provincial obligations. The necessity to do so was a revelation to me, and therefore, prior to submitting my second application, I made it my mission to learn and understand the institutionally prescribed requirements associated with the role of principal – in the absence of this knowledge, I felt other applicants might be deemed more suitable – so I searched out the documents that defined them.

**Institutional Job Requirements**

The primary institutional requirements for the principalship in New Brunswick can be delineated through two sources: the job postings advertised by individual districts for principal placements and the New Brunswick *Education Act* (1997), which prescribes the legal duties of the principal. These regulations are also used to set the parameters for the job postings.

**Job Posting**

My initial employment as principal was established through School District 18 (SD 18). My position was maintained when SD18 amalgamated with neighbouring districts to become Anglophone School District West (ASD-W) in 2012. I noted previously that the whole of my administrative career, both as vice-principal and principal, has occurred in the same small, rural school. To accommodate the autoethnographic component of the study, I have included the 2004 job posting from my principalship at MHS in Appendix E.

For SD 18, the fundamental components outlined in the job description at the time consisted of a combination of educational qualifications, including the New Brunswick
principal’s certificate and other practical skills. It is interesting to note that I had not yet earned the principal’s certificate at the time of my hiring. The certification required the completion of three specified university courses and several District Leadership Development Program (DLDP) modules as specified by the district. According to section 21(1) of the New Brunswick School Administration Regulation (1997), a person must hold a principal’s certificate in order to be appointed as a principal of a school, although the district superintendent is authorized under section 21(2) to appoint a person without a principal’s certificate for up to five years.

As a result of my lack of formal accreditation, my initial hiring was contingent on the completion of the required DLDP modules. Fortunately, I was already enrolled in the DLDP, although I had not completed all of the required modules at the time of my appointment. I was able to accomplish this during my first year as principal, all the while working through the trial by fire that was the first year principalship. I was later asked to complete the university coursework required to earn my New Brunswick Principal’s Certificate; an accreditation I earned in 2006.

**Statutory and Regulatory Requirements**

As was noted, the job postings are not the only avenue for identifying the institutional requirements of the role. The New Brunswick Education Act (1997) and the accompanying regulations and policies provide the legislated institutional requirements for principals. Sections 28(1) and 28(2) outline the majority of provincially prescribed duties of the principal (see also Appendix H).

The lengthy list of duties outlined in the legislation necessitates that the principal possess a variety of managerial skills. The legislation also specifies the amount to which
the principal is accountable, if not directly responsible, for all aspects of school life. This sense of overarching principal responsibility is noted in a number of studies. These include a number of responsibilities which are transmitted from the minister, via the superintendent, to the principal via the “chain of command.” In a study by Anderson, Brien, McNamara, O’Hara, and McIsaac (2011), one of the principal interview respondents noted, “You better have a perfect paper trail with every ‘i’ dotted and ‘t’ crossed, if anything goes wrong you are on your own” (p. 394).

As I examined the obligations outlined in the Education Act (1997), in conjunction with those outlined in the job postings, I was left with an exhaustive list of job requirements that necessitated both a broad range of skills and a significant temporal commitment on the part of the school principal. This search broadened my understanding of the role. It also enlightened me to the fact that the greatest part of accountability at the public school level lies with the principal. As a student of public administration, I could not help but liken this to the concept of ministerial responsibility in government, only on a smaller scale. Although daunting, the volume of skills and overarching accountability associated with the role did not deter me and I began my career as principal. I quickly realized the institutional requirements were not the only things I needed to understand in order to navigate the system and be effective in my role. There were practical and relational aspects of the role which I find are often more important than the broad institutional components.

**Illustrative Vignettes**

The following two illustrative vignettes elaborate on some of my experiences as principal, provide insight into the role, and will help provide clarity to the final statement
from the previous section. The first vignette outlines some of my interactions with a
departmental official, which acted as a catalyst to my ongoing study of the principalship.
The second outlines how I operated as principal and some of the tasks that I took on in
order to fulfil my obligations to students to ensure that their educational opportunities
were maximized. In sum, these two vignettes are illustrative of how the perceptions of
many, even those who are charged with defining the role, may be inconsistent with the
reality or, in this case, my reality as principal.

Why I Chose to Study the Principalship

While working as principal, I was chosen to work on a New Brunswick Teachers’
Association (NBTA) committee representing principals provincially. I was asked to chair
this committee and did so for two years. At the midpoint of the first school semester
during the 2011–2012 school year, my committee work afforded me the opportunity to be
part of a meeting with a high-ranking departmental official. His job was to consult with
our group, field general questions, and hear comments and concerns about the role of the
principal. During the dialogue, I had occasion to note the overwhelming busyness of the
principalship. Although I was aware of some of the research into principal workloads
(Anderson et al., 2011; IPPN, 2014; Wallace, 2002), I was not prepared for the reaction I
received. The official seemed indignant, and asked why I believed I was any busier than
anyone else in the system. I was offended, but rather than begin what I thought would be
a fruitless debate, I decided to gather some data to illustrate my point. This began my task
of collecting role-specific data. These data were recorded through a time and motion
study, which was established for a six-month period, including the whole of semester II
of the 2011–2012 school year.
Given the numerous responsibilities associated with my role, accompanied by teaching obligations, simply finding the time to jot down notes was quite challenging. Nonetheless, I was committed to being both diligent and accurate in my recording. The result of my labour was a 99 page document, which outlined my daily duties and included reflective journaling detailing my state of mind at points in time throughout the process.

Upon completion of the time and motion study, I sent a copy to the departmental official whose reaction had provided the catalyst to my efforts. I wanted to share the practical demands of the role and hoped to receive some form of institutional acknowledgment of the amount of work that principals do. At the very least, I hoped he would acknowledge my effort to document and share the actual obligations of the role. Despite the initial correspondence and subsequent meetings with the same official, I never received any acknowledgment of my communication. I do not believe the document was taken seriously and, given the overt lack of acknowledgement, I am unsure if it was ever read. Perhaps the document was read and the official “chose” to ignore the actual demands associated with the role. By doing this, he would have no obligation to act on the information. As one colleague put it, “If they actually defined the role, they would have to pay you more” (R. Williams, personal communication, June 2015).

My time and motion study had an unintended consequence. I realized that the role was consuming my life and, although I was living, I was not living well. Through my reflective journaling, I determined that the obligations associated with my role had been contributing to some health concerns. Similar concerns have been identified in other jurisdictions. In a study conducted in Ireland (IPPN, 2005), which examined factors found to be discouraging to aspirants to the principalship, the authors noted the “vast
workload and ever-increasing responsibility with a consequent negative impact on the health, welfare and personal life of the Principal” (p. 15) as a primary factor deterring skilled aspirants from taking on the role. My personal health concerns are illustrated by the following journal entry, taken directly from my time and motion study:

Feeling exceptionally under the weather the past two weeks … The obligations, and to be quite frank, foolishness associated with dealing with individuals and issues, at all levels, is putting a strain on my physical and emotional well-being … Today, I am here despite severe stomach upset and a lack of sleep. I started email replies before 5:00 a.m. and was here at 8:10 a.m. I feel like I have put a full day in already. I am exhausted and need to take a day and rest, given that I am feeling weaker and sicker daily. (Journal entry: 8:10 a.m., Tuesday, April 24, 2012)

This journal excerpt is illustrative of how the overwhelming work obligations were contributing to my fatigue and associated health concerns. This led me to two other considerations: First, if the role was unmanageable and the demands so great that they were making me sick, perhaps I should quit and go back to teaching full time. Second, I questioned if these were solely my perceptions or if other practitioners shared my concerns? I felt I needed confirmation, but the desire to answer these questions did not lead me directly to this study. It was another interaction with the aforementioned departmental official that provided the catalyst for my actual return to academia.

Following the completion and attempted sharing of the time and motion study, I decided to further my studies and was considering applying for my PhD when I was contacted by a colleague from district office. She called to encourage me to apply for a provincially sponsored leadership development program called the STAR Academy.
With my colleague’s encouragement and recommendation, I completed the application process, was shortlisted and received an interview.

When I walked into the formal interview, I was surprised to see that the same departmental official was one of the three interviewers. In fact, he was the chair of the selection committee. Given our tenuous history, I had no expectation of being selected. During the interview the two other panelists asked several follow-up questions, beyond the formally prescribed ones, and I thought I might have a hope yet. This hope was dashed when the chair asked me his sole follow-up question, “What will you do if you don’t get in?” He might as well have said, “when you don’t get in.” I didn’t miss a beat. I said I would apply for a PhD in education. When I received formal notification of my rejection from the STAR Academy a few weeks later I immediately began my application for admission to the PhD program at UNB.

My interactions with the departmental official could be interpreted as negative, but in my perception they had an upside. They prompted me to maintain my composure, pursue ongoing study, and not act too hastily by leaving the principalship. I decided instead to step back and use my new educational odyssey to further examine the role of the principal, using a more weighted, academic approach. I decided to focus my PhD studies in the area of educational leadership. My goal was to advance my knowledge and share my perspectives on the role of the principal to a broader, and hopefully more receptive, audience. The clarity that I am able to provide in further defining the role will provide an added benefit for those who are making decisions about the role. It will also advance the understanding of the principalship at the institutional level.
I have noted that several data sources are used to analyze my practice and advance my knowledge of the principalship. Each additional source helps to further identify the requirements associated with the role of principal and allows for triangulation of data as noted in chapter 3. The district job description, as well as the duties of principals as outlined in the New Brunswick *Education Act* (1997), are important for defining the institutional requirements and were used by me to learn about the role when applying for the principalship. Although they also provided me with an understanding of the broad responsibilities associated with the role, they did not, as I alluded earlier, prepare me for the practical obligations that came with the actual practice. The narrative inserted below illustrates how I quickly learned that my practice as principal includes much more than simply addressing the institutional requirements of the role.

**My Practice as Principal**

I have established through the literature review that the role of the principal is not well defined. While working as a principal, I found that many individuals working within the system and most of those working outside the system have misconceptions about the role (Yavus & Bas, 2010). Few seem to understand the numerous intangible aspects of the role, as they operate within diverse school contexts. Furthermore, many of these intangibles would never be evident to a person by simply examining a job posting, nor would the site-specific factors be evident to those who are not working within a specific context. The following vignette is illustrative of this fact.

As principal, ensuring that all students have the supports they need is something that I have always valued. Working in a remote school with a high-needs clientele often necessitated that I, as principal, and other staff members, go the extra mile. One such case
occurred with a student who was struggling with attendance, whom we will call Jamie (a pseudonym). Jamie was intelligent, creative, and talented, but he could not get himself out of bed in the mornings to allow for a timely arrival prior to our 8:25 homeroom bell. As a result of his many absences and daily tardiness, he was missing huge chunks of instruction. Early in the first semester of his Grade 11 year, the teachers met and put an intervention plan in place for Jamie. The school administrative assistant provided morning calls to get him out of bed and help alleviate his morning struggles. Teachers also went out of their way, many giving up personal time at noon and after-school to offer remedial support for him – that is, when he was actually on site. In class, teachers used praise and encouragement to try to further motivate Jamie.

As principal, I had met with Jamie on numerous occasions and worked to establish a strong rapport with him. In addition to his intellectual potential, Jamie also had a positive demeanour and, as one staff member put it, he “had a bit of charisma.” It was clear from our experience with Jamie that he did not respond well to any firm disciplinary action. When confronted with sanctions, or even a firm tone, he would retreat further into the solitude of his basement. Such retreats were often followed by increased absenteeism in the days that followed.

As the principal of a small school, I was involved in all Educational Support Services Team (ESST) meetings and also provided direct interventions and supports when others found it challenging to do so. Furthermore, all major attendance issues required my direct intervention. As a result, Jamie and I met on many occasions. Given that Jamie responded well to praise and encouragement, any dialogue I had with him was, as a former mentor had suggested, “Like a father to a sick child.” When meeting with
Jamie, I would consistently begin by stating his many skills and talents. I would follow by outlining what he could be doing to reach his vast potential. In September of Jamie’s grade 11 year, I met with him and told him what the school was willing and able to do to help him achieve graduation. I explained that the grade 11 and 12 years were the ones that counted on a transcript and added that the marks earned by students during these two years were key in providing access to post-secondary education, apprenticeship, or employment opportunities. During these meetings, my final statement was always, “I will do anything, within reason, to help you get to graduation.” I would always add, “I will do my best to help you, as long as you are working with me.”

Jamie did okay for the first three weeks of his Grade 11 school year. He had a couple of late arrivals and one or two absences, but his attendance had improved dramatically. By the fourth week, however, Jamie began to fall into his old habits. He arrived late, almost daily, and the morning calls home by our administrative assistant were becoming increasingly less effective. By October he was late almost every morning and began missing large amounts of instructional time.

When I was apprised of his deteriorating situation, I began calling home myself. For the first couple of days, this approach was effective. Then, in the three days that followed, his mother said he refused to get out of bed. I requested a meeting with the parent. She agreed but, because she did not have a car, the meeting was scheduled to occur at the family home. I arrived for the meeting and was seated at the kitchen table along with Jamie and his mom and dad. We proceeded to discuss his attendance. Mom reiterated that he would not listen to her. Dad was extremely quiet and, despite good
intentions, was not going to be firm with Jamie. This was simply not in his nature. I was at a loss.

When confronted with student issues such as these, I always go to the source. (I recall recounting the story to our guidance counselor, and saying that I became like a used car salesman.) Rather than asking Jamie what we needed to do to get him into a car, I asked him, “What do we need to do to get you to school?” Not unlike Jerry McGuire, I was asking him to “help me, help you.” This may sound somewhat tongue-in-cheek but, from my recollection, this is exactly the terminology I used.

Jamie explained that the alarm clock did not wake him. He added that, despite not liking conflict or a strong tone, he needed a firm hand to force him out of bed. I explained that if his attendance trends continued, he was not going to graduate and, at the risk of ruining the positive rapport which I had worked diligently to build, I offered to be that firm hand. It was agreed that I would arrive at the house every morning at 8:00 a.m. and would knock on the basement window until Jamie responded. I would then offer to wait five minutes for him to get dressed, brush his teeth, and get in the car. Living close to the school, it was his choice to either meet the five-minute deadline or walk to school. We agreed he was to arrive prior to the end of homeroom and no later than 8:30 a.m.

I liked the idea, but was concerned about the potential for conflict as well as the approach to take if this strategy did not work. Being an intelligent and intuitive young man, Jamie must have sensed my concern. He immediately added that he would need a consequence, in addition to the suggested support, to make sure he was motivated to move, especially in the morning. Jamie suggested that we adopt a three-step process: I would first knock on the window and have a direct dialogue with Jamie. Failing this, I would...
would then knock on the door and come in and speak to his mother. His mother would then go and tell Jamie to get moving. The third step, he suggested, involved his mother taking me to the basement, where we would physically unravel him from his blanketed slumber. Jamie added that any time he refused the ride and was late, he would be obligated to make up, double, his late time at noon or after school. We agreed to this approach while sitting at the breakfast table in this small bungalow.

Looking back, anyone observing this scene without any contextual information would have felt they were witnessing something that could be likened to a Norman Rockwell painting. The beauty in this approach was that the student had generated much of the contract himself, and therefore was invested. There was no way he could say it was unfair, because the plan was his.

The challenge for me was the obligation to follow up. Considering the other demands of my role, it was sometimes difficult for me to get away. The other challenge was that I was not willing to breach the provincial pupil protection policy, known as Policy 701 (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2004). No matter the circumstance, I was never going to physically help his mother roll him out of bed. I never told Jamie that I was unwilling to do this and, thankfully, over the course of the next two years, it was never required.

The daily process had begun. I would arrive around 8:00 a.m. and would knock on the window. Jamie would say, “I’ll be out in a minute” or, “I’ll see you at school in a little while.” Jamie availed himself of the transportation option about half the time, and would enjoy the school breakfast program on many of these days. The days Jamie drove with me were interesting. Our conversations were eclectic. He had interests in many
different areas and would share information on a variety of subjects, ranging from conspiracy theories to “good movies”.

On the days when he decided to walk, which I believed were often solely based on the weather conditions, he arrived on time – mostly. When he was late, I did not have to search for him. He would arrive at the office after school, and he would stay to finish any incomplete work. In the absence of any unfinished work, I would issue an assignment based solely on his interests. This seemed to help promote his school and academic engagement.

Over the two years approaching graduation, I only had to go to the door three times and, thankfully, never had to venture to the basement. Twice, his mother met me at the door noting that he was legitimately ill. The third time, I let slide, although I had a dialogue with Jamie the next day about mutual respect and appreciating the support. There were very few issues otherwise.

I often recall the days approaching Jamie’s graduation. I never resented the extra duty and came to enjoy our conversations. I actually learned a lot from this inquisitive young man. This being said, nearing the end of Jamie’s graduation year, I was exhausted. There were things coming at me from all fronts. There were numerous other behavioural issues to address, planning obligations, and year-end marking for Cooperative Education 120 and Law 120. There were also district forms to complete, plans to submit, and schedules to generate. I was taxed.

The day of Jamie’s graduation was a full one, to say the least. For me, it began at 7:00 a.m., with the morning graduation ceremony beginning at 11:00 a.m. The ceremony took a full two and a half hours. As principal, I was asked to give a speech, which added
to the tumult of the day. Following the formal ceremony, I met with the dignitaries in attendance, helped set up the gym for the evening Grand March activities, visited the families of the students who had offered invitations, and then went back to the school to help finalize preparations for the evening activities. My evening activities included greeting the students and their escorts for the Grand March and acting as master of ceremonies and announcer.

Specific to Jamie’s graduation, I remember receiving a grad photo from him, but no invitation. Given the two years of support, and the ongoing dialogue with Jamie and his family, I was a little surprised. In fact, I had already written a congratulatory card for him, as I did for any of the other graduates who provided me with an invitation. In the din of graduation, I quickly forgot about this and continued to attend to my duties.

That evening, following the Grand March, I plunked down on the stage while students and family members were milling about. I use the term “plunked down,” because that is exactly what I did. For the first time in my adult life, my feet were aching. I felt like I did not have anything left in the tank. A teaching colleague sat down beside me and said, among other things, “Why do we do this job?” adding, “We must be crazy?” He, and many others, had put in a very long day. I sat there for a minute contemplating the comment and trying to decide if I really wanted to do this job for the rest of my working life. In the midst of my contemplation, and just when the aching in my feet was beginning to subside, a person approached the stairs and asked if she could speak to me. My fatigued internal voice was saying, “What now?” but thankfully my outer voice responded with “Sure.”
Graduation, in a small school, is a big deal for the community. Almost everybody was dressed up and most in attendance looked different than they normally did. As a result, I didn’t recognize the person requesting the conversation. She went on to explain that she was Jamie’s aunt and that we had met before. She said Jamie’s mother wanted to speak to me directly, but was too embarrassed. She went on to state that, being of little means, Jamie’s family found the cost of graduation taxing. Consequently, they didn’t have enough money left to have a “proper party.” At this point, I felt bad and thought, even though this was Jamie’s big day, how hard some of this must be for his family. Jamie’s aunt added that the mother wanted to share something with me, but couldn’t find the words. In my exhaustion, and in the din of a few hundred other people in the gym, the aunt said something that touched me and stayed with me. She simply said, “He wouldn’t have made it without you. Thank you!” At that moment, all of the fatigue, stress, and doubt were gone, at least for the moment. In my head, I was answering the questions posed by my colleague: “No we are not crazy; this is why we do it.” We didn’t do it for the thanks, but to actually help students achieve and, to use a term I often attribute to my practice, do some good. I was so choked up by the sentiment that my reply to the aunt was short. I remember saying, “He would have made it, but it would have been harder.” Then, in order not to choke up further and possibly cry, I added tongue-in-cheek, “and probably not this year.” She jovially agreed and we exchanged niceties as she departed. The rest of the day was a blur, but I know I didn’t question my job choice the rest of that evening. I recall coming in with a renewed vigour the next morning, despite nearly 16 hours on duty the day before. When I saw my colleague who had issued the crazy
question the evening before, I made it a point to tell the story and punctuated the ending with, “This is why we do it!”

With respect to the role of the principal, it is simple to legislate the minimal requirements and institutional obligations in a job description or policy document. What the uninitiated or the uninformed would not know is that these documents cannot begin to capture the intangibles associated with the role. In this circumstance, only Jamie, a couple of his close family members, and a select few staff members knew of my daily visits.

I mentioned I was tired. I wasn’t tired because of my work with Jamie. I was tired because of my work with Jamie, accompanied by 120 other students, staff, parents, as well as the numerous other administrative, district, and provincial obligations, which served to saturate the role. In fact, examining the situation with Jamie and many others like him, I feel they are the primary reason I did the job. No institutional description will ever capture the humanistic, personal, and relational aspects of the role that are reflected in the previous narrative. When I consider some of the other impersonal and mundane obligations, I think my colleague may be right. Perhaps we are a little crazy.

When examining this narrative, it becomes easy to understand how most individuals outside of the education system have difficulty comprehending the realities of the role in practice. The reaction from my departmental colleague reinforces the fact that some of our colleagues, even those working within the education system, have a similarly limited comprehension of how schools operate and the dynamic and vital role that principals play.
The Data

The data coding process has been outlined in chapter 3. The main sources of data used to inform the themes which follow are the interview of the participant researcher as principal and the time and motion study conducted while working as a principal. These sources of data were supported by the job description and the institutionally prescribed requirements of the role outlined in legislation and regulations.

Given the importance of the data gathered from the participant researcher as principal, I will provide the background and articulate the questions and content associated with the 16 interview questions posed to me as principal. The first 15 questions, which are fully elaborated in Appendix D, came directly from the New Brunswick School Review Process in the form of the Administrator Forum Questions. The final question, number 16, was specific to the topic of inquiry and asked, “How does your role, as principal, compare with what was described in the job posting?”

The Interview Questions

Following is a summary of the content I collected from each of the interview questions. In some instances, the associated challenges identified during the interview are included.

Question 1 asks how I, as principal, use the vision, mission, and values to guide and support student learning. The vision, mission and value statements are collaboratively developed foundation documents, involving input from all staff members which are used to inform the SIP. When school personnel are making decisions which have school-wide implications, or are addressing challenging issues, these statements are used to inform the decision making process. The vision, mission and value statements
are also foundational documents which are used to inform the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP delineates the practical actions established to address identified school goals.

Question 2 deals with the process and data used to create and monitor the SIP. Several formal, informal, school, district and provincial assessments are used to set SIP priorities, actions and monitor ongoing progress toward identified goals. We use the Tell Them From Me (TTFM)/Our School student surveys and the Teacher Perception Survey Data (TPSD) as two tools to help support the examination of the overall school climate. Information from these surveys is used to set SIP and Positive Learning Environment Plan (PLEP) priorities. The Core Leadership Team (CLT) is the mechanism used to ensure SIP strategies and actions are enacted, monitored and adjusted as needed. During my interview, I specifically noted the use of the CLT to monitor the effectiveness of the “interventions that we’re applying and the efficacy of initiatives”.

Question 3 asks how I, as principal, get input into decisions that have implications for change throughout the school community. This is accomplished through staff meetings and feedback from staff gathered via the combined Educational Support Services Team (ESST) and CLT members. Student input is gathered through direct dialogue, consultation through class representatives and student assemblies.

Questions 4 addresses communications and focuses on how I, as principal, keep the staff, parents/guardians and community informed. The primary mechanisms to ensure effective reciprocal communications with staff are the ESST/CLT team and a memo book which is used as a record of all major correspondence (important emails, memos, event schedules, monthly calendars, newsletters, etc.). Of these, emails were
used as one of the primary mechanisms to ensure effective ongoing communication with staff members. I also made it a point to try and generate a monthly newsletter for distribution to the community, although there were times when the other obligations associated with the role pre-empted this. I encouraged teachers to use their web pages to facilitate school to home communications but, as noted during the interview, “teacher webpages are a challenge.” The use of teacher webpages was inconsistent and did not occur to the degree or at the frequency I would have liked. I also tried to use the school website as a vehicle for school community communications. When speaking about updating the website I noted that “time was a challenge.”

Question 5 was used to identify the established school teams and how I monitor the effectiveness of team practices and their impact on student learning. I noted that monitoring often occurred through my direct participation in team meetings. I also noted that “I generally do the minutes.” The CLT/ESST were used to monitor interventions. When I was unable to attend a meeting, I would ask for a copy of the minutes which I would subsequently read and distribute to staff. During the interview I noted that “finding the time to attend meetings in conjunction with the many other responsibilities associated with the role was challenging.”

Question 6 dealt with teacher performance, specifically the monitoring of curriculum and pedagogy to ensure that teachers were using best practices in instruction and assessment. I noted the use of informal walkthroughs as the primary mechanism to monitor teaching, but these occurred “mostly when I was asked to be in a class to address an issue or concern.” I added that “formal walkthroughs were hard [to complete] because of the limited time in a small school due to my teaching load.” The district teacher
evaluation cycle recommended that all staff be evaluated over a 3-year cycle. This includes D contract teachers (those with a teaching contract and recall rights, but no guarantee of ongoing employment), new B contract teachers (those with a permanent teaching contract), and others who were on formal review due to behaviour or performance. I noted that it could be “challenging to complete formal cycle depending on the clientele and situation in a given year.” I also identified several other challenges in this area. During the interview, I noted that I “prioritized working with new and struggling teachers” but added the challenge of “finding time” to do so. Another associated challenge included ensuring lesson plans were completed in an adequate manner to effectively address the needs of diverse learners. This necessitated I work directly with reluctant staff members.

Question 7 asked how ESST supported teachers in the school. During the interview, I noted that “ESST was invaluable in providing direct and indirect supports to students with academic and behavioural needs.” I also noted several challenges in this area, including the fact that “small schools have limited resources which are exacerbated by Educational Support Teacher-Guidance (EST-G) and the Educational Support Teacher-Resource (EST-R) holding teaching obligations.” In my circumstance I noted that I, as “the principal often have to pick up the slack.” I added that “the principal’s overall accountability for ESST leads to additional duties on the principal to ensure student needs are met.”

Question 8 addressed the obligation for me, as principal, to ensure that teachers are taking primary responsibility for teaching students with diverse needs and providing appropriate accommodations, modifications, interventions and/or supports.
Observations and walkthroughs were used to determine that the planning and application of appropriate accommodations and modifications were occurring on a daily basis. I noted that this was “highly variable between teachers.” In order to ensure teacher growth, knowledge and ability in this regard, I worked to provide teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities. I also worked to ensure buy in and teacher engagement in the specific SIP initiative focused on planning for diverse learners. Once again, several challenges were identified. I noted that some teachers were challenged to generate effective diversified lesson plans, “some by knowledge, others by confidence, or ability.” Furthermore, the academic diversity of the population created challenges. The school population included many students with severe academic and behavioural needs. During the interview, it was also noted that “teachers struggled to address the needs of advanced learners… and were more focused on addressing the needs of struggling learners or dealing with high-needs students and those with behavioural issues.” Lesson planning was noted as an area of concern with some staff members reluctant to complete lesson plans which would lead to diversification of instruction. Once again, I noted finding the time to conduct walkthroughs and provide feedback to teachers challenging because, as I commented, “as a teaching principal, I am always pressed for time.”

Question 9 dealt with teaching assignments and scheduling decisions. As principal, I always worked to ensure that scheduling decisions were based on teacher expertise, competencies, and experience. I made it my practice to seek teacher input into course selection preferences when scheduling. However, in my small school, I had limited flexibility because of such things as the middle high configuration and the lack of specialist teachers.
Question 10 inquired about the ways I provided ongoing formal and informal feedback to staff regarding their performance. I noted a “lot of informal dialogue.” By informal, I mean interactions which were unplanned and undocumented. For example, when I happened to be in a room I would often comment to the teacher on some of the positive practices I observed and offer suggestions to improve the lesson. Formal dialogue occurred when “a teacher was on formal evaluation or when someone was struggling.” Under our current District arrangements formal evaluation occur on a scheduled basis for D-contract teachers and B-contract teachers and as needed for those who are struggling. I always tried to prioritize the provision of support for those who were struggling, but also commented that it was hard to, “source the time to be in class to observe and support teachers.”

Question 11 focused on how I promoted continuous professional growth and provided support to those who were new to a subject area, assignment, or those who were struggling. In this context, new assignments included teachers newly assigned to the school, subject area, grade level, or role within the school. To provide this support I shared professional readings, personally generated and administered Professional Development (PD) sessions, set up opportunities for teachers to observe peers, and mentored new and struggling staff members. My mentoring efforts included frequent observation of classes while also providing constructive feedback on their teaching practice and behaviour management. The following quotation is illustrative of my commitment to support staff members. It is also an indication of support being provided as a measure of self-preservation. Specifically, I was using my presence in the
classrooms to pre-empt serious misconducts which prevented the need to deal with larger issues later:

I am often in the rooms. Sometimes it’s easier to be in the room to provide support or model than it is to pick up the pieces afterwards. So I’ve done a lot of that. Finding the time to do this is challenging.

Question 12 examined the ways that I worked to build leadership capacity on staff. I made it part of my practice to identify potential leaders on staff. To provide opportunities for them to lead I would: ask them to replace me when I was away; encourage them to lead team or individual initiatives; and recommend them to the district leadership development program. I also worked to encourage and support ongoing study. For example, I would source, or in many cases directly provide release time for teachers who were interested in attending PD sessions. Once again, I noted the reluctance of some staff members to take on leadership roles. Some teachers would go so far as to say, “It is not in my job description.”

Question 13 delved into the ways that I, as principal, ensure I am current in my understanding of current pedagogy and methodologies and how I work to share and promote this with staff. I noted my ongoing personal study and the sharing of information with staff on a variety of topics including pedagogy, planning, curriculum, instruction, behaviour management, and numerous other areas. My supervisory obligations necessitated I examine curriculum documents, consult with teachers, and provide direct support where needed.

I also noted the study and generation of content needed to administer PD sessions as being beneficial to my ongoing professional growth. This being said, I identified this
aspect of my role as incredibly time-consuming. I noted that “some staff will help with PD in-house, but many are reluctant to do so, both in-house and beyond the school level. Some lack the confidence, some the skill, and others the inclination.”

Question 14 examined the ways I worked to support inclusion in the school. The combined ESST/CLT was noted as “invaluable” in promoting inclusionary practices. I relied on these team members to facilitate communications between staff members. The EST-R and EST-G were also invaluable in helping ensure that interventions were being applied in individual, small group and classroom settings. I identified encouraging and supporting student-led initiatives, being proactive and adopting a hands-on approach to supporting special-needs clientele, and facilitating the establishment, development, and maintenance of a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA). The fact that some stakeholders were adversarial when the GSA was being established was noted as a challenge.

I added that some special-needs students required extensive resourcing. These included temporal, human, and physical resources to support their needs. Establishing effective programming and providing supports for students with extreme needs was identified as particularly challenging, especially when these students presented with extreme behaviours. During the interview, I noted specifically that “one high-needs student with behavioural issues can consume the majority of your time and have a negative influence on the overall school climate.”

Question 15 looked at the ways I provided staff members with thanks and other recognitions for contributions and accomplishments. I offered that thanks and recognitions were shared on a regular basis including: during monthly staff meetings (by me or via other staff members), during school assemblies, and via monthly formal student
recognition events (e.g. middle and high school students of the month). I also made it a point to provide direct thanks to students and staff members, either personally or through the use of email. Similar to the challenges in other areas, finding the time to offer thanks was also identified as a struggle.

The final question, number 16, asked how does my “role, as principal, compares with what was described in the job posting?” I found this to be a challenging question to answer. I described the role as indescribable, identifying the duality of the role to include management and leadership. I noted that the additional teaching duties associated with my position created temporal challenges. Attending to walkthroughs and providing teachers with constructive feedback were noted as invaluable in promoting ongoing teacher professional growth. Finding the time to attend to these activities was noted as particularly challenging due to other obligations. I offer the following quotation to encapsulate the challenge of the tripartite role in my context:

You are teaching, and you want to be a curriculum leader as well as an educational leader. To me a managerial function is very challenging. To be an educational leader in the building is also time-consuming. The time is not available so the roles are almost counterproductive.

**Emergent Themes: Individual Interview Data**

The interview data were coded and tiered in priority by frequency of occurrence. Specifically, the greater the frequency of occurrence, the higher the item was placed in the tier. Through this process 18 minor themes emerged from the initial analysis. Through the data coding (threshing) process outlined in Chapter 3, all items were grouped and regrouped until the final themes were established. Three dominant themes
Collaboration, Teaming, and Leadership emerged naturally as part this process: (a) collaboration, teaming, and leadership; (b) too many duties for the available time; and (c) supporting teacher professional growth. Table 4.1 lists the overarching themes and underlying content. The ensuing dialogue will explain the themes, including the content supporting the establishment of the themes.

Table 4.1: Emergent Themes: Participant Researcher as Principal Interview Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration, Teaming, and Leadership</th>
<th>Too Many Duties for the Available Time</th>
<th>Supporting Teachers Professional Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of CLT/ESST</td>
<td>Reluctant Staff</td>
<td>Walkthroughs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Leadership</td>
<td>Lesson Planning and Diversification of Instruction</td>
<td>Lesson Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Leadership – Low</td>
<td>Exceptional Needs – Academic and Behavioural</td>
<td>Teacher Performance Evaluations – Formal Cycle</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informal Dialogue/Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collaboration, Teaming, and Leadership**

In my context, working as a principal in a small school, the importance of collaboration cannot be understated. Collaboration was used as a vehicle to expand capacity, delegate some of the various responsibilities associated with the role, and promote and share leadership opportunities. School-based teams were the primary mechanism used to facilitate collaboration and accomplish the other aforementioned objectives.

From the data, it was clear that the majority of the collaboration and planning was facilitated through meetings with the CLT/ESST. These are identified as the two most important teams in my context. The ESST included the EST-G and EST-R teachers. I note this because my school, although small, included a large percentage of students who
would be considered high needs, both academically and behaviourally. The challenges associated with this school population necessitated that ESST initiatives, and school-wide policies, the latter of which were historically discussed at the leadership team level, often overlapped.

It is important to note that the CLT and ESST were combined in my context. There were two reasons for this combination. Firstly, the membership for each committee was overlapping, so the combination established improved efficiency for membership due to the ability to discuss and address what was often overlapping content. Further temporal efficiency was gained by eliminating an extra meeting for staff members who were already obligated to a variety of other school-based commitments. For these and other reasons I found the ESST/CLT to be “invaluable.” The following quotation from my interview as principal is illustrative of this value. Subsequent quotations speak to some of the challenges and how team members helped to mitigate them including the reluctance on the part of some staff to engage in opportunities for leadership and professional growth:

There is some team teaching going on. In a small school it is hard because both guidance and resource have pretty large teaching loads … it’s going on enough that I’m satisfied that they’re doing it probably 20 per cent of the time and co-teaching similarly [each EST-G and EST-R]. They do triage quite a bit. So if there is a teacher struggling, like I said, somebody is struggling with behaviour management or to target interventions, then they would put primary emphasis on them. They both attend all ESS Team meetings diligently. I have to say, I do a lot of the follow-up myself. But when it’s something very specific to their role, they
were very good at following up. The guidance teacher, I have to add, has been excellent for our school climate. She has a very positive attitude. She doesn’t allow a lot of negativity. She calls people out, but in a positive way. So she is that person who has been contingent in actually helping create a very positive school climate. (Francis interview as principal, q. 7)

Sharing leadership can be a means to expand the capacity of the school. By sharing authority you allow staff members to exert their influence in areas where they have experience and expertise. I attempted to share leadership opportunities with staff members. The degree of success in this endeavor was variable with some staff members engaged in supporting many educational and extra-curricular while others were reluctant, choosing to simply attend to the legislated obligations of their role.

I also worked with staff to promote student leadership. In fact, it was one of the goals outlined in our SIP. From a leadership perspective, I believed that if teachers were promoting student leadership it might also encourage some of those reluctant staff members to take on more leadership opportunities as well. The sharing of leadership and reluctance of students to engage in leadership opportunities noted previously when speaking of the adult population was mirrored in the student population. The following quotation illustrates the challenge:

Student Leadership – is low but we have class reps and are working continually to promote student leadership opportunities. Similar to the adults, there are always a few who carry the load. That seems to be the nature of leadership in the modern era. (Francis interview as principal, q. 3)
Analysis of my time and motion document indicates that, although this was identified as one of the SIP goals, my support for this initiative died in the second semester. There were no notations listed to support this initiative. This is indicative of how the numerous other obligations of the role can serve to overrun the best of well-intentioned activities.

**Too Many Duties for the Available Time**

I noted above my attempts to share leadership opportunities with staff members. In my situation, this was done in an attempt to advance the capacity of the school. I also hoped that, by delegating some responsibilities, I would also alleviate some of the pressures associated with the tripartite role which included educational leader, administrator, and teacher. I found some staff members reluctant to engage. This reluctance occurred both in educationally focused and extra-curricular areas. The quotation below provides an example of the reluctance of staff to participate in shared leadership opportunities and specifically the reluctance of staff members to participate in the ESST/CLT meetings despite an open invitation:

EST-G and EST-R are young, but are both strong teacher leaders. They both work on the ESST/CLT. All staff can attend the ESST/Core Leadership Team meetings if they want, but generally they don’t. (Francis interview as principal, q. 12)

Working in a tripartite role requires that I attend to a diversity of obligations. As principal of a small school I am asked to deal with any serious behavioural issues, work to address the needs of a diverse student population, attend to my planning, teaching, and assessment obligations as teacher, and work to support the staff members who may be reluctant or lack some of the skills needed to effectively address the needs of our diverse
population. The journal entries and interview content inserted below reflect a few of these obligations. This first quote is illustrative of the complexity of the role I was assigned:

The dual role, which is in reality a tripartite role in my context, is very challenging. There isn’t enough time to effectively attend to all the obligations of the tripartite role. These include administrative/management duties, the responsibilities associated with providing educational leadership opportunities for staff, and the teaching role and associated planning obligations. (Francis interview as principal, q. 16)

I have noted the reluctance of some staff to engage in leadership opportunity while others are reluctant to engage in activities which would help them better serve the diverse needs of the students in their care. These include more diversified lesson plans and offering further accommodations and modifications for students with distinct needs. These statements are not made to vilify teachers. On the contrary, the reality is that the obligations associated with lesson planning and diversification of instruction are perpetually increasing. Issues with behaviour management are growing and the prevalence of students with exceptionalities has perpetually increased over my career. The following quotations note the challenges faced by teachers which also serve to accumulate on the duties of principals amounting to too many duties for the available time for teachers and principals alike:

Teachers are challenged in knowledge, confidence, and ability, given the diversity of the population. High needs students are a challenge. Teachers don’t often get to advanced learners because they are dealing with high-needs struggling learners.
Addressing severe behaviours is very time consuming. (Francis interview as principal, q. 8)

In some classes, you need to provide supports like educational assistants (EAs), for instance, because the range is so broad and variable, not only within the class, but between students that it would be challenging to plan for 15 different learners...

As principal teacher, I taught Law 120 this year. There were 16 students registered in the class, which included a broad range of needs. One student was a non-reader (the diagnosis specified “profound dyslexia”), two students were on individualized programs, one of these students held a diversity of diagnoses, two students were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, and I also had two high achievers in the class. The remainder of the students could be considered low average. This group was very challenging to work with, plus I did not have access to EA support. This was the first class I taught after returning from my role as LSR. It was an interesting eye-opener for me because of the diverse challenges in the class and the absence of any additional supports. (Francis interview as principal, q. 7)

It is interesting to note that I, as the delineated principal and therefore instructional leader of the building, struggled to address the profoundly diverse needs of the students in this one class. It sometimes feels hypocritical to ask teachers to address the needs of similarly diverse populations. This being said, I believe that planning goes a long way to addressing both academic and behavioural needs. I have made it a point to promote lesson planning with teachers.
I do a lot of informal walkthroughs. Being a small staff, I would hear very quickly if there were issues or concerns. I do look at lesson plans, but that has been a challenge. Getting some teachers to consistently operate with complete lesson plans has always been an issue. Some of the teachers feel like they don’t necessarily have to do that, which is to me an obligation. Others are much better at it, but to get the consistency has always been a challenge. (Francis interview as principal, q. 6)

Despite an ongoing reluctance by many staff members in this and other areas, I have consistently promoted lesson planning as a mechanism to address the needs of all learners, both struggling and advanced. During the interview, I offered the following quote to illustrate this point. When dealing with reluctant staff and the need for the lesson plan to address the needs of diverse learners I said the following: “I’ve had to force their hand to say this student will be in your classroom; be it a struggling learner or an advanced learner, you need to diversify your instruction to their needs.” (Francis interview as principal, q. 7) We have struggled with the advanced learners because in general they represent a small proportion of our population and the teachers spend the majority of their time dealing with struggling learners, students with special needs and those with severe behavioural challenges.

**Supporting Teacher Professional Growth**

An ongoing obligation – which sometimes takes a back seat due to the many other responsibilities – is that of supporting ongoing teacher professional growth. This includes tending to walkthroughs (both formal and informal), ensuring the aforementioned effective lesson planning, addressing the requirements of the district’s formal teacher
evaluation process, and also generating and administering professional learning opportunities for staff on diverse topics. The dialogue and associated quotations below identify some of the responsibilities, and the associated challenges of attending to some of these responsibilities.

Completing walkthroughs is challenging. Specifically challenging is finding the time to complete walkthroughs and provide constructive feedback to promote ongoing teacher growth. This challenge occurs because of the limited staffing allotments in a small school accompanied by the teaching load and planning obligations. I noted in the interview that, “Time is always a challenge. For example, despite teachers wanting feedback, a principal with teaching obligations is challenged to complete formal walkthroughs with any regularity (Francis interview as principal, q. 6).”

Later in the interview I delved back into the subject of walkthroughs and the benefits which can accrue when walkthroughs are done effectively. This dialogue occurred in relation to the provision of feedback to new D-contract teachers and those who are struggling. I offered that,

A lot of informal dialogue occurs through walkthroughs. Formal dialogue occurs when somebody is struggling. The D contract teachers would receive their onsite evaluations on a regular basis. I’m in classes quite a bit for either D-teachers or those teachers who are struggling. I make it a point to be in those classrooms quite a bit. They’ll get written feedback if it’s either a D-contract, formal evaluation or if it’s something that’s extremely challenging. (Francis interview as principal, q. 10)
In a subsequent answer, I delved back into a similar topic, noting that in the absence of walkthroughs, feedback, and the provision of professional learning opportunities to support effective teacher growth, teachers may struggle.

As principal, I try to conduct a lot of informal walkthroughs. During these walkthroughs I examine lesson plans, but I have identified through my interview as principal that this has been a challenge, offering that in the absence of effective planning:

Sometimes teachers will default to a cookie-cutter approach. But we are always discussing that [effective planning and the diversification of instruction] and trying to move them along. Having worked with the staff for a long time, I noted that my first formal PD I created for the staff was in September, 2009 and was focused on differentiation. We’ve revisited that 15 times since because some teachers are reluctant, or struggle to effectively differentiate. (Francis interview as principal, q. 8)

The teacher evaluation cycle is another avenue to support teachers and promote professional growth. The District teacher evaluation cycle is intended to include all teaching staff receiving a formative evaluation over a three-year cycle. During the interview I noted that, “I’ve always followed that. This includes a recommended focus on D-contract, new B-contract teachers, and those who are on formal evaluations due to performance concerns.” During the interview, I also identified a challenge related to the administration of the District teacher evaluation cycle. I offered that,

About 4 years ago, I called the district. We had a lot of behaviours. We were working on a number of different things, a number of different initiatives. I asked for support to get either the time to do the [teacher] evaluations or requested to
have somebody from the district come in and do them for us. Basically the district
said, don’t do them this year. It is challenging to complete the formal cycle
depending on the other obligations as well as dealing with the student clientele
and the many behavioural situations you are obligated to deal with in a given
year. (Francis interview as principal, q. 6)

I also noted many occurrences of informal dialogue and support. Incidents such
as these included occurrences of support provided to assist staff members with both
professional and on occasion personal concerns. During the interview, I noted that:

I am always studying, sharing readings/ideas, generating and administering PD.
Some staff will help with PD in-house, but are reluctant to do so beyond the
school (lack of confidence). I also provide direct support to teachers often
learning the curricula while in class on site. (Francis interview as principal, q. 7)

Later adding that:

I also consult with people individually. I will also have the resource and
guidance follow up if there are certain areas, interventions or behaviours
that they can supported. Feedback is ongoing. It never stops. And teachers
are always saying –I want more. In fact, the resource teacher that
transferred in this year told me that she appreciated my candor and the
ongoing feedback that I gave her; be it informal feedback, information on
staffing, or information on student issues. I feel that is the way to do it.
There is no premium on information, and few limits on what needs to be
shared. (Francis interview as principal, q. 10)
Emergent Themes: Time and Motion Data

The second major source of data for this chapter is the time and motion study that I compiled during a six-month period in 2012. Given the length of the text (99 pages), and the conscious effort to document any and all relevant information during the recording of the time and motion data, there were twice as many emergent themes as in the participant researcher’s interview data even though I did the same rigorous coding and threshing of the data. Table 4.2 identifies the six themes that emerged through the time and motion data coding process and the associated frequencies used to establish the themes. The brief discussion that follows elaborates on each of these themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrence: Underlying Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support to Students</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>Direct – 37</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect – 24</td>
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<td>Behaviour – 43</td>
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<td>Special needs – 14</td>
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<td>Administration</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Fiscal Matters – 40</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plans/Reports/Surveys – 21</td>
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<td>Facilities – 17</td>
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<td>Staffing – 9</td>
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<td>Collaboration and Teaming</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>Supporting Staff – 28</td>
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<td>Communications</td>
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<td>Daily email – average 34</td>
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<td>Other Duties</td>
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<td>Specifically Noted Other Duties – 29</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Daily Teacher Obligations – 22</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wheelchair access – 1</td>
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</table>
Support to Students

From the viewpoint of participant researcher, I was pleased to discover that support to students emerged as a major theme from my time and motion data, being identified 118 times. These included direct and indirect support, behaviour issues, and special needs support. In my small school, I had teaching obligations, which necessitated direct contact with, and influence on, students. On top of the contacts which occurred through my teaching, there were 37 incidents of direct support to students noted. For coding purposes, one-on-one dialogue with students was counted as direct support. Examples included speaking with a student about bullying concerns occurring outside of school and meeting with a group of six students who had course selection concerns (Tuesday, January 12, 2012). In fact, I made it my practice to examine each report card and had a dialogue with any student who was struggling as well as those who were transitioning from school to work, school to school, or school to life. Most of these reported incidents occurred in the office. Conversations occurring outside the office were not coded.

There were also 24 recorded incidents of indirect support to students. I coded incidents of indirect support in cases where I arranged for someone else to provide support to students. These included referrals to and requests for support from professional services, district office personnel, and provincial agencies.

As a principal working in a small school without a vice-principal (VP) to rely upon for counsel and support, I was responsible for dealing with any serious behavioural concerns. Behaviour management is a very challenging endeavour. I documented 43 incidents of behavioural support under this category. These include any behavioural
issues referred to the office by staff, several of which were serious enough to potentially warrant suspension from school. Five of these incidents included the need to address students who were suffering psychological issues due to stress, depression, or addictions.

To illustrate, five of the documented behaviour-focused conversations were extremely sensitive and time-consuming. These conversations involved direct dialogue with students to help address serious mental health concerns, and included follow-ups with specialists, parents, and other support personnel. Each of these incidents required ongoing dialogue with parents and guardians. Many of these incidents included the parents and guardians being supportive during the initial contact. In many cases, after speaking with their child – from whom they received a different story – subsequent contacts occurred which resulted in a protracted dialogue.

Fourteen incidents of support related to working with students with some form of identified exceptionality. Examples included consulting with a student regarding a modified schedule, working with another student to establish a work placement, and several meetings with a third student to ensure a positive rapport, which also served to promote positive home and school relations. All of the examples noted in the previous sentence were recorded in the time and motion study on Thursday, February 2, 2012, and are a testament to the complexity and busyness of the role. The following brief notation encapsulates how I felt at the time. “Direct support to students and behaviour concerns dominated the day. Exhausting!”

**Administration**

There were 97 documented instances categorized under the theme of administration. Administration includes the day-to-day management of the school and
school personnel. Fiscal matters were encapsulated in the largest category under this theme at 40 occurrences. This category involved a variety of components such as finance (15), fundraising (4), and grants (11). It is important for an understanding of the complexity of the role to distinguish between these interrelated but different activities. Finance and fundraising are daily activities that require ongoing dialogue with the administrative assistant as well as Student Representative Council (SRC) members. Examples of financial matters included a review of year-end purchasing guidelines with the administrative assistant (February 28, 2012) and confirming the payment for the bus for the PARTY Program (May 8, 2012). Fundraising included things such as discussions with the SRC over team fees (May 2, 2102) and actual fundraising activities such as pizza sales (May 28, 2012). The grant process, on the other hand, is different. It often includes activities that occur through the completion of three major steps: the application process, purchases and the provision of an interim report, and authoring a summative report to delineate where funds were allocated and outlining the success of the program or initiative based on the metric identified in the application. All of these steps were time consuming and most included intense periods of focused work and collaboration. Others activities recorded under the fiscal category included, monthly cheque signing sessions, which were more inert but were still time consuming.

As school principal, it was incumbent on me to ensure that a number of plans, reports, and surveys were completed. This category had 21 notifications with seven specifying the Positive Learning Environment Plan (PLEP), four focusing on the School Improvement Plan (SIP), another four associated with generating a Plan of Establishment, four dealing with the Numeracy Plan, and two associated with the
Technology Plan. These time and motion counts are undervalued, given that the plans are living documents with the SIP being a conversation item during each of our documented monthly staff meetings and the PLEP plan being the guiding document for our ESST. Regardless of the numbers, each of these plans was drafted by me and revised based on staff feedback. Further, the District required finalized copies of each plan as an accountability measure. Each plan took an enormous amount of work to plan, draft, revise, and implement.

A facilities category was included in the coding for this theme. I coded 17 incidents associated with this category. The work underlying this category was also was tremendously time consuming. To illustrate, in one instance getting permission to have the shop class build a wall between the music and multi-age rooms necessitated more than two hours of telephone dialogue, numerous emails, and a school visit from two district facilities representatives. Other examples in this category included attempting to get access support to address internet network problems. Network issues were important because they had a negative influence on teachers’ ability to instruct their classes.

There were 10 meetings at district office recorded during this period, which included principal and staffing meetings. In the majority of these cases these were principal meetings called by the superintendent. In one case I, as principal, requested a meeting in order to discuss our staffing allotment which I felt was seriously underestimated. These meetings normally required travel from my school to the district office, which took over an hour each way.

For several of the coding counts, a low frequency rating does not do justice to the gravity of the category. Of these low frequency categories, none is more stressful and
demanding for me than work associated with the annual staffing process, which was recorded nine times. These included dialogue with teachers to identify staffing needs, generating an initial plan of establishment, the generation of a subsequent staffing proposal for submission to district office, and ongoing dialogue with district personnel to ensure that the staffing needs were known and addressed. For me, staffing is particularly time-consuming and stressful. I noted on April 10, 2012, that “staffing is a stressor for me that lasts a minimum of 10 weeks. It is not about numbers, but about how the numbers affect people.” From a relational standpoint, it was impossible for me, as principal, not to know each staff member personally. When staffing cuts are deemed necessary, I feel them in a visceral way. When our small school loses a teacher, staff members and students feel the loss of skills, as well as the loss of the personal and professional connections that the person has established. That year, we were facing an extremely stressful situation: the potential staffing cuts of two of our valued ESST members, both D-contract teachers. For me, as principal, staffing is time-consuming, emotional, and is never fully out of my thoughts until it is finalized.

The documentation needed to ensure that adequate staffing is provided illustrates the complexity and demands of this administrative task. I began work on the staffing proposal document on April 18, 2012, and it was shared with staff prior to the finalization of staffing numbers. The document was over 2,200 words, with very specific content necessary for identifying the distinct needs of the school community.

**Collaboration and Teaming**

The third theme arising from the time and motion study was collaboration and teaming. The 68 items included in this category were school-based meetings and
incidents related to supporting staff. School-based meetings, recorded 40 times, were the primary mechanism to promote collaboration, teaming, and sharing of leadership opportunities. They were necessary for the effective functioning of the school. These included meetings of the whole staff, of the ESST, and the problem-solving team. Many of these 40 meetings required enormous amounts of preparation time on my part, and much of this work occurred at home during the evenings. Many of these meeting preparation sessions lasted between one and two hours. This work is rarely apparent to any observer.

Supporting staff was the second category recorded under the collaboration and teaming theme. This category included 26 separate documented occurrences that took place in my office. This is a broad category which included such items as consulting with the middle school math teacher on interventions, working with teachers to support the management of absent students, and allaying the fears of one employee about potential cuts when the Government Renewal Program was being rolled out, and personally covering classes for absent teachers. These four incidents all occurred in the office on the same day, once again acting as a testament to the enormity of the role in my context.

Similar to support to students, there were many instances that were not documented. For example, I made it a part of my practice to spend time in classrooms working to support teachers with behaviour management when there were no other personnel available to provide necessary supports.

Providing thanks and recognitions to staff was also subsumed under the supporting staff category. This was another category where the rating was artificially low at two notations. In conjunction with the two documented incidents, thanks and
recognitions occurred on a regular basis, the majority of which occurred in the form of personal thanks and informal dialogue in the staff room, classes and hallways. We also had a formal process to recognize the accomplishments of our peers on staff. At the beginning of each monthly staff meeting, other staff members and I recognized the efforts of any colleague who had contributed beyond their normal work obligations or accomplished something notable.

When examining this theme, 68 incidents may not seem like a dramatically high number for this invaluable component of the role, but an examination of the previous text indicates that a simple frequency count does not explain the work that occurs to support effective collaboration and teaming.

**Communications**

I coded 67 incidents associated with communications. During the coding process, only formal communications such as newsletters, memos, and notes were counted. Many of these were general distributed to the full staff or to groups, such as the greater community, in the form of website notifications, newsletters, or memos to parents and guardians. For example, on February 6, 2012, I noted the need to generate a memo to students and parents regarding report cards and included a middle school update. On the same day, I sent a memo to staff asking that the finalized course selections and class lists be sent to the office. Another staff communication focused on the appropriate use of email. General communications such as these occurred 46 times.

Communications with parents were recorded separately and occurred another 20 times. The majority of these parental communications were associated with student programming or academic progress, with one focused on student access to summer
school programming. Please note that each of the 43 behavioural incidents noted in the “support to students” category also required parental communication, but these were coded separately from the parental communications reported here. It is important to distinguish communications from meetings. Meetings that were formally scheduled with groups or individuals were not coded under communications. It is clear that communication permeated all areas of my role as principal: teaming, collaboration, meetings, support for staff, support for students, and all other areas necessitate effective written and verbal communication skills.

For our analysis, email was an important communication tool, given increased public use and the ever-increasing rate and volume of email correspondence received by me as principal. The time and motion coding did not focus specifically on emails, although email counts were documented. Analysis of the data indicated that I addressed between 30 and 60 emails per day, with a daily average of 34 incoming emails. This may not seem like a large volume of daily emails. It is important to note that the recording of emails for coding purposes included only those that were directly associated with the school operations. Emails associated with other professional obligations, including professional and personal development, education, and reading were not counted. Also, only incoming emails were counted. Replies, which were often time consuming and sometimes arduous to compose, were not included in the count. From a practical viewpoint, I simply could not find the time to count the ebb and flow of emails throughout the din of the day, so I made the choice to count only incoming email correspondence. I found the sheer number of emails and the heightened demand for immediate replies increasingly challenging. During my time and motion journaling, I
offered the following notes about emails. The first note recorded on February 1, 2012, describes the email traffic dealt with on a day off:

I booked off due to health appointments for me and my kids. I fielded questions, via email, regarding access to the Lodge for the Chinese Exchange. Despite the “day off,” I received numerous emails, including 17 in the morning, 18 in the evening, and 7 the following morning. Much of the email was inconsequential. Others, approximately 15, were associated with school or the Chinese Exchange Program and required my immediate attention.

A second entry, recorded on March 28, 2012, illustrates the stress that can be associated with emails: “Emails can be overwhelming – even those specific to one topic, for example the PARTY Program, can dominate a day.”

**Other Duties**

An esteemed colleague and recently retired principal would often jokingly use the phrase “other duties as assigned.” This phrase was used generically to refer to the many issues he might have to address on a daily basis, none of which would be included in any principal job description. There were 54 documented occurrences recorded under this theme. Of these 29 were a variety of highly variable activities coded specifically under other duties, another 22 were associated with daily teacher obligations, and the remaining three had to do with a lack of access to supply teachers.

Within the first 29 notations the tasks were varied including, helping students with the message board (9), assisting with the student exchange (6), sourcing sporting equipment (2), and delivering books (1). The remaining 11 items subsumed under this category included anything that required technical knowledge or mechanical skill and
often included doing the work of skilled tradespeople or other district personnel to serve
the interests and needs of my students and teachers. An illustrative example involved
relocating a SMART Board. This task is supposed to be completed by skilled technicians
at a cost to the school. With the assistance of another staff member, I relocated a SMART
Board during March Break. This was done to help reduce the strain on the small school
budget. An auxiliary benefit of moving the SMART Board was a reduction in wait times
for teachers and students to access the technology needed to support instruction.

There were other tasks which I classed under this category. In one instance I
needed to make calls to access a driver to transport some MHS exchange students to an
event. The following notation, from what I identified in the time and motion document
as my weekend journal, documents some of the tasks included in this other duties
category.

I went to the school and cooked a welcome spaghetti dinner with an EA and my
two children. In the evening I called to check on the van, which is not officially
confirmed until they can assure insurance. I also made a number of calls to see if
we could access a driver. (Sunday, January 29)

As a teaching principal, I have always tried to separate my practice as a teacher
from my administrative obligations. This being noted, I also was charged with daily
teacher duties which were underrepresented in my time and motion analysis at 22
notations in total. Notations included lesson planning (12), instruction (6), and
supervisory obligations (4). Given that my other administrative duties subsume all other
free time, I am not afforded a formal preparation period; consequently, the time and
motion data attest that the majority of my lesson planning and marking occurred after
other staff members had left the school or at home in the evening. My teacher supervisory obligations included greeting the bus each morning (two bus runs), supervising the weight room, and attending to other formal teacher supervisory obligations. These daily supervisory obligations (bus, playground, noon duty) are contractual, and are required to be distributed equitably among all bargaining unit teaching staff, principals included.

Challenges were noted on both sides of the principal/teacher role. As a teaching principal with no other administrator on site, my principal obligations often invaded my classroom environment. The data indicate that classroom interruptions occurred and included unplanned meetings with custodial and maintenance staff, tradespeople, parents, and other district, departmental, and support personnel. The most frequent teaching interruptions occurred when educational staff requested support to deal with discipline issues that they felt were beyond their scope, ability, or authority to address. To ensure that I was prepared to attend to such interruptions while still maintaining the integrity of my classroom, my daily lesson plans included anchor activities to ensure continuity of instruction when my absence was required.

The final incident count under this theme is associated with supply teachers. Although included in other duties, these easily could have been included in the problem-solving category. Supply teachers are usually not overly challenging to access. On three separate occasions, we could not access supply teachers, so it was necessary for me adjust the school schedule in order to ensure that the students had a body in front of them to supervise their classes.
Problem Solving

The final category may be the one that required the most skill on my part as principal. Any issues which were complex or necessitated inordinate amounts of thought and time to address were counted as problem solving. Although problem solving was only recorded 38 times, it necessitated a dedicated category in the coding process.

The data indicated that majority of problem-solving activities involved staff issues and concerns, documented 21 times in the data set. These included offering mediation to address concerns and potential disputes between staff members. An examination of the content associated with staff issues showed that addressing these issues was both extremely time consuming and enormously stressful. The following quotation from Tuesday, Apr. 24, 2012, is illustrative of this fact:

Day 66

Feeling exceptionally under the weather the past two weeks. Staffing issues as well as accumulating workload seem to be getting the better of me. The obligations, and to be quite frank, foolishness associated with dealing with individuals with issues, at all levels, is putting a strain on my physical and emotional well-being. If everyone would just do their jobs, instead of looking at everybody else to blame, the system may have a chance.

Many other situations required the application of problem-solving skills. These included addressing graduation concerns (6), five of these dealt with tenuous seating arrangements for the graduation ceremony, another dealt with monitoring the yearbook to ensure there was no potentially offensive content. Other categorization included dealing with sports issues (6), challenges associated with transportation (4), and a final notation
specific to mitigating concerns regarding wheelchair access for a student with
exceptionalities. Much of the problem solving that occurred was complex, often
necessitating that I make decisions within very tight timeframes. I will offer the following
eamples to illustrate.

A notable example includes a Facebook issue, recorded in the time and motion
coding under sports issues. The documentation notes it as a single incident, but also
supports the fact that there were several contacts with students and parents in the follow
up. The associated journal entry on January 16, 2012, read, “I was greeted at 7:10 AM
by a staff member informing me that there may be a Facebook concern with a picture of
one of the BNB basketball players on site showing partial butt? This was supposedly put
on another students Facebook page.” In the journal I added, “I did not wish to deal with
another issue, such as this, first thing on Monday morning.” This issue necessitated
multiple contacts with students and parents to address an issue which could have ended in
litigation for some of those involved.

The notation under wheelchair access provides a second example of how simple
coding does not do justice to the complexity of the problem. This single coding notation
involved a special needs student whose wheelchair access to classes was limited by a
mechanical problem with the elevator. On its face, this does not seem like a complex
problem but the situation involved several confounding factors. Originally we were
going to have the student’s peers come to her on the main floor, but the parent felt that
this could be considered restricting access and therefore discriminatory. Following a
parent complaint to district office, the ESST met to identify other viable options. We
discovered there were very few. In the final analysis, we identified only one viable
option, which necessitated that an EA and I physically transition her, floor by floor, throughout the day. These actions were completed to guarantee access to classes with her peers and also to ensure positive ongoing home/school relations. The complexity of these types of problem solving activities is often lost on those unfamiliar with the role.

**Thematic Synthesis**

A side-by-side illustration of the themes allows for an at-a-glance view of the similarities and differences between these data sets. Table 4.3, provides a direct comparison between the interview and the time and motion themes. Given the previously noted volume of data established through the time and motion study, I decided to include the frequency of occurrence below for the benefit of the reader.

*Table 4.3: Emergent Themes: Participant Researcher as Principal Data Sets*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Data</th>
<th>Time and Motion Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration, Teaming and Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of CLT/ESST</td>
<td>Support to Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Leadership</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Leadership</td>
<td>Collaboration/Teaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Too Many Duties for the Available Time</strong></td>
<td>Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctant staff</td>
<td>Other Duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Planning and Diversification of Instruction</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional Needs – Academic and Behavioural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting Teacher Professional Growth Walkthroughs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Performance Evaluations - Formal Cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Dialogue/Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Noting the different institutional (Interview) and practical (Time and Motion) aspects of the role associated with each data set, the combined data sets provide a realistic overview of the role of the principal. Table 4.4 below outlines the themes which emerged from the combined interview and time and motion data: (a) collaboration, teaming, and leadership; (b) too many duties for the available time; and (c) support. Included in the established themes are the associated sub-categories which help inform the reader of the responsibilities associated with each emergent theme. Problem solving is an aspect of the role which almost transcends categorization because it is almost ubiquitous. Analysis indicated that it is best associated with collaboration, teaming, and leadership, and therefore was inserted under this overarching theme.

Table 4.4: Combined Themes: Time and Motion and Interview Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration, Teaming, and Leadership</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLT – Distributive Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESST/Support for students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Teacher Professional Growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Too Many Duties for the Available Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Duties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Final Narrative: Francis as Principal

For the purposes of efficiency and brevity I will not reiterate the dialogue associated with the interview and time and motion content which has been discussed in the previous two sections. Rather, I will provide a final autoethnographic narrative, which will be used to provide a picture of the overall role from the perspective of participant researcher as principal. Clandinin and Connelly (1988) explain that an autoethnographic narrative “is a study of how humans make meaning of experience” (p. 269). This narrative, although fictional, is illustrative of my experience as principal and is used to provide a picture of the role from my perspective. The process of gathering, coding, and interpreting the data has helped me make meaning of my experience. Further, it has provided me insight into my practice as principal and meaning to me as a practitioner.

As is the case with any autoethnographic research, it is up to the reader to decide whether the narrative resonates with them. The value of the narrative is in the dialogue, the thought that it provokes, and the insight it provides about the role of the principal. Insights from all participants will be used to inform the narradigm, which will be shared in the final chapter. Identified themes have been placed in square brackets throughout the text for the benefit of the reader.

[Administration] This morning, I arrived at 7:00 a.m. and had to reschedule much of the day because a teacher and an EA called off sick. After putting the absences on AESOP (our district’s automated system for providing replacements for absent staff members) and then making several calls to optional replacements, I found that there were no replacements available. In the midst of this conundrum, I needed to complete my
morning supervision and greet the students arriving on the bus. The principal is contractually obligated to ensure equitable distribution of supervision duties and, as a part of the bargaining unit, the principal is not exempt. While greeting the students, I was able to follow up with several students regarding discipline issues that occurred yesterday. During one of these dialogues, a student disclosed a struggle with drugs. I was very concerned. When I finished my supervision, I completed an alternate schedule for teachers and EAs, and made sure all classes were covered.

[Support] As soon as this was completed, I got on the phone to try and access supports for the student with drug issues. Directly after getting in contact with addiction services, and setting an appointment for the student, a parent walks in and wants to speak to me immediately. The parent had a big issue that needed to be addressed immediately. The parent was at the soccer game the evening before and a student cursed after being kicked in the shin. The parent was concerned because the referee didn’t act on it and the coach didn’t hear it.

[Too many tasks for the available time] To further establish the context, I was scheduled to teach in 15 minutes and, although prepped, felt I needed a few minutes to go over my materials. Despite being pressed for time and wanting to tell the parent to relax, I put on a brave face and greeted the parent. After what felt like a protracted dialogue, the parent left with the assurance that I would follow up with the student. I looked at the clock and it read 9:35. I was scheduled to teach in seven minutes. There was no time to review my materials, so I gathered my teaching materials and went off to class.

[Teaming, Administration] After teaching and gathering up the in-class assignments to mark that evening, I went upstairs to meet with our SRC teacher.
representative and the administrative assistant to discuss the guidelines around fundraising and allocation of resources. We needed to ensure that the funds raised were tracked and that they were allocated to the area that they were initially intended when the fundraising occurred. The meeting went well, although it was necessary to keep referring back to the district fundraising guidelines outlined in policy.

I went to my office to prepare for the combined ESST/CLT meeting, which occur weekly at noon. The team includes our EST-R, EST-G, middle-level math teacher and high school English teacher. All teachers, even the resource and guidance teachers, have heavy teaching obligations, so I volunteer to establish the agenda and generate the meeting minutes. I sifted through my emails to gather the suggested agenda items provided by the teachers. I inserted the suggested items into our meeting template. It was a large agenda.

[Support to students] I ruminated on the fact that one specific student has taken a great deal of my time and we were still struggling to get her to complete her work given her multiple needs and the challenges associated with reactive attachment disorder. As I completed the agenda, I noticed that it is 11:50. I had 10 minutes to heat my lunch, print the agenda, and gather the student’s cumulative and behaviour tracking files. Despite being busy with follow-up from our finance meeting, the admin assistant offered to get the student records for me, noting that I also needed to speak with two students who were referred to the office due to disciplinary issues. I placed my food in the microwave, spoke to the students and completed a quick parent follow-up call for the more serious of the two infractions. The second student was referred back to the teacher. It was a minor incident and the teacher, who struggles with providing effective discipline, needed to
follow up. I put a note on my desk to inquire whether she has read the Ron Morrish book on discipline that I shared last month. [Promoting teacher professional growth]

The noon meeting went well although one teacher, who was unaware of the discipline issues I was addressing earlier, seemed annoyed at my slightly late arrival. I think the fact that I arrived with my food in hand exacerbated his annoyance. Otherwise the meeting went well. [Collaboration, teaming] We spoke about several students but ended up focusing the majority of our time on that one new student who was pushing the envelope. The guidance teacher volunteered to assist the teachers with some behaviour tracking. We hoped we would be able to identify triggers and put processes in place to avoid any major disruptions. The resource teacher agreed to contact the parents about her refusal to complete work. Given that my resource and guidance teacher are both new to the district, I was asked to follow up by requesting some EA support for her. The student recently transferred into the school and was not included in the original EA allocations. Noting the severity of her behaviours as well as the diagnosis, I was asked to request additional support. We tried to accommodate her needs within existing resources, but recognized the EAs were already maxed out working with the medically fragile students and several others with exceptional needs.

Following the meeting I added to the “to-do” list on my desk. Following number 7, which read “Establish follow-up lesson planning PD,” I added 8, “Contact DO” and 9, “Complete ESST/CLT meeting minutes.” I no sooner recorded these tasks, when the noon duty teacher brings me some information regarding a fight that purportedly happened in back of the school at noon hour. After some investigation, I found out that one of the students, who had a wonderful relationship with our guidance teacher,
recorded the fight on her phone. I asked the guidance teacher to assist, and she was willing. [Collaboration] Her engagement with the students and support are invaluable to me as principal. I don’t know what I would do without her. Staffing scares me because she is a D-contract teacher and, although she has recall rights, there is no guarantee she will be with us for the upcoming school year.

The guidance teacher was successful in getting the video. It was apparent that one student was the aggressor and the other was merely acting in self-defence. Despite the video evidence, the parent of the aggressor complained that were not treating her child fairly and called the District Office to complain. Dealing with this conflict took up the remainder of my afternoon. I looked at the clock and it read 3:55 p.m. As I was packing up to leave an EA came into the office and asked if we could chat. I said, “Sure.” The EA shared that she was having some challenges at home with her child and added she was also struggling to work with the one of the high-needs behavioural students. She told me that she feels ill each morning when she arrives, and is not sure if there is a health issue or if this is stress induced. [Support to staff] During the dialogue, I suggested she contact employee family assistance and provided the contact information. I also suggested, the next time she feels sick she should take the day off to seek medical advice. She thanked me and departed. I looked at my watch. It was 4:30. My son had a game scheduled for 5:00 and my daughter had riding at 6:00. I glanced at my “to-do” list going out the door and turned back. I took a picture of the list with my phone. I planned to work on the list that evening after the kids were asleep. There was no way I wanted that list to greet me in the morning. [Too many tasks for the available time] It is a regular
occurrence. Despite my work throughout the day, my to-do list was three items longer than when the day began.

**Autoethnographic Insight**

One major autoethnographic insight (Bochner & Ellis, 1995; Chang, 2008; Denzin, 1989; Ellis, 2004) was realized while coding my personal interview and time and motion data sets. Interestingly, this insight came not specifically from the data, but from my state of mind while coding the data. There were distinct physiological reactions felt by me, as participant researcher, while coding these two different data sets. I feel that these disparate reactions provide insight into how I operate in my role and will also add greatly to the understanding of the role for others.

By the time I began coding my time and motion data, I had already coded my personal principal interview data. I thematically coded the interview and time and motion data sets separately three times. From an autoethnographic standpoint, there were dramatic differences between my state of mind while coding my interview as principal, as opposed to my state of mind while coding my time and motion data.

While coding my personal interview as principal, I noted that my state of mind was calm. In fact, although I was very engaged with the interview data, I felt a certain objectivity and sense of detachment from the data. However, the same calmness and detachment were not present during the time and motion data coding process. During the initial time and motion data coding, I noticed an increased level of stress and agitation. The response was actually visceral and included tension in my neck and shoulders, flushed cheeks, and agitation. I set this reaction aside as an anomaly, believing that other personal and situational factors may have been contributing to this response. I formally
revisited the time and motion data set two more times. Both times I experienced similarly intensely negative physiological responses. As the participant researcher, it was incumbent upon me to delve further into the underlying meaning of these emotional and physical reactions (Méndez, 2013). This type of visceral response to something as inert as data analysis necessitated some introspection and metacognitive analysis to help unearth the root cause.

Upon further examination, I identified that the physiological response was relevant to the understanding of the difference between the institutional role and the practical role. While I was being interviewed, I adopted what I would term as my institutional persona. I answered the questions as I would have if speaking with a news reporter, superintendent, or departmental official. As I frame it, I had adopted my institutional or media persona. In this context, I was speaking about the requirements of the role in a sanitized way. I was using “teacher talk,” a term I occasionally use when conferring with teaching colleagues.

To explain, the first parent-teacher interview that I conducted was during my practicum as a practice teacher. After the parents were seated and niceties exchanged, I offered “your child has very good ability, but was lethargic and even lazy in class.” I went on to note that the child “didn’t apply himself” and “wasn’t coming close to living up to his potential.” The parents did not seem surprised and took the news well, but my cooperating teacher was aghast. In the dialogue which ensued, he told me that I needed to be much more diplomatic when speaking with parents. He added, “Never use terms such as lazy, rude, or disruptive.” I was told to use a more sanitized approach and say things like, “They are not working to potential” or “They can be off task.” This is what became
known as “teacher talk.” Teacher talk provides a sanitized version of reality, so as not to upset anyone or seem too direct or abrupt. I found that I was answering my interview questions similarly. Despite knowing the parameters of the study, and looking to examine the actual role of the principal through interview and analysis, I found myself offering the sanitized version of the role during my interview.

To further the analysis, while coding the time and motion data, I was confronted by the daily realities of the role. These included the challenges, stressors, time constraints, and numerous and varied obligations associated with the role. I found it impossible to sanitize the time and motion analysis. I believe this unsanitized version provided a realistic picture of the practical role, including the enormity of obligations and stressors. The interview data were more effective at simply identifying the institutional requirements of the role. Despite being from the same participant researcher, the analyses and coding between the two data sets are distinctly different. This being identified, in sum the combined data are effective in providing a realistic overview of the role. The autoethnographic insight lies in the fact that there are institutionally prescribed parameters as well as practical realities surrounding the role which, in my context, are dramatically different. Furthermore, if I as a practitioner was unable to see the enormous difference between the institutional and practical roles without this type of in-depth analysis, how would anyone operating outside the role, including those defining it, understand its realities?
Chapter 5: Participant Researcher as Lead School Reviewer

This chapter will be used to examine my autoethnographic perceptions of the principalship from the perspective of an external observer – that of Lead School Reviewer (LSR) for the Province of New Brunswick. As in the previous chapter, I will begin by sharing background information, including my road to becoming an LSR, the factors that prompted me to apply, and the actual job description as outlined in the job posting (see Appendix F). Following that, I will describe the practical role of the LSR and the school review process. I will also discuss my approach to the LSR role and how my previous experience influenced this approach.

In the second section of this chapter, I will briefly reiterate the data sources as described in chapter 3. These sources are used to address the research question from the perspective of participant researcher as LSR. In the third section, emergent themes from these various sources will be identified and discussed. Throughout the chapter, short narratives from my experiences as LSR will be shared to advance the reader’s understanding of the principalship. The fourth section will include two components. The first is a more elaborative narrative produced to help share the identified themes established through the LSR data. The second is a final word included to provide the reader with some overall observations on and insights into the principal’s role from the perspective of the LSR.

Background: Lead School Reviewer

I have stated throughout the thesis that one of the main motivations for this study stems from my experiences and perceptions as a school administrator. Another impetus was generated through feedback I received from colleagues. While I was working as a
principal for School District 18, there was a group of principals who would meet informally in the parking lot immediately following each district principals’ meeting. This group, consisting largely of rural school principals would: share ideas, discuss problems, collectively brainstorm solutions, and identify the challenges associated with the role. These conversations advanced our knowledge. Often, the superintendent or director of education would join us, and we would extend the dialogue to include district representation. Many positives came out of these meetings, and I thoroughly enjoyed having these conversations with principals of like-sized and -configured schools. In addition to advancing our knowledge, these informal meetings also provided an avenue to ensure that we principals were not toiling away in isolation.

It is a sad fact but principals, despite spending the majority of their day with many different people (students, teachers, support personnel, parents, and other stakeholders), still note a sense of isolation. The old adage that it is lonely at the top certainly applies, and numerous studies support this assertion (Anderson et al., 2011; Daresh & Playco, 1995; Dussault & Barnett, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Howard, 2002; Howard & Mallory, 2008; IPPN, 2005; Jones, 1994; Mercer, 1996). Howard and Mallory (2008) note specifically that “principals are susceptible to the juxtaposition of job overload in a people-oriented business and experience feelings of isolation in their professional and personal lives” (p. 7). These informal meetings helped to alleviate some of this isolation.

These parking lot meetings, as they came to be known, spawned another tradition. Recognizing the beneficial nature of these conversations, the district superintendent and director of education began circulating a sign-up sheet for what they termed “parking lot issues” to be added to the agenda at subsequent principal meetings. This afforded
principals the opportunity to suggest topics of discussion without the pressure of speaking publicly, while also alleviating any stress associated with voicing concerns in a public forum.

At this point, the question needs to be asked, “Why begin the background section of the LSR chapter with this anecdote?” Throughout my travels as LSR, many principals suggested they suffer from this sense of isolation. Others noted an accompanying feeling that their knowledge and voice were not valued at the district level, adding to the feeling of isolation. These are not aspects of the role which would be apparent to external observers who are unfamiliar with the role. My work throughout the province afforded me the opportunity to dialogue with principals from schools of all sizes and configurations. Some principals voiced these concerns directly, while others alluded to them. These dialogues have allowed me to hear multiple perspectives on the role, which has provided me with many different insights into it.

**How I Became a Lead School Reviewer**

I applied to the position of LSR twice. At the time of my first application, I was feeling fatigued in my role as principal and believed that a new position might help invigorate me. I also felt that it would afford me the opportunity to dialogue with others, providing the added benefit of diminishing my feelings of isolation, which, while I was working as a principal, were exacerbated by the remote nature of my school. My first LSR application resulted in being shortlisted, selected for an interview, and receiving a rejection letter.

At the time of my second application, I had already begun my university studies into the principalship. In fact, one of the individuals on the interview committee, who
ultimately became my immediate supervisor as LSR, indicated that my desire for ongoing improvement was consistent with the overall mandate of the School Improvement Service. She went on to note that this was an enormous factor in my success as an applicant the second time around.

Along with the opportunity to dialogue with other principals throughout the province, and a reduced feeling of isolation, an added potential benefit was realized at the time of my hiring. Through negotiation, it was agreed that I could use the information gathered through my discussions with others working in the role to inform my study of the principalship. These interchanges would have the further benefit of ensuring that my perceptions of the principalship were shared by others working in the field.

One of the main incentives prompting me to apply for the LSR position was the feeling that I needed a change, at least for the short term. While I was working as a principal, I found it challenging to balance my work and home life due to the constant stress associated with the role. In fact, I felt like I was burning out. I believed a change, any change, might alleviate some of this stress.

The Role: Lead School Reviewer

In November 2012, shortly after the start of the 2012–2013 school year, I assumed a position as LSR for the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. My formal title was School Improvement Consultant. I held this role for three years until the dissolution of the Departmental School Improvement Reviews in July 2015. The primary responsibility associated with the role was to conduct school improvement reviews in the Anglophone education sector in New Brunswick.
I have previously noted that the time constraints and demands associated with my job as principal were becoming challenging. In concert with the other benefits, noted in the previous section, I believed that assuming this new role would provide me with more time to complete my study of the principalship. At that time, I was not aware of the responsibilities associated with the new position.

The demands of my new role as LSR included, but were not limited to, the following:

- conducting workshops and on-site sessions to help prepare schools for the review process,
- preparation of documents and materials for each of the individual reviews,
- generation and analysis of school data for each review,
- conducting on-site reviews and follow-up collaborative dialogue meetings,
- writing school review reports,
- researching and generating support documentation on specific topics, and
- following up with schools to provide ongoing support in targeted growth areas.

Even with this abundance of work obligations, I found the role manageable and the on-site experiences professionally rewarding. I never felt isolated. The only major drawback was that the “extra time” I thought I would have to focus on my studies did not materialize.

School Improvement Reviews

For the purposes of transparency and completeness, it is important to further delineate the role of the LSR by examining the school review process as established by the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. I will
begin by describing the school review instrument, the indicators document, and then the actual school review process.

**The school review instrument.** The school reviews used an evaluative instrument, the school review indicator document, which was originally established in 2006 and was updated, based on research, at the end of each school year. The review process used a process of triangulation of data, utilizing information gained from conversations, observations, and the analysis of products to determine individual ratings for 124 indicators distributed over seven domains as follows:

- Vision, Mission, & Goals
- Instructional Practice & Curriculum
- Continuous Monitoring of Progress
- Educational Leadership
- Learning Environments
- Professional Learning
- Relationships

The seven domains were established to cover all aspects of school life. Specific to the school review document, domain segmentation was largely used for observational and organizational purposes. Topics like lesson planning were delineated in the Instructional Practice & Curriculum domain, but aspects of lesson planning ran through a diversity of domains and were used to inform other areas. For example, suggestions for improved lesson planning were often used to support school improvement planning initiatives, which are outlined in the Vision Mission & Goals domain. The establishment of the
seven domains took into consideration Danielson’s (1996, 2008) seminal “framework for teaching.”

**Indicator ratings.** Each indicator received a rating on a sliding scale, with possible ratings for each indicator as follows: very evident, mostly evident, somewhat evident, and not evident. A very evident rating was the highest rating and was the only rating with established criteria: “Very Evident – The evidence indicates that this look-for is consistently demonstrated, well-established, and sustainable (processes, knowledge, skills, data, etc. required for this are in place)” (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014a, p. 1). The following questions were to be considered when using these ratings:

- Is this part of the way we do business (pervasive, routine part of the school culture)?
- Would this survive if the leadership changed?
- Is there a process for induction of new staff members?
- Is this a school-wide approach?
- Is it consistently demonstrated by staff – or just pockets of staff, or certain groups of staff?
- Is it documented with data or artifacts?
- Would your staff be able to explain/speak to this practice?

Similar to lesson planning, school leadership, and specifically the principalship, is a thread which runs through all school review domains. For the purposes of this study, it should be explained that school leadership included the principalship and the development of leadership capacity in schools. A distinction between school leaders and
school administrators was delineated in the school review process. The term *school leaders* was defined as follows:

School Leaders refers to Principals, Vice-Principals, and any teachers who offer leadership to other teachers in terms of peer coaching and support. This could be, but would not be limited to, SPRs (Teachers holding Supplementary Positions of Responsibility), and Educational Support Services Team (ESST) members. Each school would have a model whereby they are explicit in the identification of instructional leaders. (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014b, p. 23)

By contrast, the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2016) defined the term *school administrators* thus:

As outlined in the New Brunswick Education Act, the title Principal refers to the person who is “educational leader and administrator of the school and has overall responsibility for the school and for the teachers and other school personnel employed at the school.”

**The review process.** The School Improvement Review Process included several steps to be completed by the LSR prior to, during, and after the formal on-site review. An initial step for the LSR was an extensive data analysis prior to the on-site component.

Data analysis for each review included in-depth examination of the following documents:

- School Improvement Plan (SIP)
- Positive Learning Environment Plan (PLEP)
- Assessment Results (Formative and Summative – School, District and Province)
- Tech Plan
- Teacher Perception Survey Data
• Tell Them From Me - TTFM (Now the “Our School” Surveys)
  - Snapshot
  - Bullying
  - Student Engagement
  - Parent Surveys – as available
• Meeting Minutes - a representative sample for all school-based teams
• Parent School Support Committee (PSSC) Minutes
• Special Education Plan/Personalized Learning Plan (SEP/PLP) Analysis
• Web Site Analysis-including teacher usage

The on-site component of the school review process included three intensive days at the school. It began with an initial meeting between the External Review Team and the principal and/or administrative team. This was followed by a principal-led orientation tour for the external review team. The principal or administrative team would then present the External Team with any relevant data, information, and documentation that was not provided before arrival at the school. The remainder of the first day was spent observing classroom teaching and school procedures, as well as talking informally with as many staff members and students as possible. The strategy for the first day was to take a broad comprehensive approach, so that by the end of the day the team would have an understanding of the overall school community.

Throughout the three-day period, several forums were conducted, each focusing on one of the school’s various constituents, including students, parents, teachers, support staff, educational support services (ESS) teams, and administrative teams. Generally, the teacher forum would occur at the end of Day 1. This meeting was attended by External Review Team members and all teaching staff. The purpose was to establish a dialogue to gain their overall viewpoints about the school community. This meeting was pre-arranged by the principal, who did not attend.
On Day 2, the External Team would begin to focus on specific domain indicators. As on Day 1, External Team members would visit teacher work areas and ask them questions about their roles, including asking for their perspectives on the day-to-day operations of the school, school administration, and leadership. Lesson plans, sample assessments, and samples of student work were also examined. At specific, pre-arranged times, the External Team members would hold the remaining forums with groups of parents, students, and support staff representatives. These forums were held to help gather a diversity of perspectives on the functioning and overall culture of the school. It was always recommended that the composition of these forums be such that all groups and ability levels from the school community were represented.

On Day 3, the External Team narrowed their attention to specific domain indicators, focusing on those areas where evidence was still needed before accurate ratings could occur. At a pre-arranged time, the External Team would meet with the administrative team. It was recommended that this forum occur at the beginning of the instructional day. Usually, late on Day 3, the External Team would complete their ratings and identify school strengths as well as the three or four key recommended areas for growth. These areas would be discussed at the Collaborative Dialogue Meeting (CDM), which was usually scheduled for the Tuesday of the week following the on-site component of the review.

Within a day of completing the review, the principal and administrative team would receive a Ratings Comparison document that showed both the Internal and External Team ratings for each of the indicators. They also received a document with the combined Internal and External Team Potential Areas of Focus. Our practice as LSRs
was to recommend that these documents be shared with all Internal and External Review Team members. This information was used to guide the professional dialogue at the CDM.

The most important part of the process was the CDM, during which the respective teams would have an exchange of ideas to discuss strengths, establish priority areas, identify strategies, finalize ratings, address splits, answer any outstanding questions, and provide clarification of the process, where needed. As was noted, since the CDM was the lynchpin of the process, all Internal and External Team members were asked to attend. During this meeting, all input was valued and no team member’s input was valued over any other.

Following the CDM, the final report, which highlighted strengths, challenges, and the key recommendations for improvement planning, was sent from the Department to the principal. Copies were sent to the senior education officer and the district superintendent. This document was used to inform ongoing school planning, with specific focus on the School Improvement Plan (SIP) being recommended.

**My Practice as Lead School Reviewer**

Prior to my becoming an LSR, the school of which I was principal had been reviewed three times. I witnessed the stress that staff members, including the principal, felt when being reviewed. In order to ensure that the schools I worked with were comfortable with the process, it was important for me as LSR to establish a comfort level and trust with school personnel. While working as a teaching principal, I had numerous experiences with individuals coming from outside the school, many of these non-educators, telling me what I needed to do. I was often skeptical of the directives and
advice I received. I did not want school personnel feeling the same skepticism. My work as a teacher and principal led me to believe that, if the process were to be deemed credible, and the suggestions made were to going lead to actual implementation, then I had to also be viewed as credible. As LSR, I wanted teachers and administrators to trust that I understood their roles. To accomplish this, I always communicated my previous experience as teacher and principal. To further this trust, I consistently operated on a few personal principles while following the prescribed review process to ensure my credibility.

**Humanistic approach.** I always tried to be humanistic in my approach. When meeting with school staff members, I would explain that I was not the Department coming in. I would add that, regardless of my role, I was Francis, a teacher and principal, who left my job on November 10, and was here to offer an objective, unbiased, constructive, and external view of the strengths and potential areas of improvement for the school. According to staff members at schools, feedback forms, and my supervisor, my experience and approach put people at ease. This approach helped to establish a connection with school personnel and often allowed me to hear the “real story” while working at different schools. This allowed me to effectively identify the real strengths and challenges at each school and offer suggestions to assist schools in making meaningful progress in a targeted way.

**Personalizing the review.** I would always look for a way to personalize the review. I would do this in two ways. First, I would examine all the data intensively. As I often put it, “I would torture the data.” Sources of data, like meeting minutes, provide a pretty clear picture about the school and often the individuals within the school.
Frequently, I was able to personalize my discussions with staff members based on this information. Second, I would make sure to have dialogues with as many individual staff members as possible. When working in a larger group setting, I would tell stories to dissipate the nervousness of staff members who were participating in the review. The following narrative is illustrative of my approach, which included working to ensure staff members were comfortable during the review process.

At the end of day 1 at a particular school, I did not feel that staff members were comfortable with the review yet. In fact, prior to the teacher forum, the principal confirmed my suspicions, informing me that they were actually quite nervous about it, so I was searching for something to personalize the process and alleviate their apprehensions. I had occasion to go to the washroom directly before conducting the forum and went into what I thought was the men’s washroom. On the wall, there was a sign that read, “Be the woman you want to be, not the woman you want others to see.” I immediately opened the door to check if I was in the right washroom. I was. At the beginning of the forum, I decided to mention my washroom experience. After I had shared the anecdote, the lone male teacher on staff spoke up: “Now you know how I feel.” The staff had a good laugh. Following this, the teachers seemed at ease, and the rest of the review was more comfortable for me as well. This comfort level seemed to carry over for the remainder of the review. Staff members shared information easily and were very engaged in the process.

**Recognizing strengths.** Most school personnel work extremely hard. Rather than focus only on areas for growth, I made it a point to also recognize the strengths of the school. All schools have challenges, and school personnel, especially teachers and
principals, are often very self-critical. By highlighting the strengths from the viewpoint of an external observer, the review offered a more balanced approach. Once the strengths were shared, staff members were consistently more receptive to the suggestions related to the areas targeted for improvement.

**Limiting the target areas.** I selected only three or four target areas for potential improvement. Schools—all schools—are working to attend to many different needs prior to the arrival of the school review team. In order to ensure that staff members and school administrators were not overwhelmed, I would always target three or four key areas for improvement. I always thought of this approach in relation to the 21 key leadership responsibilities of Waters et al. (2003). If you ask principals to improve in all areas, they will invariably fail. Schools are the same. When principals or schools are confronted with too many initiatives, they often shut down because they are overwhelmed by the sheer enormity of the many associated tasks. I always targeted the R (realistic) in SMART Goals. Limiting the target areas to those that were designed to either improve the overall learning environment or advance student outcomes meant that the school was truly able to be realistic (R) in their goal setting.

**Recognizing the challenges.** I have noted that each school has different strengths and challenges. Size, configuration, staff, and student clientele determine the priority areas. These different factors may also create barriers or challenges for schools. To illustrate, small rural schools in New Brunswick are sometimes challenged to access specialists, such as music teachers. Rural schools are also sometimes challenged to keep staff members who, upon getting their permanent contract, prefer to transfer to the city centres to eliminate the travel obligations often associated with work in a rural school.
When working with schools, I always accepted the valid structural challenges and accommodated them in our school review ratings. Further, suggested actions often took into consideration the immitigable challenges inherent in some schools. To illustrate, a small K–2 school with three teachers, one of whom is a principal who teaches half-time, does not need 20 different school-based teams to be deemed effective. Often the three teachers within this school structure are the team. More meetings, couched under the auspices of different team names, will not often improve outcomes in these circumstances. Through my recognition and acceptance of these distinct challenges at each school, we were often able to focus in the areas where the school could make meaningful change.

**Focusing on solutions.** The final aspect of my approach was always to be solution-focused. On numerous occasions, school personnel would identify challenges that they could mitigate, but they couched them in terms that expressed they did not have either the means or the inclination to address these challenges. When manageable challenges were being presented in this way, I always worked to shift the discourse back to potential solutions. These types of situations often occurred in cases where specific staff members were simply being negative, complaining rather than offering viable solutions to manageable problems. When confronted with these staff members, I always used the phrase, “You can light a candle, or curse the darkness.” This would invariably focus the discussion back on identifying meaningful solutions.

Before leaving the school at the end of Day 3, it was my practice as the LSR to have a dialogue with the principal. This happened after I obtained the Internal Review Team ratings and their suggested areas of focus. I would also ask the principal if there
were any concerns, personal or professional insights, or final details they would like to share. These informal meetings usually resulted in a rich exchange of ideas.

I found these facets of my approach, which were intended to focus on building trust and on utilizing a realistic, humanistic approach to working with schools and individuals, to be effective. Our school reviewer evaluation forms and one-year follow-up calls indicated that school personnel appreciated this approach and that it consistently resulted in positive outcomes at the school level.

The Last Word on the School Review Process

The overall school review process was based on effective schools research, was formative in nature, and received consistently positive feedback on anecdotal and formal evaluations from Internal and External Team members as having positive systemic effects. At the provincial level, aggregate school review data were used to inform the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and districts about systemic needs. It was also used to determine the direction for upcoming teacher professional learning sessions designed to address identified systemic needs. The last word on the beneficial nature of the school review process comes from Freedman and DiCecco (2013), who noted, “Collaborative school reviews are a cost-effective way of continuous improvement and should be seen as part of the overall leadership and management role” (p. 8).

By the end of my mandate at the department, I had participated in 39 School Reviews, 36 of those working as LSR. Through each iteration of the review process, I was able to benefit from the sharing of ideas and learning that occurred at each school.
Findings from the Data

Several sources of data were used to inform my perspective as LSR. They included the job description, time and motion analysis, interview as LSR, and dialogues with principals while I was conducting the actual reviews. Although each source of data has utility, the latter of these two sources of data will be the primary sources used to inform the themes and associated narrative. I will discuss each in turn.

Job Description

The job description sets the parameters of the role as outlined in appendix F and adds credibility to the supposition, stated above, that school personnel preferred to work with an LSR who has worked in, and therefore understands, their roles. The first essential qualification outlined in the job description reads as follows:

A Master’s degree in Education and a minimum of six (6) years public school teaching experience plus a minimum of three (3) years of leadership experience (i.e., Principal, Vice-Principal, SPR, Learning Specialist, Mentor etc.) in public schools and/or school districts.

While I was working as LSR, my supervisor often noted the necessity of credibility in the role and observed that my previous experience added to the establishment of this.

The job description also helps to outline the obligations and skills required to work with schools. The obligations were delineated in the previous text. The skills include the requisite education and experience, knowledge of best practices, knowledge of the provincial curricula, an understanding of the practices used to support inclusive education, and several other behavioural and technical competencies.
**LSR Time and Motion Study**

When the time and motion analysis as LSR was established, it was not intended for use in this study. In fact, on its own, it is likely inadequate to support the establishment of any theme. It does, however, provide utility in two areas. First, it provides a comparative perspective on the temporal aspects of the roles of principal and LSR. Through this analysis, I realized that the dedicated time I needed to complete the recursive process of school reviews was no less than that which I had dedicated to the principalship. Just as when I had been working in the principalship, I found myself working evenings and weekends to keep up with the job obligations. The time and motion analysis noted 65 hours and 25 minutes dedicated to the on-site component for one school review. This count does not include the time dedicated to report writing and revisions. See Appendix I for a full elaboration of the time dedicated to one school review. I recognized that although the LSR role provided greater flexibility in how I used my time, there was no more time.

This second area is associated with one those autoethnographic insights which researchers using this methodological approach seek. In keeping with the process established in the previous chapter, I will wait to share this insight until the end of this chapter.

**Interview as Lead School Reviewer**

The second data source, the interview content from the participant researcher as LSR, was thought-provoking. Trends emerged from the data that were not expected. As participant researcher, I used the same 16 interview questions that were posed to the principals during the school review process, but with some minor adaptations. To
accommodate the fact that I was acting as a LSR and not as a principal, many of the questions were framed differently, asking how “a principal should” rather than “you as principal would.” For example, the question “How do you use the vision, mission, and values to guide and support student learning?” was adjusted to “How should a principal use the vision, mission, and values to guide and support student learning?” Despite the intentional change as part of my research design, my resultant answers were never limited to “the principal should.” When coding the data, I found that I always included the “should” component (suggestions for the principal), but also, unconsciously, included the associated challenges.

In keeping with the format used in the previous chapter, I will outline the topics that emerged from the 16 interview questions posed to me as LSR and will provide a brief summary of the pertinent content collected from each of the interview questions. Once again, the challenges, where noted, will be included as identified during the interview.

Question 1 asks how should a principal use the vision, mission, and values to guide and support student learning. The vision, mission, and values statements should be collaboratively developed accessing input from all staff members. The statements should be used to inform the SIP as well as any decisions which have school-wide implications. Challenges include ensuring staff buy-in. Some staff members do not see the utility of the SIP as a living document to inform school growth.

Question 2 asks about the process and data a principal should use to create the current SIP, the process a principal should use to monitor SIP goals, and whether there is an active Distributive Leadership Team at the school. Principals should use a diversity of
data to inform school direction including classroom observations, formative assessments as well as school, district, and province assessments. The SIP should be monitored on an ongoing basis. The School Improvement Service recommends a formal assessment of SIP efficacy based on data a minimum of four times annually. Schools should have some form of distributive leadership structure, often operating under the title of CLT, which can be used to ensure effective reciprocal communication between staff and school administration. This team is also used to gather input on issues which may have school-wide implications. Challenges can be variable between schools and, in the case of data, some schools lack the expertise on staff which can cause issues for schools when trying to use data to set goals and identify potential areas of focus. Time is always a challenge. In relation to the SIP, finding the time to gather and analyze data, author an effective plan, and ensure ongoing progress toward identified goals is challenging. Finally, there is little agreement within and between districts of what a good SIP is. This sometimes this leads to confusion at the school level.

Question 3 asks about the mechanisms that a principal should use to get input into decisions that have implications for change throughout the school community. As noted above, the CLT is an effective avenue for gathering staff input. Principals should ensure that there are avenue to gather staff, student and parent input into decisions. This could include Parent School Support and Home and School parent representatives as well as class representatives who represent student interests.

There were several challenges identified under this category. They included an unwillingness on behalf of some individuals and groups to engage in the consultative process, a lack of knowledge and understanding at all levels about the regulations and
prohibitions a school is obligated to adhere to, getting agreement within and between groups especially when policy adherence is necessary, varying degrees of skill and willingness of staff especially when we are speaking of assessment practices and data analysis, and accessing the time to meet with the diverse stakeholders to gather input.

Question 4 asks about the ways principals should work keep staff, parents/guardians and community informed. It was noted that principals should use multiple means to communicate and source the preferred mode of communication for each group. This should involve all staff ensuring that there is a communication network that includes reciprocal communication between principal and staff, and similar reciprocal communication lines between school and home. If a network is not in place, the principal should work to establish one.

Challenges include finding effective means to communicate with and to engage diverse stakeholders, and a lack of comfort with technology for some stakeholders which limits options for communications. High variability in the preferred modes of communication can cause challenges for principals. This necessitates more work for principals when they are tasked with sending the same message using multiple modes.

Question 5 focuses on the required school teams and what the principal should be doing to monitor the effectiveness of team practices and the impact on student learning and behaviour. In the best case scenario the principal should attend meetings ensuring that meeting norms are followed and teams are working to address identified school goals. When this is not possible, principals should monitor the formal team minutes and offer feedback. Information between school administrators and teams should be shared
freely and effectively. Finally, data should be used to monitor ongoing progress toward established goals.

Challenges in this area include adherence to meeting times (attendance) and norms, ensuring that comprehensive meeting minutes are recorded and shared, and that there is a team member skilled in the use of data, so that accurate progress monitoring occurs.

Question 6 examines the ways principals should work to ensure that teachers are teaching the curriculum and using best practices in instruction and assessment. It was noted that principals should use both formal and informal means to assess teacher efficacy. This would include providing verbal and written feedback to teachers. Walkthroughs were identified as the primary mechanism for principals to ensure effective teaching and assessment practices. These would include an observation of lesson plans to ensure that the appropriate daily planning was occurring as well as an examination of PLPs to ensure that the necessary interventions, accommodations, and modifications were being applied at the classroom level.

Challenges were noted, mostly in relation to time. Accessing the time to attend to walkthroughs, support new or struggling staff members, address reluctant and/or challenging staff members, and fulfil the obligations of the district teacher evaluation cycle were all listed as time-consuming. When considered en masse, these obligations led to the necessity of the principal to constantly triage.

Question 7 asked about the ways principals should work to assist the ESST to support teachers in the school. It was offered that principals should attend ESST meetings and ensure that supports (both human and physical) are in place. It was also
noted that principals should work to support the EST-R and EST-G teachers in their roles and the activities they are trying to implement to support the obligations of their roles. It was added that principals should ensure that staff members have access to professional learning (PL) opportunities and encourage participation and the advancement of skill and knowledge on staff.

Challenges included a lack of skill or knowledge of staff, including the reluctance of some staff to engage in the PL opportunities to advance their knowledge. Time was also noted as a challenge. It was noted that building capacity is time consuming and, in many cases, advancing professional learning was almost wholly the obligation of the principal.

Question 8 asked what support principals provide to teachers to guarantee that they (teachers) are able to take primary responsibility for teaching students with diverse needs and are ensuring that the appropriate accommodations, modifications, interventions and/or supports are in place. It was noted that this is highly variable between schools. In small schools this includes direct observation. In larger schools there is more of a reliance on others, including the EST-R and EST-G, to ensure these things are being accomplished. Regardless of whether the principal directly supervises or delegates this responsibility, it was noted that lesson plans and Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) are two avenues to ensure that the appropriate accommodations, modifications, interventions and supports are in place. Team meetings are also used to share information and to discuss best practices.

Identified challenges included a lack of knowledge and skill on behalf of some staff members. Time was listed as a challenge in this area as well. Often the principal
does not have the time to directly supervise teachers and support their growth. When supervisory and support responsibilities are delegated to the ESST members, the skill and ability of the ESST members, especially the EST-R and EST-G, can seriously influence growth and efficacy in this area.

Question 9 asked what principals should do to ensure teaching assignments and scheduling decisions are based on teacher expertise, competencies, and experience. It was offered that principals should have a dialogue with staff so they know their training, skills and preferences. Observations should be used to advance principal knowledge of staff and identify the best course assignment for teachers. One major challenge was identified in this area. It was offered that scheduling decisions become extremely difficult when staff members voice a preference for an area but lack the skill and, most importantly, don’t recognize their lack of skill.

Question 10 was focused on the ways principals should work to provide ongoing feedback (formal and informal) for staff regarding their performance. The response to this answer was similar to the one provided for question six. It was noted that principals should use both formal and informal means to assess teacher efficacy. Walkthroughs were identified as the primary mechanism for principals to ensure effective teaching and assessment practices, with observation of lesson plans and an examination of PLPs to ensure that the necessary interventions, accommodations, and modifications were being applied at the classroom level. Challenges included finding the time to attend to walkthroughs and dealing with reluctant and/or challenging staff, which was identified as being very time consuming.
Question 11 asked about the activities principals should complete to promote continuous professional growth, which included the ways they should work to provide supports for staff members new to a subject area or assignment, or those who are struggling. It was offered that ongoing observation and feedback were important to ensuring ongoing teacher improvement. It was added that principals should encourage and facilitate PL opportunities for staff, provide continuous constructive feedback to staff specific to instructional practices, participate in, and encourage, ongoing study, and set up processes to allow for mentoring and support for new and struggling staff. Challenges included accessing the time to support and train teachers as well as a lack of knowledge in certain curricular areas, which often led to a need to delegate some of these supervisory and support obligations.

Question 12 delved into the ways principals should build leadership capacity on staff. Suggested activities included the provision of formal and informal leadership opportunities, encouraging staff members to lead teams, having staff members replace absent administrators and offering other leadership opportunities for staff. The latter of these would include leading PL sessions and encouraging staff members to lead specific initiatives (e.g., SRC or GSA). It was also noted that principals should provide potential leaders with a “tap on the shoulder,” encouraging participation in leadership development programs, professional job opportunities and ongoing study. Other challenges included working with skilled staff members who possessed leadership potential but were reluctant to lead, and the reluctance of some principals to delegate, feeling that delegation of responsibility was tantamount to giving up control.
Question 13 dealt with the things principals should do to ensure they are current in their understanding of current pedagogy and methodologies and how they share or promote this learning with the staff. It was noted that most all principals are deeply engaged in ongoing study, including attending and offering PL sessions. It was also noted that principals should promote staff participation in PL opportunities and encourage sharing with colleagues in a train the trainer format. Minimally, it was suggested that principals should share readings and encourage discussion on promising practices. Identified challenges included the unwillingness of staff to engage in PL opportunities, a lack of time to research and share learning, other obligations that limited opportunities for principals to participate in PL sessions, and too many externally prescribed PL sessions which had little to do with the needs of the school, some of which were identified by teachers as “the flavor of the day.”

Question 14 asked about the things principals should do to support the inclusion of diverse school populations. The first topic which was mentioned was the need for principals to support the establishment of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) to promote the acceptance of those with diverse gender identities in the school community. It was also noted that principals should focus some of their energies supporting students with exceptionalities. This included working to advance their own and other staff members’ personal knowledge and skill in this area. Stretch learning was also mentioned. It was specifically noted that learning opportunities for advanced learners should be promoted, but often take a back seat when schools are challenged to provide support for a growing student population who have significant needs. It added that principals should recognize
and support the diverse ethnicities at the school with particular attention to First Nation populations.

Several challenges were identified, including having too many needs to accommodate within existing resources, perpetually increasing behavioral and psychological needs, staff members who are reluctant to work with students who have exceptionalities – be it because of a lack of skill or lack of inclination. Finally, it was noted that accompanying an ever-increasing high needs clientele are stakeholders who expect schools to do more, but don’t recognize the finite human and physical resources at the school level.

Question 15 dealt with the means principals should use to provide staff members with thanks and other recognition for contributions and accomplishments. It was noted that principals generally do a good job of this. They should use both formal and informal means to share thanks and recognitions. It was added that formal recognitions should occur regularly at monthly staff meetings and principals should also offer cards and emails to individuals who have achieved something notable. It was suggested that this should not be the sole responsibility of the school. It was offered that it may be beneficial for districts to begin adding similar recognitions to their personnel files. The primary challenge identified was the ubiquitous challenge of time. Another issue was staff jealousy. Although it was noted that some staff members “carry the load,” others who do not do anything beyond the formal job requirements do not necessarily want to hear about their successes or to share in them. It was added that principals often purchase cards and gifts out of pocket and, although it is appreciated by staff, providing cards and gifts often amounts to a personal cost for the principal.
Question 16 asked how the role of the principal compares with what was described in the job posting. The following interview quote is illustrative of my view of the principalship from the perspective of the LSR:

I honestly don’t think any job posting would even come close to describing the role. When you look at the 15 administrator forum questions that LSRs used during the school reviews; all of those obligations are included in the principal’s role. If a principal feels the need to attend to each one of these obligations themselves, they can't do it. It is necessary to prioritize, triage, and share leadership. The ability to share leadership is based on a number of site-based factors and needs to take into account the many other obligations attached to that specific role. Add to that, if the principal is in crisis mode, everything else goes out the window. Having a teaching load creates further challenges. The willingness of your staff to engage in initiatives and provide support will play into what you can accomplish. The size of the school will influence the role and what is delegated. Even the configuration changes the dynamics. I cannot remember which person I spoke to, but I was always waiting for principals to say it. During one early one review somebody said to me, “I work in a K-5 and my friend is a principal who works in a grade 9–12 school. They deal with discipline all day and I wipe runny noses.” So, even the configuration of the school changes the dynamics. If you have a dual configuration school, a K–8 or a 6–12, that adds to the complexity. I know that for sure. So, you have large and small school dynamics, you have inclusion which we’ve talked about, and you have dynamics associated with different configurations. (LSR interview, q.16)
The institutional role obligates the principal to attend to all responsibilities associated with the 15 questions referenced above. The role as prescribed is not doable if principals feel they need to attend to all of these tasks personally. A principal has to prioritize, triage, and share leadership. The capacity for the principal to do these things is based on several factors:

- Configuration - K–5 is dramatically different from 9–12
- Other obligations - Each principalship holds different obligations
- Teaching load - if required
- Skill and willingness of the staff
- Size of the staff/school - economies of scale function
- Dual and tri-level configurations (add complexity to school management).

**Emergent Themes**

The same tri-level coding process was used to identify the themes from the LSR interview. Frequencies were counted and through the data threshing process outlined in chapter 3, themes established. I used information from all data sources to inform the themes but, as identified at the outset of this chapter, the greatest focus was on the interview content which provided the richest data. Through the data coding process three emergent themes were identified: collaboration and teaming, support to staff, and challenges.

**Collaboration and Teaming**

The first emergent theme was collaboration and teaming. Under this heading there were 18 occurrences identified in the frequency count from the LSR interview. Included in this
count were 11 notations citing meetings, four of communications and three more under the auspices of data. As a school reviewer, I have always believed that effective communication is an integral aspect of effective teaming. The interview data support this premise. I noted that principals “should work to make sure there is reciprocal communication occurring between team members and also between teams” (LSR interview, q. 5). These communication lines need to be shared with all staff members to ensure that they are aware of the various avenues available to them for providing input, having a voice, and sharing ideas. I always recommended from an external reviewer standpoint “that principals use multiple means to communicate. And that’s challenging.”

When working with school teams, I regularly offered that on each staff there may be “15 different preferred modes of communication,” adding that the challenge for principals was to “look at what the preferred mode is for each group” (LSR interview, q. 4).

Specific to the mention of data, I noted that “the principal should also be looking at what is on the team agendas and the data they are using to ensure that they are working toward school goals.” I also noted that the documentation which sets the mandate for the school, including

- the vision, mission and value statements which should be collaboratively developed, including all staff, and if possible students. Sometimes I would say it is challenging to access student voice, but it is possible. Data should be used to inform the vision and mission statements as well as the school improvement plan. If you truly have a value statement, it also should be used to help guide all major decisions. I think that these things should be talked about, monitored, and revised on an ongoing basis. Some of the challenges are having staff are associated with
staff buy-in. They are asking, ‘Why are we doing this?’ and ‘Is this important?’

From a data perspective, oftentimes there is a lack of skill on staff, so they do not have an understanding of its value and utility. (LSR interview, q. 1)

Specific to the actual school reviews, while there is a focus on teaming in general terms, two teams have been prioritized in the overall process, as evidenced by their prevalence in the school review indicator document. The school review indicator document specifies the importance of establishing a Core Leadership Team (CLT) or some other form of distributive leadership team. The ESST is also highlighted in several different domains. The psychological and behavioural needs of students have been growing continually since I began working in the system 18 years ago. This increases the value of the ESST. I noted during the interview that, “One of the things that stand out for me is if you have a good resource team, you can do wonders. If you have a tough resource team to work with, then it is a struggle” (LSR interview, q. 16). Observations at many of the schools I have reviewed attest to this fact. Due to the ever-increasing needs within the system, the ESST has become invaluable to ensuring the effective operation of schools. As LSR, I have always focused on these two main teams, regardless of the size and configuration of the school.

For small schools, I have often recommended combining these two teams for the purposes of efficiency. Other school teams are necessary, but the size and grade-level configuration of the school help determine which teams are of primary importance. It is recommended by all New Brunswick districts that each SIP include a focus on components of language arts and math. This often necessitates that schools have established language arts and math teams. Depending on the size of the school, the
principal may require grade-level teams. In smaller schools, with singular classes at each grade level, this is not efficient. It is impossible to collaborate on a grade-level team consisting of one teacher. In lieu if this, small elementary schools will often divide into K–2 and 3–5 teaming configurations. No matter the size or configuration, it is incumbent on the principal to determine which teaming structures will best serve the interests of the students and the school.

When establishing teams, it is important for the principal to ensure that the chosen teaming structure does not segregate individuals and teams. Sometimes teaming structures can have the unintended consequence of establishing undesirable, us-versus-them dynamics. With this in mind, the principal has several team-related obligations to attend to. These include monitoring teams and team practices, and also ensuring that protocols are followed, teams are targeted in their actions, actions are monitored, and that the necessary training and supports are in place to enable teams to reach their identified targets.

In order to monitor the effectiveness of teams and their teaming practices, the principal should attend as many team meetings as possible. When they are unable to attend, they should appoint a designate, monitor team minutes, and provide teams with formal feedback. It is imperative that any teaming structure enacted at the school level include a mechanism to share information between teams. The principal should also examine the data used by each team to inform identified school-wide areas of focus, associated strategies, and progress toward identified targets. If principals are not proficient in the analysis and use of data, they should look among school personnel for an
expert or champion to lead in this area. Delegating this responsibility provides the principal with an opportunity to share leadership amongst the staff.

It is recommended that the principal encourage team members to lead in other areas as well. This leadership includes encouraging potential school leaders to chair meetings, provide agenda items, document meeting minutes, share professional learning and expertise, and lead a diversity of initiatives.

Support to Staff

The second major theme that emerged from the LSR data is provision of support to staff. There were nine incidents of staff support specifically noted in the LSR interview data. Of these, seven were formal and two informal. Supporting the establishment of this overarching theme were interview notations specific to several other topics, including walkthroughs (6), the provision of professional learning opportunities (6), lesson plans including observation and feedback (3), sharing leadership opportunities (3), and mentoring/providing feedback to promote teacher growth (3).

**Formal.** There were seven incidents of formal support recorded in the interview data. Regarding the formal evaluation process, I noted the challenge associated with finding time to provide constructive feedback. Principals are asked to follow suggested district protocols for teacher evaluation. The suggested rule of thumb includes completing formal evaluations for one-third of the staff per year. This would include new B contract (permanent contract) teachers and D contract teachers (teachers with recall rights but no guarantee of future employment). Formal feedback should be accompanied by teacher self-evaluations and pre- and post-conferencing with the supervisor.
Formal support incidents included assisting staff members to advance their practice, often with a specific focus of addressing the needs of students with exceptionalities. I noted that, in this regard, there were distinct differences between the schools I observed offering,

Often, in small schools, it is direct observation by the principal. In large schools, it is not. In both structures the principal is often reliant on EST-R and EST-G to assist with the diversification of instruction for students with exceptionalities. In large schools these observation and support responsibilities are often delegated to your SPR, VPs, or department heads. (LSR interview, q. 10)

This delegation creates a problematic separation between the principal, the students, and the actual instruction. In some of these circumstances, this separation also separates the principal from the realities of the classroom. Over the expanse of my 39 reviews, I observed several principals working in large schools who were absorbed by the administrative obligations associated with managing such schools. This necessitated the aforementioned delegation of responsibilities to others. One of the most often delegated responsibilities was attending to walkthroughs. Walkthroughs and the provision of feedback were deemed invaluable. During the interview, I noted:

Feedback could be written or verbal, informal or formal. Walkthroughs are similar. They can be informal or formal depending on where teachers are in their career or the needs. Walkthroughs are more likely formal if there are challenges or if staff members are struggling. In these cases the principal needs to formalize the feedback. Included in that would be observation of lesson plans. Are they diversifying instruction and planning for diverse learners? And they are following
the plan? I’ve seen some pretty good plans, but there was a lack of follow-up on implementation. I also think that the principal should be examining the Personalized Learning Plans (PLP). Once again, time is a huge challenge here. For example, you see a student, Francis, in the class. Francis has needs. Is Francis getting what he needs from teacher A? When discussing things with teachers I would suggest the principal approach everything under the auspices of support. (LSR interview, q. 11)

Lesson planning to support the establishment of interventions and the diversification of instruction mentioned above is highly variable within and between schools. Feedback can be used to ensure that effective teaching practices are known and consistently applied. During the interview, I noted that teachers want feedback. “Teachers are very open to it. They want to know what they can do better. They are asking for that [feedback]” (LSR interview, q. 11). It is important to identify some of the obstacles to providing this. In the interview, I addressed this directly:

The challenge for those principals, especially those either new to a school or working in a small school, is finding the time to actually get out and provide the observation and feedback. Sometimes there is nobody to delegate to. Dealing with challenging or reluctant staff on any front is going to be very time consuming. (LSR interview, q. 11)

Often, teachers are reluctant to complete written lesson plans citing their experience as sufficient to address student needs. In these cases, the time dedicated to monitoring, offering advice and assistance, and working to change an embedded albeit ineffective practice can be very time consuming.
Informal. I noted two instances of informal support during the interview and also identified instances when a principal has provided personal support to staff members:

Some of the principals I spoke to will actually make it a point to bring a coffee to somebody that is struggling or needs a little pick me up in the middle of the day. This is well beyond the scope of any job description, but it is certainly what principals do. It is not a “should,” but they do. (LSR interview, q. 15)

These actions are not limited solely to supporting teaching staff. The note below is illustrative of the support principals provide to a diversity of staff members. I identified the principal picking up a Tim’s card for the custodian now and again. Doing something to recognize the people who may feel like they are on the fringes, those who are not going to be recognized at a staff meeting, is important. Recognizing some of the things they are very good at goes a long way toward keeping everybody feeling connected to the bigger picture. I think it’s important. I think it is important especially for those EAs, bus drivers, custodians, and administrative assistants. I think they can easily be overlooked, especially on a larger staff. Sometimes a simple kind word goes a long way. (LSR interview, q. 15)

These gestures are things that you would never see in any job description, but many principals do similar things to help support the professional and psychological needs of staff.

Challenges

The data indicate there were numerous issues faced by principals. This leads us to the identification of a third theme – challenges. Although the frequency of occurrence
was higher than the previous themes, this theme was intentionally presented last. Challenges were noted in all interview questions and therefore permeated all aspects of the role. The discussion of the two other themes included mention of some challenges. Not unlike the school review indicator document, the utilization of thematic categorization is for the purposes of organization and comprehension. Nothing in the school environment happens in isolation. Schools are messy and the principalship therefore can be similarly messy. To illustrate, during the interview I noted increased psycho-social concerns for students. These issues do not always stay solely with the student but are often shared, for better or worse, throughout the school community. To elaborate, a student who is in the midst of a family break-up is likely suffering. When examining this from an objective viewpoint, we would categorize this student’s need under the auspices of student support. This being said, the way the student responds to the break-up can influence many other areas. If the student is disruptive in class, this can influence instruction. If the student has a major blow-up, this can influence the whole learning environment. Disruptions and challenges do not wholly define the principalship, but they certainly influence it.

Three areas emerged during the coding process. The frequency of occurrence is as follows: lack of time (13), a lack of staff buy-in and unwillingness of staff to engage (24), and other challenges. In the dialogue that follows a lack of staff buy-in and unwillingness of staff to engage will be combined, although there is a distinction which needs to be identified. A lack of staff buy-in is overt. The principal is aware that staff members are in disagreement. An unwillingness to engage can be more challenging to identify and address. Staff may agree to an initiative, but when it comes to
implementation, they do not follow up. If the initiative is associated with instruction, and
the principal is unable to be in classes to view that instruction, then this may go unnoticed
and therefore unaddressed for extensive periods of time.

**Time.** The LSR time and motion analysis speaks to the persistent time stress that
 principals operate under. The interview data substantiate this finding. While working as
LSR, I cannot recall any principal who did not mention the challenge of time.
Specifically, they noted inadequate time to address all of the responsibilities associated
with the role. My LSR interview data strongly support this premise. During the interview,
I noted:

> The challenge of time seems to be a consistent theme in every area. If you’re
dealing with anything, it may take away from seven other things on the list of
obligations. These obligations include addressing the growing behavioural needs,
special needs, and even the academic needs. It all puts a strain on the time the
principal has. (LSR interview, q. 16)

Regardless of school size or configuration, principals all noted the challenge of time. This
being noted, the challenges are not the same for differently sized or configured schools.

Principals working in large schools noted challenges in relation to the
overwhelming managerial duties, attending to their obligation to provide observations
and feedback for teachers, and the task of trying to engage all staff members in SIP
planning and the implementation of SIP initiatives. Further, it has been my observation
that large schools are often challenged to ensure consistent policy application. Principals
also struggle to ensure that all staff members follow up on the actions outlined in the SIP.
Lack of staff buy-in and unwillingness to engage. This challenge is likely associated with two of the other major identified areas underpinning this theme: a lack of staff buy-in (12) and an unwillingness of staff members to engage (12). A lack of staff buy-in can occur in many areas. Staff may not agree to an initiative even though they have voted and the majority, or a plurality, has decided that this is the direction they want to go. They may also disagree with something that has been prescribed in policy or has been decided by the district or the department. When it is a practice or policy change that requires skill development, principals often struggle to ensure that all staff develop the skills needed to effectively implement the practice. In the interview, I noted:

One of the challenges is ensuring there is a level of engagement on staff. You try to get that first before moving ahead with policy or initiative. Invariably some (staff members) will make an excuse not to attend a meeting. The problem with that is there is no obligation for staff members to attend any professional development meetings outside of school hours. So, if you are trying to help build the skills to implement something, it is challenging to ensure they are physically there to receive the training. If it is professional development outside of school hours, it is not obligatory. (LSR interview, q. 11)

Technology was noted three times, generally in relation to a lack of skill, which led staff to avoid engaging in new or challenging initiatives. Communication was noted as one of the areas where a lack of buy-in on the use of technology and a reluctance to learn to effective use of technology created challenges in promoting reciprocal home-school communications. During the interview as LSR I noted:
Sometimes, there are issues when schools are trying to engage stakeholders. Once again a lack of skill with technology, and also the reluctance of some people to learn, creates roadblocks. For example, despite the functionality, some will claim they cannot use their teacher pages. (LSR interview, q. 4)

According to the interview data, these technological challenges are often associated with the aforementioned lack of skill on site and a lack of buy-in to learn new skills. The interview answers identified a lack of skill in several areas. Specific to the interview questions, a lack of skill, which was often associated with an unwillingness to engage in learning activities, was noted in Questions 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 14, and 16. The areas associated with these topics are as follows. Question 2 dealt with data and the inability of some staff members to understand the complexities of effective data analysis. Question 3 noted some staff members who lacking the knowledge to provide input into some decisions which had school-wide implications. Question 8 addressed the challenges associated with teachers taking primary responsibility for ensuring modifications and accommodations are provided for students with exceptionalities. Question 9 addressed the issues of struggling staff members and some who, to quote an oft used phrase, “don’t know what they don’t know.” Question 11 specified staff members needing support and training to advance their practice. Question 14 addressed the diverse challenges some staff members had to effectively support inclusion. Finally, question 16 speaks to the research question and the challenges associated with the overall role. In all cases a lack of skill was accompanied by a lack of buy in on the initiative itself and a reluctance to engage in the activities needed to gain those skills, hence the overlap in the dialogue.
Other challenges. There were other challenges noted that were low in the coding frequency but high in intensity - the way they influence the role. These items which bear mention included: challenging clientele (1), too many irrelevant or unproductive initiatives (1), stretch learning (1), prescribed but ill-fitting professional learning opportunities (1), and other obligations (1). Any one of the aforementioned challenges may necessitate the principal react, rather than act in a proactive manner. For example, a principal who is consisting dealing with disciplinary issues due to a challenging clientele may be challenged to enact any proactive initiatives which may change the nature of the school climate. Each of these areas had low frequency counts in the interview but each can cause huge disruptions which take the principal away from activities which may promote whole school growth.

Fictional Narrative

This section utilizes a fictional dialogue between the LSR and a school principal to describe themes identified through the LSR data. The school principal in the narrative is the sole administrator in a small-school setting. As noted earlier, as LSR I always made it a point to have a discussion with the administrative team following the CDM to ensure that we were in a position to move some of the recommendations forward. This fictional narrative is representative of one of those conversations. The dialogue will focus mainly on the three identified themes: collaboration and teaming, support to staff, and challenges. For the benefit of the reader, themes are identified throughout the text in bold font.

LSR: I wanted to touch base before I left to ensure you are going to be able to act on some of the recommendations outlined in the report. The first area of focus was
collaboration and teaming. Do you feel your team will be able to act on the suggestion to establish a core leadership team and you will be able to share some leadership opportunities with your team?

Principal: I am hopeful. I feel there is an abundance of skill on the staff, but some of the teachers with the greatest leadership potential are reluctant to join.

LSR: Why do you feel they are reluctant?

Principal: They have noted they are struggling to keep up with data collection. We have been using AimsWeb to try and offer targeted interventions to students. We are also trying to use this data [assessment results] to communicate with parents to see if we can get more [engagement] home support for academic growth. This has stressed some teachers. I have offered training sessions but some teachers are not adept with technology, others are not data savvy. For the teachers who have been struggling, I have offered some personal support. This has become quite a challenge. Some staff members have welcomed the support. They are seeing the academic benefit of having the parents on board. Parents who are on board and are also aware of the needs, are able to help their children at home. This has been very effective in advancing student development. On a staff of 12, I have six doing the analysis and communicating effectively. Unfortunately, three of the older staff members are not comfortable with the technology and are not willing to use it, even when support is offered. [Unwilling to Engage] Three others, newer staff members, have young families and despite being provided release time, have not done an acceptable job assessing their students. In the absence of
this, they are not aware of where to target interventions and therefore students are not progressing as well as they could if the teachers were more aware of the gaps.

These challenges have been ongoing. Staff members who aren’t comfortable with the technology use this as an excuse. Others cite their familial obligations as prohibitive. I have offered to provide training sessions focused on assessment and targeting interventions. Given the diverse obligations I have throughout the day, teaching and addressing behavioural issues, I can only provide these training sessions after school and none of the reluctant or incapable staff members are willing to attend. I cannot say I blame them. All of them lead co- or extra-curricular activities and are already giving up their personal time to help students out. Also, there is no professional obligation for them to attend any of these extra sessions.

Lately, I am feeling exhausted myself. After getting staff input, I purchased the AimsWeb Program. The district supports the use of the program but does not provide the financing to purchase it. I did all the training myself and then offered it to staff. This took up the majority of my summer. [Time] In September, I offered a training session during one of our professional development days and thought we were on our way. [Support to Staff] After checking with the teachers, I realized only half of us were really on board. I felt deflated. I put in all of this extra effort and now the result is actually a staff who is divided and several staff members who feel I am pushing them unjustifiably hard. In the end, I don’t think they understand that I also teach half the time, have to look after all the administrative items, address all major behavioural issues and
am doing the same things I am asking of them. I recently read an article by Sarah Sparks, which claimed principals worked 60 hours per week. That was actually in the title. I thought, *I wish.*

*LSR:* Well it seems you are doing your share of the work and you certainly have tried to move the **teaming** aspect along already.

*Principal:* I have. I am pleased with the review though. Three of the reluctant staff members came to me after examining the external review team’s initial recommendations and told me they were surprised that the recommendations are the same things that I have been trying to promote. One of my most reluctant **staff members** said he is going to attend one of my training sessions. He is quite vocal. If I am able to get him engaged, I think the other staff members will also follow suit. That is, if he sees the benefit for the students.

*LSR:* I have some easy-to-use training materials. I will share them with you. If they support some of the other materials you have generated, you may want to use them.

*Principal:* That would be great. I have been working with the district mentor, but they have over 30 schools to work with, so his time is limited. Any support you can provide will be appreciated. To be honest, this is the first time I felt like someone understands my situation. I often feel like I am working away on my own. I know that isn’t true, but the feeling creeps in when I am confronted with so many things on my “to do” list and no **time** to get to them. I guess that’s the job. Having worked at this for two years, I have to say, it is not what I expected.

*LSR:* If it is any consolation, the staff respects you. They told me that.
Principal: That is interesting.

LSR: Why is that?

Principal: Because nobody ever told me that.

This brief narrative is illustrative of the realities of the role of principal. It speaks only to the requirements of the role for one small school. The data indicate that the overarching institutional responsibilities are consistent. It also indicates that the practical responsibilities are highly variable for large, small, single-configured, multi-configured, elementary, middle, and high schools. In addition, the dual role of educational leader and administrator can be further complicated when a principal is also obligated to teach.

Autoethnographic Insight as LSR

Earlier, I alluded to an autoethnographic insight garnered from my analysis of the time and motion as LSR. The LSR time and motion study data may not be sufficient to allow for the establishment of a theme, but it definitely provided me with insight into one of the established themes - time. The insight was not associated simply with the time dedicated to each role, but in the difference in my state of mind, specifically my stress level, while working in each respective role. Examining the time and motion data, I recognized that the time and effort dedicated to working on school reviews were similar to those dedicated to working as a principal. Both roles necessitated working evenings, weekends, and even holidays. When I assumed the LSR role, I dedicated enormous amounts of time to the reviews and also gave up the majority of my summer vacation. Eight weeks of vacation time were reduced to three.

Although the time dedicated to completing my departmental work obligations was similar to that dedicated to the principalship, it is important to note that the job held fewer
stressors. The stressors that occurred in the principal role included those associated with the administration and management of the school and the challenges of managing people at all levels: students, parents, teachers, support staff, and other community stakeholders. In both roles I had a prescribed set of duties and was asked to manage a variety of different human dynamics. The difference was, while working on a review, I mainly operated as an objective observer and advisor. Conversely, while working as a principal I was wholly immersed in the environment, as many principals and researchers studying the role would confirm.

Furthermore, I never knew what issues or concerns I might be asked to manage at any given time as a principal. As one colleague put it, “There is no continuity to the role.” This complexity often pushes the principal toward a fight-or-flight state, which has negative ramifications for an individual’s mental health and physical well-being. At best this type of stress puts strains on our well-being; at its worst it can lead to what the Japanese call karōshi, meaning death from overwork (Nishiyama & Johnson, 1997). I have not experienced anyone succumbing to the latter, but my interactions as LSR and principal indicate the former is prevalent amongst many practitioners. Every principal I worked with as LSR noted some aspect of time stress associated with the role. Although both roles included robust temporal demands, the comparative stress level as LSR was dramatically reduced.

When I generated the LSR’s time and motion study, I had little understanding of the stress generally associated with the role of the principal. I was, however, fully aware of the stress that I had dealt with in my own personal practice as principal. The autoethnographic insight for me as a participant researcher is that the many obligations
associated with the principal role, and the unpredictability inherent in the role, creates stressors beyond those of simply managing time. The temporal obligations associated with each role are similar and, despite the dramatic reduction in vacation time, the data indicate that my stress level was markedly lower while working as a school reviewer. The stress inherent in the role bears consideration when examining the principalship.
Chapter 6: The Voices of Other Principals

This chapter will provide information on the perspectives of the principalship by practitioners (principal participants) working in each of the four Anglophone school districts in New Brunswick. The pool of potential participants was established from the 39 schools that I, as lead school reviewer, had worked with through the administration of the school review process. I interviewed 12 principals from the four Anglophone school districts. Participants were selected to reflect various school sizes and configurations within the province. The “participant demographics” section in chapter 3 describes the process in more detail.

The chapter content which follows will provide an overview of the data gathered from the school review questions followed by a discussion of the emergent themes. After this I will discuss the themes which emerged from the research question. The next section will focus on the narrative, which will combine the data from the school review and research questions and will be used to provide an overview of the role using the perspectives of the participating principals. The final section will identify the autoethnographic insight derived from the principal participant responses.

The Interviews

Prior to the interviews being conducted, job descriptions from each of the districts were examined. Despite some variability between districts, the fundamental components outlined in the job descriptions are similar. For all postings, a combination of educational accreditations and numerous practical skills are included in the description of the role. Prior to each interview, principals were asked to review their actual job postings. Six of the 12 participants were able to locate and review their own postings. Of the remaining
six participants, four were provided with similar postings from their respective districts. Two others participants chose to be interviewed without reviewing any postings. During the interview data analysis, access to the postings did not seem to influence the participant responses.

Interviews were conducted using the 15 administrative forum questions established for use during the school review process, with the addition of a final research question: “How does your role, as principal, compare with what was described in the job posting?” As discussed in chapter 4, these questions were designed to touch on all aspects of the principalship as outlined in the school review instrument.

Before we proceed further it is important to note that data analysis suggests responses from principal participants were similar to that of my personal interview as principal. The interviews with other principal participants resulted in answers to the school review questions focused on the institutional role, while responses to the research question delved more into the practical, day-to-day, role. Much as I had done in my interview, principal participants tended to answer the school review questions in a very formal almost dispassionate way, as though they were being interviewed by a news reporter.

School Review Questions: Institutional Overview of the Role

The text below provides an overview of the information provided from the school review questions. This information emanates from the 12 external principal participants interviews and is used to provide a brief overview of the institutionally prescribed role.

Question 1 asked the principals, how do you use the vision, mission, and values to guide and support student learning? The SIP was collaboratively developed (4), guides
all decisions (4), including challenging decisions (1), and is goal oriented (3). One school principal noted that the SIP was student focused. Identified challenges included the requirement to align with district office as well as issues with achieving staff buy-in.

Question 2 asked what process and data did you use to create the current SIP? Ten principals noted a focus on school, district and provincial data to inform planning. Five principals noted the importance of ongoing monitoring to determine progress toward identified goals, with five specifying the importance of the ESST in monitoring. Within this, one school noted a combined CLT and ESST. Four principals identified a team oriented approach. Four principals noted a goal oriented approach, with four others identifying a student focused SIP. It was noted that a difference in clientele (First Nation, behavioural, exceptionalities) influenced SIP priorities. Finally, one other noted the need to align with the district plan but also identified this as a potential challenge.

Question 3 asked how the principal accesses input into decisions that have implications for change throughout the school community. Teams (6) were noted as the primary mechanism of gaining input with the ESST specified on five occasions, the CLT four, and the need to access parent input through input also noted four times. Only two principals noted attempting to access student input. Finally, it was offered that the prevalence of ESST input could be considered as a response to the need to ensure an inclusionary environment for all learners.

Question 4 asked how do you as principal keep the staff, parents/guardians, and community informed? A variety of means were mentioned including, email (7), websites (6) with three other social media modes noted (Twitter, Facebook, and video messages), for a total of nine, talk mail and SynerVoice were identified (5), newsletters and memos
(5), calls (4), staff sharing information (4), and meetings identified under this banner four times. The term team was used twice with both mentions noting the use of ESST to share information. It was interesting to note that electronic communications were more prevalent in the data than direct face to face communications.

Question 5 asked about the established school teams and how the principal monitored the effectiveness of team practices and their impact on student learning and behaviour. The ESST was identified as having a role in monitoring the impact on student learning at nine occurrences, with two principals directly noting it as the key to effective monitoring. Grade level teams were noted eight times. Seven principals noted that meeting minutes were kept and shared. Six principals identified direct attendance at meetings to monitor and support team efficacy. The CLT’s role in monitoring progress was mentioned six times, with subject level teams being mentioned in a similar light five times. In larger schools the principals noted the need to delegate these responsibilities to SPRs and/or department heads. Sadly, in four cases the principals identified weak PLC structures.

Question 6 asked principals, how do you ensure that teachers are teaching the curriculum and using best practices in instruction and assessment? Eight principals identified walkthroughs as the primary mechanism to ensure teachers were teaching the curriculum and using best practices. Dialogue and conferencing were identified by seven participants. Seven principals mentioned the formal district process, with five noting a focus on D contract teachers. Only three principals mentioned a data focus in this area, and only one principal identified themselves as curriculum leader. Challenges were numerous in this area. Four principals noted attending to walkthroughs as challenging (in
two small schools due to teaching load and in two large schools due to other demands). Time supporting and dealing with struggling teachers was identified as a challenge by three principals, and a lack of knowledge of the diverse curricula mentioned in one other case.

Question 7 inquired about how the ESS Team supports teachers in the school. Ten principals noted the role of ESST in ensuring effective communication and collaboration, with two of these respondents specifying the need for effective reciprocal communication. Seven principals identified co-teaching and coaching, six noted ESST as being important to supporting teacher professional growth and thereby helping them better support individual student needs. When discussing needs, six principals identified the ESST role in supporting academic needs and six citing behavioural needs. Six others noted the role of the ESST in ensuring that the school was goal directed, specifically working to help support SIP goals. Finally, five principals noted the importance of the ESST in PLP planning. Once again there were several challenges noted in this area. Five principals noted the use of a referral system to triage, three identified the need to bring in district mentors to support necessary growth in this area, two cited a lack of experience on staff, and two other principals working in small schools noted a reluctant staff, with one specifying a challenging staff member as creating concerns in this area. One principal admitted that the EST-R still wrote the plans for teachers with another feeling the need to mention that the PLP is a legal document.

Question 8 asked if teachers are taking primary responsibility for teaching students with diverse needs and ensuring appropriate accommodations, modifications, interventions, and/or supports are in place? Six principals noted that the ESST support
teachers were taking the lead, but they were still in transition. Shared decision-making and collaboration were identified six times, with three specifically using the term shared decision-making. Four principals stated that this was the expectation, alluding to the fact that the school teams were on the path, but had not reached this expectation. Four notations referencing lesson plans were also recorded with one speaking directly to the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) plans. The reluctance for teachers to get on board was identified with the challenges associated with high clientele being specified by four participants.

Questions 9 asked principals about the factors they considered when making teaching assignments and scheduling decisions. Eleven principals noted consideration of teacher expertise and training, with 10 stating they gave teachers the opportunity to share their teaching preferences, and four noting that teacher experience influenced scheduling decisions. Challenges with struggling teachers were mentioned with four participants noting they moved teachers in the best interests of the students, despite teacher preference otherwise.

Question 10 inquired about the ways principals provided ongoing feedback (formal and informal) for staff regarding their performance. Eight principals spoke about formal D contract evaluations as being a mechanism to provide feedback, with seven noting the importance of walkthroughs in providing feedback. Informal feedback was noted by five participants. Finally, teacher self-evaluation was identified by four participants, with Danielson’s Framework being specified twice under this category. Interestingly, only one principal noted peer and team support under this category. Two of
the large school principals once again noted the need to delegate responsibilities to SPRs and department heads.

Question 11 asked how principals promote continuous professional growth and the supports in place for staff members new to a subject area or assignment, or who are struggling. Eight principals identified mentoring as a means to promote growth. Seven principals spoke about providing access to professional learning opportunities and information and sessions for staff. Seven principals spoke about supporting struggling teachers and staff. Within this, two principals identified that the supports were provided directly by them. Two of these mentions of support included support being provided to those new to a subject area or assignment. Financial support was mentioned five times in terms of helping source finances to help provide teachers with access to PL sessions. Finally, support through team dialogue was identified four times.

Question 12 examined the ways that the principal worked to build leadership capacity on staff. There were a number of mechanisms identified, including teams (5), informal support (5), encouraging staff to replace absent administrators (5), encouraging potential leaders to apply to the leadership development program (4), suggesting membership on the CLT (4), and promoting ongoing study (4). There were several challenges noted under this category, including the reluctance of staff to engage in leadership opportunities, a lack of teacher confidence, and teachers stating overtly that this was not a part of their role. On two occasions the principals identified that promoting leadership was embedded in the SIP.

Question 13 asked, what are some of the ways that you ensure you are current in your understanding of current pedagogy and methodologies and how do you share and/or
promote this with your staff? Eleven principals noted ongoing reading and study, seven stated that they shared current research, and six spoke of team meetings being used to share and learn. District and provincial PL was mentioned four times, and three principals identified sharing readings and information with staff. One principal noted that non-teaching principals are challenged in this area, offering that the further away one is from engaging in the actual practice (temporally), the harder it becomes to remain current.

Question 14 asked, what does inclusion look like in your school and what is your role in promoting inclusionary practices? Participants mentioned school groups five times as a mechanism to promote inclusion. Four principals cited student-led initiatives. There were also four principals whose responses focused on the topic of sexual orientation. Principals did note concerns in this area, with four asking if we are doing enough. Another two participants specified growing high-needs populations as creating challenges.

Question 15 asked principals how they provide staff members with thanks and other recognition for contributions and accomplishments. All 12 participants identified activities in this area. All 12 principals identified providing individual notes and cards to staff members, six mentioned meetings with recognitions and celebrations of individual accomplishments, five identified sending recognitions via email, five spoke of personal dialogue, and three identified offering tokens of appreciation to various staff members. Four principals also stated that they wanted to do more but found that time was a challenge.
School Review Data Themes

The themes were identified through the same data coding process established for the previous participants. Inserted below are the themes, content, and frequency counts used to support the themes.

Teaming

Principals highlighted teams when answering eight of the 15 questions (2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, and 15). It is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that there are effective teaming structures in place at the school. Staff members need to be aware of these structures and use them as a mechanism to communicate. In order to be effective, these teaming structures should be collaboratively developed. This helps ensure staff buy-in. All major decisions should be discussed at the team level, and teams will provide input to inform most major decisions. Major decisions would be those associated with on-site operation and school-based policies.

The value of the ESST was identified by 10 participants. The importance in ensuring effective communication and collaboration was noted by all 10, with two noting their role in promoting effective reciprocal communication. Co-teaching and coaching (7), supporting teacher growth and individual student needs (6), supporting SIP goals (6), and leading PLP planning (5) were also highlighted.

One principal specifically stated that “ESST is of primary importance with learning and behaviour” (P1, large, 6–8, female, q. 5). Another similarly noted, “The ESST team is, for lack of a better term, our backbone to support those students in need” (P10, small, 6–12, male, q. 7). In large schools, EST-G and EST-R were seen as specialists who, specifically in the case of EST-Rs, had supervisory obligations. Both the
EST-G and EST-R were seen as having administrative obligations associated with their respective roles. EST-R attended to the needs of students with exceptionalities, or worked in conjunction with the principal to support those individuals working directly with these students (EAs and teachers). EST-G duties were more focused on the needs of students with social/emotional issues. It is important to note that principals identified supporting student transitions as a key aspect of their role. These transitions included those within the school (grade to grade), between schools, school to life, and school to work.

Data

Ten principals noted that all major decisions should be evidence based and data driven, although some noted a lack of skill in this area. All principals noted the need to use a diversity of school, district, provincial, formative, and summative data to inform ongoing progress toward identified SIP goals. They noted that the monitoring of SIP priorities generally occurred through the Core Leadership and Educational Support Service Teams. In cases where discussions were focused on students with exceptionalities, Educational Support Services Team members, with expertise in specific areas, were encouraged by principals to provide input and to lead where appropriate.

Communication

All principals indicated that communication was a key aspect of their role. One of the participants, working in a small multi-configuration school, identified the value of reciprocal communication. When speaking of leadership and effective communications he stated,

When you talk about leadership capacity, this has to come with the ability to communicate with all other staff and feel comfortable to share your opinions and
to understand that each teacher in this building is a smart, intelligent individual that has a lot to offer. If you give them the opportunity to share, it doesn’t have be a complicated kind of system. (P8, small, 6–8, male, q. 12)

Communication included formal and informal contacts with all key stakeholders. Interview data indicate that direct communications with students and parents, by the principal, occurred more often in small schools. In larger schools, where there were management obligations associated with larger student populations and larger facilities, it was indicated that principals would generally delegate some of these responsibilities to vice-principals and/or SPRs.

Principals were consistent in noting the need to ensure effective communication networks be established and maintained. These include within school (staff and students) and beyond school (parents, guardians and external stakeholders). Seven participants offered that electronic technologies, including email and websites, although adding potentially effective communication tools, also tended to be labour intensive. Several principals noted challenges with the sheer volume of emails which needed their attention. One participant identified the challenge of email communications, noting how it adds to the other duties associated with the role:

Something has to give; either the 70 or 80 emails that come in, or the attendance policy for staff now that I have to check up on a weekly basis. It’s all of that stuff – that administrative stuff – that the administrator has to do. These are things you have to do, it’s not like you have a choice; you can’t download it to somebody else. But at the same time, it takes you away from being in classes and doing the things you need to do with the teachers and having dialogue with teachers and
seeing the instruction and making the observations and providing support. (P6, medium, K–8, female, q. 16)

**Support to Staff**

Principals spoke about providing ongoing support to staff members. Support included the need to support and encourage collaboration, promote professional development, administering to walkthroughs and providing feedback to teachers, promoting leadership opportunities, and offering thanks and recognitions to staff members.

Six principals spoke overtly of collaboration extending beyond meetings. Once again, the ESST was noted as being key, particularly when assisting staff members to address the needs of students with exceptionalities. Support included advising on lesson plans to help teachers and educational assistants address the needs of challenging and/or reluctant learners. Several principals spoke of the challenges of dealing with students who have severe academic challenges and behavioural needs. It was noted that teachers need ongoing training to address growing systemic requirements. In several instances, it was added that the obligations, schools are being asked to address, are often beyond the skills and expertise of those on staff.

The need to generate materials and administer professional development sessions was another obligation shared by several principals. Two spoke directly about this in terms of challenges, while others simply identified it as an obligation. According to the New Brunswick *Education Act* (1997) section 28(2)e, principals are required to ensure that teachers have access to a variety of professional development opportunities. In all but one case, principals spoke of perpetual ongoing study to improve their own personal
practice. They also spoke about providing the aforementioned access to teachers.

Providing access for teachers occurred in two ways: directly, with principals providing professional development (PD) sessions themselves, or indirectly, by sharing resources and articles, and by facilitating teacher access to professional learning sessions.

Two other challenges were identified in this area. One principal noted,

A lot of our PD this year was district or provincially driven and, therefore, did not relate well to our work. We didn’t have a lot of choice there, but when we did have choice they (PD sessions) were always related back to results. (P11, large, K–8, male, q. 11)

Another principal was direct, indicating a specific challenge associated with providing ongoing PD opportunities for staff members: “That is a tough one, because the staff here, when it comes to PD, they want it during the day. They don’t want it after school” (P12, medium, K–5, female, q. 11). This reluctance is associated with the fact that there is no contractual obligation for teachers to attend PD sessions as part of a staff meeting. Some principals were asked by staff to put the professional learning content at the end of staff meetings. In these cases, those who were interested in exercising their contractual right to opt out could do so. Thankfully, participants indicated these occurrences, although a reality, are rare.

The desire for more site-based autonomy when it came to the selection of PD topics was noted. This afforded principals the opportunity to provide staff development sessions tailored to address the needs of their school population. When struggling staff members were seen as unwilling to participate in professional growth opportunities, rather than simply struggling, principals at all levels noted the enormous amount of time
needed to address these individual circumstances. Seven principals discussed supporting staff members who were struggling with personal and/or professional issues. In four of these instances, support was provided directly by the principal. Two of these cases resulted in the teacher being moved to a new grade level or assignment. Notably, these principals added that supporting other staff members who were struggling, although invaluable, necessitated a great deal of time and effort on the part of the principal. This was one of the major stressors noted by some principals.

Another interesting challenge remains for principals themselves. Despite being obligated to provide access to PL sessions, or in many cases personally provide training sessions for staff, a lack of pre- and in-service training for principals was noted. One principal, who received training while working in another jurisdiction, said he felt better prepared when he became a principal because his training was different from that provided in the New Brunswick context. He stated specifically,

I did not receive my leadership training here in this province. I received it someplace else, and the training was night and day. I worked in another province for two years. Each of these years, we spent a week learning about the role of the principal. This included doing role plays while acting as a principal. It’s such a complicated job, that I really question, “Are we preparing our future administrators for the role that they’re about to take on?” … The training program (from the other province) helped prepare me for the role by using real role plays. I still remember some of those role plays because, when I look back, I can say that has since happened in my own office. In these cases, I felt I was very prepared because I had practised. The first time a parent stands up and starts yelling and
screaming at you, and F U, and F this, I mean, if you haven’t had any other role play … you’re not going to handle it properly. (P5, small, K–8, male, q. 16)

Specific to the promotion of ongoing professional growth, principals were consistent in citing the value of walkthroughs, with eight noting that they were invaluable. Effective walkthrough processes included conferencing. In two large schools, principals reiterated the necessity of delegating many of these responsibilities to others, citing an unfamiliarity with some of the curricula and, more often, temporal constraints that contributed to the necessity of sharing this responsibility. Five principals, working in small and medium-sized schools, spoke of personally attending to walkthroughs.

Interestingly, when speaking of walkthroughs, two small-school principals cited the same temporal challenges. Given their teaching obligations, finding the time to attend to walkthroughs was challenging. Size was a prohibitive factor in these cases. With no one else to delegate this responsibility to, segments of staff were not provided feedback on their teaching. Also, without the luxury of deferring to others with expertise in specific curricular areas, small-school principals were charged with attending to walkthroughs and providing feedback to those instructing in all curricular areas. One principal noted that this was even more challenging in schools with multi-grade configurations. In several cases, it was noted that district specialists in areas such as French or music were providing additional support, observing and providing feedback to teachers. Regardless of the method, all principals noted the value of some form of in-class observation and feedback mechanism to support ongoing teacher growth, although many cited challenges attending to this on a regular basis. Seven principals shared a variety concerns associated with walkthroughs and overall staff development. These principals identified the
tremendous amount of effort needed to support staff members who were struggling. In large schools, the obligation to complete walkthroughs and provide mentoring and support was often delegated to SPRs and/or department heads. In some smaller schools, this obligation was supported through access to district specialists. In others, providing these supports became the principal’s obligation. Time was noted as prohibitive in these cases.

The promotion of leadership opportunities was also an area of discussion. Many voiced the idea that supporting and promoting ongoing leadership opportunities for staff members was inherent in the role. Five of 12 principals noted that they used their own personal absences to provide opportunities for different staff members to get a taste of administration. In one large school, this opportunity was generally afforded to the SPRs, although, as the principal pointed out, teachers were often reluctant to assume such positions. He added, “Whenever admin is out, we always ask an SPR to come in to replace. In some cases, even the SPRs lacked interest. When it’s becoming too much, we ask another staff member” (P9, large, 9–12, male, q. 12). Three other principals noted that staff members were similarly reluctant. This is indicative that the role can be challenging at times, even for those already in leadership positions.

Four principals specified encouraging teacher participation in leadership development programs. With that, principals shared that staff members often rejected this suggestion. The reluctance of staff members to assume formal leadership positions was identified. In one case a principal shared the reluctance of some staff members to even be viewed as “leaders.” Furthermore, seeing the principal deal with conflict, which is inherent in the role, contributes to the reluctance of staff members to aspire to the
principal’s role. Principal participants noted they felt an obligation to encourage the sharing of leadership opportunities and provide training and support for teachers. In an interesting contrast, the data support that despite being asked to provide leadership development for staff members, there is little in the way of ongoing leadership development training opportunities for principals. A recent study focused on the principalship in Prince Edward Island offered similar conclusions. In the study the author identified several reluctance factors for aspirants including a lack of: succession planning at the district level; formal support structures; knowledge about the role, and “a lack of confidence or uncertainty in their abilities to do the job” (McIsaac, 2015, p. 157). One New Brunswick principal encapsulated some of these concerns when he offered, “it’s such a complicated job that I really question “are we preparing our future administrators for the role that they’re about to take on?” I question this, given the lack of training and experience they really need to step into the role.” (P5, small, K–8, male, q. 16)

All principals noted ongoing work to recognize the efforts of staff members who worked to contribute to the school community beyond the scope of their normal role, and acknowledging those who had accomplished something notable. All principals described sending cards, notes, emails, or having one-on-one dialogues to recognize and/or support colleagues. Six others noted offering formal recognitions during staff meetings. In one case, the principal noted that formal recognitions were no longer provided during staff meetings; doing so in the past had created a rift, since some staff members had become jealous. Consequently, this practice had been discontinued.
The Research Question: Prevailing Themes

When asked the research question, how the role outlined in the job posting compared to the actual role in practice, principals provided a more realistic representation of the practical daily realities of the role. Four prevailing themes emerged from the research question: management versus educational leadership, the actual role being indescribable, challenges, and communications. I will discuss each of these in turn.

Management versus Leadership

I was once told that the term *versus* created a negative dichotomous relationship that could be viewed as adversarial. Throughout this thesis, I have deliberately avoided the use of this word, but in this specific context, the use is intentional. Many principals noted the challenges associated with the ever-increasing number of managerial functions associated with the role. In fact, nine of the 12 respondents noted, overtly, that the management function was overrunning the valuable and necessary leadership function. Six principals were very direct in stating that there were too many plans and too much paperwork to deal with. I could attempt to offer my own perceptions, but it would be more appropriate in this context to allow the voices of others to speak. Several quotations could have been used to represent the voices of the respondents, but this one seems to best encapsulate the challenge of balancing management with leadership:

I almost feel … no not almost feel, you act almost like a CEO manager of the building. We really feel, even my own vice-principals would say, we really and truly feel … we are managers of the building. I don’t know if we call ourselves educational leaders. Are we confident we know what’s going on? Yes. But are we the driving force behind the everyday happening in classrooms and in
understanding what’s happening on the regular basis? I would say no, because of the many distractions that happen in this job … the many meetings take place in the run of the day. Your day begins, and not the way that you may have planned. There’s many discussions with teachers and staff. You are managing a big building with parents and students. To meet the needs of students and parents today is challenging. We are seen to be the hub for everything from mental health, sexual health, and drugs, and we are supposed to solve all the problems. We don’t have a lot of those services within our building, so we’re expected to have the answers to support a lot of people. Meanwhile, you are trying to instill the culture of the academics, involvement, and citizenship. (P2, large, 9–12, female, q. 16)

Another principal expressed similar sentiments:

I find it heavier towards management now. I feel more like a school manager than a school leader a lot of the time. The finance part of it is also starting to hit too, because we’re trying to tackle some really big projects here at the school. When you tackle those big projects it’s a lot of fundraising, a lot of meeting with community partners, and it’s sourcing a lot of grant applications to support those types of things. That’s not really built into the expectations for a principal, but it’s still stuff that you have to do. So you’re trying to do all the things that are in your contract, or in your personal expectations, but then you have to do all those extras if you want to move things forward. (P11, medium, 6–8, male, q. 16)

One principal noted a similarly precarious balance, offering the following, “If you look at the pillars of the current standards, it’s the educational leadership stuff that I find myself struggling with in terms of how to push that along” (P3, small, K–5, female, q. 16)
It was not an inability to lead that was mentioned, but the challenge of trying to balance the leadership obligations with the numerous other demands. Another colleague spoke directly about working in a small-school setting and how this creates issues for her when she tried to act as an instructional leader:

The instructional leadership component is still a bit of a challenge. Time is a challenge. I’m doing scheduling at the beginning of the year, and am looking at myself saying, “Should I keep this amount of time open while going through other people’s schedules?” I am asking myself, “Am I going to be a good instructional literacy leader when I’m teaching the whole time that literacy is going on in the school? … We’re not really given the time needed to be good instructional leaders, and I think until recently we weren’t talking enough about instructional leadership at all. (P7, medium, K–5, female, q. 16)

A principal of a medium-sized school shared similar systemic concerns about a lack of focus on actual leadership at the systemic level – both district and provincial. She spoke of her job posting and interview, and how she had walked into the role with certain expectations related to leadership. She said, “Coming into the job, in an elementary school, you know that you’re going to be teaching. The job posting was for a teaching principal.” As she termed it, “The job posting wants you to be an instructional leader, but the district does not seem to be focused on this.” She added, “I would like to hear more talk of instructional leadership and use our time at admin meetings for that, but I still don’t know what my whole role is” (P6, medium, K–8, female, q. 16).

The final word goes to yet another principal, who spoke of the challenge of balancing the overarching demands of the role by stating,
Management is my biggest frustration right now, because I’m trying to pack everything into our work day and I also need to have balance for our family. I don’t want my kids saying, “Who’s this guy that walks in at 7 o’clock every night because he lives at the school?” (P11, medium, 6–8, male, q. 16)

This last quotation actually evoked a visceral response from me as a participant researcher and principal. I have always tried to prioritize family, but, similar to my colleague, have found the demands of my work role have contributed to personal stressors. On more than one occasion, my work life has created challenges in my personal life. The challenge of balancing the numerous demands, including the management obligations, with the need to be an educational leader and the many other added duties has created stressors which have trickled into my personal and parental life.

**Indescribable Role**

When asked the final research question, every respondent paused before replying. Eight of the 12 respondents stated that the actual role was indescribable. One respondent said, “Any job description would only cover 10% of the role” (P5, small, K–8, male, q. 16). Another said, “There is no way to be able to describe it fully and accurately. There’s just no way. You’d have to have a full two-three-page description of the job itself,” adding, “but that’s just scratching the surface of what the job is all about” (P4, large, 6–8, male, q. 16). Another respondent spoke of the daily dynamics, which lack any predictability. After noting that it is impossible to fully describe the role, one principal added:

The way to describe it is to expect the unexpected. When you’re driving to work in the morning, you know what our staffing should look like for the day but, if it
doesn’t look like that, what’s your contingency plan? So, you have to always try to be a step ahead of what could happen. (P11, medium, 6–8, male, q. 4)

In this specific instance, the principal was citing his inability to access a replacement teacher and a replacement educational assistant on the day of the interview. The principal and vice-principal worked directly, actually teaching classes, and indirectly, seeking support from other colleagues on staff, to ensure that student needs were met. When asked if this was unusual, the principal described the uniqueness of each day. He added that “everybody wants a piece of your time.” When asked again if he could describe the actual role, he offered, “Triage is probably the best description. You’re always asking, Is it a red, yellow, or green? – and the greens have to wait” (P11, medium, 6–8, male, q. 16). He described red as a major issue requiring that everything else stop while it is addressed – and went on to note that everyone feels that their issues are red.

The lack of perception about the role, mentioned previously, is indicated by the misconception of what others feel needs to be prioritized. This principal went on to note that his prioritization differs dramatically from that of others, for whom “the perception is probably 50% red, 25% yellow, and 25% green.” He went on to state,

The reality, if I had to rate it, is probably 15% red, 35% yellow, and 50% green … When I think of yellow I think of something that, if I don’t deal with it fairly quickly, it’s going to become a red. Preventative maintenance is better than trying to correct it after the fact. It’s a lot easier to put out the fires before they get big, letting them fester, or letting them burn. Red is major discipline, maybe it’s even affecting the overall learning environment, where the other kids are unable to learn. So that’s the red for me, when the other 20 kids in the classrooms suffer
because one child is choosing to act in certain way, or not act in a certain way.

Actual prioritization is about protecting the learning environment for the teacher and for the other kids. (P11, medium, 6–8, male, q. 16)

The lack of perception about what constitutes an actual crisis parallels the pervasive misconceptions about the role.

As noted previously, on the day of this particular interview, the principal had two staff members absent without replacements. He and his vice-principal covered several classes and then taught their own classes. The principal conveyed that, upon his return to the office, there were over 20 contacts (emails, phone calls, and direct staff requests) that required his direct follow-up. He added six staff members were lined up, requesting his immediate attention. This is the reality of his role.

I could not help but draw an interesting parallel about his reality to a children’s story. My two-year-old son has a children’s book about a truck that gets stuck in the mud (Scherlte & McElmurry, 2016). When the anthropomorphic truck cries for help, nobody responds. They don’t respond because the truck hadn’t helped others in the past. The line the children’s author offers is, “Nobody heard, or nobody cared.” Having worked with this principal, I know that the needs of the staff were attended to. In fact, I would hazard the guess that oftentimes the needs of the staff were attended to at the principal’s expense. The parallel I would like to draw is that if nobody knew of his plight that day, the overwhelming number of requests would be understandable. However, I know first-hand that most staff members knew the principal was thoroughly and completely in triage mode. Add to this the fact that the majority of the requests demanding his immediate attention were not reds. Therefore, since it was not a case of nobody knowing the
circumstances, it can only be surmised that “nobody cared.” Perhaps, more appropriate for this thesis, they did not have any comprehension of what the actual role entails. This short vignette leads us suitably to the next category: challenges.

**Challenges**

When answering the research question, all principals spoke of the challenges associated with the role. As was mentioned, four specifically noted that there is a lack of ongoing post appointment training to help deal with challenges and the changing role dynamics which are often prompted by policy developments. Some challenges, such as finding the time to attend to all of the duties, seemed to be pervasive. With this challenge being noted, the data indicate that the way in which the challenge of time manifests is contingent on the setting. One principal, who had worked in several schools of varying sizes and configurations schools, encapsulated this, stating emphatically, “All schools are different!” (P5, small, K–8, male, q. 16).

**School size.** The data indicate that school size is an extremely important factor in determining which daily challenges the principal will confront. One principal working in a small school linked many of the challenges to school size. She spoke of the staff lacking skills in certain areas and also mentioned an accompanying unwillingness of some staff members to engage in ongoing improvement, noting “Sometimes you get resistance and sometimes their knowledge base is maybe not as strong as it needs to be” (P3, small, K–5, female, q. 16). Another principal working in a small school expressed similar sentiments offering, “That is a challenge on a small staff. There aren’t people in the building at this time who have any interest in pursuing formal leadership” (P6, medium, K–8, q. 12).
Further exacerbating this problem is the inability of small-school principals to attend to walkthroughs. Walkthroughs are one of the most effective mechanisms principals can use to facilitate the professional growth of staff (Downey, 2007). Principals, working in small schools, noted that teaching and administrative obligations, coupled with the necessity of managing student behaviours, created enormous challenges to conducting formal walkthroughs and providing constructive feedback. They shared that the majority of feedback occurring within small-school structures is informal.

Principals working in large schools noted similar challenges, although the data indicate the origin of these challenges is different from those of their small-school counterparts. One large-school principal stated,

The challenge is that everything is operating within time constraints. There’s the large number of teachers we have here and, with the number of things going on, it’s hard to keep track. With this, it’s really hard to judge the impact (of actions) on student learning. (P9, large, K–12, male, q. 7)

Another principal asserted that it was a challenge to provide the feedback, give constructive criticism, and offer suggestions … All of that, to a certain extent, can really impede the amount of relationship building you can do, because you’re so tied to trying to get all of the other stuff done. Trying to get this report done and that report done. All of this adds to the challenges, especially when you’re getting three or four emails, on the same thing, from the same person. There’s a level of frustration. (P6, medium, K–8, female, q. 16)

Those who are struggling. Frustration was not limited to these administrative systemic issues. Principals also identified the challenges associated with supporting staff
members and students with personal struggles. This was a facet of the role that seven participants noted as obligatory. These struggles occurred in a variety of areas. One principal noted the time it takes to address the “challenges of students with high needs, specifically autism and behavioural challenges” (P6, medium, K–8, female, q. 7). Six other respondents echoed this struggle. A lack of training and limited access to specialists to address the growing systemic needs was also identified by participants. One principal specified students with severe needs and identified some explicit concerns specific to what she termed, “behaviour kids and high-needs students.” As to this specific segment of the student population, she said,

I don’t want to say they are challenging, but they seem to get angry a lot easier than most children. We are working on the Zones of Regulation with groups of students. We have groups for our students that definitely need to learn their zones. You always have challenges, but we are doing the best that we can. (P3, small, K–5, female, q. 7)

One principal identified an additional challenge he observed as a non-teaching administrator when he stated, “The further away from teaching classes, the greater the challenges of knowing the issues faced by the teachers. This includes the knowing the diverse curricula and understanding the behavioural challenges” (P4, large, 6–8, male, q. 13).

In fact, seven principal participants stated overtly that dealing with staff and students who are struggling creates time management issues. These principals affirmed that working with these individuals, although invaluable, was extremely time consuming and caused stress when they were trying to attend to the many other obligations
associated with the role. Dealing with struggling staff and students was not the only variable associated with the scarcity of time.

**Time.** All principals noted that time as a challenge. Some spoke of how the scarcity of time made it impossible to maintain a positive work–life balance. As one principal put it,

Maintaining a work and family balance is a challenge. As soon as I get the kids to bed then I’m back to work; whether literally back at the school, working on my email, doing some reading, or whatever it might be. It works okay because my wife is also a teacher, so she has that same workload and mentality, but I couldn’t imagine doing this job with a non-teacher spouse. (P11, medium, 6–8, male, q. 16)

Eight principals termed the role as “all-encompassing.” The following short vignette, from one of the principal participants, is illustrative of the potentially all-encompassing nature of the role. This principal shared a story about his vacation. He began by saying, “You’re always on.” After making this statement, he went on to describe what that actually meant for him, relating the following:

I even found myself working most of the time during the summer. One day, I said to my son, who is starting school this year, “I’ll take you anywhere you want to go for a vacation. Think of where you want to go for the summer vacation.” I’m thinking, he’s a five-year-old little boy. He’s going to say Disneyland or something like that. He’s big into dinosaurs, so he said, “I want to go to the Museum of National History in Philadelphia.” I was, like, “Okay, sure.” “They have the world’s largest intact Tyrannosaurus Rex.” So I said, “Sure, we’ll go
down there.” So we go on the road. I am driving and he’s sitting in the back seat sleeping. My wife is sitting in the front seat sleeping. My two-year-old is sleeping in the back. My daughter’s in the back, and she’s sleeping as well. So here I am, driving down the freeway in New Jersey, thinking about school. If I’m not talking about something else, I’m just thinking about school. This is part of the job, I think. (P11, medium, 6–8, male, q. 16)

Communications

Communications were discussed earlier in this chapter. Six principals noted the challenge of dealing with too many plans and too much paperwork, which, although directly associated with the management function, also required an enormous amount of effort in terms of ongoing communications. These types of management communications included getting clarification on the systemic requirements specific to grant applications, and providing interim and summative reports including documentation to prove adherence to spending guidelines. Several principals noted the ongoing assistance of district personnel in managing these demands, but several also noted an undue level of complexity in the system (i.e., red tape).

Five other principals mentioned communications in reference to other areas. Two of these principals noted the challenge of emails and the overabundance of electronic correspondence. As a principal, and an external observer/evaluator, I have witnessed the increasing demands associated with communication. It is often stated that the intent of technology is to lighten the societal workload and allow for greater efficiency and more downtime for workers. Throughout my own work experience as principal, my administration of 39 reviews as LSR, and the interviews with the 12 participant principals
for this study, not once have I heard anyone say that we have approached this efficiency. To the contrary, nine principal participants noted the increasing administrative workload occurring concurrently with advances in technology and, specifically, advances in electronic communication technologies.

**Final Narrative**

The final narrative is provided to synthesize the perspectives of others working in the role. The narrative will also be used to provide a description of the role, utilizing the voices of principals working in a diversity of school contexts. In order for the final narrative to actually accomplish synthesis while also recognizing some of the site based factors which influence the practical role in diverse settings, this fictional narrative utilizes the voice of a principal who has worked at all levels, elementary middle and high and at different sized schools. The principal is being asked to describe the role of the principal. Because the answers provided for the school review questions and the research question spoke to the role in different ways they remained separate in the previous dialogue. The fictional narrative will be used to synthesize the themes which were identified as follows:

- School Review Questions (institutional role) - Teaming, Data, Communications and Support to Staff.
- Research Question (practical role) – Management versus Leadership, Indescribable Role, Challenges and Communications.

For the benefit of the reader, themes are identified throughout the text in bold font.

*Principal:* I must begin by saying I have a distinct perspective. Over the course of my career, I have worked as a principal in three very different schools. I started my
administrative career as a small rural school principal. After this I worked at a medium-sized middle school. The past few years I have been working at a large urban high school. These varied experiences afford me a familiarity with the role as it functions in different sized and configured schools.

It is actually easy to describe the job in general terms. It is when you go beyond the general description and begin to look at the role as it operates in different venues that defining it becomes complex. [Indescribable role] To explain, the job descriptions provide a broad overview of the role and include the generic job requirements. You would find these types of descriptions in almost any job posting. The similarities are situated in the overall responsibilities all principals are required to attend to. The job descriptions outline these responsibilities in general terms. Our responsibilities begin with ensuring effective communications are established. They include ensuring that effective communications occur between home and school, as well as ensuring that communication systems within school are established and are understood by all staff. This is only one aspect of the role. There are many others outlined in the job description.

The problem is that the job descriptions only scratch the surface. For instance, when you look at the example I provided, communications, I can attest to the fact that communications have become increasingly complex over the past 10 years. There are more demands in both the volume of communications we receive and the expectations for immediacy of response. [Challenges] The numerous school stakeholders now have greater access to school personnel, which creates issues for teachers and administrators. Most people would not understand that there are very different communications obligations at each school level. As an elementary principal, I was always working to
ensure that teachers had the skills and the inclination to maintain home–school contact. Most of the communication at this level was associated with academics, although there were exceptions. I found the communication more complex at the middle level, because issues and concerns seemed to grow along with the students. In my current role at the high school level, I find the intensity of communications increases further. Often this intensity is associated with more serious student behavioural challenges, but you also have academic considerations, which increases the pressure. At the high school level, you are working to ensure that students who have ongoing struggles, both academically and behaviourally, have the skills and supports they need to transition within school and from school to school, school to work, or school to life. While attending to the needs of struggling learners, principals also have to guarantee that graduation requirements and transitions for all students, including the average and advanced learners, are well managed. Data is used to inform the School Improvement Plan and also identify individual student needs. The problem is you need a person on staff who is skilled in data analysis. You also need the time to gather, analyze and implement actions based on the needs identified in the data. For example, our teacher perception survey data indicated that we are not meeting the needs of advanced learners. I have observed the struggles of teachers to meet the needs of advanced learners while working at all levels. At my most recent high school placement, although we worked diligently to meet the needs of the high-achieving students, we still feel that we are not meeting the needs of these students. We have worked hard to gather the data to identify them, but we are so challenged to provide appropriate accommodations and modifications for the struggling students that we often fail to address the needs for the advanced learners;
providing what the department calls stretch learning opportunities. I have witnessed increasing demands on schools over the years. Even the most skilled teachers sometimes struggle to address the growing range of student needs in their classrooms. Class composition seems to have changed dramatically over my tenure as principal. I am not sure why. It could be a reliance on technology, the breakdown of the nuclear family, or other environmental factors like genetically modified foods or a lack of access to nutrient-rich foods. Regardless of the reasons, the composition of the class in front of the teacher has drastically changed. A normal class, if I can say that, used to consist of one or two struggling students, with the majority of the class operating at an average level and one or two high achievers. More recently, I have found that teachers still have the one or two high achievers to attend to, but there are increasingly more students with severe needs and fewer “average” students. This creates challenges for teachers. When the teacher is unable to meet the needs of the students, the students often become frustrated and act out. This is when these challenges trickle into my role in the form of behavioural issues.

As principal, I am obligated to ensure that the students’ needs are met, regardless of the grade or ability. ESST is invaluable in this respect. [Teaming] Our EST-R works with medically fragile students and those with intellectual and academic challenges. In some cases, they request my support to help advance the practice of teachers who lack the skill or the inclination to diversify their planning and instruction to meet the diverse needs in their classes. [Support to staff] When teachers fail to diversify their instruction, despite being provided ESST support, these teachers become my responsibility. In my
experience these situations are extremely time consuming and detract from my ability to address the other obligations associated with my role. [Time]

Regardless of the teachers’ ability to deal with an increasingly varied student population I believe that guidance has also become increasingly important. When I began my career, guidance counselors were primarily focused on career planning and supporting student transitions. Guidance counselors, or Educational Support Teachers – Guidance (EST-G) as they are now known, are increasingly obligated to focus on assisting those students with behavioural challenges and help support teachers. When they are challenged to do this, these obligations fall to me. [Support to staff] This includes supporting students with severe psychological disorders such as oppositional defiant disorder, reactive attachment disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and a host of other conditions. When interventions fail, as they often do, these students fall under my mandate as principal. In most cases, I work in conjunction with the resource and guidance teachers to provide access to needed supports from agencies external to the school. This is a very laborious obligation. In the worst cases, these students are dealt with punitively.

In New Brunswick, there have been some areas where they are using an Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) model to provide support for students with severe needs. This model works by having all the players from the various institutions come together at the table to collaboratively establish a plan. These include social workers, OT, PT, counsellors, psychologists, law enforcement officials, and anyone else involved with the student. I am told this system works very well. Currently, we are not afforded access to the ISD model in our district, so I am often called upon to coordinate services, ensure
the Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) are in place, meet with parents, and, in the worst-case scenarios, suspend students. This aspect of my role is challenging, especially when you consider I am also managing a large facility with a high-needs student population.

Many of these obligations are delineated in policy 322 but would never be evident in a job description. In fact they couldn’t be. If you were to write a job description that encompassed the role, it would be enormous. If obligated to do so, district HR would be overwhelmed, because an accurate description would have to include many of the site-based factors that those working outside of the school would not be aware of. For example, when I was working in a small rural school my job required more one-on-one dialogue with students, parents, teachers, and community members. Working in a medium-sized middle school, I dealt more with parent committees, such as Home and School and, Parent School Support Committee (PSSC), but was able to rely more on the teachers and the vice-principal to look after some of the other aspects of communication. I was also able to delegate much of the behaviour management to the vice-principal in the medium-sized school. While working there I dealt only with suspendable items. Suspensions were rare, perhaps because the school had a relatively affluent student population. Finally, in my current role as a large-school principal, I delegate almost all the student behaviour management to my vice-principals. That said, I have an overabundance of administrative duties to attend to. [Management versus leadership]

The school is large, and management includes working with facilities, maintenance, purchasing, budget and accounting, resource allocation, and other administrative items, all of which consume the majority of my day.
Added to this, I also receive an enormous number of emails daily. I usually receive upwards of 200 per day. [Communications] If I let it, email correspondence would consume my day. [Time] With all of the administrative duties to deal with, I find it challenging to be in touch with what is actually happening in the classrooms. I rely on my VPs and SPRs to ensure that the instructional aspects of the school are functioning well. I hate to admit it, but in this context they are the actual educational leaders. I used to operate on an open-door policy, but can’t now. In this venue, my administrative assistant is invaluable in acting as a filter for what gets through to me. If I had an open-door policy, like I had at the small school, I would fail. The facility would fail. I would never have spoken this directly in the past, but I am in my final two years and am not worried about the consequences.

I have been listening to the CBC morning show recently, and the New Brunswick education system has been a hot topic. On one occasion, an educational panel was speaking about teachers’ inability to speak publicly about the system. The ministerial representative on the panel said that this was not the case. At the time, I was trying to recall how many times I had been told that anything that amounted to a public criticism of the employer could lead to disciplinary action. While listening on another occasion, I heard Heather Hogan, a retired vice-principal, speaking about the challenges with classroom composition and inclusion. At the time, I was driving to work in my car thinking, She has hit the nail on the head. Then my mind defaulted to, Why couldn’t I say that? It seems the people who know the most about the principalship, and are required to lead schools, have the weakest voice in setting the systemic direction.
So, I guess when I am asked to describe the role, it’s challenging – extremely challenging. [Challenges] The system does not honour or encourage our voices. There also seems to be a lack of understanding, on the part of others in the system, about the role. Bureaucrats fail to understand that each venue is different and consequently each principalship is different. I learned this while working in several different settings and can say, with confidence, that each school was drastically different. The dominant, consistent facts are that the challenges have increased over time and each school is dramatically different. These differences make the role hard to describe in generic terms. [Indescribable role] In the small school, I was teaching and was wholly aware of what was going on with many of the students. In the large school, I have to delegate more and rely on the judgment of others to ensure that the educational components are being covered well. [Management versus leadership] I feel that the system works to overload principals at all levels. This overload takes on different but equally debilitating forms, depending on the size and level of the school. I guess if I were to sum it up in one phrase, my effectiveness is challenged by a lack of role clarity and initiative overload.

Don’t get me wrong, I love my job and enjoy the role. But I cannot say this has been true throughout my career. I found it challenging when I was raising my family. I have only rediscovered my enjoyment of the role over the past few years, now that my children have gone off to work. Now they are off on their own, I can now focus solely on the role. If it were earlier in my career, I would not apply for the principal’s position. The demands are becoming too vast.

If I were advising those considering a principalship, I would counsel them to examine their personal situation first. If their family situation allows, they should also
consider the other school-based factors. If they wanted a challenge, they could apply to work at a struggling school. This could be a school with low assessment results or one with a challenging learning environment. Turning these schools around requires that the principal work to establish trust, share the vision, maintain effective communications, and build functional teams. In the absence of effective teams, schools will struggle.

[Teaming] Most importantly, the principal has to be skilled and confident enough to make the hard decisions. If a candidate prefers the management aspects of the principalship, then they should aspire to lead a larger school. But they should be cautioned; it is rare that a novice is awarded a large-school principalship. They would likely have to cut their teeth at a smaller school, or work as a vice-principal in a large school, before being awarded one of these positions. Also, those working in a large school should ensure they have people they trust to whom they can delegate some of the educational leadership components of the role. [Teaming] [Management versus leadership] If they are unable to do this, they will likely become overwhelmed.

Regardless of the grade levels, clientele, or size of the school, principals need to ensure that the overall school vision is focused on addressing the needs of the students.

Finally, I would advise that anyone considering the principalship not go into it for the status, thanks, or remuneration. My friends who are not in education do not understand why I do the job. They tell me that, with my level of education, I could be making tons of money in the private sector. These friends, who are in retail, private industry, or even working in the government, often say to me, “Why do you do it?” I say, “You don’t do it for any other reason than you’re here to make a change for your
community.” I believe if I can invest in the kids now, then I know that they’re going to be well-educated, responsible citizens when they grow up.

I often say, the day I don’t love my job is the day I’ll quit. That’s a bit of a lie, because there are many days I don’t love my job. On these days, it is the inertia that keeps me going. On other days, it is that one staff member or student I am able to help that keeps me here. Working in a large school, I feel further removed from the actual educational leadership. As a result, I find that these moments are harder to recognize than when I worked at a smaller school. Although, I still feel like I make a difference. It just looks a lot different at a big school.

It is even more interesting when colleagues working at the district or department ask me why I do the job. I believe I get the question because most people, even those associated with education, don’t understand the role and, without understanding what we do, they will never understand why we do it. Perhaps the greatest challenge to defining the role comes from the fact that those working in the role have the weakest voice in defining what it is.

**Autoethnographic Insight**

When asked to describe the principalship, most principals said there was simply no way to describe it. The data speak to the fact that the site-based factors, which are distinct to each principalship, belie description. Participants noted that the constant accumulation of duties also contributes to the indescribable nature of the role. It is the accumulation of duties which led Bob Farrace, director of public affairs at the National Association of Secondary School Principals, to say, “The principalship, as it is currently constructed, is far too big for any one person to do” (Arnett, 2016). The
data point to a combination of factors which contribute to the inability to conclusively define the role.

Interestingly, the challenge noted above leads us to the first of two autoethnographic insights. My dialogue with several of the interview respondents noted the indescribable nature of the role and a bevy of challenges. This being said, the majority of participating principals indicated they still, generally, love the role. Given the diversity of demands and the variety of responses, perhaps a love/hate dichotomy would be a better descriptor. One of the respondents encapsulated this peculiar dichotomy when he stated, “You wouldn’t do it for any other reason than love.”

The second insight was the realization of the dramatic differences between schools. As one respondent succinctly noted, “every school is different.” I recognized there were differences, but was not aware of the scope of the differences until I examined the interview content. Participants indicated that differences in school size and configuration create different dynamics for principals which have dramatic influences on the role. Interestingly, participants noted how smaller changes in staff and student clientele can create large changes in the overall school environment. Depending on the nature of these differences, the influence can be beneficial or detrimental to the effective management and leadership of the school. Further, they can change how the role is defined in each particular context.
Chapter 7: Synthesis of Themes and Discussion

The intent of this study was to use an analytic autoethnographic approach to define the role of the principal. In this chapter, there are two main sections: synthesis of themes and discussion. In the synthesis of themes, I will present the themes and autoethnographic insights arising from the findings reported in chapters 4 to 6 using the insights provided through my perspective as a practising principal and LSR, and the perspectives of 12 other current principals. The voices of others were invaluable in ensuring that my perceptions were consistent with those of others working as principals. For the vast majority of the study, this was found to be the case. In fact, the insights provided by others vastly broadened my perspective and provided for several insights, which is a fundamental goal for any autoethnographic researcher.

The discussion section will compare my findings with the literature cited in chapter 2. Through my literature review, I identified four major categories associated with the principalship: performance, people, process, and permanence. As I conducted my interviews, I found insights into these categories interspersed throughout the content. These categories will be referenced throughout this chapter. The literature review also pointed to three main areas of focus specific to the role itself: (1) principal impact on student outcomes, (2) the evolving role throughout history, and (3) expanding duties and expectations. My discussion will address the themes that synthesize the perspectives of all participants, which provides insight into the role and how it functions in different contexts. I will also discuss the four major categories and three areas of focus as they pertain to the study.

The chapter will conclude with a final word on the role of the principal.
Synthesized Themes

The information provided by all participants added value to the study. Each participant group held a distinct perspective on the role. The principal participants held some disparate viewpoints, depending on their specific school contexts. As a result of these diverse perspectives, a variety of themes were identified. Interestingly, although there were disparate viewpoints depending on the differences in school, the majority of the identified themes were consistent and provide insight into the role. There is a distinction between “role” and “roles” that will be clarified at the conclusion of this chapter. These synthesized themes will be used to inform the actual narradigm, which will be presented in the final chapter and will be used to define the role(s) of the principal.

Inserted on the following page, in Table 7.1, are the overarching themes for all participants, the autoethnographic insights for each participant group, and a summary of the synthesized themes.
Table 7.1 Overarching Themes All Participants

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<td>Support to Staff</td>
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Combined Themes
- Collaboration and Teaming
- Inadequate Time to Address all Demands
- Support to Students
- Support to Staff
- Management versus Leadership

Autoethnographic Insights

**Chapter 4**
Differences between the institutional and practical definition of the role.

**Chapter 5**
The time stress associated with the role.

**Chapter 6**
Dramatic differences between schools – sizes, grade levels, staff and student clientele.

**Chapter 6**
Love of the role despite the challenges.

The combined themes that emerged when all data sets were considered are listed below. Following the list will be a brief description of each theme.

- Collaboration and Teaming
- Inadequate Time to Address all Demands
- Support for Staff
- Support for Students
- Management versus Leadership
Collaboration and Teaming

All participant groups spoke of collaboration and teaming in some manner. It was posed as a mechanism to communication as well as a way to collaborate on decisions, share ideas, delegate responsibility, and in some cases help the principals survive. There were several participants who noted that they utilize teams as a mechanism to share leadership opportunities. Within the study, this shared leadership approach emerged under the overall thematic heading of collaboration and teaming. The New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, through the School Review Process, adopted the approach recommended by Kilgore and Reynolds (2011) which suggested the use of a shared leadership approach through the establishment of some form of distributive leadership structure.

The term generically used in the New Brunswick context to represent groups designed to facilitate this type of leadership approach is the Core Leadership Team (CLT). The challenge for principals, when establishing this and other teaming structures, is to ensure teams function to advance student outcomes. Principals working in both large and small schools were not able to say with certainty that their teaming structures accomplished this intended goal. In the larger schools, it was noted that the sheer size of the school and numerous other obligations associated with the management of the school, pre-empted the in-depth data analysis and classroom observations needed to evidence this with any certainty. In small schools, it was the teaching and management obligations which often created challenges. The numerous obligations of the role impeded the ability of principals to participate in meetings, complete observations, and support the overall
efficacy of teams. Principals also identified staff reluctance as hindering attempts at sharing genuine leadership opportunities.

Perceptions on collaboration and teaming were varied with participants noting similarities and differences. For all participant groups, teams were used as a mechanism to promote effective communication among staff and collaborate on decisions with school-wide implications. All participant groups noted the value of the CLT which were often noted as the primary mechanism used to ensure effective communications and share leadership opportunities. As principal, I noted that the combined CLT/ESST was key to the effective functioning of the school. Examining my two main participant researcher as principal data sets, I noted that collaborating and teaming was rated much higher in my interview data than it was in my time and motion study. The time and motion study was informed directly by my practice as a small school principal, which spoke to my reality as a practising principal. I always put students as my primary focus in practice. I note this to explain that each school context is different and help situate myself, provide transparency, and elaborate on my context and practice. It was an interesting insight to note that this was not the case when I examined the principalship from the perspective as LSR. Rather than prioritizing the students, collaboration and teaming was the first rank-ordered category. My institutional perceptions of the principalship were similar for both my interviews as principal and LSR, which I have identified as being more focused on the institutional role.

Challenges associated with collaboration and teaming were identified by all groups. Examining the collaborative aspect of the role, in some circumstances it was unclear if sharing leadership opportunities was used as a legitimate mechanism to
collaborate and promote ongoing professional growth. In some circumstances, participants indicated sharing was in actuality used to support principal survival by distributing some of the overwhelming duties associated with the role. Similarly, Sugrue (2015) speculates on the validity of shared leadership as it occurs in different contexts. During my interview as principal, I noted that teams were sometimes used as a mechanism to delegate responsibility in order to survive the numerous obligations associated with the role. Principals working in larger schools identified the need to delegate a number of responsibilities in order to address the monumental demands associated with the management of large staffs and facilities. The use of teams as a survival mechanism was alluded to by other participants, but was stated less abruptly than in my instance.

One aspect of collaboration and teaming that was consistent for all groups was the importance of the Educational Support Services Team (ESST). This was noted by all principal participants. Several participants, including myself, identified this team as invaluable to the effective functioning of the school and as a support to the principal. Policy 322, the Inclusive Education Policy (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013), requires all schools to have an operational ESST. As with many other school-based responsibilities, it is ultimately the responsibility of the principal to “establish and operationalize a school-based ESS Team to provide systemic support (e.g., coordination) to classroom teachers” (section 6.10.1). This team operates under the leadership of the principal and consists of school-based staff, including EST-G and EST-R, school administrators, and other members as appropriate. It is embedded in the policy that members of the ESST work to facilitate “capacity-building
and skill development” (section 6.1.2 subsection 1). Interestingly, although this group is charged with this responsibility, the overall accountability for the administration of all school-based aspects of Policy 322 is placed on the principal. This is identified in section 6.10.1 which reads “The principal must establish and operationalize a school-based ESS Team to provide systemic support (e.g., coordination) to classroom teachers” and 6.10.2 which adds that “the school-based ESS Team must operate under the leadership of the principal.” This accountability includes overall responsibility for the generation, content, and administration of Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) as outlined in section 6.7.3. Participant data note a lack of support for this aspect of the principal’s role, indicating that both the district and provincial training has been sporadic at best.

As principal, I also noted that challenges were created by the growing administrative obligations, which at times served to overwhelm the collaborative aspect of the role. As I perceive it, effective teaming takes time. This aspect of the role was made abundantly clear from all participants. When collaboration and teaming are done effectively, the capacity of the school is expanded, which should free principals up to focus their energies on educational leadership. This should further advance teacher capacity at the school and lead to more positive outcomes for students.

The systemic challenge is to ensure that principals have the time to work with and support teams. The data support the claim that this time is not often available to principals, which leads directly to the second theme.

**Inadequate Time to Address All Demands**

Participants spoke of time. To be more precise, they spoke of inadequate time to address the numerous demands. As principal, I spoke of the diverse challenges associated
with time. These included teaching obligations, management demands, and ensuring that effective planning, instructional practices, and interventions were happening at the classroom level. As LSR, I also noted the challenges of time but was more universal in my approach, taking into consideration how differently sized and structured schools reflected on the ability of the principal to share responsibilities.

Participants identified a variety of obligations associated with the role which put a time strain on principals, many of which were categorized as challenges. In the literature review, I identified a national study conducted in the United States which noted principals working excessively long hours to address the demands of the role (Sparks, 2016). The challenges are daunting when you consider, within these long hours, the pace while on site is rapid, leading one participant to describe it “as a marathon at a sprinter’s pace” (P4, large, 6–8, male, q. 16). The results from this study indicate that principals regularly attend to work-related duties, such as email, professional study, the establishment of professional development programs and associated generation of materials after regular school hours. Rarely are these “additional duties” calculated in the actual work hours of the principal. As several principals have attested, you are always on duty.

Participating principals noted how they are asked to utilize data to ensure interventions are targeted and that they are measuring ongoing progress toward SIP goals. Once again time is a consideration. Participants reported that ensuring a data focus can be incredibly time consuming and is especially so if there is an absence of expertise on staff. In the absence of expertise, the collection and analysis of data become the responsibility of the principal.
Participating principals identified that the overall demands are different between schools, hence the mention of *roles of the principal* rather than role. For example, participants identified significant differences between large and small schools, noting that economies of scale have a significant influence on school dynamics. Large schools have larger human and physical resource bases from which to draw. This necessitates that large-school principals manage an enormous number of resources. Participants working in large schools cited the ability to delegate to others as a means to cope with these responsibilities. They also noted the potential to become disconnected from the instructional environment, especially when the role necessitated that they delegate many of the educational leadership and staff development obligations to others.

Principals leading small schools identified the challenges associated with the numerous hats they were obligated to wear. This was identified as particularly stressful when teaching responsibilities were included. As was noted in the literature review, Drea and O’Brien (2003) identify the distinct character of each principalship. Similar to the participants in this study, they distinguish between the role of the teaching principal and that of principals who do not hold additional planning and instructional obligations. They call those who do not hold teaching obligations “administrative principals.” Participants working in small schools identified challenges that arise when a principal’s obligations are split between providing instruction and addressing their vast administrative responsibilities. Recognizing this, Drea and O’Brien offer that principals working in large and small school configurations should be considered as belonging to two distinctive groups, offering that, “the responsibilities of Principal which are envisaged in the relevant legislation and guidelines appear to be predicated primarily on the role of Administrative
Principal” (p.4). They added that “Teaching Principals have the same range of functions and accountabilities” (p.4) without being provided sufficient “time and energy to devote to the managerial aspects of the role while carrying responsibility for a full class teaching load” (p. 4). Participants working in small schools offered similar sentiments noting they are obligated to manage, lead, and teach, which creates challenges. These perceptions are consistent with the context I was required to work in as a small-school principal in New Brunswick.

The data point to school configuration as having an influence on the obligations of the role. It was noted that elementary, middle, and high school configurations come with different obligations. Also, dual and multi-configuration schools were identified as creating additional stressors. In my dual-configuration context, I was asked to attend to all of the administrative obligations associated with managing a combined middle and high school. I received all correspondences associated with both configurations. I was also required to ensure that all district and provincial assessment obligations for both levels were addressed, to have knowledge of the diverse curricula at each of the seven grade levels, to provide ongoing observation, feedback, and support to teachers, and to fulfil the additional planning and instructional obligations associated with working as a teaching principal. The other teaching principals in the study noted similar challenges associated with this tripartite role – teaching, educational leadership, and administration.

There is one positive aspect associated with the principal holding additional teaching obligations: it necessitates that the principal stay in touch with the changing dynamics at play in the classroom. Several participants have noted this benefit. By holding teaching obligations, principals are able to stay current in their practice and
therefore have a full understanding of the challenges faced by teachers on a day-to-day basis. I would add that, in order for this to truly add value, teaching principals need to be provided the time, and administrative support, to teach their classes without interruption. This additional administrative support needs to be provided by a trained and capable professional who, while “in charge,” actually addresses the issues that arise while the principal is teaching. In the absence of this, the principal will be inundated with the accumulated work once their instructional obligations are completed.

Finding the time to support or manage struggling staff members was identified by all participants. This challenge was different depending on the school. Teaching principals dealing with struggling staff members while also attending to instructional obligations, needed a vast range of skills. I would submit that there are contexts where effectively addressing all of these obligations is impossible without additional support from the district and/or department. I recognize that there are limited systemic resources. I would submit that it is important for districts and departments to identify and support the site-based factors that may necessitate a deviation from the strict application of staffing norms leading to staffing allotments (called Full Time Equivalency or FTE allocations). Each full time staff member represents a 1.0 full time equivalency. If a school has 10 teachers, then the FTE amounts to 10.0. The failure to identify and accommodate specific site-based factors constitutes a situation where an established policy does not allow districts the latitude to effectively accommodate the staffing needs of individual schools.

Geography also plays a role in accessing needed supports. In the context of this study, New Brunswick is largely rural. Accessing supports in remote areas can be
contentious, and the supports that are actually provided to the schools may be diminished if travel time is included in support personnel’s time allocation.

The necessity to source additional supports for students with needs changes the temporal dynamics for the principal. In fact the temporal demands are different between schools of different grade levels. While discussing a transition from a high school principalship to one in an elementary school, one participant described going from dealing with serious drug issues to wiping noses. She went on to note that there were also serious behaviours to address, including those of students with profound difficulties, but said they were dramatically different at each respective level. It has been noted that each principalship has its own distinct characteristics for manifold reasons. Configuration is one of those factors that is not often identified but still has a dramatic influence on the daily realities and the obligations associated with the role.

**Support to Staff**

All participants noted the need to support staff. This support occurred in a variety of ways. The majority of the dialogue was focused on supporting teachers, but was not limited to them. Principals also spoke about supporting paraprofessionals such as EAs, custodians, and bus drivers. Support was identified as personal and professional, with the greater focus on professional support. Personal support included conferencing with staff members who were struggling with personal and professional stressors and helping to facilitate access to services such as the Employee Family Assistance Program and counseling.

Support also came in the form of providing thanks and recognitions for staff members who have contributed beyond their prescribed role or who have accomplished
something notable. All participants identified this as something which they made it a point to do. This type of support is not identified in the job description but was noted as important through the school review process. Often these thanks came in the form of small incentives, such as cards and gifts often purchased by the principal out of pocket.

The majority of the dialogue around support to staff was focused on supporting teacher professional growth. Walkthroughs have been identified as one of the most effective means of identifying struggling staff members and providing feedback to support ongoing professional growth. In fact, all principal participants noted the value of walkthroughs to enhancing teacher practice. Many noted the challenge of completing walkthroughs and providing the associated, and necessary, constructive feedback. In some cases, participants offered that although the walkthroughs were completed, providing feedback was regularly usurped by the intrusion of other obligations. Without the provision of constructive feedback, the walkthrough becomes an ineffective and wasteful endeavour. In large schools, the majority of the monitoring and support obligations were delegated to vice-principals or individuals holding Supplementary Positions of Responsibility (SPRs). In medium-sized schools, these tasks were often shared between principals and vice-principal(s). In some circumstances the VP or other designates worked in the office attending to managerial and disciplinary obligations while the principals completed their walkthroughs; in others, the principal chose to attend to other responsibilities and delegate staff development obligations to the VPs. In small schools, these obligations are owned wholly by the principal and completing them was consistently identified as extremely challenging. The data, supported by my experience, indicate that effectively completing walkthroughs and providing feedback for all teaching
staff is especially challenging for teaching principals. Participants working in small schools noted that it was impossible to visit classes that coincided with their own instructional time. They also noted that specific time frames designated for classroom visitations were often interrupted or pre-empted by behavioural issues that necessitated their personal and immediate attention.

Participants also identified other mechanisms used to support teacher professional growth. These included the formal teacher evaluation cycle, formal PL sessions, and district leadership development programs. Finding the time to complete formal evaluations was noted as challenging to those in small schools. Principals in large schools often delegated this obligation. Participants noted a variety of challenges with PL. In small schools principals noted that the responsibility for establishing, promoting, and administering PL sessions was often their responsibility. In larger schools, once again these obligations were often delegated. The singular, one off nature of most PL was identified as ineffective, as was the fact that the majority of the school-based PL sessions were district prescribed and, as two participants directly noted, did not serve the specific needs of their school communities.

A critical aspect of school leadership is the principal’s provision of constructive feedback to help all staff members improve their practice and to ensure ongoing staff development. The data suggest that this becomes challenging when principals are confronted with struggling or unwilling staff members. Participants noted when working with staff members who lack skills – or, even worse, the inclination – to engage in ongoing improvement, providing support becomes extremely time consuming for the principal. My experience as principal and LSR indicates that principals working to
support and/or address struggling staff members often do so at the expense of leading in other areas. This becomes painfully evident when the principal is also teaching.

Institutionally, principals are not provided the time, represented by FTE allocations, needed to effectively identify and address challenging staff members.

Finally, participating principals noted a pressure to ensure that staff receive PL and leadership opportunities, but noted little in the way of support for their learning needs beyond the district leadership development programs, which are targeted to aspiring or new principals. Fortunately, this did not deter them from actively participating in self-directed learning.

**Support to Students**

Support to students was the first category identified through my time and motion study as principal. It was interesting to note that, although an integral part of my practice, it was not tiered as high in my principal interview component, my LSR data, nor was it highly tiered for the other principal participants. This further supports the supposition that the institutional role is different from the practical role.

As principal I was intentional in prioritizing students. I worked to provide access to academic, psychological, and behavioural supports. Other participants offered similar sentiments but often subsumed this under the auspices of the challenges they faced. Participants identified increasing high-needs student populations. I have noted escalating behavioural and mental health needs over the course of my 17-year career. These include an increasing number of students with serious psychosocial and mental health needs at my home school and many other schools.
Several principal participants, and many others who I have worked with throughout the administration of the school reviews, have also noted growing psychosocial and mental health needs among their respective student populations. Elementary principals have also noted an increase in the frequency of early-onset issues. These needs pose additional challenges for principals, as students afflicted with these disorders frequently exhibit extremely negative behaviours. Often, schools are left to tend to the growing needs of all students, even those with severe psychosocial and mental health needs. These behaviours often require principals to meet with students, contact parents, complete behaviour tracking forms, and in many cases suspension documentation, as well as many other associated managerial duties. These managerial duties include attending ESST, problem solving, and behaviour committee meetings, and corresponding with districts and other external agencies to source additional supports. Once again, the value of the ESST cannot be overstated when it comes to managing the programming of students facing these challenges. Even principals with a sound ESST note that these additional obligations are inadequately resourced, creating further stressors for the principal.

Participants noted another dynamic associated with supporting high-needs student populations. The focus on struggling learners, especially those that have severe academic delays or behavioural issues, has caused increasing pressure for schools to provide advanced learners with stretch learning opportunities. Stretch learning is the provision of supplementary progressive learning opportunities for advanced learners (Andrews, 2004; Kuzmich, 2012). Irrespective of school size and configuration, principals are charged with ensuring that the needs of all learners are being addressed. In my own school
In this context, I took on the obligation of assisting students who had university aspirations with formal essay writing. I took on this additional obligation so that the regular classroom teacher could focus her attention on the remainder of the students to ensure their vastly diverse needs were met.

In sum, ensuring academic rigour and student adherence to minimal standards is a challenge given what participants have identified as the increasing needs of diverse school populations. Principals noted this as one variable confounding the ability of the principal to be deemed effective in their role. There were many other on-site factors which were identified as creating challenges for principals to effectively lead. One of these challenges lie in the overwhelming management obligations faced by principals.

**Management versus Leadership**

The dominant theme that emerged from the data was management versus educational leadership. It was noted in the previous chapter that the use of the term “versus” in this categorization is intentional. The experience identified by all participants, supported by my observations as LSR, points toward a precarious tension between these two sets of obligations. Many principals mentioned overwhelming administrative demands, which have increased concomitantly with advances in technology and the advent of the accountability movement. The data strongly indicate that these administrative demands have put restrictions on the principal’s ability to attend to the educational leadership aspects of the role.

Exacerbating problems in this precarious balance is the systemic inclination toward perpetual change. This inclination has intensified the pressure on school principals to stay current in their practice, share innovative approaches with staff, provide
training for staff, implement new initiatives, and monitor the effectiveness of each new initiative. The Irish Primary Principals’ Network (2014) has identified similar stressors in their system, noting, “Change, innovation and transformation now challenge stability and predictability as the cornerstones of our education system” (p. 7). The cornerstones they speak of are the principals themselves.

Accumulating administrative obligations have created a situation that leaves them, as many principals cited, unable to attend to some of the invaluable educational leadership functions. This inability occurred because principals felt institutional pressure to attend to other more managerial duties, including completing copious amounts of paperwork, addressing budget and accounting responsibilities, dealing with facility concerns, addressing human resource management issues, and working to address a host of other administrative duties. One principal put it succinctly, stating that working in “the front office seems to be concerned more with acting as a manager as opposed to actually being a curriculum leader” (P2, large, 9–12, female, q. 6).

Fullan (2006) echoed similar sentiments when he spoke of the numerous items that diminish the capacity of principals to actually address the educational leadership aspect of the role. He described these distractors as “bureaucratic, managerial, industrial actions and other forces that eat up time and energy at the expense of instructional and student-achievement matters” (p. 12). He added, “Proactively addressing the distractors has to be at the heart of any solution” (p. 12). Despite Fullan’s protestations, I have not witnessed any of these distractors being addressed in any effective manner. As the role has evolved, many duties have been added with few taken away.
Discussion

Data analysis pointed to several findings which aligned with the categories and themes identified through the literature review. Through the literature review, I identified four major categories associated with the principalship: performance, people, process, and permanence. As I conducted my research, I found these categories to be interspersed throughout the data. Not unlike the principalship itself, it is difficult to definitively affix each of the four Ps to a single theme. In chapter 2, I offered the premise put forth by Senge et al. (2000) that performance in complex organizations depends on the interrelationships between people. Schools are complex organizations which often make the principalship seem messy. Site-specific factors influence the ability of the principal to perform, further complicating simple categorizations. Recognizing the numerous themes and complex factors identified through the data, I will briefly discuss the four Ps in relation to the findings from this study. Then I will also discuss the study findings in relation to three areas of focus found in the literature.

Performance

The ability of a principal to enhance performance in a school context is contingent on several factors. Often performance is defined by what the school, district, and department determine to be the actual metric to measure performance. Regardless of the measure, there are manifold influences that affect the ability of the principal to facilitate performance growth.

In my literature review, I discussed Fiedler’s (1967), contingency model. This model focuses on the fit between the leader’s style and the situational favourableness. Situational favourableness includes leader-member relations, task structure, and the
leader’s position of power. If the principal’s style fits well with the situational factors, then they are often deemed effective. In this sense, performance can be linked directly to selection. Currently, in the New Brunswick context and many other jurisdictions, there is a deficiency in succession planning. Participating principals identified the fact that selection processes for principals seldom take into account the site-based factors that influence the goodness of fit, nor do they scrutinize the ability of principals to manage these site-based factors, including the people.

Under the *Education Act* (1997) section 28(2), principals are charged with promoting the ongoing professional growth of staff. Walkthroughs have been identified by principals in this study as one of the key mechanisms to promote teacher professional growth. Effective principals use walkthroughs to identify strong practices and areas needing remediation. Principal participants working in both large and small schools noted that personally attending to walkthroughs was extremely challenging. Although the overall challenge is similar, the data identify that the factors contributing to this challenge are different for large and small school principals. They show that the overwhelming demands associated with management of large facilities and the issues associated with managing large staffs necessitate that principals delegate many responsibilities. The overwhelming management demands make it virtually impossible to be in classrooms, witness the instruction, provide valuable feedback to teachers, and act as the educational leader of the school. As one large-school principal noted, “I feel more like a manager than an instructional leader.” This principal went on to add that the inability to be present in the instructional environment makes it “hard to see whether initiatives have the desired effect on student outcomes” (P9, large, 9–12 male, q. 16).
Principals toiling in small schools noted that the numerous managerial functions, coupled with teaching and supervisory obligations, make attending to walkthroughs challenging. The inability of principals to attend to walkthroughs created challenges to ensuring that the ongoing professional growth of teachers is supported. Once again, this affects the ability of principals to act as educational leaders. The data indicate that the size and configuration most amenable to the principal completing walkthroughs and providing teachers with ongoing constructive feedback is the medium-sized, single-configuration school. In these structures, the principal can choose to delegate other responsibilities to the vice-principal(s) and is therefore able to carve out the time to be in classrooms and provide formal feedback. This is not to say principals in medium-sized schools are not busy. The data indicate that principals working in medium-sized schools also have enormous demands on their time but, unlike principals working in small schools, they generally do not have teaching obligations. These teaching obligations create additional “time stress,” when preparation and instructional time is added to the numerous managerial duties associated with the role. For the purposes of clarity, I must reiterate that there is little consideration, at the institutional level, for many of the site-based factors that serve to convolute the role for many principals.

**People**

One of the most important site-based factors to consider, when examining the role of the principal, is the people. There are numerous human factors to consider when examining the role of the principal. The data, supported by my experiences as principal and LSR, indicate that the staff and student clientele are the two most important groups that influence the role of the principal.
As reported earlier, principals expend enormous amounts of time and effort when supporting struggling staff members and even more when working to address unwilling staff members. This is not a factor that is considered when principals are allocated administrative time, although it definitely influences the role. Several principals noted reluctance on behalf of some districts to effectively address staff members who are unwilling or incapable of effectively carrying out the requirements of their roles. Principals have noted this lack of action occurring even after school-based supports have been provided, performance issues documented, and improvements still not realized. Principals stated that these situations create the necessity for them to schedule for damage control. In these cases, effective scheduling often included assigning the struggling teacher a lighter course load and burdening the more skilled teachers with more challenging content and/or student clientele. Systemically, there is perception that all teachers work diligently as professionals and therefore are willing and able to manage their professional obligations independently. However, many principals have noted the necessity to “manage” struggling staff members and acknowledge the toil which accompanies the obligations of managing under-performing teachers and other challenging staff members. Staff members are not the only people principals are charged with managing. There are numerous other individuals (teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff) who require the principal’s attention. The most important of these are the students.

It has been established that the makeup of the student clientele directly influences the obligations associated with each principal’s role. A high-needs student population, or one that includes students with severe behavioural issues, creates additional obligations
for the principal. This is not often recognized at the systemic level, and sometimes is even misunderstood at the school level. The following short vignette which emerged from a dialogue with one of the principal participants is illustrative of this point.

During the administration of a forum at one of the school reviews, members of the teaching staff commented that the principal “just sat in his office” and added that they “had no idea what he actually did.” I followed up with the principal, who was managing a very challenging student clientele at the time. During our dialogue, the principal pointed to a credenza in his office and explained that it was full of student files. These were the files of many of the most challenging students within what was universally known as a challenging student population and, most importantly, they were ones for whom he took direct responsibility. All of this work was done to support the students and staff so that, as the principal framed it, “the teachers could focus on the business of actually educating the students.” When asked why the staff members were not aware of his additional work, he humbly stated that he “didn’t want to burden them.” During our conversation, he also noted that he was feeling burnt out and that his family life was suffering. I advised him to “burden his staff” by informing them of the work he actually did on their behalf. I was also fortunate to be witness to this dialogue. Upon hearing his declaration, the ESST wholly supported the exceptional, extra work that this principal was doing to support the needs of the students and staff. The staff members in attendance were incredulous at the volume of work and were apologetic for their lack of comprehension. Although they worked alongside the principal, they had no idea he was doing everything within his power to access supports for students, so that they would be able to do their jobs unencumbered by any additional obligations. The abundance of work that was happening
when he was allegedly “sitting in his office” was a revelation to the staff. This brief narrative is illustrative of the almost ubiquitous lack of understanding of the role. It is also illustrative of the demands placed on principals who are working to manage and, in this case, lead schools with high-needs populations. Finally, this narrative illustrates that lack of understanding about the role is not limited to those working outside the system and can even be found among those working alongside a principal within a school.

Several of the principal participants noted that a lack of systemic understanding of the role is exacerbated by the distance between the school and classroom environments and the decision-makers. One principal went so far to say that even he becomes disconnected from changing classroom dynamics when he does not teach. Feedback from principals also indicated that district leaders who are selecting principals rarely consider the site-based factors and the ability of principals to manage these factors. One of these challenges is the perpetually increasing management function, which the data strongly suggest is overrunning the ability of principals to effectively act as educational leaders.

Drea and O’Brien (2003) suggest we should be establishing “processes to enhance the selection and assessment of candidates for the principalship with selecting ‘leaders of learning’ in mind” (p. 14). Not managers … leaders of learning! During the principals interviews, four participants identified concerns with the selection process noting that it was almost wholly based on a singular interview. One noted having to apply and interview twice for the position she ultimately received, citing staff support and parental pressure as the catalyst to her appointment. In all of these cases, the principals felt the process was one of complete the interview, assume the role, and then go forth and
prosper. In these cases, as well as my own, the role as it is currently established includes very little external training or support provided after the appointment. There does not seem to be much to promote actual leadership development, and current principal selection does little to ensure that the selection of leaders is effective in addressing the needs of the school.

The necessity to consider any goodness of fit when selecting principals, often noted in the literature, is rarely considered. Although the system seems to be challenged to establish an effective process for principal selection, there is no absence of other policies and processes that have an effect on the role. The role of the principal is rife with policy adherence, and the data indicate that principals are bound by, and often restricted in, their role by the abundance of policies and processes they are required to abide by. As early as 1971, Richburg identified the accountability movement having its genesis in three areas, “government influence, dissatisfied public, and technological cultural influences (p. 2). Each of these influences has increased dramatically since the publication of Richburg’s white paper. The factors associated with this movement have added dramatically to role of the principal in recent years. By legislation, accountability at the school level lies ultimately with principals.

**Process**

Principals are obligated to ensure personal and staff adherence to the numerous processes delineated in policy. As outlined previously, principals operate on obligations similar to those associated with ministerial responsibility. Charging principals with ensuring that all processes are followed, and polices adhered to, may not be a realistic expectation when principals are concurrently saddled with increasing obligations in
numerous other areas. Persistently expanding management obligations was an issue identified throughout this study.

Increasing principal accountability, which has been exacerbated by the advent of modern communication technologies and increased public access to information, has led to accumulating demands on teachers and principals. These include increasing demands for teachers and principals to communicate with diverse stakeholders, as well as increased accountability to parents, supervisors, and the general public (Diosdado & Gamage, 2007a). These changes have served to add to the duties of teachers and principals without the provision of additional supports necessary to address the increasing obligations. This imbalance between demands and resources contributes to the “perfect storm in education” alluded to by Rutledge (2016). The arrival of the accountability movement has been accompanied by numerous policy changes. Many policy developments have been accompanied by associated obligations accumulating on the role of the principal without the addition of resources to support the demands.

The increasing size of school districts cited in the literature review makes it challenging for district and departmental personnel to be familiar with the demands associated with the operation of individual schools. The sheer size of the districts, which were amalgamated in 2010, was a factor which led some participants to note the need for more site-based management.

Finally, the incessant need for the addition of policies and the inclination for perpetual systemic change are factors, according to my study participants, that complicate the role of the principal. Given the aforementioned inadequate resourcing, it is evident that not all policy changes are well thought out. Williams (1995) agrees that not all
changes are well thought out, planned, and delivered in today’s schools, stating that “the failure of most attempts at change is due to the uncritical, incoherent and fragmented approach used in education” (p. 2). Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991, cited by Williams, 1995) state, “The greatest problem faced by school districts and schools is not resistance to innovation, but the fragmentation, overload, and incoherence resulting from the uncritical and uncoordinated acceptance of too many innovations” (p. 3). This perpetual change creates a potential crisis associated with the last category identified through the literature review—that of permanence.

**Permanence**

The literature review indicated that permanence, in an educational context, is associated with the identification, establishment, and maintenance of a sustainable culture of learning in the school system in the face of constant change (Hermosilla, Anderson and Mundy, 2014; Roach, Smith and Boutin, 2014; Sahlberg, 2011). The rate of change in the system creates challenges for school principals and confounds the role. It has been my experience that, with each change in government, there is a frantic push by the “new government” to adopt new policies. These new policies are established by governments more for the purposes of optics than for promoting systemic growth. The new government wishes to be perceived by the public as addressing the identified shortcomings of the previous administration. These policy changes are often unnecessary, amount to rebranding, and do little to promote actual systemic growth. For principals and schools, it is of primary importance to note that this inclination toward constant change breeds uncertainty in the system and is usually accompanied by additional obligations, without the addition of resources to address these obligations. Exacerbating the problem
is the fact that, as obligations are added, few of the previously established obligations are ever removed. This recursive cycle has led to an accumulation of policies and associated processes, the majority of which the principal is accountable for. Many of these obligations are management rather than leadership obligations that do little to actually improve teacher practice or student outcomes (Chall, 1967, cited by Ravitch 2000). Pierre Battah, certified management consultant (CMC) and a certified human resources professional (CHRP), was quoted as saying, “When you lead more and manage less, you can have a huge impact on productivity” (personal interview, November 28, 2016).

Through this study, it has become abundantly clear that the accumulation of management obligations leaves little time in the role for the principal to actually lead.

What is often forgotten at the systemic level is that schools are complex organizations, and each year as the student population changes so do the needs of the school. This perpetual change creates further challenges for the maintenance of a sustainable culture of learning in the school system, which is also in a state of constant systemic change. The dynamic nature of schools and the pressure of perpetual systemic change, coming from both within and beyond the school environment, make the task of defining the role of the principal extremely complex.

The systemic inclination for perpetual change creates challenges to permanence and, taken together with the other identified factors, contributes to the “perfect storm” for the principalship. These systemic changes become a crisis for the principalship, as well as the system en masse, when those who are responsible for providing leadership at the school level are not provided the time, training, or resources to do so.
Three Specific Areas of Focus in the Literature

There were also three main areas of focus identified through the literature review: the principal’s impact on student outcomes, the evolving role throughout history, and expanding duties and expectations. Examination of these three areas illustrate how the overall role has evolved, although it is perhaps better to say changed, over time. Evolution suggests growth and improvement. The data that emerged from the study suggest that, as the managerial demands on principals accumulate, the ability of principals to ensure their actions have an influence on student outcomes becomes more tenuous. When examining the latter two areas, it is clear that there is a direct link between the changing role of the principal and expanding duties and expectations. I will elaborate on these three factors and how they interact to influence the role.

Principal impact on student outcomes. The data indicate that principals working in large schools are challenged to accurately gauge whether they, and the school-based initiatives they support, are having an impact on student outcomes. Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) have noted that most leadership effects are in fact indirect. The provision of support to teachers and supporting teacher professional growth were identified by large-school participants as the most effective means of ensuring a positive influence on student outcomes. All principals noted that providing this necessary support in these areas has become more challenging as the managerial obligations accumulated, thereby eliminating opportunities to provide support to teachers and nullifying many indirect influences principals might have on student learning. Two principals overtly stated that they were unable to accurately determine any impact they were having on student outcomes.
The data indicate that this phenomenon is not limited to large schools. Principals working in small and medium-sized schools cited similar challenges. In fact, all participants indicated that increasing managerial obligations have detracted from the ability of the principal to function as the educational leader. Teaching principals noted their direct involvement with students through their instructional obligations afforded them a familiarity with the changing dynamics of the classroom. Teaching also allowed them to have a direct impact on the students in their classes through their instruction. This being noted, teaching principals also noted that the growing managerial obligations coupled with additional planning and instructional obligations often did not allow them to perform at their best in either role. Consequently, the principal who should, as the educational leader, model exemplary practices was not afforded the time to do so. In this way, their ability to positively influence student outcomes was also diminished.

**The Evolving Role Throughout History.** Through the literature review we discussed how the role has evolved and what factors, including how the amalgamation of districts and growth in school size has affected the role. What participants indicated was the growth in communication technologies and changes in policy development have created unintended consequences on the obligations of the role. The premises established during the literature reviews were confirmed by participants. Technology has added to the communication demands placed on principals. Concurrently, policy developments, including the accountability movement, have increased principal accountability to parents, supervisors, and the general public (Diosdado & Gamage, 2007b). These evolutions in the role have increased administrative obligations on principals, and have also put a strain on the ability of principals to act as educational leaders.
**Expanding duties and expectations.** A protracted dialogue about expanding duties and expectations would be redundant at this point. This was discussed in the literature review as well as throughout the text. Williams (1995) used an analogy that best described the current circumstance. In an article entitled “Calves, Cows and Sacred Cows,” he described an accumulation of duties accompanying each iteration of change in the system. This accumulation of duties can serve to cripple the principal’s ability to effectively lead. Reeves (2010) calls this initiative fatigue: “When the number of initiatives increase while time, resources, and emotional energy are constant, then the new initiative – no matter how well conceived or well intentioned – will receive fewer minutes, dollars, and emotional energy than its predecessors” (p. 27). When faced with this overload, principals are forced to choose what aspect of the role they will focus on, often at the expense of other aspects. Participants, through necessity, noted casting off some of the duties associated with the role, for example walkthroughs, choosing instead to focus on the management obligations. Principals felt it necessary to attend to the management obligations to ensure that they would not be perceived by district supervisors as uncaring, unresponsive, or worse still, incompetent. Through this study, I have come to the conclusion that principals cast off these duties not out of sloth or lack of ability, but more often out of the need for survival. In the best case, duties are shared. In the worst case, they are simply ignored. Previously in this text, I have noted that I have been guilty of sharing leadership responsibilities out of sheer survival. As a small-school principal with no vice-principal, working in a dual-configured school and holding teaching obligations, I have often felt the obligations of the role to be unrealistic and
therefore unmanageable. Once again, if the expectation is that principals actually lead, then the time has to be provided for them to do so.

At this point in the dialogue, it is important to reiterate that these issues are not exclusive to New Brunswick. The principals associated with this study, and many others working in other jurisdictions, have noted similar concerns. Throughout this thesis, I have noted some of the research done in Ireland which supports my findings. As early as 2003, the Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN) began identifying similar concerns occurring within their context. In March 2005, IPPN held a symposium, which included a report entitled The Challenge of Recruiting and Retaining School Leaders. The report study surveyed over 1,500 teachers across 22 countries on the “Attitudes and Aspirations towards the Role of Principal.” Of the teachers surveyed, “over half said they ‘would not apply for the post of principal at some stage in their career’, with a further fifth undecided” (IPPN, 2005, p. 1). A thought-provoking sub-category emerged from this study. Even those individuals involved “in school middle management (assistant heads), were no more likely than other teachers to apply for principalship” (p. 1). Seemingly, those closest to the role are wary of the obligations associated with it. In a 2004 survey of principals commissioned by the same group, IPPN, D’Arcy (2004) described “a worryingly high number” of principals who said they “would ‘hand back the keys in the morning’ if they were able to go back to class teaching without loss of seniority, pension and allowances” (p. 1). Similar to the principals in the study, there are many days when I would have handed back the keys, if doing so would not have come with the loss of seniority, pension, and salary.
Final Word: Role of the Principal Defined?

Earlier in the chapter I identified a distinction between the role and roles of the principal. I did this because the role has evolved into a dual role (leader and manager) for most, and a tripartite role (leader, manager, and classroom teacher) for others. Participants have noted that the dual role is becoming increasingly harder to reconcile. Participants noted the tripartite role can be considered even more challenging although it does allow the principal direct experience with the changing dynamics of the classroom. Contrarily, participants noted that teaching often amounts to one more duty added to an already saturated role. The evolution of the role includes an expansion of principal accountability and an associated accumulation of managerial responsibilities on the principal. In this regard, the evolution may actually constitute devolution. If the actual goal for the role is to have principals lead schools, rather than just manage, then it needs to be recognized that the accumulation of managerial demands on principals is inversely proportional to their ability to actually provide educational leadership.

With all this being said, several of the interview respondents, my dialogue with others in the role, and even feedback from those working in the Irish context, noted an interesting contrasting opinion. Regardless of the overwhelming challenges, some of the participating principals indicated they still, generally, love the role. Given the diversity of demands and the variety of responses, perhaps the peculiar dichotomy of love/hate would be a better descriptor. To reiterate the point made earlier by one of the respondents, “You wouldn’t do it for any other reason than love.”

Without belabouring the dialogue further, it is unmistakable; the results are worrisome. The role cannot be so complex that it is impossible to define or manage. The
literature focused on leadership succession indicates that there are diminishing numbers of applicants for vacant positions in Canada and elsewhere (IPPN, 2005). The research leads to the conclusion that the increasing demands of the role make it unappealing to many of those potential leaders who would be best equipped to effectively lead schools.

The dynamic nature and increasing obligations associated with the role makes it challenging to define. The challenge of definition is further exacerbated by the complexity of the role as it functions in different contexts. There are consistent delineated responsibilities all principals are obligated to adhere to. There are also numerous other site-based considerations which lead me to the conclusion that, depending on the context, principals are sometimes forced to decide which role: educational leader, administrator, and principal teacher to prioritize.

The next step will be to communicate the various roles through the use of narradigm. Pursuant to this goal, the narradigm presented in the next chapter will be used to provide insight into the different roles of the principal as they occur in individual contexts.
Chapter 8: The Narradigm

Throughout this thesis, I have examined the principalship from a variety of perspectives. Chapter 4 used autoethnographic information gleaned from my perspective as participant researcher and principal. Chapter 5 examined my autoethnographic perspective on the principalship from the perspective of provincial LSR. To accommodate the analytic component of Anderson’s (2006) approach, chapter 6 incorporates the voices of others, specifically termed “informants beyond the self,” through the use of interviews to access the voices of others working in the role. Chapter 7 was used to unify the emergent themes from each set of participants. Cumulatively, this content leads us to chapter 8, in which the narradigm will be used to share an overall understanding of the culture.

Throughout the thesis, several narratives have been shared to help describe aspects of the role from the perspective of each participant group. The narradigm will synthesize these perspectives and will be used to define the actual role(s) of the principal. To accommodate the dynamic nature and different aspects of the role as it is manifested in differently sized and configured schools, the narradigm will consist of a dialogue between three principals leading and/or managing small, medium, and large schools. Through these unique perspectives, the distinct characteristics of different principalships will be identified. The principals will be discussing their day – one day – working in the principal’s role. As described in chapter 3, narradigms include components of narratives and paradigms. Through this narradigm, we will acquire a better understanding of the role of the principal including the different obligations faced by those working in differently sized and configured schools.
The three fictional principals participating in the dialogue hail from separate schools. The first works at small urban elementary (K–5) school, the second at a medium-sized rural middle (6–8) school, and the third in a large urban high (9–12) school. The dialogue occurs at a restaurant, a few days before the holiday break in December.

For ease of access and readability, Principal 1 will be named Sue, Principal 2 will be named Mariam, and Principal 3 is named Luchiano. Their individual work contexts are as follows:

1. Sue is a veteran principal of a small urban elementary school, who has returned to the role after working at the district office as a supervisor for three years. She is obligated to teach 40% of her day.

2. Mariam, principal of a medium rural middle school, is new to the principalship, but has taught at the same school for the past 24 years. She is also obligated to teach one course per day equalling 20% of the day for each school semester.

3. Luchiano is a mid-career principal of a large urban high school who has worked at several differently sized and configured schools.

**The Narradigm**

Sue and Mariam are at the restaurant when Luchiano arrives. He begins by apologizing.

*Luchiano:* Sorry I’m late. I got caught up working on my emails after dismissal and totally lost track of time. If I am not careful, I could spend my whole day doing email correspondence.  **[Increased obligations]**
Sue: That’s okay, Luchiano. Mariam and I only arrived a few minutes ago. We were trying to make sure that our Christmas concerts did not overlap. With two schools in the same community, you don’t want parents with students in both schools having to choose which child to watch. [Support] [Management]

Mariam: So, are we going to do the shoptalk, before we actually talk about something else?

Luchiano: Is there anything else? [with a wry smile]

Sue: Don’t get me started.

Luchiano: I think we have to get the shoptalk out of the way first. If not, we won’t talk of anything else. Twenty minutes maximum, okay?

Sue and Mariam: Agreed!

Mariam: Who wants to go first?

Luchiano: I think you should, Mariam. Working in the same district, it is hard not to hear about some of the challenges you are confronting with your staff. Thank goodness we all live near one another. When I worked in the middle school, I didn’t have anyone to talk to and it stressed me out. I think that is why my first marriage failed. At least Sarah knows what my day looks like. I don’t think we would make it either, if she was not a teacher.

Mariam: Me too. Even though he is retired, Bob knows I need some time to let off some steam before I can function as a partner. We have a term. We call it “emotional vomiting.” I come home and let go of everything that has happened in the day, then we have supper. If I do not do this, I dwell on what I am going to face in the
morning and I will not relax, or sleep, all night. [Potential for principal burnout]

*Sue*: So let it go Mariam … vomit away.

*Mariam*: Well, you both know I inherited a couple of challenging staff members when I assumed the role. I must be crazy, taking this on this late in my career. Between the custodian and the teacher battling, the majority of the staff are stressed. I don’t know which person is at fault. Both have their foibles, but seem fair when I speak with them. It’s when they leave the office that it all breaks loose. The custodian is good with most people, but works to rule when there is anything associated with this teacher. The teacher, for her part, is very particular and therefore spots the extra things the custodian does for others and then feels affronted. The previous principal had a number of strengths, but confronting challenging staff members wasn’t one of them. The conflict has divided the staff and has also created a very stressful environment. [Struggling or challenging staff]

*Sue*: Have you contacted the district for support?

*Mariam*: I have, but they are spread thin and, despite my file being two inches thick, I am told they are dealing with some serious 701 infractions at other schools and told me they will get to me as soon as things settle down. I may be retired by that time.

[Laughter]

*Luchiano*: I had a similar problem when I worked at the elementary school. It is amazing how one or two staff members can influence the overall environment.

*Mariam*: How did you manage it?
Luchiano: Similar to you, after repeated dialogue with the two staff members I documented and then approached the district for support. It did not have any effect. [Lack of knowledge and support from beyond the school]

Mariam: How did you solve it?

Luchiano: Well, unfortunately I didn’t. One of the teachers accepted a transfer and things settled down from there. Interestingly, this was my first principalship, and everyone thought I had done a great job changing the school climate. Despite my best efforts, I didn’t really change much. I was there for five years and the change came after the teacher left. I worked my tail off to mediate the dispute, but the real change came when the teacher transferred. I am told things did not go any better at her next placement. It is amazing how much time and effort I put into this one issue and how one person can change the whole school dynamic. [Increasing obligations]

Sue: You have that right! I would never have believed it if I had not seen it myself.

Mariam: Enough of that … How are things with you, Sue?

Sue: I am getting my feet under me. I was away from the role for a brief three years, but had totally forgotten how busy it is. Not that I was not busy at the district. It was just a different kind of busy. At the district, I could pretty much control my schedule. At the school, I never know what is coming at me. I like to plan. Each day I come in with a plan, and each day something comes up that totally derails my plan. If it isn’t a discipline issue, it is something that comes up with my class. I was working in ESST for the past three years and would go into schools to consult on student cases. I found that a lot easier than planning for the diverse
needs in my room. I tried to establish a schedule so I would not be overwhelmed, but found there aren’t enough hours in the day to plan, teach, manage, supervise, and support others. It is the support that I cannot get to … I have teachers who want feedback, and I am not able to get to them because I am either teaching or managing behaviours. I also have students with severe needs in my class. Really severe needs! [Increasing student mental health and behavioural needs]

Trying to source supports for these kids is unbelievable. The Integrated Service Delivery Model has been successful in other areas, and they are planning to implement it in our district. It is still problematic because they are planning to take from existing resource and guidance time at the schools to fill “new” positions at the district to implement the model. I don’t think that this is a good idea. The closer I got to the classroom, the more I realized the flaws in this approach. [Decision makers too far removed from the front lines]

*Luchiano:* Wow! It sounds like you have your hands full.

*Sue:* I sure do. I didn’t appreciate the severity of the needs until I started working in my school. We have a high-needs population, even at the elementary level. As the years go by, more and more students are coming in with serious diagnoses. [Increasing student mental health and behavioural needs]

This year we had 30 come in to kindergarten. Over half of them do not have any number or letter recognition. Several of the parents said overtly, “It is your job to educate them, not mine.” All I can say is wow! All this for a few more dollars each year. [Potential for burnout] [Challenges leading to reluctant leaders]
Luchiano: I know the feeling. I have several students with severe diagnoses and they aren’t little tykes. Several of the EAs have refused work, because they are legitimately afraid for their personal well-being. I have asked my resource teacher to manage the EAs, but she is struggling. [Distributive leadership] She is torn because she feels these students have a right to be in the class, but she is legitimately afraid of what they might do in class. It’s a Catch-22. For my part, I spend most of my time looking after facility and HR issues. Now I am also forced to support her in managing the EAs. [Support to staff] As it stands I do all of my emails after everyone leaves. I can’t remember when I was actually in a classroom to simply observe the instruction and offer constructive feedback. My VPs do this for me. They are the educational leaders and I am the manager. [Management not educational leadership] I feel like I do well, but am considering going to a smaller school where I have fewer management issues. I know of a middle school that will be opening up soon. The principal is retiring and the full-time VP is a friend of mine. He has no interest in being the principal and is encouraging me to throw my hat in the ring. [Reluctant leaders] I am seriously considering it. What do you both think?

Mariam: I would love that. I have a small teaching load, but find it challenging. Our school administrative time is 1.1, so when I am teaching the VP is sometimes available. This doesn’t seem to be enough. I never have time to observe teachers and offer constructive feedback. [Inability to support teacher growth due to other demands] I really had no idea how much extra work there would be when I applied. I spend three weeks during my “summer off” revising our schedule. We
have French Immersion and that complicates the schedule. It is challenging to get
good French teachers. Teachers come to us for a couple of years and, when the
opportunity arises for a placement in the city, they transfer out. I am afraid the
change to early immersion will dismantle our staff. Having staff continuity is hard
in a rural school. This is really going to throw a wrench in the works. I expect I
will be doing interviews well into next summer. After these are completed, I’ll do
the schedule, based on who I can get. [Management] Three teachers have already
told me they are putting in transfer requests. I guess this is just one more thing to
manage.

*Sue:* Yes, it is a precarious balance on a good day. I cannot do justice to everything and
still teach. I haven’t completed very many walkthroughs, even though the teachers
want to hear my insights on the special-needs clientele. Given my past experience,
they see me as an expert. I feel I have a lot to offer, but simply do not have the
time to offer it. [Inability to support teacher growth due to other demands]

*Luchiano:* I am lucky that our VPs and SPRs are good. The VPs complete their
walkthroughs and offer feedback, unless the behaviours get out of hand then they
are stuck in the office with me. My SPRs are pretty good at sharing which
teachers need support. [Distributive leadership] We have a lot of skill on staff,
but still have to triage to ensure that everyone gets the support they need. I guess
it is sharing leadership, but I must say I feel disconnected from the pedagogy. It is
all a trade-off.

*Mariam:* It is. I feel if I could get some of the other minutiae off my plate, I could be a
great leader. Right now, I am just trying to manage those two staff members.
[Struggling or challenging staff] After that is taken care of, I will try and focus on some walkthroughs. [Supporting teacher professional growth] I wonder if I could recommend a transfer without breaching any ethical guidelines.

_Sue:_ I would tread lightly on that one Mariam. If someone feels a transfer is being recommended as a punitive action, you may be the one answering to superiors.

_Luchiano:_ I agree. If you aren’t careful, staffing issues can bite you. Our school has a reputation of saving some of those who aren’t up to snuff, consequently the district sends us many of these people to save. [Struggling staff members]

[Decision makers too far removed from the front lines] To be honest, it is starting to burn me out. [Potential for principal burnout] When the VPs struggle to help these staff members, they become my responsibility. [Increasing obligations] These people have become a major undertaking. At least I have the VPs and SPRs for support. I don’t know how you do it, Sue. They are all yours.

_Sue:_ Yes, sometimes I am so rushed I begin to question my decisions. Like I said, I don’t feel I have the time to support the teachers like I should. [Support to staff]

Maybe when things settle down, I will.

_Mariam:_ Do they ever … settle down, I mean? [All laugh]

**Synopsis**

Several characteristics of the principal role identified by the participants in this study were identified through this brief dialogue. These include how increasing management obligations are overrunning the ability of principals to act as educational leaders. These increasing management obligations were identified as detracting from the time that principals have to provide leadership opportunities and support ongoing teacher growth.
Schools are dealing with increasing student mental health and behavioural needs, which adds to the obligations on principals and teachers to ensure these growing needs are supported. Additional duties associated with policy developments have also added to the role. As was noted, each policy development tends to add to the obligations on schools with few obligations being taken away. The narradigm identifies how these increasing obligations are felt by principals and teachers. Study participants noted support for well-intended policies such as the inclusion policy, but noted they are often under-resourced at the school level, adding to the duties of principals and teachers. The narradigm is illustrative of how school staff members struggle to address these additional duties and how this can add to the role of the principal when they are obligated to provide support.

Throughout this study it was noted that working to assist struggling, less skilled, or challenging staff is extremely time consuming for the principal.

The inclusion of students who struggle with severe behavioural challenges has increased obligations of the principal to manage these behaviours. The narradigm provides insight into how these and other challenges lead to the potential for principal burnout and also contribute to the reluctance of potential leaders to vie for principal positions. The narradigm is also illustrative of the fact that the distributive leadership approach, although beneficial, may be used as a mechanism to survive, rather than share genuine leadership opportunities. Finally, the narradigm indicates that systemic decision makers may be too far removed from the actual practice to make informed decisions which will result in improved outcomes for students. All of these challenges may be leading to a crisis in the principalship if not mitigated.
Chapter 9: The Role of the Principal Defined? Recommendations and Conclusions

Due to the complexity of the data in this study, numerous themes have emerged. Multiple perspectives came from myself as participant researcher LSR, myself as participant researcher principal, and the voices of 12 others working in the role. This complexity illuminated findings that I had not previously observed in the literature. Although situational factors are often discussed in relation to the principalship, rarely have the practical influence of size and configuration been identified as a confounding factor in defining the practical role. In this study, this complexity, beyond that simply associated with the institutional obligations of the role, has become abundantly clear. The narradigm was used to illustrate the similarities and differences inherent within the role. Regardless of the structural differences and the different obligations associated with principals working in these different structures, the data consistently speak to the role as being one of exceptional busyness. This being said, while working as a principal, I never had the luxury of time to read an expansive text, such as the one that precedes this final chapter. I always appreciated being provided with an executive summary to help accommodate the time constraints I persistently worked under. Consequently, an overview and the subsequent recommendations will be presented in an executive summary format, allowing for principals, aspirants to the role, and others working in the system to have the opportunity to hear the recommendations and digest the results without labouring to access the time to read the whole of the previous text.

It would be impossible and impractical to discuss all of the themes that emerged through the dialogue with each of the participants. It is evident from the narradigm that the role is extremely complex and demanding and that site-specific factors influence the
definition of the role in each respective context. These site-based obligations are not well understood systemically and are contingent on the size, configuration, staff, and student population of the school and many other factors.

In general, the principalship is a dual role made up of management and educational leadership obligations. Participants noted that the management aspects of the role are usurping the more valuable educational leadership functions. Large-school principalships are dominated by management. This necessitates that principals delegate the educational leadership aspects of the role to vice-principals, SPRs, and department heads. In small schools, where teaching obligations are added, the role becomes tripartite. This adds complexity to the role and often necessitates the principal triage, prioritizing some aspects of the role over others. How this prioritization is manifested varies highly across principals and schools.

Another challenge associated with the role is addressing policies which are well thought out in theory but often under-resourced in practice. Participants indicated that inclusion may be the most challenging policy to accommodate due to a lack of training and inadequate resourcing.

The most prevalent challenge emerging from the data is a lack of time to address the numerous and expanding obligations of the role. These expanding obligations are exacerbated by increasing student mental health and behavioural needs and what participants identified as a lack of training and support for both teachers and principals to address these growing needs.
Recommendations to Aspiring and Current Principals

The primary factor aspirants to the role and current principals have to consider is the actual choice to lead. I include current principals in this decision because the data, as well as my experiences, indicate the principalship has changed so dramatically over the past 18 years (my formal time in the system) that some principals, including myself, are questioning their desire to stay in the role. The choice to pursue the principalship can be influenced by a myriad of factors. Any aspirant considering the role should take into account their familial obligations, the differing dynamics in large, medium, and small schools, and site-based factors, including struggling staff and challenging student clientele which would serve to influence the goodness of fit between the principal and the school.

Regarding familial obligations, two study participants specifically noted waiting until their children were grown before applying. They identified personal and familial obligations as influencing their decision. One participant noted that she could only pursue the role when she could “fully commit to it.” She identified the overt support and encouragement of staff as being the catalyst for her application. I am recommending that principals examine their personal familial situation to determine if the principal’s role will be a good fit with their lifestyle. They should consider the age and number of the children, parental responsibilities, whether the children are at home or are away at school, and how the role may influence other areas of life, for example recreational time. Aspirants should also consider their ability to manage stress and separate work life from personal life. One principal participant noted an inability to separate work from home.
life, noting that the fact that his wife is a teacher allows for a level of understanding of
the role that others may not have, making their relationship functional.

Aspirants to the role, as well as those principals working in the role who are
looking for a change of venue, need to understand the practical requirements of the role
and that the obligations vary dramatically in different sized and configured schools. Data
from principal participants indicated that large school structures are often dominated by
the management function, with the educational leadership function often delegated to
vice-principals and SPRs. In these schools, the vice-principals usually hold the overall
responsibility for student behaviour management. As one principal participant working in
a large school pointed out, “Your position will likely necessitate that you are far removed
from the actual classroom practice” (P9, large, 9–12, male, q. 5).

The data indicate that principals working in medium-sized and small schools will
likely have to attend to the management aspects of the role, as well as the educational
leadership component. In medium-sized schools with a vice-principal on staff, some of
these educational leadership obligations can be delegated. In small schools, this becomes
more challenging. Principals working in small schools are obligated to fulfill both
management and educational leadership functions in addition to carrying out assigned
teaching duties. This tripartite role creates time management challenges. Several
participants, myself included, have noted this necessitates that the principal triage,
prioritizing certain obligations over others. This is not optimal, but the data indicate that
this is the current reality given the requirements of the role as well as limited temporal,
human, and physical resources within the system. I am recommending that those
contemplating a principalship take into consideration the myriad of factors associated
with the selection of a school including the size and structure of the school. For example, when considering school size, aspirants who enjoy teaching and being actively engaged with students may want to avoid a large school principalship, which often gravitates more toward management than direct interaction with students. Those who have not held a principalship may not have to worry about the large school dynamics at the beginning of their administrative career. New aspirants will likely have to work as a principal in a small school, or as a vice-principal in a large school, before attaining a principalship in a large school. Regardless of the path, any aspirant to a large-school principalship needs to understand the overwhelming managerial aspect of the role.

Aspirants to the role also need to examine the characteristics of the staff and student clientele. If they are asked to work in a school with a struggling staff or challenging student clientele, then they need to be able to address contentious issues and have direct dialogue with a number of stakeholders, including staff members, students, and parents, to address such issues. If attending to such obligations is not in an aspirants’ nature, then they may want to consider other opportunities.

Many of the factors that can serve to influence the goodness of fit between the principal and the school are not often considered when aspirants are applying for a position. Those interested in the principalship often take the first position available to them. I am recommending that aspirants consider the various site-based factors when choosing to apply for a principal, which can be summarized under the auspices of goodness of fit when choosing to apply.

Similarly, the districts do not seem to give strong consideration to goodness of fit when making principal selections. As four principal participants noted, the selection
process is often limited to a one-off interview process which does not consider site-based factors when selecting the best candidate. This leads me directly to the recommendations to districts and the province.

**Recommendations for Districts and the Province**

Districts selection committees should also consider the myriad of factors which influence the fit between the principal and the school. For example, a docile, introverted principal candidate will likely struggle to change the dynamics of a school with challenging and/or confrontational staff. This should be a factor to consider when selecting the best candidate for a principal position.

Several years ago, when I was applying for a principalship, the district sent out a representative to survey staff members, asking them to describe the characteristics a principal would need to effectively lead the school. I was bolstered, not because I thought this gave me any advantage as an applicant, but because I believed they were beginning to listen to individuals on the front lines regarding what the role actually entailed. This was something I had not witnessed previously and, unfortunately, have not observed since.

To ensure goodness of fit between the principal and the school, it is recommended that districts complete staff surveys to determine the needs of the school and use the information from these surveys to improve the chances of a positive fit between the candidate and the school. Studies from other jurisdictions also recommend that principal training and selection incorporate a consideration of site-specific factors. Results from the 7 System Leadership Study (7SLS), an ongoing research study that began in 2012, focused on the principalship in seven different countries and contexts, shows that “many
principals are advocating for more localized, contextualized and needs-based training and development” (Harris & Jones, 2015, p. 113). The data in my study indicate these needs are not being met. There are several other recommendations that, I suggest, would make the role more manageable. These include a better understanding of the role, targeted leadership development, and system-level recommendations related to training and succession.

**Better Understanding of the Role**

This study has illustrated the fact that there are both generic institutional aspects of the role and site-based aspects which influence the role. The province should recognize the differences between disparately sized and configured schools when speaking of the principalship and, because districts are charged with tending to the actual selection process, they need to be more intentional in defining the site-based requirements of the role to better inform the selection process. Therefore, my first recommendation to districts and the provincial government is the development of a more accurate definition of the practical role as it occurs in each context. I am recommending they be attentive to the site-based factors which influence school dynamics and the role of the principal, and make an effort to use this understanding to better inform principal selection.

Partly due to this lack of definition, participants defined the principalship role as indescribable. This lack of descriptive clarity has been noted elsewhere. In a study commissioned by the IPPN, Drea and O’Brien (2003) identified the lack of descriptive clarity in the Irish context and identified one of the challenges associated with this lack of clarity stating:
Because of a lack of a detailed statement of the day to day tasks which are or are not part of a Principal’s role, there is no satisfactory mechanism to determine what is a legitimate duty to be undertaken by the Principal. In the absence of such a statement, Principals come under pressure to take on a variety of tasks which are not central to the key elements of the role. (p. 3)

Participants in this study have noted similar concerns, identifying insufficient time to address the numerous and varied responsibilities associated with the role.

Through this study, I have identified that there are differences between the institutionally prescribed role and the actual role as it operates in practice. The institutionally prescribed role includes the generic aspects of the role all principals are bound by. A complication arising from the lack of understanding about the role and the disparate, practical, site-based factors that operate to make each principalship different is the lack of understanding of the distinct administrative (FTE) needs in each area. Along with districts and provinces making an effort to understand the different site-based factors which influence each principalship, I am recommending they use this understanding to modify the process for FTE allotments to accommodate the diverse needs. By further defining the role, districts and departmental leaders will be able to make more informed systemic decisions which take into consideration the differences between schools when allocating FTE and other resources. Further comprehension of the role may also facilitate district and departmental leaders making systemic decisions which eliminate some of the managerial tasks that take away from the ability of principals to address the leadership aspects of the role. An accurate definition of the role necessitates district and
departmental leaders examine the following site-based factors that influence each principalship:

- the necessity of large-school principals acting as managers,
- the tripartite obligations of small-school principals (manager, educational leader, and teacher),
- a lack of additional support for schools with high needs and large “at risk” and low socio-economic status populations,
- supports to address growing mental health and behavioural needs,
- the recognition of the additional duties associated with different grade leveled and multi-configured schools,
- the identification of schools with new, struggling, or transitory staff members—sometimes identified as vulnerable schools.

To the final point listed above, in my capacity as LSR, I was involved in conversations regarding what Willms and Porter (2002) have identified as vulnerable schools. During these conversations, departmental officials recognized the distinct nature of each school and the fact that, due to the aforementioned factors, some schools require additional FTE or administrative support. This would allow principals the time to lead targeted interventions and facilitate positive change.

Once these factors have been identified, I am recommending that staffing allotments (FTE) for administrative time be adjusted or additional administrative supports provided to accommodate some of the previously unrecognized challenges faced by principals in differently sized and configured schools.
Finally, it is suggested that individuals working at the district and department commit to working as teachers in classrooms for one week on an annual basis. This would ensure that those who are making systemic decisions are aware of the current daily realities and site-based factors faced by principals and teachers.

Before leaving the topic of resource allocation, one final point should be clarified. I am recommending that upcoming changes in educational funding allocations be focused on putting more human and physical resources schools in rather than adding personnel at the district and departmental levels. Adding resources elsewhere in the system does little to support the effectiveness of the prescribed school leader (the principal) who in the current climate, *is forced to manage and challenged to lead* [emphasis added]. In the final analysis, we need to decide if we want principals to lead or simply manage. Currently, the obligations of the role gravitate toward the latter. To improve the situation in schools, resources need to be accessible to those working at the schools; otherwise, increases in education funding will not assist those working with an increasingly challenging clientele.

**Leadership Development**

Participants identified what they perceived to be a fragmented process for leadership development in the province. They noted that each district operates components of their own leadership development programs, while the province is responsible for administering the actual principals’ certificates and is charged with the task of ensuring that principal certifications meet the legislated criteria. The certification requirements to become a New Brunswick principal are set out in *Policy 610* (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2006). These include belonging to their District
Leadership Development Program and completion of six modules, including three compulsory ones: Legal Aspects 1, Legal Aspects 2, and School Improvement Planning/School Performance Review. The other three modules are required at the discretion of each individual district. The content and rigour required to complete these leadership development programs are currently highly variable between districts, hence my determination that the programming between districts is fragmented. Further, this certification requires the completion of three graduate-level university courses in current administrative theory, supervision of instruction, and assessment and evaluation in education, all of which provide some academic preparation for the institutional requirements of the role. Although principals are required to complete a practicum before receiving the principal’s certificate it was my experience that this practicum generally consists of the principals simply acting in a position before receiving their certification. In my situation, I was never told of any practicum and worked as principal for two years before actually earning my principal’s certificate. In fact, I was unaware of this requirement until it was pointed out to me by a trusted advisor during the thesis writing process. In fact, I don’t know of anyone who did a formal practicum, although I do know many who have worked in acting positions before they were given the formal title of principal. Discussions with the lead for certification at the Department indicated that anyone who served a full year working as a vice-principal prior to a principal appointment was considered to have completed their practicum (personal correspondence, August 30, 2017). I also do not know of many principals who were provided with intensive site-specific training (during a practicum or while in service)
focused on improving their ability to address the needs of her or his specific school community.

Similar concerns were raised by McIsaac (2015) in his study of principalship aspirations of teachers in Prince Edward Island. In his study he uses the term *career development ignorance* to describe the lack of knowledge about the role by aspirants and district leaders who are in charge of succession planning and preparation of new principals.

Participants indicated the majority of their leadership training, following their appointment, was self–directed. Once principals have completed their principal certification, there is no obligation for them to continue training unless they feel a personal desire or moral imperative to do so. I learned that 11 of the 12 principal participants cited perpetual and rigorous ongoing study as inherent in their practice, but also noted that this ongoing study was almost wholly self-directed and self-funded. I am recommending that districts and the province focus more on pre- and in-service training for principals. This includes the establishment of a learning community for principals, beginning with the formation of an online principal portal site, where principals can share knowledge and promising practices.

To address the issues associated with a lack of ongoing leadership training and fragmentation between district training programs, study participants recommended the province unify the leadership training programs from each district into one uniform, rigorous program. They recommended that principals be consulted on what training would benefit them and their school communities. Consultation should include frank discussions on the practical obligations and the complexity of the role as well as the
practical differences between schools of different sizes and configurations. Participants noted that they believed such dialogue would help to establish a rigorous high-quality provincial leadership development program which could be applied within and between districts. One principal was specific in his recommendation, suggesting the establishment of a provincial leadership development program that included the use of role play to better prepare principals for the practicalities of the role, adding that this approach was effective in other jurisdictions.

Feedback from participants noted the challenges associated with a lack of training and support are not limited to aspirants and new principals. Another recommendation is that districts facilitate the establishment of a peer mentoring program for new principals and the establishment of communication networks for new and veteran principals working in like-sized and configured schools. This would accommodate the challenges for principals at all career stages. It would also facilitate the sharing of ideas between veteran principals with the wisdom of experience and those who are new to the role who may have innovative ideas to share.

Participants also noted a disconnect between the perception of some individuals defining the role and the actual practice as it functions within the school environment. Systemically, principals should be given a voice in defining the role and its obligations. This should include the establishment of a provincial principals’ committee to provide input into best practices, the challenges associated with the role, and the development of progressive steps to mitigate some of these challenges. This type of committee would also serve to help alleviate the sense of isolation noted by study participants and would serve as a mechanism to share ideas and promote ongoing professional growth.
Districts should also consider the establishment of site-specific training sessions for schools of different sizes and configurations. Topics could include balancing teaching and leadership in small schools and sharing information on ways to ensure the effective management which is necessary for larger schools. I am recommending that the topics for these sessions be principal selected and that sessions be facilitated by veteran principals. As was noted, the roles differ dramatically as school sizes and grade-level configurations change. It is recommended that the aforementioned virtual platform be used to facilitate sharing sessions, whereby principals share challenges and brainstorm solutions with individuals working in similar school structures.

One disconcerting aspect of the current system of training is associated with the introduction of initiatives and the use of singular training session provided by the districts or province. These “one off” training sessions are expected to provide enough information for principals to effectively implement new policy initiatives and address complex changes at the school level. Participants noted challenges when new policies or initiatives are introduced, adding that these one-off training sessions were inadequate to address the ongoing professional learning needs of school leaders. I am recommending that these sessions be followed by support sessions where principals are given opportunities to ask clarifying questions, access more information on the topic of inquiry, share ideas, and have the time to consider ways to become more adept in their role. Additionally, the provision of regular, ongoing, advanced training opportunities for principals should be considered, to aid in the advancement of personal knowledge and assist principals in promoting teacher growth in targeted areas such as inclusionary practices.
In situations where individuals are transitioning into new or different leadership positions they should be afforded opportunity to more effectively transition into the new role. These include participating in job shadow opportunities and being provided time to work and/or observe in the school they are assigned to, so they are better able to understand the contextual factors within the new school environment.

With regard to the actual selection process, it is recommended that districts look to incorporate some of the aforementioned processes including: early candidate selection, transitional job shadowing opportunities, a survey of school needs and the gathering of staff input, to ensure effective transitions between schools and a better goodness of fit between the principal and the new school community.

Finally, participants also noted the inability to act as educational leaders due to increasing managerial obligations. A systemic recognition of this challenge needs to occur. Principals working in large schools could be provided some extra administrative FTE to ensure that they have time to be in the classrooms, engage with students, and familiarize themselves with changing classroom dynamics. Small school principals should be offered more administrative support, so the management function does not overwhelm the necessary leadership components of the role. Any approach should include the identification of mechanisms to reduce or reallocate some of the management obligations associated with the role, and could include the appointment of school-based managers to assume some of the managerial functions.
Conclusion

Through this thesis I have worked diligently to define the principalship based on my experiences as principal and LSR and using huge volume of information provided from the 12 principal participants. The evolving nature of the role and the dramatically different site-based factors create challenges to providing a generalizable generic definition. A generic definition of the role would simply outline the basic institutional obligations of the role as outlined in the legislation.

It has been established that the management obligations associated with the role are growing regardless of the size and/or grade level configuration of the school. This being noted, it has also been established that the obligations of the role are radically different between small and large schools. It was also noted that the grade level configuration of the school influences the temporal demands and how the practical role is defined for each context. In order for aspirant and current principals to be truly informed about the role as it functions in a specific context, a myriad of site-based factors would have to be examined.

The insights provided about large and small schools may be the most important information emanating from this study. The fact that large school principals often operate more as facility managers than educational leaders may be one of the most important insights provided through this study.

The increasing management obligations create challenges for all principals, but especially impact teaching principals. This is particularly true when the management obligations do not allow the teaching principal adequate time to prepare exemplary lessons or when they intrude on the principal’s actual classroom instruction. In either
case, the role of the teaching principal needs to be better defined to ensure that it is understood by those making policy decisions and aspirants who are considering such placements.

I understand that some of the recommendations would put additional financial stress on the system and may not be well received by some of those with decision making authority. I expect some of my comments on inclusion may incite some derision as well. What has to be kept at the fore is that the principalship as it is currently defined has become too heavy of a load for one person to bear. If the role is not redefined at the systemic level, then managing it effectively simply becomes a resourcing issue, which necessitates the provision of additional FTE to allow principals the time to address the growing needs. In the absence of consideration for any of these factors, it is my belief that the principalship is, and will continue to be, in crisis. The data indicate that the principalship, as it is currently defined, is not sustainable.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The principal role is one that is complex and dynamic and consequently offers rich opportunities for research. There are a few suggestions for future research that flow from this study. The results of this study are similar to some of the research emanating from the IPPN study. Although the IPPN study did not use an analytic autoethnographic methodological approach, many of its conclusions and recommendations aligned with the ones established through this study. In order to examine how this study’s findings compare to other contexts, I recommend that we begin by examining the French context in New Brunswick, as it is the only officially bilingual province in Canada. It would be interesting to identify whether the principalship in the French sector operates similarly to
the English sector. Researchers could then use the information provided to offer province-wide suggestions for improvement.

This thesis has also brought to light some of the disparate dynamics of the role that occur in the context of varying school sizes and configurations. I believe that these differing dynamics warrant further research. When examined through the lens of the different principal participants, it became abundantly clear that the dynamics at play in small, medium, and large schools are dramatically different. This could include a subsequent study focused solely on comparing the roles of principals in small and large schools. Alternatively, an analysis focused on comparing the role of principals with teaching obligations to those who do not hold these obligations would add greatly to the understanding of the role.

One concept that could be used to help mitigate the identified challenges associated with the principalship in both large and small schools was that of shared leadership. Participants identified challenges with sharing leadership including staff reluctance and temporal constraints. Future studies could examine factors contributing to these challenges with the goal of identifying ways of advancing collaboration, teaming and shared leadership while concurrently reducing the workload for principals.

Finally, although analysis of gender differences was not prioritized in this study and analysis of data did not indicate any dramatic difference between male and female respondents, an examination of the principalship with specific focus on potential gender differences in the perception of the role may provide some interesting and innovative insights.
Epilogue

Autoethnography is a methodology that utilizes the self as one of the major sources of data. This being identified, I would be remiss if I did not state that at the time of this publication, I have chosen to leave the principalship. This is not a decision that I take lightly. When discussing staffing with district representatives, I was told I would be obligated to teach 50% of the time. I always said that this was too much, considering the management obligations, clientele, and the dual (middle/high) configuration of the school. Prior to this staffing discussion, I was offered a Learning Specialist position at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Given what I believe are the ever-increasing and irreconcilable obligations of the role as it is now prescribed, I have chosen to accept this offer. This decision comes with a great deal of emotionality and was made after a long and torturous consideration of the factors at play. These factors include my familial situation, my personal well-being, and what I believe to be the increasingly irreconcilable requirements associated with the role. I worked with many people I trust and care for at the school, but feel the time allotted to fulfil the obligations of the tripartite role does not allow me to adequately perform in any of the three roles (teacher, educational leader, and manager) to my satisfaction. I am hopeful that my newfound position at the department will position me to share my concerns about the principalship and have a voice in the future direction of the role. I feel that some changes in the defined requirements of the role are necessary if the requirements are to be attainable and, dare I say it, manageable.
References


Church, S. M. (2014). *The principal difference: Key issues in school leadership and how to deal with them successfully*. Markham, ON: Pembroke.


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Murphy, J., & Beck, L. G. (1994). Restructuring the principalship: Challenges and possibilities. In J. Murphy & K. S. Lewis (Eds.), *Reshaping the principalship*.


Appendix A

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty’s (2003) 21 Key Leadership Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>The Extent to Which the Principal…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Affirmation</td>
<td>Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Change Agent</td>
<td>Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Contingent Rewards</td>
<td>Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Communication</td>
<td>Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Culture</td>
<td>Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Discipline</td>
<td>Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Flexibility</td>
<td>Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Focus</td>
<td>Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Ideals/Beliefs</td>
<td>Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Input</td>
<td>Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</td>
<td>Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</td>
<td>Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Monitoring/Evaluating</td>
<td>Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Optimizer</td>
<td>Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Order</td>
<td>Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Outreach</td>
<td>Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Relationships</td>
<td>Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Resources</td>
<td>Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Situational Awareness</td>
<td>Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Visibility</td>
<td>Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Leadership Theories

The table below provides a sampling of leadership theories to represent the breadth and variety of perspectives. The following table groups leadership theories into the following categories: power, performance, processes, people, and permanence.

Please note that there could be overlap in many of these groupings. For example, transformational leadership necessarily involves people, but may be better suited to the permanence sub-category because, if done effectively, transformational change will be positive and permanent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
<th>Title, Text or Descriptor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power – Early Militaristic and Political Theorists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Tzu</td>
<td>circa 500 BCE</td>
<td><em>The Art of War</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machiavelli</td>
<td>5th century AD</td>
<td><em>The Prince</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiedler</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Contingency Model of Leadership</td>
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<td>Freire</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Neo-Marxist variation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Pedagogy of the oppressed</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td><em>The principles of scientific management</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drucker</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Total Quality Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lezotte</td>
<td>1985, 1994</td>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander &amp; Sweeney</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lezotte &amp; Bancroft</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Effective Schools</td>
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<td>Lezotte</td>
<td>1985, 1989, 1995</td>
<td>Correlates of Effective Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Barth</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Shared Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambert</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Building Leadership capacity in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash &amp; Persall leaders</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Formative – <em>Developing teacher leaders</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stiggins &amp; Duke</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Formative – <em>Assessment leadership</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grogan &amp; Crow</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Collaborative – Mentoring leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Year(s)</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hargreaves &amp; Fink</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Distributive Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spillane, Halverson, &amp; Diamond</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Distributed Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eacott</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daresh</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
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<td>Watkins</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Situational Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>People</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carlyle</td>
<td>1849</td>
<td>Trait – Great Man</td>
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<td>Stogdill</td>
<td>1948, 1970, 1974</td>
<td>Personal factors associated with leadership</td>
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<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Moral Leadership</td>
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<td>Begley</td>
<td>1996, 2006</td>
<td>Authentic</td>
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<td>Harris</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Distributed – School Improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harris &amp; Spillane</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Distributed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Permanence</td>
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<td>Bush &amp; Bell</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Transformational Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leithwood</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Towards transformational leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jantzi &amp; Leithwood perceptions</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Transformational – teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leithwood &amp; Jantzi performance</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Transformational and student performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hargreaves &amp; Goodson</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Sustainable Leadership</td>
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</table>
## Appendix C

*The 21 Leadership Responsibilities Mapped to Performance, Process, and People*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Area</th>
<th>Leadership Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance</strong></td>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum instruction assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contingent rewards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of curriculum instruction assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitors/evaluates</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discipline</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Optimizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People</strong></td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communications</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ideals/beliefs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Interview Questions

Administrator Forum

Pre-Forum Notes to Consider:

Participants: All administrators attend this forum.

Questions:

1. How do you use the vision, mission, and values to guide and support student learning?
2. What process and data did you use to create the current SIP? Please describe the process for monitoring the SIP goals (e.g., Is there an active Distributive Leadership Team?).
3. How do you get input into decisions that have implications for change throughout the school community?
4. How do you keep the staff, parents/guardians and community informed?
5. What are the established school teams? How do you monitor the effectiveness of team practices and their impact on student learning and behaviour?
6. How do you ensure that teachers are teaching the curriculum and using best practices in instruction and assessment?
7. How does the ESS Team support teachers in this school?
8. Are teachers taking primary responsibility for teaching students with diverse needs and ensuring appropriate accommodations, modifications, interventions and/or supports are in place? How do you help support growth in this area?
9. Are teaching assignments and scheduling decisions based on teacher expertise, competencies, and experience?
10. How do you provide ongoing feedback (formal and informal) for staff regarding their performance?

11. How do you promote continuous professional growth? Are there supports in place for staff members new to a subject area or assignment, or who are struggling?

12. What are some of the ways that you build leadership capacity on this staff?

13. What are some of the ways that you ensure you are current in your understanding of current pedagogy and methodologies and how do you share and/or promote this with your staff?

14. How do you support inclusion? This includes supporting all members of the school community - community members, students and staff to include those with exceptionalities/needs; sexual minorities; First Nations populations; or other individuals or groups who may require support.

15. Do you provide staff members with thanks and other recognition for contributions and accomplishments?
Appendix E

McAdam High School Principal Job Postings, 2004

New Brunswick Employment Opportunities

SCHOOL DISTRICT 18
Applications are invited for the following position of responsibility, (appointment effective the 2004-2005 school-year):

Competition No. 18-0611
PRINCIPAL – McADAM HIGH SCHOOL
Grades 6-12, approximately 160 students

Desirable Qualifications:
The selected candidate for the above position will have:
- A valid New Brunswick Teacher’s License, Certificate V, a Principal’s Certificate and a minimum number of five years successful teaching experience at the level(s) to be administered.
- Extensive knowledge and understanding of the middle and high school curriculum.
- Evidence of successful leadership.
- Proven ability in providing quality education for students and improving student outcomes.
- Effective communication skills.
- Capacity to promote participation of the school community in developing and achieving the school’s goals and purpose.

To Apply:
Please apply by letter, with resume/portfolio of achievement, copy of transcript, copy of Certificate, names and telephone numbers of three referees, by 4:00 p.m. on Monday, June 7, 2004, to:

Director of Human Resources
School District 18
P.O. Box 10
1135 Prospect Street
Fredericton, NB E3B 4Y4
Fax (506) 462-2186
www.district18.nbed.nb.ca

Please quote the competition number on your application. Additional information on school profile may be obtained by contacting the District Office. Thank you in advance for applying. Only those selected for an interview will be contacted.

Subject to the response of this competition, education and/or experience requirements may be raised.

The successful candidate will be required to provide a criminal record check.
Appendix F

Lead School Reviewer Job Posting

SECONDMENT/CONTRACT OPPORTUNITY
(One year with the possibility of extension)
LEARNING SPECIALIST
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT/LEADERSHIP CONSULTANT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Fredericton
(Pay Band 7)

The Professional Learning Services Branch of the Educational Services Division (Anglophone), Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, is seeking a School Improvement/Leadership Consultant. Reporting to the Director of Professional Learning Services, the successful candidate will work half time as a lead reviewer for the New Brunswick School Improvement Service and half time as a coordinator for teacher professional development and leadership programs.

As a member of the Branch, the successful candidate will be responsible for contributing to the ongoing development of the provincial school improvement service. The Learning Specialist will be conducting school reviews and writing school improvement reports, interpreting a variety of data including student achievement and perception data, developing and refining materials required for school improvement, developing training and professional learning opportunities for principals, learning specialists, and external reviewers in the area of school improvement, facilitating professional conversations with administrators and school staffs about individual school performance. The successful candidate will also be collaborating with school districts, department staff, the NBTA, universities and other stakeholders to foster teacher development and leadership programs that support New Brunswick teacher and leadership standards; and supporting staff responsible for the district Leadership Development Program and beginning teachers.

The successful candidate will be expected to work collaboratively with other members of the Educational Services Division and will contribute to the development and the implementation of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development initiatives.

ESSENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS:
A Master’s degree in Education and a minimum of six (6) years public school teaching experience plus a minimum of three (3) years of leadership experience (i.e. Principal, Vice-Principal, SPR, Learning Specialist, Mentor etc.) in public schools and/or school districts. The successful candidate must possess a thorough knowledge of research and best practice in education as well as knowledge of the provincial curricula. He or she will demonstrate a sound knowledge of the public school system and a strong working knowledge of the practices that make schools inclusive and effective. Preference may be given to candidates with previous responsibility for teacher professional development.

Written and spoken competence in English is required. Please state your language capability on your application.

Applicants must clearly demonstrate the essential qualifications to be given further consideration. Please ensure that preferred language for assessment is identified on your resume.
**BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCIES:**
The successful candidate will possess the following behavioural competencies: Conceptual Thinking; Information Seeking; Results Orientation; Effective Interactive Communication; Flexibility; Relationship / Network Building; Teamwork & Cooperation.

**TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES:**
The successful candidate will possess the following technical competencies: Specialized Subject Matter Expertise and Knowledge; Project Management; Written Communications; Consulting Skills.

This competition may be used to fill future vacancies at the same level. We are an Equal Opportunity Employer and we promote a scent-reduced environment.

Salary: **From $71,994 to $87,074 annually**

We encourage applicants to apply on-line at [https://www.ere.gnb.ca/competition.aspx?lang=E&t=Y](https://www.ere.gnb.ca/competition.aspx?lang=E&t=Y) or by mail at the following address by **June 20, 2011**

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Human Resource Services
250 King Street, Place 2000
P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, NB
E3B 5H1
(506) 444-4914

We thank all those who apply however only those selected for further consideration will be contacted.
Appendix G

Sample Job Postings, ASD-S

ANGLOPHONE SOUTH SCHOOL DISTRICT
INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

SAINT JOHN EDUCATION CENTRE

(Acting) Principal – Westfield School (K-5) - One Year Term
This school has both an English and French Program with a projected student population of 320 and a teaching staff of 20.

Applicants should possess knowledge of, and previous teaching experience at, the school level noted above.
All applicants must possess the NB Principal's Certificate with five years successful teaching experience at the appropriate level, have strong written and oral communication skills with the ability to work within a collaborative team, possess exceptional problem solving and conflict resolution skills, demonstrate knowledge of curriculum and teaching strategies, as well as the School Improvement Planning Process, and provide evidence of recent professional development through the Professional Growth Process.

A Master of Education Degree, previous leadership experience and computer literacy will be considered assets.
Note:
- References may be contacted in advance of interviews
- Candidates are encouraged to present a professional portfolio during interview
- Subject to the response to the competitions, education and experience requirements may be altered

A complete resume, at least three references, university transcripts, and a copy of the NB Teacher's Certificate must accompany the application.
Apply in writing by 12:00PM, Friday, July 1st, 2016 to:

Stewart Stanger, Director of Human Resources
Anglophone South School District
490 Woodward Avenue, Saint John, NB E2K 5N3
(Fax) 506-658-5399
asd-s.jobs@nbed.nb.ca

Thank you in advance for applying. Only those selected for an interview will be contacted.
Anglophone South School District reserves the right to request a Criminal Record Check.

We are committed to employment equity.
(All facilities in Anglophone South School District are scent free environments)

OUR MISSION – EXCITED. INVOLVED. PREPARED
Appendix H

New Brunswick Education Act (1997), Duties of Principals

28(1) The principal of a school

(a) is the educational leader and administrator of the school and has overall responsibility for the school and for the teachers and other school personnel employed at the school, and

(b) is accountable to the superintendent of the school district for the performance of the principal's duties and the overall educational progress of the pupils enrolled in the school.

28(2) The duties of a principal include

(a) preparing, in consultation with the Parent School Support Committee and the school personnel, a school improvement plan and coordinating its implementation,

(b) preparing, for parents of the pupils enrolled in the school, an annual school performance report, and ensuring that that report is communicated to those parents and the school community,

(b.1) submitting annually to the District Education Council concerned, through the superintendent of the school district, a copy of the school improvement plan and a copy of the annual school performance report,

(c) ensuring that reasonable steps are taken to create and maintain a safe, positive and effective learning environment,

(d) participating in the selection of school personnel for the school,

(e) encouraging and facilitating the professional development of teachers and other school personnel employed at the school,

(f) evaluating the performance of teachers and other school personnel employed at the school,

(g) being accountable and responsible for funds provided to and raised for the school,

(h) ensuring that provincial, school district and school policies are followed, and

(i) ensuring the establishment of and participating in the operation of a Parent School Support Committee at the school.
Appendix I

*Sample Time and Motion: Time Dedicated to One School Review*

**Monday Prior to Review – Meetings and School Review Preparation**

8:30–9:15 Worked on correspondence with upcoming reviews and follow up with documentation, fellow Lead reviewer and Administrative Assistant (EECD) re: working document

Email correspondence throughout the day re: SIP planning session I will be competing for an upcoming school.

9:30–12:00 Worked with Supervisor re: previous reports – finalizing School Name Deleted and School Name Deleted and discussed process and future projects

Priority: to establish District follow-up.

12:00–12:30 Lunch

12:30–2:00 Revise and file documentation from previous School Name Deleted review

Send follow-up email to Internal and External Teams

Prepare documentation for Current School Review School Name Deleted

2:00–4:00 Travel

4:00–6:00 Supper

6:00–9:07 Examined all documentation from website and re-evaluate data

9:07–9:27 Record the major day events and email correspondence.

**Total dedicated time – 10:30 hours**

**Day 1**

Arrival at Current School Review School Name Deleted at 7:14 a.m.

Work with external team – assign forum leads and scribes and observation schedules

Principal Tour

Classroom observations/conversations until 11:00

11:00 Support Staff Forum.
Lunch with students – dialogue and observation
1:00–3:00 Classroom observations
3:15–5:30 Teacher Forum (10:16)
5:30–6:00 Examine notes and documents on site.
6:00–6:45 Discussion with principal (1:15)
6:45–8:30 Supper and commute to accommodations
8:30–9:47 Examine forum meetings notes and establish day two areas of focus for team (1:17)

**Total dedicated time – 12:48**

**Day 2**
5:30–5:45 Email (15 minutes)
7:10 Departure from accommodations
7:20–4:30 On site – Forums, observation, document
4:30–5:55 Supper off site (8:20)
5:55–6:30 Parent Forum meeting prep and meet and greet
6:30–9:15 Parent Forum (3:20)
9:15–9:47 - Clean up meeting area, meet with principal, and then transit back to accommodations
9:47–10:27 - Analyze document and generate focal areas for principal’s forum (2:12)

**Total dedicated time – 13:52**

**Day 3**
7:30 Arrival on site
Observation and conversation with staff and volunteers at the breakfast program
8:30–11:00 Administrative Forum
11:00–3:00 Indicator document and questions, classroom visits, establishment of ratings and areas of focus
3:00–3:30 Meet with principal
3:30–5:00 Commute
5:00–5:30 PM Fuel for rental, transfer luggage/materials
5:30–6:00 At EECD to complete review specific research on BYOD programs, print documentation for further analysis.
6:00–6:30 Commute home

Total dedicated time – 11:00

Friday Following the On-site Review
5:35–7:30 Begin to generate documentation specific to areas of focus and possible suggestions
10:30–1:30 Conference call
5:00–6:30 Revisions and modifications and the establishment of areas of strength. Email to internal principal and external team colleagues.

Total dedicated time – 6.30
Week total – 54:40

Collaborative Dialogue Meeting
8:00 Depart home
Pick up documents and rental.
Travel to site, 227 kms.
Meeting preparation on site.
12:00–3:45 Meeting
3:45–4:15 Informal meeting with principal
4:15–6:10 Travel to rental company arrival, transit home
6:45 arrive home

Total dedicated time – 10:45
Review sub-total – 54:40
Collaborative Dialogue Meeting sub-total – 10:45
Total time on review – 65:25 (report writing and revisions not included)
Appendix J

Research Participation Request and Letter of Informed Consent

Dear potential research participant,

My name is Francis Bennett. I am currently a principal in Anglophone School District West as well as an active PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. The purpose of my research study is to examine and define the role of the school principal and determine how practitioners view the practical role as compared to the requirements outlined in job postings. I will draw from my own experiences as principal (8 years) and School Improvement Consultant/Lead School Reviewer for the Province of New Brunswick (3 years). I will also draw from the experiences of other participants (10 – 12) principals from the Anglophone New Brunswick context in an attempt to provide a definition of the role. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2016-009.

Your employer has granted permission for me to approach you and seek your participation in this research study. Your prior experience in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development School Review Process with me, the participant researcher, has led to your inclusion in the pool of potential participants. Based on your current role as principal and your previous experience with the school review process, I would like to invite you to take part in this research, and would like to draw on your experiences to inform the study. If you choose to participate, then you will be asked to sign the letter of informed consent (inserted below for your consideration) and forward an electronic copy, via email, followed by a signed copy to me, via school mail, prior to your participation. Your participation is voluntary and you will only be included if you provide permission.

I would like to invite you to take part in a one-on-one interview which will take place face to face, over the phone, or via Skype. Interviews will last approximately 40 to 60 minutes. Prior to the start of the interview, I will review this information letter and the consent form with you and you will be asked to provide consent to participate in the study. The interview will be transcribed. At any time throughout the study you can request access to your transcript, and within one to two weeks of the initial interview being transcribed, I will informally share with you the transcription of our interview and any themes I have noted in order to ensure that you are satisfied with my understanding of our conversation. You are free to withdraw from the study up until the analysis of the data begins and you can request that the recording of your comments cease at any time during the interview without any consequence.

All transcribed data will remain confidential and will be secured in a locked facility, and stored on password protected computers. Only you and I will have access to the information you provide – no other parties will be granted access. The data will not be shared in any way until it has been cleared of all identifying information. All the names of interviewees and schools/districts will be removed and pseudonyms will be used in the written report, and within the transcribed data, so that your identity is kept private. Data will be stored for a period of five years post-publication.

The benefits of participating in this study are that you will be involved in the advancement of the understanding of the principal role in the 21st century context. This information will be used to
inform aspirants to the role and further inform those already practicing within the role. Also, this research will provide a foundation for a better understanding of the role at the district and departmental levels. The results will also be used to inform further studies in this research setting.

If you have concerns about this study, you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Ken Brien of the Faculty of Education, University of New Brunswick, at 506-452-6213 or by email at kibri1@unb.ca. Alternatively, you could contact Dr. R. Steven Turner, Chair of the UNBF Research Ethics Board at (506) 458-7433 or by email at turner@unb.ca. Both Dr. Brien and Dr. Turner have no direct involvement with this project. If you have any questions about the study, please free to contact me using the contact information included below.

Sincerely,

Francis Bennett, PhD Candidate
University of New Brunswick
Phone: (506) XXX-XXXX
fbennett@unb.ca

Letter of Informed Consent

Please read and then sign this document below.

I agree to be a Participant in the following for PhD Research Project:

*Defining the Role of the School Principal: An Autoethnographic Study Comparing the Dual Perspectives of Insiders (Principals) and Outsiders (Participant Observers)*

I understand I will be a participant in the above named research project. I will be identified by a pseudonym when any direct or indirect references are made regarding information I have disclosed. I have agreed to participate in this research project freely and expect no remuneration or other compensation for my participation.

The researcher (Francis P. Bennett) agrees to hold participant information in confidence, and to provide pseudonyms when using participants’ information that is relevant to the research project.

Participant Name
(Print):
Email: ___________________________ Work Phone: ___________________________

Participant

_____________________________________________________

Date (d/m/y): ______________________________________________________________________

PhD Researcher: Francis P. Bennett

Researcher

_____________________________________________________

Date (d/m/y): ______________________________________________________________________
Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick
PhD in Education Leadership and Administration
2010-2017

Bachelor of Education (Social Studies/Counseling)
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick
1996-1997

Master of Arts (Public Administration)
McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario
1995-1996

Bachelor of Arts (Political Science/Psychology)
Former University College of Cape Breton (now Cape Breton University)
1989-1993

WORK EXPERIENCE
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD): Learning Specialist Provincial Improvement Framework Developer
November, 2017 - Current
Supervisor: Mrs. Tiffany Bastin

Office of First Nation Education (EECD): Learning Specialist
April, 2017 – November, 2017
Supervisor: Ms. Sacha DeWolfe

EECD: School Improvement Consultant
November, 2012 – August, 2015
Supervisor: Mrs. Inga Boehler

McAdam High School: Principal
Supervisor: Mrs. Karen Morton

McAdam High School: Vice-Principal
June, 2000 – June, 2004
Supervisors: Mr. Frank Carroll and Mrs. Judith Lane

McAdam High School: Teacher
September, 1998 – June, 2000
Supervisor: Mr. Frank Carroll
Trifos Design Consultants: Accounting Technician
Supervisor: Mr. Spyro Trifos

New Brunswick Nurses Union: Legal Clerk
April, 1997 – August, 1997
Supervisor: Mr. Tom Mann

University of New Brunswick: Teaching Assistant
Supervisor: Mr. Tom Mann

Trifos Design Consultants: Research Consultant
April, 1996 – August, 1996
Supervisor: Mr. Spyro Trifos

Maritime Tire Limited: Store Manager (Fredericton)
October, 1992 – June, 1994
Supervisor: Mr. Mike McCrea

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS


