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Editorial
*Jing Xiao* 3

Learning for Less: A Postcolonial Analysis of Efficiency in First Nations Education
*Brian Knowles* 5

Support or They'll Abort: Teacher Retention and the Influence of School Administration
*Jared Wipf* 25

Supporting Your School Team—The Principal's Role as Coach
*Jonelle Ulrich* 43

Positive School Culture through Transformational Leadership
*John Jamieson* 61

Responsive Instruction: Meeting the Needs of Every Student
*Jennifer Haywood* 77

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The *SELU Research Review Journal (SRRJ)* is a forum for graduate student research reviews capturing the state of current research in Educational Administration. Topics related to leadership, policy, and the administration of K-12 education, post-secondary education, and other educational institutions are the focus of this journal. The work published in the journal reflects graduate students' work throughout their program at the University of Saskatchewan. This *Journal* is intended to provide a resource for educational practitioners to access current and comprehensive overviews of research. The reviews presented in the *Journal* represent diverse perspectives and findings from academic research that will aid in policy development and the improvement of practice in educational institutions.

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# Editorial

Jing Xiao
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## Challenges Faced by Educational Leaders: An Introduction to the Special Issue

Welcome to this special issue of the *SELU Research Review Journal* (SRRJ). In this issue we are exploring the challenges faced by educational leaders. The articles that appear in this special issue are the result of student papers in a graduate course, EADM 991, Educational Leadership: Field Based Applications. As the capstone course of the Master of Education Program in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan, students are provided with the opportunity to reflect on their learning experience in the program and the implications of this experience for their practice in educational leadership. This special issue represents a survey of topics related to the issues and challenges that are faced by educators in their roles as teachers, administrators, and school leaders.

Educational leadership refers to leadership across different levels and forms of educational institutions. In this special issue, the discussion of educational leadership focuses on the context of primary and secondary education. Recent research on Canadian principals' work (for example, Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014; Newton & Da Costa, 2016; Pollock & Hauseman, 2016) shows that the changing demographics of communities and school populations in Canadian society have presented significant challenges for school leaders. As a result, many school leaders are facing challenges related to issues in the following three areas: the changing demographics and social contexts in Canada, the shifting expectations of public schooling, and the changing roles and responsibilities of school leaders (Xiao & Newton, in press).

In this issue, we have five articles that explore educational leadership challenges. In the first article, Brian Knowles uses a postcolonial lens to examine the concept of efficiency in education. His article reveals how the notion of efficiency and its culturally embedded assumptions, beliefs, and values have become a hegemonic force influencing the funding of First Nations education. Jared Wipf's article explores the challenge of teacher retention for school administration. Wipf identifies the significant factors in teacher retention and how school leaders could have positive influences on teacher retention decisions.

Jonelle Ulrich's article examines the challenge in leadership coaching. The article proposes that principals are facing challenges of fulfilling many roles and responsibilities in schools today. Ulrich argues that the role of principal as leadership coach has become increasingly important in supporting a school team and facilitating positive organizational changes in the school. John Jamieson reports on the findings of an investigation on the relationship between a transformative leadership approach by school principals and positive school culture. Through investigating the influence of transformative leadership on teacher engagement and student achievement, Jamieson claims that transformative leadership with the characteristic of strong relationships between school principal and teachers could benefit the overall positive culture of a school, and consequently, student achievement.

In the final article, Jennifer Haywood examines the impact of what she terms as responsive instruction on school teaching and learning. Haywood discusses the important role that school leaders play in supporting teachers to implement responsive instruction in their teaching practice.

In closing, challenges exist in many different forms and at various levels for educational leaders. This special issue is intended to show how these challenges are reflected in Saskatchewan schools through the reflections made by our graduate students with respect to their daily roles as teach-

ers, administrators, and school leaders. It is my hope that this issue will initiate a conversation about efforts to better understand the challenges for educators in an increasingly complex social context in Canada. I also hope the ideas discussed in these articles could generate further discussion and consideration of more professional support for school leaders.

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# Learning for Less: A Postcolonial Analysis of Efficiency in First Nations Education

Brian Knowles

## Abstract

The efficient use of resources is an ongoing concern in public education. Evangelized by Taylor (1916/2011) and Fayol (1916/2011), efficiency was a defining characteristic of scientific management, which swept through the public and private sectors in the early 20th century, and continues to hold high status in educational governance and administration. Studies of school efficiency focus on the relationship between funding and student achievement on standardized exams in math and language, and do not identify efficiency as a culturally constructed notion, nor do they question its underlying values. In Canada, efficiency has influenced the funding of First Nations education and has allowed the Canadian Government to fall short of its treaty obligations. From residential schools to more recent attempts at assimilation grounded in neoliberal ideology, efficiency continues to be a hegemonic force used to rationalize Eurocentrism in education. This paper examines the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values that inform the standard notion of efficiency, provides examples of the detrimental effects of efficiency on First Nations education, and makes recommendations to inform a humanizing notion of efficiency.

## Keywords

*efficiency, postcolonial, First Nations education, colonization, scientific management*

Aligned with perceptions of rationality and fiscal responsibility, the status of efficiency is secure among the priorities of educational leaders. In Canadian schools, efficiency efforts exist within a colonial context and disadvantage Indigenous peoples, particularly through the pursuit of efficiency in the funding of education. This paper is offered in response to the work of Indigenous scholars who have called for a critical analysis of the Western colonial worldview and its impact on education (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Ermine, 2007; Hodgson-Smith, 2000). The history of efficiency as an organizational imperative (Callahan, 1962; Fayol, 1916/2011; Taylor, 1916/2011), along with its contemporary applications in K-12 education (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015; Alexander, Haug, & Jaforullah, 2010; Hu, Zhang, & Liang, 2009; Huguenin, 2014), situate efficiency within an economic paradigm (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007; Callahan, 1962; Lowe Boyd, 2004; Menashy, 2007; Welch, 1998) and necessitate a critical examination of its impact on quality and equity in education. Research conducted on various continents has measured levels of school efficiency (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015; Alexander et al., 2010; Ayres, 1909; Hu et al., 2009; Huguenin, 2014). A body of empirical data has been established to describe the contributing and diminishing factors of efficiency and provide recommendations to policymakers. Grounded in the presumed neutrality of Euro-western mathematics (Bishop, 1990/2006), and predicated on the scientific management theories of Taylor (1916/2011) and Fayol (1916/2011), the methodology of these studies provide evidence of the values, beliefs, and assumptions that inform efficiency efforts.

Additionally, efficiency efforts in education can be indirectly observed in a body of research examining the relationship between First Nations and the Canadian Government. Historical and contemporary accounts of the Indigenous/settler relationship in education contain evidence of the detrimental effects of efficiency on the educational outcomes of First Nations students (Carr-Stewart, 2006, 2007; Drummond & Kachuck Rosenbluth, 2013; Phillips, 2010, 2011). The disparity within this relationship reveals power dynamics consistent with neocolonialism

(Godlewska, Schaefli, & Chaput, 2013; Phillips, 2011) and is evidence of the continued "oppression through the pathologization" (Thira, 2014, p. 161) of Indigenous peoples. A postcolonial examination of efficiency in educational administration is necessary to articulate its oppressive effects and move towards a humanizing notion of efficiency.

## Purpose

This paper examines the presumed cultural neutrality of efficiency in education, and the impact of efficiency efforts on the fulfillment of the Crown's treaty obligation to provide for First Nations education. The examination seeks to "problematize the way dominant groups see themselves" (Hodgson-Smith, 2000, p. 163), specifically, the Euro-Western image of progress through efficiency. This is accomplished through a postcolonial analysis of efficiency efforts in education. Colonial, neocolonial, and neoliberal ideologies are found to be responsible for the underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions that inform the implementation of efficiency in education. Efficiency efforts and their guiding ideologies have had a negative impact on First Nations education. Decolonization of education will require a notion of efficiency that arises from postcolonial and decolonial literature to promote equity and quality in education. This paper concludes with recommendations for the construction of a humanizing notion of efficiency.

## Research Questions

This paper applies a postcolonial lens to answer three questions. First, what assumptions, values, and beliefs guide the use of efficiency efforts in education? The meaning of efficiency is often glossed over. In a report outlining efficiency issues in educational governance in Saskatchewan, Perrins (2016) defined efficiency as "the best use of resource" (p. 18). This definition is overly simplistic and requires further investigation. Best is a culturally constructed notion and is determined by one's position in society. Resources often include money, but may also include people, in which case critical analysis is necessary to ensure the casting of humans as resources does not dehumanize them (Freire, 1970). Furthermore, it is important to know what resource is being used efficiently, by what means, and to which end (Menashy, 2007). The answers to these questions will reveal cultural complexities that must be brought clearly into the discussion, for their impact will affect equity and quality within education.

The second question examines the effects of efficiency: how has efficiency influenced the Crown's fulfillment of its treaty obligation to provide education to First Nations? Historical and contemporary examples will position efficiency within a broad goal of assimilation achieved through colonial (Carr-Stewart, 2007), neocolonial (Carr-Stewart, 2006; Phillips, 2010, 2011), and neoliberal ideologies (Drummond, & Kachuck Rosenbluth, 2013; Godlewska et al., 2013). In each case, efficiency is presented as a neutral and rational necessity at the expense of First Nations education and treaty rights. The dehumanizing effects of efficiency are tolerated or largely ignored.

The third question seeks to identify a notion of efficiency that promotes quality and equity in education: what theories of efficiency best position Indigenous and Euro-Canadian cultures to engage in the decolonization of education? I will make no attempt to appropriate Indigenous concepts of efficiency; rather, I aim to find humanizing theories existent in Western thought and apply them to describe a humanizing notion of efficiency. In this way, I hope to put forward recommendations to inform a notion of efficiency that will help Euro-Canadian researchers and educational leaders engage with Indigenous researchers and educational leaders to improve quality and equity in education.

## Significance of Study

Given the expense and importance of public education, governments have a strong interest in the efficiency of their education systems. Saskatchewan's current provincial deficit and the Provincial Government's interest in revising educational governance (Perrins, 2016) will un-

doubtedly position efficiency as a key issue in the coming years. Whether increases in efficiency acquired through governance restructuring will improve the quality and equity of education depends largely on the "undercurrent" (Ermine, 2007, p. 197) of values, beliefs, and assumptions guiding these efforts. Failure to analyze this undercurrent risks the perpetuation of a Western colonial worldview that reinforces patterns of privilege and discrimination, as the "imperative of efficiency" (Ermine, 2007, p. 128) prompts the use of managerial strategies that are ultimately dehumanizing (Kumar & Mitchell, 2004). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRCC) (2015) Calls to Action recognized the history of dehumanization through schooling, and called upon the Federal Government to "draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples" (TRCC, 2015, p. 2). A humanizing notion of efficiency will aid governments, educational leaders, teachers, and stakeholders as they plan, implement, and respond to change.

## Limitations

The distribution and use of funding within public education is a multifaceted issue with unique, context-specific variances. This paper focuses on the culturally constructed nature of efficiency, the effects of this notion on the funding of schools, and the valuing of education. It does not engage in an analysis of specific funding formulae. Efficiency studies and critiques of First Nations education funding provide evidence from which to create an understanding of efficiency and its effects on education. Efficiency studies have been conducted in a variety of countries using a data envelopment analysis (DEA), or a similar method to benchmark efficiency within a system (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015; Alexander et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2009; Huguenin, 2014). At the time of this paper, I was unable to find similar studies conducted in Canada, though Canada was included in a multi-country study conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015). Consequently, observations regarding the values, beliefs, and assumptions that inform efficiency studies are extrapolated to the Canadian context.

The discussion regarding the impact of efficiency on the Crown's fulfillment of treaty obligations in education is situated in the Canadian context. While similarities exist between Canada and other countries with colonial histories, it is important to be cautious in comparing colonial processes across contexts.

Finally, efficiency will continue to be an important value in public education. This paper attempts to problematize the current notion of efficiency and offers starting points for Euro-Canadian researchers and educational leaders to engage with Indigenous researchers and educational leaders to co-construct a form of efficiency that is bicultural. The accomplishment of redefining efficiency to promote the decolonization of education will be a collaborative effort and will take various forms depending on local contexts.

## Indigenous Rights to Education

The *United Nations International Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2008), and the TRCC's (2015) *Calls to Action* contain specific assertions and directives regarding the decolonization of education. UNDRIP stated, "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning" (United Nations, 2008, p. 7). The TRCC *Calls to Action* outline the need for federal legislation to ensure "sufficient funding to close identified educational gaps", improve "education attainment levels and success rates", provide "culturally appropriate curricula", assert "the right to Aboriginal languages", ensure community participation, and respect "Treaty relationships" (p. 2). The colonial history and contemporary circumstances that necessitate these documents lend credence to a warning from Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2006) who wrote, "education is perhaps the most insidious and in some ways the most cryptic of colonialist

survivals, older systems now passing, sometimes, imperceptibly, into neocolonialist configurations" (p. 371). Though this passing may be imperceptible to some, numerous Indigenous scholars have called for and engaged in a critical analysis of neocolonial Western epistemology, and have challenged its monopoly within education (Battiste et al., 2002; Ermine, 2007; Stewart-Harawira, 2013).

Battiste et al. (2002) found such a monopoly within attempts of Canadian Universities to include Indigenous peoples. They identified the consistent privileging of Western epistemology as central and opposed to the Indigenous margins of epistemology, to which concessions are made, often without meaningful consultation or the participation of Indigenous people. The privileging of Western epistemology as normal and neutral, along with the exclusion of Indigenous epistemologies from education constitutes "cognitive imperialism" (Battiste et al., 2002, p. 83), a discourse of "knowledge production and dissemination… that serves the elite in a nation" (Battiste et al., 2002, p. 83). Cognitive imperialism is buttressed by "cultivated ignorance" (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010, p. 417) of Indigenous cultures, knowledges, histories, and contexts (Godlewska et al., 2010). This ignorance is largely the result of the favouring of Euro-Western knowledge in K-12 curricula (Godlewska et al., 2010). Significant concerns arise where cognitive imperialism intersects with economics, which Battiste et al. described as "perhaps the most formidable remaining sanctuary of an open or coded colonialism" (p. 89). The problematic qualities of efficiency in education become apparent when the normalcy and universality of Western epistemology are examined through a postcolonial lens.

## Postcolonial Analysis

According to Battiste, Bell, and Findlay (2002):

> The postcolonial is about rethinking conceptual, institutional, cultural, legal, and other boundaries that are taken for granted as "natural" or "proper," or assumed or asserted to be universal, but that function in fact as structural barriers to justice for marginalized and dispossessed peoples. (p. 88)

Efficiency, as it is generally understood, comprises a set of boundaries. Conceptually, efficiency has been used to describe the purposeful and effective translation of inputs to outputs without waste (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015; Alexander et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2009; Huguenin, 2014; Taylor, 1916/2011). This linear metaphor oversimplifies the complexity of educational organizations. Institutionally, efficiency favours a business model of education where economic goals are achieved at the expense of social goals (Callahan, 1962; Lowe Boyd, 2004; Menashy, 2007; Welch, 1998). Culturally, efficiency is a Eurocentric notion supported by theories originating in the industrial revolution (Callahan, 1962) and continuing under a neoliberal ideology that excludes other cultural perspectives of productivity (Casey, Lozenski, & McManimon, 2013; Rabasso & Rabasso, 2010). Legally, efficiency has been used as a rationale to excuse the Canadian government's failure to fulfill treaty obligations (Carr-Stewart, 2006, 2007; Phillips, 2010).

Numerous conceptual frameworks of postcolonial theory (Burney, 2012) are applicable to an analysis of efficiency in education. Among these, two notions stand out as being most clearly relevant to the current discussion: Eurocentrism and hegemony. Eurocentrism was defined by Burney (2012) as "the process by which Europe has been socially constructed as the centre of the world and is taken as the natural, normal, or universal starting point of all discourse" (p. 187). Although the colonial power of Europe decreased throughout the 20th century, Eurocentric epistemology, ontology, and methodology have retained their dominance in education and academia (Battiste et al., 2002; Stewart-Harawira, 2013). Ermine (2007) has referred to this as "Western universality" (p. 198), and Battiste et al. (2002) have noted, "the broad and entrenched assumption ... that Eurocentric knowledge represents the neutral and necessary story for 'all' of us" (p. 83). Efficiency, as it is generally understood, fits securely within Eurocentric discourse and has had a strong influence on equity and quality in First Nations education. Indeed, Eurocentric education is and was a primary tool for the assimilation of Indigenous peoples

(Carr-Stewart, 2007; Godlewska et al., 2013; TRCC, 2015), it is the venue and means by which hegemonic pressure was and continues to be applied.

*Hegemony* describes the ability of "the ruling class… to convince the working class… and the colonized peoples that the governmental interests are universal interests" (Burney, 2012, p. 189). Hegemonic pressures have enshrined Eurocentrism in education, where Eurocentric knowledge and discourse are presented as normal, necessary, and neutral (Battiste et al., 2002). Schooling has been used by ruling classes to inculcate a sense of natural inferiority within colonised peoples who come to accept the legitimacy of their oppression (Freire, 1970). Canadian residential schools are a clear example of this pressure, but hegemonic pressure continues to be applied through disparity in educational funding (Carr-Stewart, 2006; Phillips, 2010, 2011), neoliberal policy (Casey et al., 2013; Godlewska et al., 2013), the cultural legacy of scientific management, and the privileged position of Eurocentric curricula (Battiste et al., 2002; Godlewska et al., 2010). Among the roots of these hegemonic forces are basic, and often unrecognized, assumptions regarding the cultural neutrality of Western mathematics (Bishop, 1990/2006). The privileged place of Western mathematics in academia and educational governance perpetuates a broad consensus that empirical measurement and economic growth stem from rationality and logic, and are consequently infallible.

## The Presumed Neutrality of Western Mathematics

Measurements of efficiency typically gather empirical data in a positivist paradigm; it is, therefore, necessary for this discussion to include an analysis of Western mathematics as a culturally bound construction. While math is often assumed to be culturally neutral, it is only neutral in its abstract applications (Bishop, 1990/2006). Bishop (1990/2006) provided the example of the sum of the angles of a triangle equalling 180°, a numerical truth having "universal validity" (p. 80). Problems arise, however, when the universality of abstract mathematics prohibits further exploration of Western mathematics as a cultural construction, and the implications of its uses, which are neither abstract nor neutral. Bishop identified "clusters" (p. 82) of values rooted in Western mathematics, which had, and continue to have, significant impact on Indigenous cultures. "Objectism" (Bishop, 1990/2006, p. 82) is one value cluster, which Bishop (1990/2006) defined as "a way of perceiving the world as if it were composed of discrete objects, able to be removed and abstracted … from their context" (p. 82). This value runs throughout Western science, which seeks to "decontextualize" so it may "generalise" (Bishop, 1990/2006, p. 82), a process evident in efficiency studies of school systems. Objectism has potential to create significant dissonance when laid upon Indigenous understandings of the world, as Bishop (1990/2006) noted, "if your culture encourages you to believe, instead, that everything belongs and exists in its relationship with everything else, then removing it from its context makes it literally meaningless" (p. 82). Notions of efficiency in education often fail to adequately consider the implications of removing information, or data, from its context, especially when these data include socioeconomic status, measures of academic achievement, special education needs, student/teacher ratios, or graduation rates, all of which are imbued with significant social, cultural, and historical context. The removal of education from local context is consistent with Eurocentrism, which negates the local by superimposing European epistemology, ontology, and history.

Decontextualization allows for generalization. Once decontextualized and generalised, data are susceptible to another cluster of values: "control, and power" (Bishop, 1990/2006, p. 82). These values manifest in the use of mathematics to manipulate the "physical and social environment" (Bishop, 1990/2006, p. 82). Decontextualization and generalization have potential to ignore the human needs of individuals and groups within an organization, assuming that the correct application of data will be beneficial regardless of which set of humans populate the organization. This assumption was debunked as early as 1941 by Roethlisberger (1941/2011) in *The Hawthorne Experiments*, which sought to "find out the relation of the quality and quantity of illumination to the efficiency of industrial workers" (p. 162). Roethlisberger's conclusion was unexpected but poignant: the social environment has a significantly larger impact on productivity than does the physical environment. Nevertheless, the use of data guided by values of control and power is deeply rooted in educational administration, which evolved from a tradition of

organizational theory, heavily influenced by Taylor (1916/2011) and Fayol's (1916/2011) contributions to the theory of scientific management (Callahan, 1962).

## Efficiency Through Scientific Management

Controlling operations to increase production and reduce waste in order to amass wealth is the foundational process of scientific management, and could be read as a definition of efficiency. Determining best practice through the gathering of data, and utilizing this knowledge in the daily work of an organization provides management with greater control and power over the physical environment of the workplace (Taylor, 1916/2011). This held implications for the social environment as well. Taylor (1916/2011) claimed: "Nineteen-twentieths of the real wealth of this world is used by the poor people, and not the rich, so that the working man who sets out as a steady principle to restrict output is merely robbing his own kind" (p. 66). This bold claim was a classist offering of "false generosity" (Freire, 1970, p. 44), a generosity that does not seek to alleviate the root source of oppression from which the supposed philanthropist derives privilege (Freire, 1970). Besides the questionable validity of this claim, the assertion that the poor are responsible for their own poverty, and that the wealthy do not impose a significant problem for society through their accumulation of wealth are clear examples of the application of hegemonic pressure. Nevertheless, the logic of this claim was apparently sufficient, and scientific management spread throughout Western society in the early 20th Century (Callahan, 1962). Careful manipulation of labour and materials could drive down production cost and maximize profit, which in turn was believed to benefit labour, management, and consumers (Taylor, 1916/2011). This arrangement situated efficiency at the heart of organizational theory, where it continues to enjoy high status.

Taylor (1916/2011) and Fayol (1916/2011) set efficiency against presumptions of human nature, which they described as inefficient, self-interested, irrational, and ignorant. Through scientific management, these vices are overcome by adherence to certain principles (Fayol, 1916/2011). Principles such as the "division of work" (p. 52), adherence to a "scalar chain" (p. 60), "unity of direction" (p. 55), "discipline" (p. 53), and "subordination of individual interests to general interests" (p. 56) among others, contribute to an understanding that efficiency is achieved through the measurement, regulation, and control of human nature. An "imperative of efficiency" in educational governance prompts the use of managerial strategies that create generic dehumanized workers and students (Kumar & Mitchell, 2004, p. 128). These strategies include "denial of proximity" (p. 130), which isolates the decision makers, "effacement of face" (p. 132), which supplants the individual for the generic, and "reduction to traits" (p. 133), which dehumanizes individuals. Together these strategies facilitate expedient, objectively rational, and unemotional decision-making (Kumar & Mitchell, 2004). Kumar and Mitchell cautioned against the use of these strategies in the "single-minded pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness" (p. 130) through which it is possible to detach from the moral implications of policy decisions. Efficiency detached from morality is problematic when applied to education, where the moral neutrality of efficiency may be exposed as a false assumption.

Taylor (1916/2011) referenced a skepticism of efficiency among workers who, he believed, feared that increased efficiency would result in layoffs, as less workers would be required to maintain an equal output. This skepticism is shared by critics of efficiency in education, who found that efficiency efforts are typically motivated by a desire to cut costs, narrow curricula to suit the demands of industry, and impose strict accountability measures adopted from the private sector (Lowe Boyd, 2004; Menashy, 2007; Welch, 1998). The results of such efforts have been found to be "a loss in equity and a narrowing of the curriculum" (Welch, 1998, p. 157). The concerns of skeptical workers described by Taylor, and shared by those who are wary of efficiency in education, call attention to the presumed intrinsic value of efficiency. The actual value of efficiency should not be determined by its mere presence, but by its influence on a system (Menashy, 2007). Indeed, one way to increase efficiency is to reduce inputs to achieve approximately equal outputs (Alexander et al., 2010), or if equal outputs cannot be maintained, a lower quality of output may be acceptable. Taylor sidestepped these concerns with the assertion that efficiency would increase production, profit, wages, and jobs, thus creating prosperity and organizational

unity. Taylor also suggested that any labourer would accept the desirability of efficiency as a logical and rational truth if it were explained to them. This belief in the indisputable productive and harmonizing potential of efficiency, along with the presumption of its moral neutrality remain active in educational administration.

The advancement of scientific management centred efficiency among the priorities of organizations (Callahan, 1962). Efficiency relies on the decontextualization and generalisation through processes facilitated by numerical measurements, from which conclusions are drawn and extrapolated to inform policy or provide evidence of the quality of return on investment. The result of this contemporary notion of efficiency is an oversimplified understanding of the complex dynamics that occur when humans organize themselves to teach and learn (Lowe Boyd, 2004; Menashy, 2007; Welch, 1998). While expedient and potentially informative, studies of efficiency in school systems present a culturally constructed valuing of education. Ignorance of the culturally constructed nature of efficiency allows for its use in the legitimation of hegemonic pressure.

## Efficiency Studies

Efficiency studies date back to 1909 with Ayres' Laggards in Our Schools, which attempted to determine the rate at which students were completing primary education. The language in the study is shocking by modern standards[1]. Ayres (1909) based the study on an input/output model of factory production: a school can be said to be efficient if it turns 100% of its students into graduates, and if it can do this on a set schedule. This narrow view of efficiency was particularly discriminatory to minority students. Ayres noted, "the coloured pupils of Memphis make the poorest showing with 75.8 per cent above normal age" (p. 48) for their grade, this is compared to 33.7% of all children in the 31 cities surveyed. A chapter was devoted to "the nationality factor" (Ayres, 1909, p. 103) in which Ayres sought to determine the impact of immigration on school efficiency. The contents of the chapter are heavily steeped in socially constructed notions of race and sweeping generalizations that attached success in school to the country of origin. In a subsequent chapter, Ayres attempted but failed to find a relationship between "physical defects and school progress" (p. 117). Ayres concluded the chapter with the statement: "among the reasons for poor scholarship are still to be found such old standbys as age upon starting, absence, laziness and stupidity" (p. 131); regardless, both attempts to explain a lack of academic progress situate the problem within the student and not the school. Heavily influenced by an industrial business ideology that had swept into American schools (Callahan, 1962), Ayres' study initiated a set of conventions that would reappear in efficiency studies approximately 100 years later. These conventions include the expectation of an input/output model of education, success defined in narrow and empirically measurable terms, an emphasis on the desirability of cost reduction, and the casting of culturally and socially diverse students as detrimental to efficiency.

Internationally, contemporary studies have been conducted to measure the efficiency of schools (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015; Alexander et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2009; Huguenin, 2014). These studies used data envelopment analysis (DEA), a commonly accepted process used to determine productivity benchmarks within a system by comparing the relative impact of variables, or decision-making units (DMUs) (Hu et al., 2009). Inputs, variables, and outputs are selected for measurement. Once the general efficiency of schools is measured, researchers conduct a data regression analysis to determine the effect of individual variables. The purpose of these studies was to identify the positive and negative influences on school efficiency and provide recommendations to inform policy[2].

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[1] "Retardation" (Ayres, 1909, p. 36) is used to describe students who did not advance through the grades on time; "mortality" (Ayres, 1909, p. 49) is used to describe students who drop out prior to completion.
[2] Interestingly, I was unable to find DEA studies of the efficiency of Indigenous school systems. In the past, research has been used as a tool to justify colonization and Eurocentrism (Stewart-Harawira, 2013). If found inefficient, an Indigenous school would likely be judged through socially constructed notions of race, a layer of judgment that would not be applied to predominantly white schools. The lack of efficiency studies conducted on Indigenous schools may also be due to the inability of such methods to account appropriately for the complexities of education in postcolonial contexts.

The consistent use of this method suggests confidence in its legitimacy.

Mechanistic language permeates school efficiency studies. Inputs are selected, which regularly include the number of teacher, administration, and support staff full-time equivalencies (FTE), school budgets (Huguenin, 2014, p. 545), and student enrolment (Alexander et al., 2010). One study also included teachers' average teaching experience, level of education and salary, the number of books and computers per student, and total instructional hours (Hu et al., 2009). Outputs are measured in the form of "technical efficiency" (Huguenin, 2014, p. 539) as evidenced by scores on standardized exams in math and language (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015; Alexander et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2009; Huguenin, 2014). The studies also identify variables that mediate the relationship between inputs and outputs. Typical variables include: socioeconomic status, special education needs, additional language instruction, immigrant student population, school competition, urban or rural location of the school, and school size and composition (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015; Alexander et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2009; Huguenin, 2014). These variables are assigned a value of zero or one, based on researchers' expectation of their effect. In one study, schools that offered special education services were assigned a value of one, which would negatively influence efficiency (Huguenin, 2014). Also, several studies have identified low socioeconomic status students as having a negative influence on efficiency (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015; Alexander et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2009; Huguenin, 2014). Researchers acknowledged the detrimental effect of low socioeconomic status on efficiency as an indicator of problematic social contexts that make it more difficult for some students to succeed (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015; Alexander et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2009; Huguenin, 2014); however, these studies contribute to a narrative that places low socioeconomic status students in opposition to the efficiency interests of school systems. Casting low socioeconomic status students as bad for efficiency locates the problem within students, a location of blame reminiscent of Ayres' (1909) study.

An international comparative study of secondary school efficiency published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2015) measured the correlation between several inputs, variables, and outputs. Inputs included socioeconomic status, student-teacher ratio, and computer-student ratio. Outputs consisted of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 math and reading scores. The relationship between these inputs and outputs was regressed through a variety of variables, including the characteristics of the schools, students, and the "school's practices and processes" (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015, p. 10). Thirty countries were included in the study. While the study identified "a positive relationship between performance and efficiency" it could not determine whether high-efficiency schools were able to improve the achievement levels of low performing students (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015, p. 15). The study also found that there is no universal consistency of strength in the determinants of efficiency (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015). The effect of a variable on efficiency is influenced by the context of the country, and by the location of the effect within the range of efficiency scores (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015). Some variables have a greater effect at the low end of efficiency, and others near the high end (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015). Based on these findings the authors concluded, "the way the schools implement policies, such as school autonomy, is as important, if not more, than the actual policy itself" (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015, p. 36). This finding is significant to the current critique of efficiency, specifically because it identifies the limitations of efficiency studies to assess the culturally bound, contextually specific, and nuanced processes that determine the extent to which a school is successful in providing education.

Discussions and measurements of the efficient use of educational funding are appropriate and necessary. If schools are to provide the best possible education, they must use their financial resources effectively (Lowe Boyd, 2004). I do not intend to argue for purposeful waste; however, efficiency studies feed into a presumption that the measurement of inputs, the accounting of the influences of variables, and the tracking of outputs is an appropriate and sufficient process to determine the extent to which schools are successful.

When read with a postcolonial lens these studies reveal several problems. School efficiency studies attempt to identify variables that allow for the greatest academic achievement in language and math with the least financial input. This question is primarily economic and places education, defined in the narrowest of terms, as a secondary concern. Since low socioeconomic status schools tend to cost more and achieve less, it may be possible to reduce funding to these schools without significant negative impact to achievement, thus increasing efficiency (Alexander et al., 2010). School efficiency studies are limited by a narrow definition of the purpose of schools, consequently, the diversity of intellectual pursuits and holistic functions of education are lost. In fact, researchers have noted a lack of data available to measure a range of educational outputs (Alexander et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2009; Huguenin, 2014). The lack of available empirical data representative of diverse educational outputs suggests much of this output is difficult to quantify, and therefore less likely to be used to demonstrate return on investment.

## Efficiency and Assimilation in First Nations Education

Agasisti and Zoido (2015) posed a question that makes an important distinction: "the policy question is whether countries are willing to improve overall performance even if that implies an inefficient amount of resources or instead they are more interested in maximizing efficiency at a lower overall level of achievement" (p. 16). This distinction highlights the potential friction between economic and educational goals and the consequences associated with how school systems choose to measure success. Jaafar and Anderson (2007) analyzed a cross-section of educational policy from various stakeholders across Canada to better understand the tension between values-based and economic approaches to accountability in education systems. They found the "true character of the accountability system manifests itself through what is measured and reported, by whom, to whom, and the consequences attached to these accounts" (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 244). This finding calls attention to the values held by school systems, and prevailing beliefs about how school systems should function in a society.

Many have cited neoliberalism as the prevailing set of values and beliefs in education. Neoliberalism applies an economic framework to education, and suggests that education systems are improved through the adoption of competition, consumer choice, standardization, and increased accountability (Casey et al., 2013; Godlewska et al., 2013; Newton & da Costa, 2016; Sahlberg, 2008). Welch (1998) summarised the neoliberal influence on efficiency: "efficiency movements can be argued to be predicated upon the idea that both individual worth and the worth of education can be reduced to economic terms" (p. 157). This reduction of the worth of education to economic terms, along with an emphasis on competition, consumer choice, standardization, and increased accountability have been found to be detrimental. Through analysis of efficiency efforts in the UK and Australia, Welch concluded that such efforts impose an economic imperative on education that results in a narrowing of curricula and loss of equity. Newton and da Costa (2016) have studied privilege and discrimination created by school choice and school competition, which favour urban residents who can afford to transport their children to a highly ranked school; rural families and families who cannot transport their children to school must attend the local school. This allows schools to become homogenous, organized by social class. This social sorting has political ramifications, as Newton and da Costa (2016) described,

> In Alberta, those schools with the lowest standardized test scores on provincial achievement tests are also those schools serving the segments of the population with the lowest socio-economic status. Families living in these communities will have the lowest social capital and least political influence of any segment of the Alberta population. (p. 1283)

Those with social capital and political influence are better served than those without and will continue to support choice and competition in public education. The use of education systems to perpetuate patterns of privilege and discrimination has a long tradition in North America and has disadvantaged those whose interests are not closely aligned with the economic interests of a government.

Casey et al. (2013) traced neoliberal policy in education, to slavery and colonization in North America. Framed within a discussion of classroom management, the authors found that the belief that management precedes learning, and is not a result of learning, is rooted in a "neoliberal world order" which has "become synonymous with teaching" (Casey et al., 2013, p. 38). The need to manage, historically, was supported by socially constructed notions of race that promoted white supremacy and pitted "different races against each other in the competition of cheap labour" (Casey et al., 2013, p. 39). These notions are clearly evident in the history of slavery in the US, but also appear in the history of industrial expansion, where the need to manage was inducted into theories of scientific management (Callahan, 1962; Casey et al., 2013). Public education inherited an industrial model of organization (Callahan, 1962), including the belief that workers, or in the case of schools, students, must be managed in order to be productive (Casey et al., 2013, p. 39). "Social efficiency educators [who] aimed to eliminate waste and to properly prepare students for their place in the labour market" held these beliefs (Casey et al., 2013, p. 40). Racism complicates this goal, as one's place in the labour market is not solely based on achievement (McIntosh, 1992). Racial applications of social efficiency can be observed in the policy and practices of the Canadian Government in regard to First Nations Education.

## Colonial, Neocolonial, and Neoliberal Efficiency Efforts in First Nations Education

The right to education was negotiated in each of the numbered treaties in Canada, with the intention of allowing First Nations people to prosper, not only in their own cultural traditions and communities but also in the European culture that was spreading across the land (Carr-Stewart, 2007). First Nations treaty negotiators were aware of the educational needs of their societies: "By the time of the Treaty 6 negotiations, the Cree people understood and were involved in the duality of education: using both Indigenous and Western educational practices to benefit their people in a changing economic and social environment" (Carr-Stewart, 2007, p. 237). Although legally obligated to provide education, the Crown enacted policy through which this obligation was handed off to religious organizations, or not sufficiently fulfilled, creating a disparity between First Nations schools and provincial education systems (Carr-Stewart, 2007). Since the treaties were signed, efficiency has negatively influenced the fulfillment of education as a treaty right.

The negative influence of efficiency is obvious in the implementation and management of residential schools. Industrial residential schools, located off reserves and run by religious organizations, were a cost-effective way for the Federal Government to enact a policy of assimilation (Carr-Stewart, 2007). Residential schools reduced cost to the Federal Government through economy of scale; labour costs were saved by relying on religious organizations to manage and staff the schools; additional labour costs were saved by dividing the school day into a morning of academic work and an afternoon of chores, farming, and maintenance all performed by the students; compulsory attendance ensured full schools, which further increased their efficiency (Carr-Stewart, 2007). By the 1930s funding for residential schools had decreased while enrolment increased, again adding to financial efficiency (Carr-Stewart, 2007). Together, these efficiency efforts depict an oppressive system of cultural assimilation, which stood in stark contrast to the bicultural education provisions guaranteed in the numbered treaties.

Despite the various efficiency tactics, the government continued to question the return on their investment (Carr-Stewart, 2006). These concerns were voiced in the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy,* 1969 (Government of Canada, 1969), through its proposal to relinquish federal responsibility to provide for First Nations education, a move which would save federal dollars by abolishing the Indian Act and handing responsibility for First Nations education to the provinces. Based on claims of equality, the policy's assimilationist solution would improve efficiency by ignoring diversity.[3] The Indian Brotherhood responded to with *Indian Control of Indian Education*, advocating for the distinct position and needs of First Nations within Canada, and their right to self-determination in education (Assembly of First Nations,

[3] Contemporary efficiency studies corroborate the rationale for desiring cultural homogeneity (Huguenin, 2014).

2010). The distinct needs of Indigenous children and communities were not considered in the application of efficiency efforts in residential schools; instead, hegemonic pressure was applied to impose a Eurocentric way of life. This leads one to wonder about the role of efficiency as a tool of colonization. The possibility of connections between efficiency and systemic oppression requires further exploration.

Though residential schools have closed, and on reserve, First Nations schools now serve their own communities, the imperative of financial efficiency continues to create inequality between the education outcomes of students who attend reserve schools and their provincial counterparts. Here again, values of decontextualization and generalisation allow Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to espouse the rationality and neutrality of their funding decisions. According to Drummond and Kachuck Rosenbluth's (2013) analysis of the funding gap between First Nations and provincial schools, there are several problems that result in unequal funding, along with rationalizations on behalf of INAC to support this inequality. Of primary concern is the unresponsiveness of INAC's funding formula, which through the use of out of date enrolment numbers, and failure to lift temporary funding caps, has resulted in a significant per student funding gap (Drummond & Kachuck Rosenbluth, 2013). In 2009, "the average instructional service dollars per [student] FTE between AANDC [INAC] and provincial districts with fewer than 100 FTEs" showed Saskatchewan provincial schools received $11 000 per student, while First Nations schools in Saskatchewan received $7 000 per student, a significant difference (Drummond & Kachuck Rosenbluth, 2013, p. 10). INAC has defended their funding of First Nations education by questioning the validity of comparisons (Drummond & Kachuck Rosenbluth, 2013). Given the complexity of educational funding formulae, it is difficult to compare funding; however, the inequity of funding can be observed when a critique of efficiency is applied.

Economy of scale and centralization are typically indicators of efficiency (Huguenin, 2014). The remoteness and size of reserve schools would suggest a decrease in the efficiency of funding, compared to large urban schools. First Nations schools also do not usually benefit from the instructional and administrative supports that would be accessible to schools belonging to a school division, though there are examples of First Nations schools forming school divisions, or creating partnerships with provincial school divisions to provide this systemic support (Phillips, 2010). Without the support of a school division, individual schools are left to hire private contractors for administrative, legal, or instructional service, and special education needs, or maintenance (Phillips, 2011). For these reasons, one would expect that First Nations schools' funding per student FTE would need to be greater than that of provincial schools to achieve equity of services, but this is not the case.

The manner in which funding is provided is perhaps more problematic than the amount of funding. A Financial Transfer Agreement (FTA) is a method of educational funding that allows for bands to prioritize and, if necessary, redirect funding from education to another priority, with the requirement that First Nations schools meet "minimum standards" (INAC as cited by Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 1007). The language of efficiency rings clear in minimum standards and illustrates an input/output system where input may be decreased as long as a suitable, though decreased, the output is maintained. This results-based accountability facilitates the prioritization of efficiency (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). The problems created by FTAs are made worse when a reserve is required to redirect funding from education to pay down debt, a practice that is often imposed on bands when a third party financial manager is appointed (Carr-Stewart, 2006). Indeed, "for those First Nations operating within an imposed financial recovery process, the largest claw back is from the education budget" (Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 1009). Directing money from education to debt repayment makes financial sense but not educational sense. This is consistent with the notion of efficiency described above, which operates under the assumed rationality and neutrality of Western mathematics. Governments and administrators who take funding from students to pay down debt can justify their actions by reverting to the abstraction of debt repayment and ignore the historical, social, and colonial factors that have created such situations. As a negotiated treaty right, education was paid for by First Nations in the release of

land (Carr-Stewart, 2007); underfunding education creates a debt for the Crown as it fails to fulfill its treaty obligation.

Funding of First Nations education is subject to the colonial history of Canada and is influenced by socially constructed notions of race, particularly the pathologization of Indigenous peoples as unfortunate, primitive, and dispossessed (Thira, 2014). The poor opinion of human nature held by Fayol (1916/2011) and Taylor (1916/2011), specifically the assumption that people tend to be lazy, self-interested, and inefficient, thus requiring strict management, is amplified through racism. *The Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal Peoples Survey* (2016) found that 67% of non-Aboriginal respondents believed that "Aboriginal people have a sense of entitlement about receiving support from governments and taxpayers" (p. 23), while 26% of respondents viewed Aboriginal people themselves as "the biggest obstacle to achieving economic and social equality" (p. 22). These opinions are echoed in proposal-based funding, which is another method of First Nations Educational funding that veils racism within efficiency. Approximately 30% of federal allocation for First Nations education funding is provided through proposal-based funding (Drummond & Kachuck Rosenbluth, 2013). Bands apply for short-term funding with a specific project in mind. Similar to other grants, the band must demonstrate how they have met certain goals. The inconsistency and short term of this funding limit the potential impact of the programing it supports, for example, this money could not be used to hire more teachers or attract more experienced teachers (Drummond & Kachuck Rosenbluth, 2013). Furthermore, this method implies that bands only deserve increased funding for education if they are held accountable by demonstrating a return on the government's investment. Here again, economic concerns take precedence over educational needs. The pathologization of Indigenous peoples is consistent with a view of efficiency that enforces strict accountability.

*Free to Learn* (Helin, & Snow, 2010) is another example of the pathologizing presumptions of Indigenous peoples hidden within calls to improve the efficiency of First Nations education funding (Godlewska et al., 2013). Published by The MacDonald-Laurier Institute for Public Policy, *Free to Learn* advances a neoliberal agenda that promotes individual rights at the expense of collective rights (Godlewska et al., 2013). Continuing a narrative of corruption and mismanagement within band administration, it misappropriates multiculturalism to promote assimilation (Godlewska et al., 2013). Helin and Snow (2010) argued that the current method of post-secondary education funding, which directs funds to bands for distribution to their members, is unnecessarily inefficient and often results in the mismanagement of these funds. As a remedy, they proposed the creation of a post-secondary savings account for each eligible status First Nations student. Funds would be placed directly into this account, to eventually be put toward tuition. Essentially, this method provides direct funding to each student and removes the administrative role of the band in post-secondary funding. Helin and Snow claimed that corruption and mismanagement in the current system prevent students from accessing funds, consequently limiting their participation in the workforce. They claim their proposal to fund individual students directly will benefit students who will have greater control over their funding, be more likely to complete post-secondary education, and help to alleviate the forecasted labour shortage by taking an increasing role in the workforce (Helin, & Snow, 2010).

Godlewska et al.'s (2013) critique of *Free to Learn* identifies the problems inherent in its settler gaze and neoliberal ideology. *Free to Learn* makes use of "the self-interested, historical geographical ignorance of the settler population" by describing a looming crisis created by widespread corruption and mismanagement among First Nations bands (Godlewska et al., 2013, p. 273). The solution presented in *Free to Learn* is reached through "scalar obfuscation", which misrepresents the scale of a problem by removing it from its context and generalizing it to a larger or smaller scale (Godlewska et al., 2013, p. 273). This tactic of decontextualization and generalization is consistent with the previously discussed value clusters of Western mathematics and is particularly controlling in its application. The funding of First Nations, as mentioned previously, is complex. Flexibility in funding allows for bands to redirect funding to pressing necessities, potentially leaving less funding for education. Additionally, the underfunding of First Nations' education is well documented (Carr-Stewart, 2006). If bands are not able to send more of their

students to post-secondary institutions, it is an oversimplification to blame this problem on widespread corruption, for which *Free to Learn* provides no evidence (Godlewska et al., 2013).

The solution proposed by *Free to Learn* advances a neoliberal ideology that divides First Nations into individual consumers of education (Godlewska et al., 2013). This is more reflective of the position of the individual in capitalist Euro-Western culture, and disadvantages First Nations bands, which rely on collective unity to promote their rights, interests, and distinct position in colonial society (Godlewska et al., 2013). An interpretation of multiculturalism supports the weakening of collective rights, where cultural diversity is nullified through claims to equal treatment and opportunity. This advocacy for sameness perpetuates whiteness as a default (Godlewska et al., 2013). *Free to Learn* continues an assimilationist agenda through its ignorance of the historical and geographical realities of First Nations, it suggests that inequalities experienced by First Nations are a result of their detachment from more efficient engagement in the market economy (Godlewska et al., 2013). From this neoliberal perspective, collective rights are inferior to individual rights because they limit consumer choice and competition in the free market. This was a central argument put forward in the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969* (Government of Canada, 1969) namely that the hardships suffered by Indigenous peoples is a result of their distance from economic participation due to their unique status in Canadian society, and not as a direct result of colonization. The presumption that choice and competition create efficiency and wealth provides a basis for the suggestion that collective rights, or the position of First Nations as a distinct group within Canadian society, is disadvantageous (Godlewska et al., 2013). Unfortunately, choice and competition are ill-suited to account for the complex social and historical contexts of life in a postcolonial society. The indiscriminate assertion of choice and competition, as is evident in the *Free to Learn* example, constitute a form of neocolonialism justified through claims to efficiency.

The priority of efficiency within educational funding has negatively influenced the Crown's fulfillment of its treaty obligations. Grounded in the assumed neutrality of Western mathematics and its value clusters of decontextualization, generalization, power and control (Bishop, 1990/2006) enacted through principles of scientific management (Callahan, 1962), and more recently through neoliberal policy (Godlewska et al., 2013), efficiency has been used to put economic goals above educational goals and treaty rights. In this way, efficiency has become a colonial concept. Decolonizing the contemporary notion of efficiency to better account for diverse educational needs and contexts may help to expose the dehumanizing applications of efficiency that currently enjoy claims to reason and logic. Fortunately, theories exist to inform a humanizing notion of efficiency.

## Toward a Humanizing Efficiency: Recommendations and Implications

Humanization was described by Freire (1970) as the central "vocation" (p. 43) of human beings, consisting of the "emancipation of labour, [...] the overcoming of alienation, [and] the affirmation of men and women as persons" (p. 44). This is achieved through an awareness of, and action against oppressive social, economic, and political forces. A humanizing notion of efficiency would raise awareness of the hegemonic pressure applied through efficiency, as it is commonly understood, and support efforts to decolonize education.

A problem at the root of efficiency is the presumption of its neutral ethical value (Menashy, 2007). As previously discussed, this is achieved through the abstraction of mathematics and its claims to rationality (Bishop, 1990/2006). In application, however, efficiency has ethical implications for organizations, especially in colonial contexts where settler and Indigenous cultures engage. The colonial notion of efficiency must be replaced with an ethical one. Ermine (2007) defines ethics to mean "the capacity to know what harms or enhances the well-being of sentient creatures" (p. 195). Each society determines its own ethical boundaries (Ermine, 2007). Settler society has opted for a definition of ethics concerned with actions that harm or enhance the wellbeing of the economy, which does not necessarily correlate to the wellbeing of individuals. The definition used by Ermine (2007), however, transcends the presumed neutrality of mathe-

matics in the promotion of efficiency and brings attention to the impact of efficiency on sentient beings. Assembling a humanizing notion of efficiency that strengthens the Indigenous/settler relationship requires an awareness of the concept of "ethical space" (Ermine, 2007, p. 194), which is created when two societies "detach from the cages of [their] mental worlds and assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur" (Ermine, 2007, p. 202). This requires the identification and suspension of universal assumptions, specifically, for settler society, the suspension of Western universality that positions Euro-Western epistemology and ontology as the normal, neutral, and necessary orientation ( Battiste et al., 2002; Ermine, 2007). A humanizing notion of efficiency will replace universal notions with "concepts such as the equality of nations" (Ermine, 2007, p. 202). The Cree negotiators of Treaty 6 recognized the need for education that would prepare students to benefit from First Nations and European knowledge (Carr-Stewart, 2007). Currently, calls for "two-way" education are challenging Eurocentric standards of education (Agbo, 2012, p. 333).

In Agbo's (2012) study of the perspectives of "First-Nations and Euro-Canadian teachers on the nature and aims of schooling, its guiding principles, its practical functions, and its role in First Nations society" (p. 333) Agbo found an acceptance of "two-way education that encourages a cross-fertilization of insights, practices, and mental prototypes of both Eurocentric and First Nations traditions and cultures" (p. 333). This study revealed several concepts that could help to construct a humanizing notion of efficiency by rooting efficiency in social needs rather than economic. First, any meaningful education must reflect the culture of its students (Agbo, 2012). This requires curriculum, instruction, and assessment to be context specific. Generalization of curricula, which typically supports a Eurocentric worldview with minor inclusions of a pan-Indigenous worldview (Battiste et al., 2002; Godlewska et al., 2010), is replaced by a specific emphasis on the local. Decontextualization and generalization are inefficient in education, given the need for cultural responsiveness.

Agbo (2012) identified instances where Euro-Canadian teachers in First Nations schools recognized the need for culturally responsive curricula but did not know how to provide it. Meanwhile, community members and the Local Education Authority (LEA), a group of community members who do not necessarily have a background in education, expected teachers to provide an education comparable to what is received in urban provincial schools. Overall, there was a lack of consensus regarding who would be in the best position to create curricula, and to what extent school should be bicultural (Agbo, 2012). This was due to conflicting views on the appropriateness of cultural inclusion in education (Agbo, 2012). Some community members viewed school as the appropriate place for Euro-Canadian knowledge, while Indigenous knowledge and traditions should be taught at home; others supported a combination of both. This division is significant and requires attention since it deals with the valuing of educational outcomes. If schools are to be efficient in a humanizing way, they must respond to the needs of the people they serve. A humanizing notion of efficiency must acknowledge culturally diverse educational outcomes, or outputs, of a school or school system.

Agbo (2012) applied a framework to describe a continuum between "conformity" and "rationality" in "bicultural education" (p. 349) where *conformity* describes an adherence to Eurocentric education, and *rationality* describes the recognition of the specific cultural reality of a community and its cultural needs. The efficiency studies discussed above conform to Eurocentric purposes and values of education; this is evident in their selection of outputs which are consistently identified as scores on language and math exams. Two-way education that incorporates Indigenous and Euro-Canadian epistemology, and is arrived at through transcultural collaboration would reflect a rational approach to bicultural education (Agbo, 2012).

A humanizing notion of efficiency in education would include a dialectical relationship between stakeholders of different cultures. A Freirian notion of dialogue contrasts the contemporary notion of efficiency but forms the foundation of a humanizing efficiency in a postcolonial society. Through dialogue:

> arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world. (Freire, 1970, p. 80)

Dialogue contrasts the social interactions embedded in the standard notion of efficiency, specifically, the principles of management in which power is applied down the scalar chain for the purposes of the unity of direction and command. Chain of command necessitates the interests of the organization over the interests of individuals to increase organizational efficiency. Similarly, the neoliberal social arrangement employs an exclusive and classist social order where individual consumers and providers of goods and services generate efficiency by outcompeting the economically inefficient. Humanizing efficiency requires a social arrangement of Freirean dialogue in ethical space, where stakeholders come together to co-create a system of education predicated on diversity. This claim requires the identification of that which may serve as evidence of a humanizing efficiency.

A humanizing efficiency measured using the usual metrics of efficiency would fail to impress, and may tempt the expression of hegemonic pressure on the part of the settler group. An alternative metric of efficiency will be necessary for anti-oppressive and decolonial education. Returning to Perrins' (2016) definition of efficiency as "the best use of resources" (p. 18), a humanizing notion of efficiency would understand best as encompassing the needs and interests of all stakeholders and would acknowledge their diverse cultural, social, and historical contexts. Resources would be expanded from a primarily financial notion to mean any person, group, process, or epistemological tradition that may be engaged in the pursuit of education, and done so with respect and a careful avoidance of objectification. It would also be helpful to determine a revised understanding of *waste*. In a humanizing efficiency study, waste could be understood as a failure to ensure honest dialogue when attempting to meet the diverse needs and interests of stakeholders. Waste could also refer to an education that is inadequately funded, culturally unresponsive, or designed to simply satisfy the needs of industry.

Inputs in a study of humanizing efficiency might include the extent to which teachers of First Nations students "understand and recognize Aboriginal world-views" (Agbo, 2012, p. 359). This would seem to be a necessary component of an efficient education system since the lack of culturally responsive curricula has been described as "meaningless" (Agbo, 2012, p. 347). A second input could be the degree to which Indigenous and settler groups engaged in education encounter each other from a position of "human-to-human dialogue" (Ermine, 2007, p. 202), and have suspended notions of Western universality. A third input could be the occurrence of the "animation" (Battiste et al., 2002, p. 91) of Indigenous knowledge. A complex concept, the animation of Indigenous knowledge can partially be defined as the recognition that "Aboriginal education requires a process of participation, consultation, collaboration, consensus-building, participatory research, and sharing led by Aboriginal peoples and grounded in Indigenous knowledge" (Battiste et al., 2002, p. 91). The fourth input in a study of humanizing efficiency in schools could be the existence of "cooperation and networking" within school systems, as opposed to "competition and disconnectedness" (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 59). Cooperation and networking among education, health, and social services could ensure that schools are not solely responsible for the well-being and development of youth. These four inputs would point researchers in the direction of school efficiency that measures more than the extent to which educational funding translates into graduates who have achieved high scores on standardized language and math exams.

The output measurements of a humanizing efficiency could include a range of systemic indicators. While outputs like an achievement in math and language are important, they alone do not reflect the entire purpose of education. If the best use of resources should be determined in dialogue among stakeholders, the dialogue would need to be conducted in ethical space, with an awareness of the postcolonial, and reflect local contexts in order to counteract Eurocentrism and hegemony. This is not to say the educational goals of an Indigenous community will necessarily oppose the standards of education set by a province; it does, however, recognize local interests, and attempts to balance these against the interests of the government. The importance

of dialogue in ethical space provides a means by which Eurocentrism and hegemonic pressures may be identified as oppressive, a necessary step in decolonizing education.

A study of humanizing efficiency conducted in Canada must include inputs, variables, and outputs that account for both Indigenous and Western epistemologies. The United Nations (2008) was clear in its assertion of the rights of Indigenous peoples to control and direct their own education in a "manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning" (p. 7). The TRCC (2015) has called upon the federal government to support these rights. To this point, the standard notion of efficiency has been used to rationalize the failure of the Canadian Government to fulfill its treaty obligation to provide for First Nations education. In this way, efficiency has been a central value in the use of education to colonize and assimilate Indigenous peoples. Rising in status through the spread of scientific management, and finding a contemporary place within neoliberalism, efficiency continues to be used to apply hegemonic pressure by asserting the need for greatest return on investment. When analyzed through a postcolonial lens, the standard notion of efficiency, as a morally neutral and rational imperative, is revealed as a facilitator of colonization and must be revised to promote the decolonization of education. A humanizing notion of efficiency is required to support transcultural dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and educational leaders working to identify a more equitable and ethical understanding of the best use of resources.

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# Support or They'll Abort: Teacher Retention and the Influence of School Administration

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## Abstract

Teacher retention has long been an area of focus in educational research. This is likely due to the alarmingly high rates of teacher attrition and turnover, which are considerably higher in teaching than many other professions. This study aims to understand what teacher retention is, as well as recognize what the negative consequences of low teacher retention are. Further, this study seeks to identify what factors significantly influence teacher retention decisions. The reviewed research indicates that numerous factors influence teacher retention to varying degrees; however, school administration proved to be particularly significant. More specifically, the literature review revealed that school administration can positively influence teacher retention rates by supporting teachers in a number of different ways. This study confirms the importance of school administration in teacher retention decisions and has implications for administrator induction programs and current practicing administrators.

## Keywords

*school administration, teacher retention, administrative support*

## Purpose

Education systems face a number of challenges. One on-going and pressing issue is teacher retention. Teacher retention generally refers to an individual's decision to remain a teacher and continue teaching within one particular school or institute. A wide variety of reasons for low teacher retention rates have been highlighted in scholarly research. One reason that has received considerable attention is the influence of school administration. In this study, school administration will refer to those individuals that administer schools on a regular or semi-regular basis, such as vice-principals, principals, and superintendents. The purpose of this study is to: (a) determine what teacher retention is; (b) identify the negative consequences low teacher retention has for students, teachers, and schools; and (c) find, among other factors, how school administration influences teacher retention rates.

## Research Questions

Four different research questions will guide the inquiry of this study:

1. What is teacher retention?
2. What are the consequences of low teacher retention rates?
3. What are the major factors that affect teacher retention?
4. In which ways do school administrators affect teacher retention?

## Significance

The focus of this study has profound significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is important to investigate teacher retention due to the contemporary trends in teacher turnover and attrition. Today, many education systems are struggling to keep teachers in their schools. Low teacher retention rates are troublesome for school districts and divisions due to the consequences they

have. Extraordinary amounts of money are spent in the hiring and training processes of new teachers due to low teacher retention. The current financial strain experienced by many school divisions/districts makes improving teacher retention necessary. Arguably more problematic is that low teacher retention rates have been cited as an inhibitor of student learning and achievement. If teachers are frequently moving schools or leaving the profession, students are less likely to be taught by experienced teachers that know their school and community.

Similarly, this study is significant as it investigates the important realm of school administration. School administrators yield significant power (of many forms) at the schools in which they work, having considerable influence over both staff and students. School administrators are expected to be leaders in their schools and strive for optimal efficiency and success. Therefore, it is crucial that the impact school administration has on teachers and their consequent decision to stay or leave schools, be continually investigated. If we can determine what school administrators do to positively influence teacher retention, then administrative induction programs and present school administrators can refine practices to increase teacher retention rates.

## Limitations

There are a number of potential limitations with regard to this study. To begin, the research and corresponding data reviewed in this study are predominantly from the United States of America, which means the presented influence of school administration on teacher retention does not recognize the diverse cultural, organizational, and demographic differences found outside of that country. Also, teacher retention has proven to be incredibly complex, being influenced by a plethora of factors, many of which are interconnected. Therefore, the presented influence of school administration on teacher retention may be affected by other factors unbeknownst to the researchers, making its measurement inaccurate. Another weakness of this study may be that the category of school administration is too broad, including a group of personnel that are considerably different from one another and may influence teacher retention to varying degrees. For instance, the influence a school principal has on a teacher's retention decisions may be substantially different when compared to the influence a superintendent or department head has. Finally, a constraint on this study is the available time to conduct the literature review given the nature of this intersession course.

## Literature Review

### What is Teacher Retention?

Teacher retention has received considerable attention in recent years, being increasingly researched as a topic of focus in a growing body of literature. Teacher retention is multifaceted, making it complex and difficult to define. Some researchers have tried to simplify teacher retention with definitions that may be overly simplistic. For instance, teacher retention has widely been defined "...as teachers who remain in their school" (Jones & Watson, 2017, p. 46). In its essence, such a definition may suffice in describing it; however, it is important that concepts such as teacher attrition and teacher turnover are included as each greatly impacts teacher retention. Therefore, a more appropriate definition of teacher retention may be: an individual's decision to persist in the teaching profession and, further, remain teaching within one particular school. Concerning the rate of teacher retention, the higher the rate, the fewer teachers there are leaving the teaching profession or moving to different schools. Conversely, if teacher retention is low, there is a high rate of individuals quitting teaching altogether or transferring to new schools.

To begin, teacher attrition refers to the erosion of the teaching workforce, whether that is in one particular school division/district, a larger provincial or state education system, or across an entire nation. In other words, teacher attrition refers to an individual leaving the teaching profession entirely to search for a new career. On the other hand, teacher turnover differs in regard to one important aspect. Although both attrition and turnover involve a teacher leaving a school, in teacher turnover an individual moves from one school to teach at another. It is important to

recognize that teacher retention rates will continually change, as both attrition and turnover are inevitable. Watlington, Shockley, Early, Huie, and Lieberman (2004) explained, "people retire, move away, and change careers" (p. 65), and even argued that some teacher attrition and turnover "...can be positive, enabling a school to bring new thinking, new ideas, and new levels of energy to the education of our youth" (p. 65).

Of course, the reality is that contemporary "teacher retention is a real and growing concern for both public and private education" (Jones & Watson, 2017, p. 44). Speaking generally in their research study, Watlington et al. (2004) demonstrated that teacher retention is not a new problem, stating, "although each year more teachers are entering the workforce, teachers already in the workforce are leaving faster than they can be replaced" (p. 56). The purpose of their particular study was to determine the relationship between teacher retention and a number of different demographic variables, such as the gender, race, and age of the teacher (Watlington et al., 2004). The researchers analyzed information regarding 2,129 teachers in four South Florida school districts during the 2000-2001 school year and then tracked those same teachers for three consecutive years to monitor their retention (Watlington et al., 2004). Troublingly, results of this study illustrated that there was a steady decrease in teacher retention rates each year for all four sampled districts (Watlington et al., 2004). Interestingly, this study demonstrated that specific groups of teachers are more likely to experience higher retention rates than others.

Two common groupings of teachers in the literature on teacher retention are beginning teachers and veteran teachers. Although these two groupings have been characterized differently at times by researchers in the field, beginning teachers are typically those teachers in the first five years of their career, while veteran teachers are those past the five-year mark. Much research has revealed that teacher retention is a particular concern for those teachers in the beginning category. For instance, the work of Ingersoll and Smith (2003) showed that between 40 and 50 percent of teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching. More recently, Riggs' (2013) research findings indicated that the onset of a teaching career is most worrisome, as 9.5% of teachers in his study quit before the end of their first year (as cited in Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Or consider qualitative data from the work of Guin (2004), where one teacher respondent stated, "every time we lost a teacher, nine times out of ten it was a first year teacher we had brought in" (p. 10). Further, contemplate the research of Hughes (2012) that looked at various characteristics that influence teacher retention. This study determined that beginning teachers were more likely to leave the profession than other teachers who had been teaching for five to ten years longer. More specifically, Hughes' (2012) study revealed that these "...experienced teachers were more than 3 times more likely (odds ratio =3.22) to remain in teaching" (p. 252) than their beginning teacher counterparts. This is only a snapshot of the research proving that retention rates may vary noticeably between beginning teachers and veteran teachers. Whether or not it is beginning or veteran teachers leaving, low teacher retention rates, in general, create a wide variety of stark consequences.

## Consequences of Low Teacher Retention

Watlington et al. (2004) proclaimed that excessive attrition and turnover "in any profession, is a symptom of serious problems within an organization, institution, or profession" (p. 65). In their reflection of the teaching profession, they concluded that a massive crisis exists given low teacher retention rates (Watlington et al., 2004). But what are the consequences of teacher retention that contribute to this crisis? Firstly, low teacher retention rates create significant financial burdens on school divisions/districts and education systems. If there are high numbers of teachers leaving the profession or moving to different schools, considerable amounts of money need to be spent in the locating, hiring, and replacing of those teachers. This forces education systems to waste "precious dollars that could be better spent to improve teaching quality and student achievement" (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007, p. 4). The replacement costs, for instance, may involve teacher orientation seminars at new school divisions/districts or professional development workshops so teachers are informed of mandated policies or academic initiatives. Brill and McCartney (2008) elaborated on these costs when they explained, "as trained teachers leave their schools, a double loss occurs: money has been lost in training that will not be applied as a

tool for improvement at that particular school, and more money has to be spent in the training of incoming teachers" (p. 753).

Determining the exact amount of money spent to mitigate low teacher retention rates, however, has proven challenging for researchers. This is likely due to the difficulty in determining with certainty how much money is spent in replacing teacher positions, and identifying where that money is coming from. For instance, a portion of a superintendent's salary will contribute to the incurred costs of low teacher retention as they are involved in the interviewing and hiring of teachers, but how much? Despite this predicament, some researchers have established rough figures to illustrate the financial cost of low teacher retention.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) by Barnes et al. (2007) is one example. The purpose of their research was to quantify "the real costs of teacher turnover in five school districts" (p. 4), being "Chicago Public Schools (IL), Milwaukee Public Schools (WI), Grandville County Schools (NC), along with Jemez Valley Public Schools and Santa Rosa Public Schools (NM)" (p. 4). Although the calculated costs of teacher attrition and turnover varied from one district to another, they all were substantial. To illustrate, the cost of one teacher leaving Granville County Schools was just under $10,000, while the average cost per teacher leaver in Milwaukee Public Schools was $15,325 (Barnes et al., 2007). In a large school district like Chicago, the average cost was $17,872 per leaver (Barnes et al., 2007). Shockingly, the total cost of teacher attrition and turnover in Chicago Public Schools alone was estimated to be over $86 million per year (Barnes et al., 2007). Although these figures may not be generalizable, this study made it "clear that thousands of dollars walk out the door each time a teacher leaves" (p. 5).

Other studies have calculated figures to demonstrate the cost of teacher retention in a larger region than one school division or district. For example, the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE) (2005) released a national analysis of teacher attrition costs in the United States using data from the U.S. Department of Labor (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010). This study

> suggested that the cost of replacing public s chool teachers that leave the profession is $2.2 billion per year nationwide, and when the cost of replacing teachers who transfer schools is added, that number rises to approximately $4.9 billion per year. (Watlington et al., 2010, p. 27)

Unfortunately, the financial burden of low teacher retention is only the beginning of its negative consequences.

In reference to the consequences of low teacher retention, Zhang and Zeller (2016) stated, "more important than monetary cost is the cost to student academic well-being" (p. 75). Low rates of teacher retention have been shown to negatively impact teacher quality and the subsequent achievement of students. Generally speaking, teacher quality can be understood as the overall effectiveness of a teacher in educating students. Although there are several factors that influence teacher quality, such as induction programs and access to professional development, it is teacher retention that has one of the most direct effects on teacher quality (Brill & McCartney, 2008).

For example, if large numbers of teachers are leaving the teaching profession within their first five years, fewer teachers will attain the teaching experience needed for effective teaching. Research conducted by Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2001) indicated "that new teachers are on average lower performing than more experienced teachers" (as cited in Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004, p. 352). This was later supported in a study by Goldhaber and Liddle (2011), which showed that students with more experienced teachers outperformed students taught by less experienced teachers. More specifically, the authors explained that

> students with a teacher who has one to two years of experience outperform students with novice teachers by about 4 percent of a standard deviation...and students with teachers

> who have three to five years of experience tend to outperform those with one to two years of experience by about an additional 2 percent of a standard deviation. (Goldhaber & Liddle, 2011, p. 14)

Also, high rates of teacher attrition and turnover hinder teacher quality as vacant teaching positions often need to be hastily filled by “out-of-field teachers” (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 752). Ingersoll (2004) explained this category of teachers as those who are assigned to teach curricular subjects which they have little or no training to teach. He argued that “highly qualified and well-trained teachers may become highly unqualified if, once on the job, they are assigned to teach subjects for which they have little background” (Ingersoll, 2004, p. 46).

A noteworthy study that demonstrates the negative impact high teacher turnover can have on student achievement is the work of Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2013). This study utilized administrative data from the New York City Department of Education, which included approximately 850,000 observations of fourth and fifth-grade students from 2001-2002 and 2005-2010 (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). The researchers examined student achievement as well as the retention data of teachers in New York City by conducting their analysis on a school-by-grade-by-year level, which allowed for the effective comparison of data from one school, grade, and year to another (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). This study is particularly significant within the literature as it was one of the first to find “empirical evidence for a direct effect of teacher turnover on student achievement…in both math and ELA” (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 30) and for identifying that “teacher turnover is particularly harmful to the achievement of students in schools with large populations of low-performing and Black students” (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 30). Low teacher retention rates can also have other institutional consequences beyond teacher quality and student achievement.

For a period of time, researchers of teacher retention believed that attrition and turnover impacted only the students and leaving teachers themselves. Such “compositional explanations” (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 8) assumed that those teachers who stayed at their schools were unaffected by those teachers who left. These explanations have come to be contested by a plethora of “disruptive explanations” (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 8), which maintain that teacher “stayers” (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 8) are indeed greatly affected by those who leave. A growing body of research is demonstrating that “all members of a school community are vulnerable, including staying teachers…” (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 7) when teacher retention is low.

Research conducted by Guin (2004) highlighted some of the intangible costs for staying teachers in schools with low teacher retention rates. This study focused on one large urban school district in the United States that served approximately 47,000 students in 97 schools (Guin, 2004). To understand the rate of teacher retention in this school district, Guin (2004) used data from seven years of state-mandated staffing forms that report information on school staff in October of every school year. Guin (2004) drew a purposeful sample of 15 schools within the district and then analyzed data from each school’s Staff Climate Survey. To better understand the quantitative data from this survey, Guin (2004) conducted one-on-one interviews at five of the sampled schools.

The findings from this study demonstrated that staying teachers, as well as the school’s organizational functioning and climate, suffer when teacher retention is low. For instance, staying teachers expressed an increased workload as a result of low teacher retention in their schools (Guin, 2004). Staying teachers assume much of the responsibility for mentoring new teachers about school procedures, academic initiatives, and programs. This continual mentoring may exacerbate teacher exhaustion. Further, the instructional planning and work of staying teachers in this study proved to be harmed by low teacher retention. Guin (2004) explained:

> For example, planning for the upcoming school year took place in the spring. This meant that with high rates of turnover, many of the teachers who would be working to implement the plan in the fall were not present for its inception. It also meant that an understanding

> of the instructional focus and planning from previous years would be lost on a large portion of the staff. (p. 13)

One teacher in this study criticized, "we are constantly reinventing the wheel. And for those of us that stay, it drains our energy. You know you can't constantly be starting over. It leads to burnout" (Guin, 2004, p. 13). Overall, school climate too proved to be hindered by low teacher retention in this study.

Guin's (2004) research further showed that high rates of teacher attrition and turnover negatively impacted teacher morale and put a strain on working relationships. To begin, "several teachers expressed resentment for having to do their jobs, as well as continually having to take on responsibilities for new teachers and their students" (Guin, 2004, p. 11). Additionally, teacher responses showed that trust was eroded when fellow teachers left. Guin (2004) rationalized,

> in order to trust someone, a person must have some experience with another person on which to base trust. For schools that are constantly getting new teachers, it is difficult to establish trust because teachers, students and parents are always dealing with strangers, individuals with whom they have no experience. (p. 3)

Low teacher retention rates, therefore, contribute to a wide variety of consequences. An abundance of research demonstrates that these consequences exist for students, teachers, schools, and larger educational systems.

## Factors Influencing Teacher Retention

Literature review reveals that an abundance of factors has been studied and proven to influence teacher retention to varying degrees. Some of the most cited factors include teacher salary, teacher workload, teacher training, and student characteristics, among many others. First, low teacher salaries have been one common scapegoat for many teacher retention issues. Brill and McCartney (2008) stated, "it is no secret that public school teachers' salaries cannot compete with those in business, law, or medicine" (p. 760). One issue with research that has blamed teacher salary is that it has often failed to recognize salary variations amongst teachers, suggesting that all teachers earn the same amount. As Hanushek et al. (2004) argued, "wages will vary across teachers within a district, reflecting different components of teacher salary contracts including experience, graduate education levels, coaching, additional duties, and a variety of other factors" (p. 329). Regardless, their study did prove that "salary exerts a modest impact [on teacher retention] once compensating differentials are taken into account" (Hanushek et al., 2004, p. 326). There is some evidence to suggest that monetary incentives may slightly improve the retention of teachers; however, it has been deemed by some researchers to be an impractical and unrealistic way to solve the retention issue at large (Brill & McCartney, 2008). A growing body of research is suggesting that non-salary factors have more of an impression on teacher retention. As Hanushek et al. (2004) stated, "much has been made of the fact that there is more to a teaching job than just the overall salary or compensation level" (p. 330). For example, the workload a teacher experiences is worthy of discussion.

Teacher workload has long been thought to affect teacher retention. Teacher workload can be understood as all the tasks, roles, and responsibilities teachers are expected to fulfill as part of their job. Brill and McCartney (2008) have argued that "...the difficulty of a teacher's workload has increased in recent years" (p. 755). When considering the increase in class size and mounting demand for student achievement, standardized testing, and data gathering, this claim seems reasonable. With increasing workload comes the possibility of increased work-related stress.

One valuable study on teacher workload and teacher retention was that of Barmby (2006). This study sought to uncover why a number of teachers in England and Wales were considering entering and leaving the teaching profession. The population of this study was 5,510 teachers that taught in subject areas of English, mathematics, and science (Barmby, 2006). Eight hundred letters were mailed out to a sample of these teachers that detailed the purpose of

the study and included a list of 22 interview questions with the intent that respondents could anticipate what would be asked of them if they agreed to participate (Barmby, 2006). In total, 246 teachers agreed to participate in the study. Barmby (2006) explained, "the views of teachers were obtained through structured interviews carried out by telephone, allowing us to interview teachers spread over a wide geographical area (England and Wales) in a relatively short space of time" (Barmby, 2006, p. 253). One of the most noteworthy results from this study was that 66 (26.8%) of the participating teachers were seriously considering leaving the profession, while another 5 (2.0%) did not know if they would stay or leave (Barmby, 2006). These 71 teachers were then asked an "open-ended question as to why they were considering leaving teaching," (Barmby, 2006, p. 257) and "workload/marking was the most frequently cited reason..." (Barmby, 2006, p. 257). This study highlighted teacher workload as an area that needs "to be tackled in order to have an impact on teacher wastage from the profession" (Barmby, 2006, p. 259).

Yet another influencing factor on teacher retention is the teacher training/certification programs that are designed to prepare teachers for a career in the profession. Interestingly, some researchers have deemed such programs as "...badly structured and operated" (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 760) that may "actually do more harm than good" (p. 760). Zhang and Zeller (2016) completed a recent study that sought to understand how teacher-preparation programs relate to teacher retention. Three predominant types of teacher-preparation programs in eastern North Carolina were of focus. The first was a "regular, accredited, baccalaureate-level college or university-based teacher education program" (p. 75) which was completed prior to beginning teaching. The second differed significantly, being "a lateral entry alternative licensure program: a sink-or-swim route to teaching that allows qualified individuals to obtain a teaching position and begin teaching immediately, while earning a license as they teach" (p. 75). The third and final program was a special alternative licensure program "designed to ease non-education majors into teaching and support them in a teaching career" (p. 75).

The researchers conducted a 22-question interview with 60 interviewees, being 22 regularly prepared teachers, 20 lateral entry teachers, and 18 alternate route teachers (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Three follow-up interviews were then completed over the next seven years to monitor teacher retention. Aside from the type of teacher preparation program, eight other variables were studied to determine their effects on teacher retention, including age, early career plans, gender, child caregiving, teaching assignment, parents' occupations, and marital status (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). The most significant finding that the researchers drew from their study was "that teacher preparation has a significant impact on retention" (p. 87) and that lateral entry teacher education programs produce the highest rates of teacher attrition.

A fourth factor that has proven to influence teacher retention is student characteristics. An abundance of student characteristics exist and a number of them have been researched to better understand teacher retention. Hanushek et al. (2004) conducted a study in Texas that demonstrated teacher mobility is significantly related to the student characteristics of race and achievement. The researchers used the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), which is a statewide educational database, to retrieve demographic data on students and teachers (Hanushek et al., 2004). Then they worked with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to combine "different data sources to create matched panel data sets of students and teachers. The panels included all Texas public school teachers and students in each year, permitting accurate descriptions of the schools of each teacher's employment" (p. 333). This study produced "strong evidence that teachers systematically favor higher achieving, nonminority, nonlow-income students" (p. 337). Hanushek et al. (2004) elaborated by stating, "teaching lower achieving students is a strong factor in decisions to leave Texas public schools...There is also strong evidence that a higher rate of minority enrollment increases the probability that white teachers exit a school" (p. 350). Another student characteristic that has been related to teacher retention is student behaviour. Kapadia, Coca, and Easton (2007) reported that severe student behaviour problems have "been found to be negatively correlated with teacher satisfaction as well as their plans to stay in the profession and to stay at their school" (as cited in Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 756).

A side from teacher salary, teacher workload, teacher preparation/training, and student characteristics, other factors exist that influence teacher retention. For instance, the physical spaces in which teachers work, being the school facilities and buildings, have proven to influence teacher retention to some extent (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). Also, available teaching resources have shown to be related, including things such as textbooks, computer technology, and assessment kits (Boyd et al., 2011). Finally, one major influencing factor on teacher retention is school administration, which is of primary importance in this study.

## Influence of School Administration on Teacher Retention

In this study school administration refers to any individuals that are responsible for the management of schools on a regular or semi-regular basis. Included personnel are vice-principals, principals, and superintendents or department heads. Interestingly, educational research has shown that it is the principal, more than any other administrative position, which has been "undeniably connected to teacher retention" (Jones & Watson, 2017, p. 47). A number of educational studies have demonstrated the extraordinary influence school administration has on teacher retention.

Consider the work of Boyd et al. (2011) that used data on teachers in the New York City public school district to identify the relationship between teacher attrition and working conditions. More specifically, the researchers sought to understand how six features of schooling influenced the attrition of teachers. These included staff relations, facilities, safety, students, teacher influence, and administration (Boyd et al., 2011). In the spring of 2005 the researchers sent a survey to all first-year teachers in New York City, which "consisted of more than 300 questions divided into the following areas: preparation experiences, characteristics of the schools in which they are teaching, teaching practices, and goals" (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 312). There were 4,360 teachers that completed the first survey, resulting in a response rate of 70% (Boyd et al., 2011). Then, in the spring of 2006, the researchers sent two different follow-up surveys. The first was sent to those teachers that completed the first survey and remained in teaching for a second year, while the second survey was sent to those teachers who also participated in the first survey but discontinued teaching after one year (Boyd et al., 2011). This particular study revealed that of all controlled school factors, it was school administration that was "the strongest predictor of retention relative to both transferring and leaving" (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 324). Their quantitative results showed that "well over 40% of both groups identified dissatisfaction with the administration as the most important" (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 327).

Looking closer at this research, it became apparent why these teachers were dissatisfied with their administrators. It came down to a lack of administrative support. Figure 1 is copied from Boyd et al. (2011) and presents the number of current and former teachers that were dissatisfied with each studied variable. It is evident in this figure that the majority of teacher dissatisfaction is in the category of support from administrators.

A second study also showed that administrative support is important with regard to retaining teachers. Jones and Watson (2017) conducted a correlational study to comprehend what specific administrative behaviours increased teacher retention in Christian schools. The three categories of administrative behaviour that were of interest included Consideration behaviours that are supportive in nature, Initiating Structure behaviours that delineate "the relationship between the leader and followers that establishes communication and procedural methods" (Jones & Watson, 2017, p. 48), and Performance Emphasis behaviours which place emphasis and importance on academic results (Jones & Watson, 2017). To determine which behaviors were most important to teachers, the researchers drew a sample of 100 teachers from the American Association of Christian Schools (AACS) that had "been at their school for at least 3 years and have had the same principal for at least three consecutive years" (p. 48). These teachers then completed the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), which included 40 questions that measured the importance of each of the three leadership behaviours (Jones & Watson, 2017). What the researchers of this study found was that teacher retention is "greatly

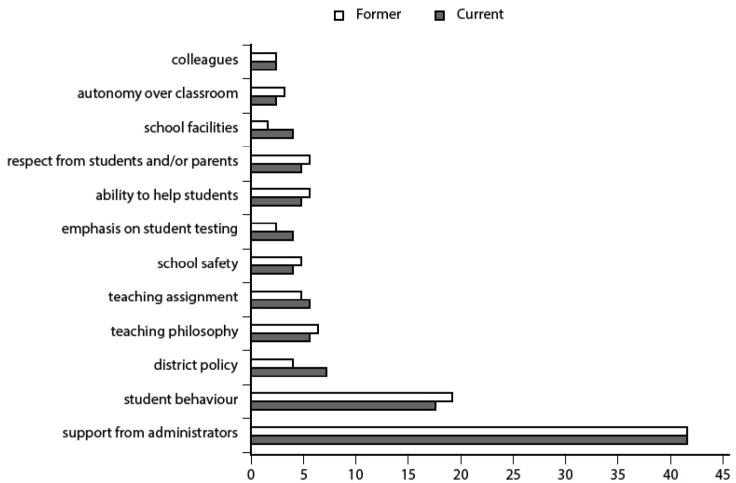


Figure 1. Current and former teacher dissatisfaction with school characteristics

affected by the leader's behaviors, particularly those that could be classified as consideration behaviors" (p. 51), which are those that exemplify support.

It is important to consider what administrative support really is. This concept has been defined differently by a number of researchers and has included different administrative behaviors and actions. Borman and Dowling (2008) vaguely defined administrative support as a "school's effectiveness in assisting teachers with issues such as student discipline, instructional methods, curriculum, and adjusting to the school environment" (as cited in Tickle, Change, & Kim, 2011, p. 343). Boyd et al. (2011) attempted to define this concept by stating, "*administrative support* refers to the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers' work easier and help them to improve their teaching" (p. 307). On the contrary, Bays and Crockett (2007) argued that a lack of administrative support is characterized by "the school leader having competing priorities and being unavailable or inattentive to teachers' needs and relying on the expertise of teachers instead of providing meaningful feedback" (as cited in Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013, p. 72).

House (1981) was one of the first researchers to define administrative support, and in doing so he illustrated that it can take numerous forms. He defined the four behaviours of administrative support as:

> Emotional support: Administrators show teachers that they are respected, trusted professionals, and worthy of concern by maintaining open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and considering teacher recommendations.
>
> Instrumental support: Administrators directly assist teachers with work-related tasks, such as providing necessary materials, space, and resources, ensuring adequate time for teaching and nonteaching duties, assisting teachers with parental difficulties, helping with managerial-type concerns...and providing flexibility for consultation time.
>
> Informational support: Administrators provide teachers with information that they can use to improve classroom practices. For example, administrators provide opportunities for

> teachers to attend staff development, offer practical information about effective teaching strategies, and provide suggestions to improve instruction, classroom management skills and strategies to identify signs of stress and burnout and strategies to alleviate these stressors.
>
> Appraisal support: Administrators are responsible for providing ongoing personnel appraisal, such as frequent and constructive feedback about their performance, information about what constitutes effective teaching, and clear guide-lines regarding job responsibilities. (as cited in Cancio et al., 2013, p. 73-74)

A number of reviewed research articles demonstrated that these various forms of supportive behaviour improve teacher retention.

Prather-Jones (2011) carried out research with the aim of identifying whether administrative support led teachers of students with behavioural disorders to remain teaching at the same school and, more specifically, which forms of support were particularly important to them. This study differed from others that are predominant in the field as it "focused on the positive findings of why teachers stay, rather than the negative findings of why teachers leave" (Prather-Jones, 2011, p. 1). The three forms of support that Prather-Jones (2011) focused on were those pertaining to student discipline, respect/appreciation, and collaboration. They used purposeful and snowball sampling techniques to select participants for this study from a population of teachers in a Midwest metropolitan area in the United States. These particular teachers taught students that had behavioural disorders and had been working at the same school for at least seven consecutive years (Prather-Jones, 2011). There were 13 teachers that agreed to take part in the study, later participating in individual, face-to-face, in-depth interviews that included a series of open-ended questions (Prather-Jones, 2011).

Of the teachers that participated in this study, 12 of 13 discussed the importance of administrative support in their retention decisions over the years, all highlighting the various forms of support. For example, one teacher claimed, "if I didn't have the administrative support, people that believed in me personally, believed that what I was doing was a good thing, then I wouldn't have survived" (Prather-Jones, 2011, p. 4). More precisely, a number of teachers cited discipline issues as a vital component of administrative support, especially "the importance of being involved in discipline-related decisions" (Prather-Jones, 2011, p. 5). Another teacher explained, "it's not really about the discipline, but more that I feel they listen to me. It's like brainstorming with me about what we need to do with a student" (Prather-Jones, 2011, p. 5). Administrative appreciation was also a theme in the results of this study, demonstrating that it too was significant in leading teachers to remain at the same school. Prather-Jones (2011) reported the response of one grateful teacher, who stated:

> The principal here has done a lot to make me feel important. He talked about improvement in a lot of children he knew and their performance. Stuff like that just makes me feel like I am doing something worthwhile. I feel like he has faith in me and trusts me to do a good job. He will tell me that he thinks I am a great teacher. That is support. (p. 5)

This work by Prather-Jones (2011) is only one research study of many that highlights the importance of administrative support in teacher retention decisions.

Research conducted by Carlson (2013) further highlighted the importance of various forms of administrative support in teacher retention decisions. This study retrieved data from the National Center for Education Statistics 2007-2008 School and Staffing Surveys, as well as the 2008-2009 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (Carlson, 2013). Both of these surveys asked research participants a variety of questions pertaining to their teaching positions, including such topics as their education and training, teaching experience, teaching assignment, teacher workload, certification, perceptions and attitudes about teaching, workplace conditions, and job mobility (Carlson, 2013). One particularly important section of the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing

Survey is Table 1, copied from Carlson (2013). This table illustrates a number of statements, which research participants recorded a measure for.

Table 2, also copied from Carlson (2013), presents the percentage of teachers that agreed with each of the following statements that related to administrative support. What the researchers found was dismal.

Some noteworthy findings from this study were that "only 34% of teachers indicated that they felt that staff members in the school were recognized for good work" (Carlson, 2013, p. 52), meaning that the majority of teachers (66%) did not feel that they were acknowledged for their accomplishments. Further, "only 56% of survey respondents 'strongly agreed' that their principal enforces school rules and backs them up when needed" (p. 52). This study also emphasized

**Participants of the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey were asked to indicate a level of agreement to the following five statements:**

1. "In this school, staff members are recognized for a job well done."
2. "My principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it."
3. "The principal knows what kind of school he or she wants and has communicated it to the staff."
4. "The school administration's behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging."
5. "I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school."

Table 1. 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey Administrative Support Statements

**Weighted responses of public school teachers**

| *Statement* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| "In this school, staff members are recognized for a job well done." | 34 |
| "My principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it." | 56 |
| "The principal knows what kind of school he or she wants and has communicated it to the staff." | 57.7 |
| "The school administration's behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging." | 55 |
| "I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school." | 59.4 |

Table 2. Weighted Response Results From the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey

the importance of administrative support by identifying what staying teachers' valued. For example,

> among those teachers who remained in their teaching positions during the 2008-2009 academic year, 89% of those teachers indicated that the school administration was supportive and encouraging. Further, 90% of those 'stayers' also indicated that their principal backs them up when needed. (Carlson, 2013, p. 52)

In conclusion to the research, Carlson (2013) reported,

> effective principals create an environment where teachers feel a sense of collaboration and support, and as a result, are dedicated to their jobs. On the contrary, ineffective principals fail to create such a climate, leaving the teachers to feel a sense of isolation, leading to dissatisfaction with their jobs and a higher probability that they will leave their teaching positions. (p. 52)

Administrative support is not only of paramount importance in North American schools.

Another study demonstrated the importance of administrative support on an international population. Mancuso, Roberts, and White (2010) piloted research with the purpose of tracking teacher turnover in Near East South Asia (NESA) international schools while also identifying factors significantly related to teacher turnover. To do this, the researchers sampled a population of teachers both staying and leaving a number of NESA international schools, as well as a group of school heads. International schools presented unique circumstances compared to nationally based schools as

> they generally have all tiers of their administrative structure on site. Depending on school size, there is usually a principal at each level (elementary, middle and high school) who directly supervises teachers and a school head who directly supervises the principals and indirectly supervises the teachers. (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 311)

In total, 248 NESA teachers agreed to participate, along with 22 school heads (Mancuso et al. 2010). Of these participating teachers, 191 indicated they would be remaining at the same school the following year, while 57 planned on leaving. All participants completed surveys that were designed to reveal information concerning teacher characteristics, school characteristics, and organization conditions (Mancuso et al., 2010).

This study found that international teachers "who believed their school head was more effective were less likely to move from their current school" (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 316). Mancuso et al. (2010) explained that teachers considered school heads effective

> if they were supportive, gave them respect, worked with them to develop the school's vision, encouraged collaboration among teachers, and worked with staff to meet curriculum standards and to solve school or department problems. Teachers who rated the effectiveness of their school head higher were less likely to be moving. (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 319)

The theme of administrative support being important in teachers' decisions to stay or leave schools was continued in the work of Tickle et al. (2011).

Tickle et al. (2011) sought to examine the effect of administrative support on teachers' job satisfaction and their consequent commitment to stay in the teaching profession. This study is unique as it involved a vast population unlike any other identified in this literature review. The researchers drew a sample of schools that completed the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey from a population of 5,437 public school districts in the United States, which included 10,200 traditional public schools and approximately 53,190 teachers (Tickle et al., 2011). Specific predictors of teachers' job satisfaction and intent on remaining in the profession included teach-

ing experience, student behaviour, teacher satisfaction with salary, and administrative support (Tickle et al., 2011). To analyze the vast amount of data in this study the researchers utilized LISREL computer software. This research found that administrative support was a stronger predictor of teachers' job satisfaction than all others studied. Tickle et al. maintained that this "study determined that administrative support mediates the effect of teaching experience, student behavior, and teachers' satisfaction with their salary on both teachers' job satisfaction and intent to stay in teaching" (p. 346). In other words, appropriate administrative support resolved other issues teachers experienced as a part of their job.

A more contemporary study completed by Conley and You (2017) demonstrated the importance of administrative support for secondary special education teachers specifically. This study also utilized the Schools and Staffing Survey for data collection, and the researchers retrieved this information from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) national database for teachers in the United States. Unlike the study conducted by Tickle et al. (2011), these researchers were only interested in how workplace factors such as teacher team efficacy, job design/autonomy, student disengagement, and administrative support influenced their intent to leave their schools (Conley & You, 2017). This study verified that administrative support had a direct effect on turnover for secondary special education teachers. Conley and You (2017) explained, "teachers who perceived their administrative supervision as characterized by supportive behavior, a clear vision, and teacher recognition were less likely to feel they might leave teaching or leave their job for another school" (p. 534). Conley and You (2017) concluded their work by stating, "the administrators' role affects many aspects of teachers' work lives, presumably reinforcing the old adage that everything 'comes from the top'" (p. 534).

An additional study completed by Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, and Meisels (2007) demonstrated that administrative support might be considered more important to some groups of teachers than others. The target study population for this research included all teachers who left two large Florida school districts in 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 (Kersaint et al., 2007). A sample of 51 teachers was drawn, and each participant completed a 36-question survey to understand why they chose to leave. Additionally, a stratified randomized sample of continuing teachers was drawn, and they completed the same survey (that faintly modified the questions to reflect differences between stayers and leavers) with the hopes of highlighting why they chose to stay (Kersaint et al., 2007). Among other things, this study was significant as it demonstrated that female teachers considered administrative support more important than male teachers, while also showing that "high school teachers considered it significantly more important than elementary teachers" (Kersaint et al., 2007, p. 782). Aside from a lack of administrative support, this study illustrated that time with family/family responsibility was also strongly related to teacher attrition (Kersaint et al., 2007).

The final research article reviewed in this study was the work of Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015). This particular study is distinct, as it not only sought to prove that administrative support is significantly related to teacher retention but also attempted "to examine the perception of support between teachers and principals and how these perceptions affect teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools" (Hughes et al., 2015, p. 129). The researchers sent surveys to a population of teachers and school principals in a western American state during the 2012-2013 school year that taught at schools with exceptionally low retention rates (Hughes et al., 2015). Of the 80 teachers that received surveys, 41 participated in the study, while 17 of the 20 school principals responded (Hughes et al., 2015). The survey was designed to reveal teachers' and principals' "experiences of perceived support, received support, and how they feel support affects teacher retention" (Hughes et al., 2015, p. 130). Also, this survey intended to determine which form of support (i.e., emotional, environmental, instructional, and technical) was most meaningfully related to teacher retention. One of the central findings of this study was that teachers and principals do not perceive offered and received administrative support equally. Table 3, copied from Hughes et al. (2015), depicts principals' and teachers' quantitative scores of perceived emotional, environmental, instructional, and technical support.

| Support Scale | Principal Scores | Teacher Scores | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional | 70.33 | 64.567 | 5.766 |
| Environmental | 47.000 | 40.055 | 6.945 |
| Instructional | 47.583 | 35.171 | 12.412 |
| Technical | 41.833 | 34.514 | 7.319 |

Table 3. Difference in Total Support Scores for Teachers and Principals

The differences are striking, demonstrating that there is a disconnect between the support administrators believe they are providing, and the support teachers believe they are receiving. The greatest discrepancy lies in principals' and teachers' perceived instructional support, with a score differential of 12.412 (Hughes et al., 2015). In addition to this finding, Hughes et al. (2015) discovered that emotional support was most strongly correlated with teacher retention decisions, although the study did show "that all areas of support affect whether or not the teachers were planning on staying in their current placement" (p. 131).

The research findings included in this literature review have various implications for the teaching profession. Due to the numerous consequences of low teacher retention, education systems must seek to improve retention rates. Research has revealed that the solution to teacher retention issues is not clear, therefore being worthy of further research. Whatever the case, the answer is not increasing the number of available teachers, as a greater issue is at large. In reference to the teacher retention issue, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) stated, "the image that comes to mind is that of a bucket rapidly losing water because of holes in the bottom. Pouring more water into the bucket will not do any good if we do not patch the holes first" (p. 4). There is an argument to be made that targeting school administration may positively influence teacher retention. Administrator induction programs could be one way to create positive change. Carlson (2013) maintained that institutions training aspiring school administrators

> should provide them with the knowledge and skills to be effective leaders in their future schools. Future principals should have a firm grasp on how to be not only efficient managers of their schools, but also how to effectively be the leaders of their schools. (Carlson, 2013, p. 52)

This literature review has greater implications for current school administrators than administrator induction programs. More specifically, this study has profound implication for school principals. Hughes et al. (2015) argued,

> principals play a vital part in improving teacher retention by providing support in the following domains (environmental, instructional, technical and emotional). As the building's instructional leader, school principals reinforce the institutional culture by providing guidance and support and offering instructional and institutional resources. (p. 130)

Whether an individual is training to be a school principal or has been acting as one for years, this study offers an abundance of evidence to prove that administrative support can improve the retention of teachers. Additionally, this study can educate principals of the various forms of support, and which behaviours may be characteristic of each. Finally, this study reveals that administrative support may be the most crucial factor in teacher retention, as it can mediate other cited factors such as teacher training, teacher workload, and student characteristics.

This literature review has identified what teacher retention is, being an individual's decision to continue in the teaching profession and remain teaching within one particular school. It has revealed that low teacher retention rates have significant consequences, being financial costs, reducing teacher quality, inhibiting student learning, damaging teacher relations, and negatively impacting school climate. This study has demonstrated that an incredible number of factors have proven to influence teacher retention, although each to varying degrees. Furthermore, school administration has proven to be significantly related to teacher retention, cited multiple times as being more influential than a host of other factors. Administrative support has proven to be the predominant way in which administrators impact teacher retention decisions, and has shown to take multiple forms from emotional to technical. Finally, this study has implications for administrator induction programs, as well as acting administrators, to recognize and understand the significant role they play in alleviating teacher retention issues. If they are aware of the supportive behaviours that teachers appreciate and need, they will have the knowledge required to keep quality teachers in this noble profession.

## Personal Reflection

This study has considerable significance given my educational and personal context. Thinking about the teaching profession, teacher retention remains a considerable problem for many school divisions across Canada and within the province of Saskatchewan. The teacher retention issue crosses many borders, not being confined to any particular region or territory. Thinking about the significant financial burden that low teacher retention creates with the frequent hiring and training of new teachers, improving the retention rates could save money that is continually becoming more and more scarce for school divisions.

To illustrate, a relevant example lies within the province of Saskatchewan. The 2017 provincial budget, released in May of this year, revealed a $22 million cut to the education sector. More relevant yet is the impact this has had on the school division I work for specifically. Chinook School Division, located in the southwest corner of Saskatchewan, was impacted the greatest when it experienced a $5.94 million reduction from this school year to the next. This corresponds to a 7.3% overall reduction in funding for the school board. In an effort to compensate for this extensive reduction to the budget, the school division has cut back on administrative personnel and 24% of teaching support staff in the division (i.e., youth workers, educational assistants, learning coaches, etc.) while eliminating several teaching positions with more expected to follow. These solutions could have a negative impact on student learning so school divisions and districts must work to save money in other ways. Increasing teacher retention is a promising solution. If school administrations are mindful of the practices that increase the retention of teachers in their schools, valuable funding and positions can be saved and student learning can be enhanced.

More personally, this study has relevance as my own retention has been in jeopardy. I have recently completed my third consecutive year of teaching in the province of Saskatchewan. After signing my first teaching contract, I was ecstatic about my career choice, yet after a short time, I began to question my decision. The nature of the teaching profession had led me to contemplate resignation and begin searching for new career opportunities. Interestingly, the school administrators I have worked with have had a positive influence on me, ultimately leading me to believe that I have made the correct career decision and will continue teaching for many more years to come. Reflecting on how my administrators did this, I believe it was achieved through supporting me in many of the ways previously mentioned in this study. My administrators have included me in a wide number of decisions that affect both the school and students, they have proven to support me when aspects of my teaching practice have come into question, and they have continually appreciated the work I have done, both publically and privately. I have developed a genuine interest in how my school administrators have influenced me, as well as how administrators can affect other teachers' retention decisions. Will I teach for my entire career? That is uncertain and may explain my fascination with teacher retention. Interestingly, I am at-

tracted to the idea of fulfilling school administrative positions and responsibilities in the future, which unquestionably provoked me to include the topic of school administration in this study.

Additionally, my personal interest in teacher retention has been fuelled by the fact that I am considered to be a beginning teacher (as I have taught for less than five years) and this grouping has the lowest proven retention rates among all teachers. I find it troubling that already a surprisingly large group of my former Education classmates at the University of Saskatchewan are no longer in the teaching profession, having only graduated four years ago. Finally, the impact teacher attrition and turnover has on staying teachers resonated with me, as I have already experienced some of these consequences. For instance, a number of challenges arose when a teacher colleague transferred from the school in which I work, at the end of her first year. Our Professional Learning Community (PLC) was broken, leaving me without a fellow teacher to plan, develop, and monitor formative and summative assessments with. Also, the middle years' culture that we had been working to establish at our school was affected, as we were left without a teacher who was familiar with our vision, goals, and student expectations.

Currently, I strive for teaching excellence. I am committed to becoming the best teacher I can be, continually searching for ways to improve and to model best practice at all times. If I do become a school administrator in the future, I too will strive to serve the noble profession of teaching to the best of my ability. This study has brought to my attention some crucial administrative behaviours that can improve the retention of the teachers I work with. I am now informed about a number of supportive behaviours that can keep teachers in schools, and I plan on sharing these whether or not I pursue a career in administration.

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# Supporting Your School Team—The Principal's Role as Coach

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## Abstract

Principals are expected to play many roles in schools today. When a principal rescues a troubled school and seemingly saves it, simultaneously increasing student achievement and reducing discipline issues, most would hold that principal in high esteem; a hall of fame leader. The work of this principal absolutely should be commended. However, if once a leader moves on, and in their absence, the school quickly loses footing, educators must ask themselves whether they really saved the school, or just ran the school. Conversely, if a leader facilitates positive change, and upon moving schools the change and positivity continue, living on in the new leaders they have developed, that school likely has experienced a coach-like leader; one who empowers others and leaves a legacy, not a void. Many of the roles, such as manager, disciplinarian, supervisor, and mentor, are extremely important; however, recent researchers have added yet another hat to the head teacher; the role of leadership coach. A solid understanding of the prerequisite training, and what leadership coaching is in schools, are examined. The benefits and implications of coaching and the principal's role in supporting their team are addressed. Leadership has moved from an isolated endeavor to a collaborative event. No longer is the principal the expert, but rather the creator of experts.



## Keywords

*leadership coaching, efficacy, succession, relationships, trust, communication, feedback, reflection, metacognition, attrition, growth mindset*


Most school principals, formerly teachers in busy classrooms, find themselves isolated most of the day, in an office environment with a desk, where they no longer teach students daily, nor directly. Principals take on an administrative role, and as such, are responsible for the management of the school. Often positioned near the front office, behind closed doors, many principals are rarely seen—legendary creatures to the students and staff. Being visible is not just relational it is also preventative. Historically, principals dealt with the problems in the school, disciplining the bad kids when needed, and solving problems independent of their staff. They had little positive interaction with students, staff, families, or the community. Today, there remains some truth to the above-described role, but the principalship has much greater potential. Remembering that principals are *teachers first* is vital. Principals allow their teachers to continue to teach curricula, by solving problems and dealing with difficult people, yes, but they do much more. Supporting teacher and student growth and efficacy is a requirement. How then do principals continue to impact student learning as they find themselves removed from classrooms? How do they continue to support all students? Leadership coaching tackles this challenge.

## Definition of Terms

Attrition occurs when teachers leave the teaching profession, or when a student no longer attends school. Mentorship is seen as an experienced colleague helping a less experienced colleague; often by teaching them how they, themselves, do things and offering resources for them to duplicate the practice. Efficacy is the confidence a person has in their ability to achieve their goals. In a school setting, efficacy would be a teacher's belief that they are capable of having students learn intended outcomes. Leadership coaching, in this study, is performed by an ad-

ministrator, where the principal or vice principal serves as a coach. Leadership coaching (also referred to in the literature as coaching) can be misunderstood, and clarifying what is meant by the roles of both coach and coachee is imperative in educating the reader about the research conducted in this paper. For the purposes of this study, a coach (an administrator) is a person who develops both themselves and someone else (a colleague) through self-reflective conversation and metacognition. The coachee is the person that is being developed by the coach. Coachees do not have a passive role in the coaching relationship; rather they are an active participant. Leadership coaching is a partnership built upon relational trust, which involves the process of observation, conversation, collaboration, reflection, and planning, guided by a formal leader, but where the coachee is the final decision maker.

## Purpose of the Study

Leaders do not possess leadership; it is something they practice and do as they build relationships. Coaching principals are visible and build relationships with all stakeholders in education through skilled communication, experience and knowledge, and shared leadership. Principals who seek, nourish, and support relationships, build school communities grounded in trust. They are both guests and hosts in their schools and must respect the duality of their position. They discover and encourage talent, and create a positive culture and climate with shared beliefs and vision. This vision is at the core of the school. Dufour and Marzano (2011) described formal leaders as impacting the culture of learning in schools, “Principals are culture-makers, intentionally or not” (p. 47). When a safe and vibrant learning community exists, which Knight (2009) referred to as “a learning-friendly culture” (p. 19), it allows for: reflection, reciprocal feedback, confidence, risk-taking, responsiveness, cooperation, mentorship, and coaching to transpire. In coaching, principals are anything but spectators. Effective principals have a significant effect size on student achievement and can have an even more meaningful impact on their leadership actions when skillfully using a coaching style. Leadership coaching results in better teaching and learning, engagement, decreased anxiety and fear, decreased attrition, increased efficacy, a positive environment, and growth. Discovering how to actualize leadership coaching in schools motivated this study. The purpose of this research paper is to explore how principals can improve student and teacher learning and growth through leadership coaching.

## Research Questions

My inquiry around coaching began with some professional reading on what I thought could be of benefit to me in my role as vice principal, as I sought to be a better leader. Leadership coaching encompassed much of what I had studied in coursework: organizational and behavioral theory, leadership, collaborative inquiry, relationships, trust, communication, data-informed decisions, human resources, attrition problems, succession, and the evolution of the role of the principal throughout Canadian history. The following questions helped guide the research paper: What is leadership coaching in schools? What is foundational, or preliminary, to coaching? What are the benefits and implications of coaching? What is the role of the principal in coaching?

## Significance

As teachers’ jobs become more complex, administrators are expected to do more complex, responsive work as well. Attrition remains a documented concern, especially early in teachers’ careers; however, supporting new, as well as experienced teachers is critical. Learning the most effective leadership actions is fundamental to the success of public schools and student achievement. Recruitment, development, and retention of quality teachers are challenging work. Having the best educators in the classroom has the greatest effect size on student growth, engagement, and dropout rates. Society depends on schools, and their exceptional teachers to produce positive global citizens and thinkers who can solve problems creatively and respectfully. Teachers must be supported in this morally imperative work. Coaching allows for principals to be the

leader of leaders, for teachers' talents to be shared, and for teachers and students to discover their own potential and possibilities.

## Methods

This research paper is a literature review. A critical analysis of peer-reviewed articles and books were reviewed through summary, reflection, classification, and synthesis. There were many similarities in the findings in the literature, but there were a few differences that will be noted as well. There are recommendations, based on gaps in the literature, for further research on coaching in the educational setting; specifically with regard to the administrators' role as a leadership coach.

## Limitations

This paper is limited by a number of factors: time, experience, language, and my personal interpretation of the literature. The paper's research, specific to coaching, was concentrated to several months study. I am limited to my personal experience as a parent, and school experience as a student, teacher, and vice principal. I conducted research in the two languages in which I am fluent: French and English, although not much research was available in French, and empirical studies conducted and reported in English are up and coming.

## Background for the Sport Metaphor

My initial wonder about leadership, "how does a principal best support their team?" led me toward an in-depth study of leadership coaching as a possible answer to my inquiry. Upon researching this relatively new leadership action, I learned that many preliminary considerations were crucial. I refer to foundational work in terms of mental preparation, relationship building, and trust. Once a solid foundation was in place, what leadership coaching was, and was not, could be analyzed. I then proceeded toward mastery in acquiring the knowledge of leadership coaching skills. Powerful communication, team thinking, and self-reflection differentiated leadership coaching from other types of leadership actions. My understanding of the benefits and implications (growth, engagement, efficacy, and better teaching and learning) of leadership coaching encouraged me, as a formal school leader, to pursue coaching as an action that I wanted to possess and practice. Principals and vice principals are often the most visible leaders in a school, and as such, I wanted to know how to make leadership coaching become part of me and the way in which I conducted myself as an administrator. I examined the role of the coaching principal.

While synthesizing my coursework and organizing the literature review, I came to see leadership coaching as teamwork, and the principal as the head coach. I have presented my findings through the use of a sports metaphor. In schools, just as in sport, there is a significant need for mental readiness, relational considerations, teamwork, skill knowledge and development, understanding of the rules of the game, awareness of the benefits and challenges of the sport, and the roles of all of the players on the team. Leadership coaching is an incredibly effective strategy used in the game of learning. A Ready, Set, Go action plan for leadership coaching guides the reader through the process.

## Literature Review

### The Game Plan—Mental Preparation

Schools are in the people business, and that can be an emotional endeavor. A teammate's mental health is essential.

**Brain fitness.** Before any rigorous activity begins, athletes must be warmed up and ready for the game, or they may get injured. In schools, thinking is the sport. Brains need to be ready for the hard work of learning too. Change is difficult, and learning, or teaching, in a different way is brave work. Deutschman stated that "change is so challenging that 90% of people who underwent bypass surgery did not change their lifestyles, even when faced with death" (as cited in Reiss, 2015, p. 44). Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) described change as being resisted neurologically. Rock explained that "motivating ourselves or others to change requires changing our long-established brain patterns" (as cited in Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010, p. 4). Reiss (2015) noted that "the harder you train mentally, the better you perform physically and your improvements will go as far as your mind will take you" (p. 52). Herrington (2013) found that "when a leader can inspire a new vision of what is possible, when the mindful leader makes the workplace a safe place to challenge assumptions and introduce new ways of thinking...[teachers] are freed to question unproductive processes and procedures" (p. 51). Herrington further gave the example of a teacher being asked by her class, labelled as remedial students, whether they were the dumb class, to which she replied, "no. You're the best class I have!" (p. 52). In that one belief statement, the school year for those students changed.

**Belief conditioning.** Wayne Gretzsky (n.d.) once said, "you miss 100% of the shots you never take". If you believe you cannot, you most certainly will achieve just that. Professional coaches would argue that mindset is critical for team success, and that athletes need to visualize themselves performing the skill. In fact, belief may surpass talent in many cases. Bailey and Reilly (2017) confirmed the following:

> What people believe about success drives their behavior. If educators don't really believe that students can achieve at high levels, then school improvement efforts are doomed to failure. School leaders must do everything possible to help teachers attain a mindset that success is the result of time, work, and practice—not innate ability. (p. 20)

Professional educator teams are not any different. What a teacher believes, and perhaps more importantly what a teacher does not believe, is directly relational to school success. Researchers (Bailey & Reilly, 2017; Bonilla, 2013; Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010, 2012; Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Herrington, 2013; Morel & Cushman, 2012; Reiss, 2015; Sweeney; 2011) found that truly believing success was possible, and being mentally prepared to achieve it, was most important, before any training or coaching occurred.

Teachers are asking students and parents to come to school with a growth mindset. Unfortunately, government-funded public education does not believe in overtime, and teachers must do all they can in a limited number of years. Every minute matters in schools, therefore any minute could help a student learn something new, or understand something better. Growth mindset is a trendy term, but will undoubtedly be an everlasting need in schools. Bailey and Reilly (2017) cautioned educators that, "each school year, parents entrust their children to a school system that is supposed to prepare them for a better future. But in many of our communities, this dream has died because of an artificial mental barrier of hopelessness" (p. 4). Changing this mindset is not only morally important for students and families, but for teachers and administrators also. Dufour and Marzano (2011) confirmed that in order for teachers to be effective, they needed to have high expectations for all of their students, and that teachers had to:

> Believe that the ability of students to learn is changeable rather than fixed, and they are able to foster the effort that leads to achievement. They create a warm socioemotional climate in their classrooms in which all students are engaged and errors are not tolerated but are welcomed. (pp. 16-17)

Bailey and Reilly (2017) gave the example:

> In 1953, no runner had ever run a mile in less than four minutes. In fact, many thought it was impossible. However, Roger Bannister believed it could be done, and in 1954, he

> became the first man to break the four-minute mile barrier….within a year 60 people had broken the barrier. (p. 4)

McIntosh argued that "when a man believed in his heart and changed his thinking, what was considered to be impossible became possible" (as cited in Bailey & Reilly, 2017, p. 4).

**Team spirit**. Creating a shared vision with a staff, where they see themselves in the work, is imperative when achieving courageous goals. Sweeney and Harris (2017) explained that you cannot, "drill down into the *moves* for student-centered coaching [until you] realize they don't mean a lot if they aren't grounded in a set of beliefs about why we are here in the first place" (p. 1). "Coaching conversations about core values help people reconnect to what their common hopes and dreams are" (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2012, p. 18). Peter Drucker et al. stated that "a mission cannot be impersonal; it has to have deep meaning, be something you believe in—something you know is right. A fundamental responsibility of leadership is to make sure that everybody knows the mission, understands it, lives it" (as cited in Morel & Cushman, 2012, p. 16). "In the absence of interdependence, one or more common goals, and mutual accountability, a group cannot be a team" (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, p. 70). The target must not only be what evidence shows students need from their teachers to grow and learn, but also what captures the heart and passion of the teachers to actualize it. Bailey and Reilly (2017) emphasized a common goal that was so believed that it could break the sound barrier, and inspired teachers to be the best they could be. They referred to this as Personal Brilliance:

> Personal Brilliance comes from finding your inner spark. When you are investing your abilities in something meaningful and congruent with your internal wiring, it creates a spark. That spark is a quality that causes your energy and joy to activate everyone around you. (p. 13)

Coach-like principals are leaders who get people to do more than they originally ever thought they possibly could. These people do more because they want to, and finally believe they can, in part because, "coaching is a way of listening and speaking to colleagues that assumes a belief that others are whole and capable" (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010, p. 9). Principals, teachers, parents, and students are prepared for the sport of school only when their mindset is also ready.

**There is no I in team.** Knight (2011), along with his team, found the following:

> After conducting close to two decades of research on instructional coaching, my colleagues and I at the Kansas Center for Research on Learning have come to believe that how we *think* about coaching significantly enhances or interferes with our success as a coach. We suggest that coaches take a partnership approach to collaboration. (p. 18)

Teachers are no longer isolated professionals who are expected to know all. Administrators and teachers need to "shift their mental model of a professional teacher as a *learning facilitator* and *collaborator*. Professional staff must embrace this as part of their emotional identity, and others must see them in this way" (Morel & Cushman, 2012, p. 8). Teachers are part of a team. One lone player cannot win a team sport without their teammates. Coaching is about endurance and succession, and building leadership potential in others, which requires group work.

Mental preparation in leadership coaching is foundational. A coaching mindset includes: neurological retraining, where teachers are encouraged to take risks and challenge themselves to change what has always been done; an honest belief that learning for all is not only possible but probable; and creating and actualizing a vision together, by seeing the commonalities and the capacity of a staff because of its team's diversity, and not in spite of it.

## The Fundamentals—What is Necessary to Get in the Game?

Once the coach and coachee are mentally prepared for change and growth to occur, let the coaching begin! Not necessarily. The pregame is very important in coaching. We cannot ignore

the people part of the work. There are feelings that go along with this work. There are clear steps, or rules, to follow, but they are secondary to the human side of coaching. Dufour and Marzano (2011) spoke of school improvement being primarily about people improvement. Bonilla (2013) explained that school improvement had it wrong, with a focus on programs rather than people, suggesting the following:

> What is lacking is talk of making schools places where teachers can be respected and appreciated so that they can be their best for students. Where are the conversations around creating schools where teachers use their creativity and students find joy in learning? (pp. 1-2)

**Cardiovascular care.** Before an athlete steps on the field, the fundamentals must be in place. The same is true in schools and classrooms. Baron, Morin, and Morin (2011) found that in order for coaching to succeed, a good working relationship was an essential condition. "Relationship remains the beginning point of coaching and its foundation….Given that it's the foundation, it can cause the most problems when it is taken for granted" (Sweeney, 2011, p. 26). People do not want to be coached by someone they do not relate well too, or mistrust. The fundamentals are all about heart health. Relationships and trust must be established before coaching can transpire. If respect is not present, neither is a relationship. The most productive relationships should be of shared benefit for those involved. Covey (2004) explained that "you can't artificially force interdependency—it has to come naturally through people's getting to know and understand and trust each other" (p. 214). Trust is what allows people to see interdependence as a positive thing, and completely separate from dependence. Weintraub mentioned that families were interdependent and schools had to, "create a family within the school" (as cited in Bonilla, 2013, p. 6). The book titled, *If You Don't Feed the Teachers They Eat the Students* by Neila Connors (2000) implied that if a principal looked after and took care of their school family (teachers), by providing them with the nutrition (support) they needed, they would then be prepared to look after and take care of the kids. This basic need, of feeding the teachers, directly lifts students, or more precisely, and to the contrary, students are at risk if teachers are not supported. Sweeney (2011) suggested that leaders document information about their staff, including their name, skills, interests, goals, coaching status, and possible coaching openings (opportunities). I would add family members to the list in terms of a more holistic view of a staff member. This document would then be monitored and would encourage leaders to develop relationships with all staff, and sit down and talk with those they did not truly know.

According to Vojtek and O'Brien Vojtek (2009), principals created purposeful relationships one person at a time, one interaction at a time, time after time. Multiple interactions are needed to develop trust and respect. Leaders cannot race to the finish when it comes to relationships. Time is often the enemy because it takes considerable amounts of it to create a relationship, but even more to grow and sustain it. In order to be trusted, it is important to be trustworthy. Relationships and trust are earned. When relationships are trusting they allow safety and confidence in risk-taking. Many researchers (Bailey & Reilly, 2017; Bonilla, 2013; Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010, 2012; Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Knight, 2011; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Morel & Cushman, 2012; Reiss, 2015; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014; Sweeney, 2011) confirmed that relationship happens through listening. Coaching is a relationship of respectfully, yet strategically, listening and speaking. McCarthy and Milner (2013) explained that, "listening creates both trust and authenticity", and that, "in listening, the coaching manager gives the speaker the rare gift of time and attention, helping develop a positive relationship" (p. 770). Bailey and Reilly (2017) mentioned that coaches needed to listen loudly, in that they needed to have a reputation of always listening. This way people trusted in their leader and came to expect transparency in the relationship. Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) mentioned the following:

> By deliberately deciding to be a committed listener, you convey to the other person that they are valued, that you are open to their ideas even if you do not agree with them, and that you sincerely want to engage in a dialogue rather than a monologue. Through committed listening you are able to build relationships and trust. (p. 23)

Knight (2011) concluded that the partnership approach insinuated a relationship and trust. He further suggested:

> The way we interact with others makes or breaks most coaching relationships. Even if we know a lot about content and pedagogy and have impressive qualifications, experience, or post graduate degrees, people will not embrace learning with us unless they're comfortable working with us. (p. 18)

Rodgers and Skelton (2014) affirmed that teaching should be about sharing, not competition. Collaboration leads to joy and respect and brings about change and growth. According to Kouzes and Posner, "collaboration is a social imperative. Without it people can't get extraordinary things done" (as cited in Dufour & Marzano, 2011). Extraordinary learning is happening and must happen every day in schools. Coaching is a partnership. Both coach and coachee must be equals in terms of what they bring to the relationship. This equality of thinking is mandatory and unpredictable. Morel and Cushman (2012) encouraged leaders to let go of the uncertainty because "coaching is people work, and people are messy" (p. 14). It takes courage to coach.

Nurturing relationships is fundamental among teammates, and is at the heart of leadership coaching. Positive, reciprocal, respectful relationships among coach and coachee are critical components, and mandatory preliminary first steps, as leadership coaching cannot begin without trust. Once trusting relationships exist, leadership coaching can transpire.

## The Rules of the Game—The Basics of School Leadership Coaching

Knowing what leadership coaching is not, will help educators comprehend more deeply what coaching is, and avoid needless misplays and penalties.

**Leadership coaching is not**. Leadership coaching is not telling someone how you would do something. It is not false encouragement, nor dishonesty. Coaching relationships are not about one person knowing more than the other. Coaching is never complementing talent over effort. It is not solving problems for people, nor presenting solutions for them. Coaching is not mentoring. It is not talking more than listening, and it is not giving someone resources they have not asked for. Leadership coaching is not supervision. It is not judgment. Coaching is not predictable, simple, nor nonreciprocal. Hellsten, Prytula, and Ebanks (2009) critiqued Hargreaves apprenticeship model, "where an expert teacher passes on knowledge and skills to a protégé [because]….it fails to recognize the existing expertise of the protégé, encourages deference… encourages conformation to existing practices to teaching and learning" (p. 707). The above is what not to do and what coaches must avoid in the sport of leadership coaching.

**Definitions of leadership coaching.** Rodgers and Skelton (2014) knew that teaching in the twenty-first century could not be an isolated endeavor, and believed coaching transformed education, "from an environment of working alone to working as a team" (p. 1). Teamwork is intrinsic to coaching, and all researchers included a partnership approach within leadership coaching. Coaching gives an opportunity to problem solve with a colleague, not complain.
Sweeney (2011) along with Sweeney and Harris (2017) highlighted that the team needed to maintain focus on data-informed and data-driven decisions. Goal setting was based on student evidence of learning, or lack thereof. Coaching goals came from students' needs, and not teacher interests. In order to celebrate confirmed knowledge of success, student achievement had to be measurably improved due to changed instruction and teaching strategies.

According to Losch, Traut-Mattausch, Mühlberger, and Jonas (2016), coaching encompassed setting clear expectations and goals, and maintaining a "collaborative helping relationship, where coach….and [coachee] engage in a systematic process of….developing solutions with the aim of facilitating goal attainment, self-directed learning, and personal growth of the coachee" (p. 2). Growth in both students and teachers implies change has transpired.

Moen and Federici (2012) believed coaching was about change. They wrote:

> The process of achieving change is rather complex, but in simplified terms a change process involves efficient cognitive preparations and decisions followed by effective actions. This includes awareness of oneself, one's relationship to what's being investigated, and the potential for growth and development. Thus, coaching focuses on psychological aspects in the process of creating change and should therefore influence important psychological variables impacting human performance. (p. 2)

Reiss (2015) argued that "coaching is all about change. It's about supporting people...through change, helping them get from one place to another" (p. 7). She stated that "creating change in organizations is first about creating change in individuals. It's a delicate process" (Reiss, 2015, p. 85). Reiss further summarized leadership coaching to be described, "in a nutshell as good communication that produces extraordinary results" (p. 130).

Douglas and Morley found coaching to be, "the process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective.… It involves the teaching of skills in the context of a relationship with the learner, and providing feedback" (as cited in Baron, Morin, & Morin, 2011, p. 2).

Knight (2009) stated that "coaches engage in dialogical conversations with teachers…observe them while working, and then use powerful questions, rapport building, and communication skills to empower those they coach to reflect deeply on their practices" (p. 18). He further recommended that there was to be a focus on professional practice that was directly applicable to the teachers' situation and that the coaching was intensive, ongoing, and grounded in a partnership that was non-evaluative, confidential, and facilitated through respectful communication. Knight (2011) identified the seven principles of coaching as follows: equality (between coach and coachee); choice (coaches had choices and needed to understand that making new choices would yield different results); voice (each member had to be heard); reflection (time to think was needed); dialogue (more than just talk; it was a back and forth in thinking); praxis (application of new skill); and reciprocity (when one taught, two learned).

Reiss (2015) defined coaching as, "a series of skills, a process, [and] a relationship" (p. 81). The relationship is the conversation, and therefore the conversation is the coaching. In short, coaching is communication.

Cheliotes and Reilly (2010, 2012) provided guidance in both the art and skill of good communication, hence good coaching. In fact, Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) boldly affirmed that coaching involved a leader being an outstanding communicator. Coaching conversations were the actions of good coaches. These conversations were "highly intentional….focused on the other person….and their purpose is to stimulate growth and change" (p. 3). How then does a leader accomplish this coaching if it has the potential to be the game changer for leaders in schools?

**Coaching playbook**. Just as in sport, there are several books used, but many reflect the same core competencies, or rules, of leadership coaching. No two coaches are exactly the same; their terminology with respect to the plays of the game may vary, but the end goal does not—winning, and in schools that winning equates to improved learning and growth in skills. Leadership coaching in schools allows for all team members to hone their skills: the coach (principal or leader), coachee (teacher or support staff), and all athletes on the roster (students); now that is win-win.

New teachers do require special consideration, however. Roberson and Roberson (2009) advised coaching principals to consider coaching new teachers first by progressing from operational to instructional needs. "What do they need to survive next week?" kinds of conversations were at the beginning of new teacher coaching. Second, shifting from procedures to process. Third, coaching conversations should center on developmental topics. Lastly, coaching would arrive at a place where the coaching was providing meaningful, instructional feedback.

Bailey and Reilly's (2017) steps for maximum performance included: creating a shared mission and goals, because "this develops the will and grit to stay in the game over the long haul" (p. 97); distributing leadership (all must work together, where all players owned the game's outcome and were accountable to each teammate); aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment (the work happened on the field, or in a school context, in the classroom). Although the work happens on the field (classroom), the relationship that exists and conversation that is heard in the dressing room (staffroom, staff meeting, in the office), sets the tone. Similarly, Morel and Cushman (2012) encouraged coaches to identify root causes for any identified failures, but to view them not through the lens of a sore loser, instead the team was to clarify the vision based on the current state, monitor the progress of the implemented plan, and change the plan if the team was not successful. Time-outs to recalibrate were encouraged.

McCarthy and Milner (2013) spoke specifically about the skillset of a great coach in the conversation part of the job. They believed that coaching was non-directive. Many coaches are accustomed to providing the next move, independent of what their players think, but here is where the leadership coaching in schools is very different. A school principal's personal solution "may not be as strong as the one that emerges through dialogue" (McCarthy & Milner, 2013, p. 771). Instead, the coach must practice "ask[ing] questions that will prompt a coachee to think, to reflect on their goals and assumptions, to become aware and grow" (McCarthy & Milner, 2013, p. 771).

Knight (2011) reflected earlier thoughts independently, identifying the components of leadership coaching to include: identifying teachers' goals, listening, asking questions, explaining practice, providing feedback, and working in a partnership. He later reframed them in a cyclical coaching framework with other researchers. Knight et al. (2015) agreed with Bailey and Reilly (2017) identifying goals with the teacher was an essential part of coaching. They encouraged recording the game (lesson). This way the coachee could analyze the play by play on video, by pausing, replaying, and even watching in slow motion what was successful in action and what could use tweaking. It was *game on* in three steps, labelled: identify, learn, and improve. To begin, *identifying* the goals and strategy to meet the goal were step one. Some questions they offered to guide coaches were:

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how close was the lesson to your ideal?
- What would have to change to make the class closer to a 10?
- What would your students be doing?
- What would that look like?
- How would we measure that?
- Do you want that to be your goal?
- Would it really matter to you if you hit that goal?
- What teaching strategy will you try to hit that goal? (Knight et al., 2015, p.12)

The coach needed to explain, teach, and model in the second step of *learning*. The improving step was where the coach and coachee monitor implementation and results. Some helpful coaching questions included:

- What are you pleased about?
- Did you hit the goal?
- If you hit the goal, do you want to identify another goal, take a break, or keep refining the current practice?
- If you did not hit the goal, do you want to stick with the chosen practice or try a new one? If you stick with the chosen practice, how will you modify it to increase its impact?
- If you choose another practice, what will it be?
- What are your next actions? (Knight et al., 2015, p. 18)

Reiss (2015) highlighted her core competencies of coaching actions. After coaches set the foundation, they used skills, such as active listening, powerful questioning, direct communication,

creating awareness, designing actions, planning, and goal setting, and managing progress and accountability. She explained that coaches did not tell unless directly asked, and it was in the best interest of the coachee; they asked questions instead.

Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) wrote of coaching conversations. Their coaching training camp required leaders to meet certain criteria in order to make the team, and not get cut as the head coach. If the leadership talent rested on giving advice and answers through loaded questions, the leader was in the supervising zone. If teaching and offering options were occurring, then the leader was in the mentoring zone. Once the following actions: creating awareness, designing actions, planning, and goal setting, monitoring progress, and celebrating success, were part of the co-created relationship that was in the skill set of the leader, then coaching was happening. This leader was operating from the coaching zone. "Rather than be judgmental, a coach-like leader helps others plan, reflect, problem solve, and make their own decisions" (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010, p. 17). There were three main goals in the coaching zone, the hat trick included: committed listening, powerful speaking, and reflective feedback.

*Getting in the zone, step one—committed listening.* This type of listening means listening with your ears and eyes. Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) advised that paying attention to both verbal and non-verbal communication was crucial. Valuing silence was good practice, and avoiding unproductive listening was common, yet to be avoided completely. They named the unproductive listening as judgment or criticism listening, autobiographical listening, inquisitive listening, and solution listening. Judgment listening took place when the listener found flaws in what the speaker was saying. Autobiographical listening involved making someone else's story all about you and relating it to your experience instead of respectfully listening to theirs. Inquisitive listening was defined as listening that was so interesting to the listener that their mind became full instead of being mindful. Solution listening occurred when the listener was solving the speaker's problems before they even finished talking, and in some cases, the listener was already rehearsing what they would respond with instead of continuing to listen completely.

*Getting in the zone, step two—powerful speaking.* Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) stated that a powerful speaker always had an identified intention before they engaged in a coaching conversation. This process needed to happen before anyone spoke a word. This kind of intentional talk led to action. Powerful speakers chose words carefully and specifically. The levels of language chosen formed the commitment of both the speaker and the listener. "I should, I must, I might, I want" were lower commitments than, "I will, I expect to, I plan to, my dream is to". Powerful speaking required positive presuppositions and expressing positive intent. This allowed for relationship building and reflective thinking. Powerful speaking avoided giving advice, which built independence and capacity. Staff members needed to know that their leader trusted them, believed they were capable, and that it was safe and encouraged to take risks. Powerful questions were at the core of powerful speaking. Powerful questions caused thinking and solution finding.

*Getting in the zone, step three—reflective feedback.* Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) cautioned coaches to outweigh negative and conciliatory feedback with communicative feedback. Communicative feedback included the following:

- Clarifies an idea or behavior under consideration (to be sure you are talking about the same thing).
- Communicates positive features toward preserving them and building upon them.
- Communicates concerns and suggestions toward improvement.
- Consumes more time, requires thought and effort.
- Read as careful, respectful, and honest. (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010, p. 65)

When offering reflective feedback a coach learned what kinds of questions to ask instead of searching for a solution to a problem. Reflective feedback, "set[s] the stage…to think aloud" (p. 74) as thinking partners. Even when Cheliotes and Reilly (2012) reunited, they did not talk of data-informed decisions or common visions, but clearly reaffirmed the essential elements of coaching conversations to include: committed listening, asking powerful questions, and reflec-

tive feedback. However, it can be inferred that if the coachee was about to choose to practice and implement the entirely wrong skill, thereby injuring themselves or others, they would be steered in the right direction.

Leadership coaching is a partnership where both the coach and coachee benefit from highly intentional, growth stimulating dialogue. These conversations involve committed listening, powerful speaking, and reflective feedback. This coaching, or verbal thinking, is not about *telling how* to teach, but rather about asking reflective questions that allow others to personally *discover how* for themselves.

## The Winning Team—What are the Benefits of Coaching?

The scoreboard lights up when it comes to coaching. Coaching undeniably has advantages. Because leadership coaching necessitates the prerequisite work of building trusting relationships and meaningful, shared values, along with a growth mindset, leaders have earned match point before they have even started coaching.

**Nobody loses in coaching.** The ace is served when coaching conversations follow. Coaching conversations accomplish many positive outcomes, such as inspiring growth, cultivating positive culture, developing talent, increasing engagement, reducing attrition, building confidence, encouraging risk taking, promoting reflection, increasing efficacy, bringing about joy, creating succession, and improving teaching and learning.

Moen and Federici (2012) specifically found that motivation, self-efficacy, goal setting, knowledge, and commitment all increased. Many of the issues in schools seemed less problematic when effective coaching took place. Weissberg and Durlak found, “increased attendance, decreased suspensions, better student engagement, and increased academic achievement” (as cited in Patti, Holzer, Stern, & Brackett, 2012, p. 270).

Patti, Holzer, Stern, and Brackett (2012) determined that coaching leaders were metacognitive about their practice, their strengths, and challenges, as well as their emotional and social skill development. Because they were more self-aware, they could manage conflict better and made decisions based on multiple perspectives. Shared decision-making allowed all to fulfill the vision.

Edwards (2001) synthesized much of the research about coaching and identified the following eight positive outcomes:

1. Increase in student test scores and “other benefits to students”;
2. Growth in teacher efficacy;
3. Increase in reflective and complex thinking among teachers;
4. Increase in teacher satisfaction with career and position;
5. Increase in professional climate at schools;
6. Increase in teacher collaboration;
7. Increase in professional assistance to teachers; and
8. Increase in personal benefits to teachers. (as cited in Knight, 2009, p. 20)

Hellsten, Prytula, and Ebanks (2009) noted that coaching focused on student learning and increased engagement in teaching, while Baron, Morin, and Morin (2011) spoke of many (a team approach) accomplishing much more than one (just the formal leader), and coaching created a working alliance between the coach and the coachee. Collaboration leads to change. When change creates growth, there is celebration, and celebration leads to joy. Baron, Morin, and Morin (2011) also warned that the more consistent, on-going, and cooperative the coaching, the better effect there was on self-efficacy and development. This finding showed the importance of having actions reflective of a coaching philosophy as often as possible in schools, and with as many team members as possible for optimum benefit.

James-Ward's (2013) coaching survey noted the benefits to be: the opportunity to learn things quickly, becoming comfortable with the profession, improving the ability to provide meaningful feedback, developing leadership skills, and managing policies. Teachers who implemented the commitments they made while being coached were quoted as saying, "I felt pushed, in a good way, to learn quickly and come up with an action plan or next steps", and "It was an experience that saved my sanity and provided me hope when I felt helpless" (James-Ward, 2013, p. 27). "The value of the coaching experience was grounded in the practicality of the work" (James-Ward, 2013, p. 31). James-Ward (2013) noticed that the coaching experience gave educators confidence as well as new skill sets to face and overcome many issues in teaching.

Reiss (2015) believed leadership coaching could curb attrition because, "coaching helps us integrate our gifts, dreams, talents, and skills into our daily lives. It helps coaches create their loves on purpose, by connecting the inner self with the outer world. It is a great strategy for reducing burnout" (p. 77). Reiss explained that coaching was very successful because it emphasized *action*.

Coaching benefits abound, but among the most significant are teacher efficacy, and student and teacher growth. Leadership coaching takes dedication, skill, and perseverance.

## Practice Makes Perfect—What are the Implications?

Or should we say, "practice makes permanent?" If coaching is not done correctly it is anything but perfect, in fact, it can be detrimental.

**Awareness of potentially challenging hurdles.** Coaching cannot be rushed. Good coaching takes considerable time and should not be selective. Coaching should be practiced with all team members. Whether someone is a new teacher, in a new school, has a new assignment, or none of these, coaching is the right move. Sweeney (2011) felt the principal needed to truly know their students and staff and to use data to inform coaching needs rather than what was, or was not, taking place in the classroom. The curriculum was the tool to reaching student learning objectives, and not the specific objective of the coaching. The principal was there to support teachers reaching goals, unlike the person who held teachers accountable.

Every school year is different from the last because new students change the classroom. All educators need coaching, including the principal. Many feel that coaching is an action needed to rescue the needy. Educators need to learn that coaching is rooted in believing people do not need rescuing at all. Knight (2011) added that coaching was not a punishment, nor was it only for those who were struggling in the sport of teaching, but it was a gift that a coach could give to allow the coachee to develop to their full selves. Reiss (2015) echoed his sentiments saying, "coaching is not solely for people who are perceived as needing help; it is highly effective for ensuring that all leaders are achieving at their peak potential. Coaching is a perk, not a punishment" (p. 24). According to Hunt and Weintraub, "effective coaching helps everyone and is much more powerful and useful than merely providing feedback to someone with a performance problem" (as cited in McCarthy & Milner, 2013, p. 769).

Baron, Morin, and Morin (2011) addressed that even though leadership coaching was becoming popular in practice, there were not many empirical studies about the process. James-Ward (2013) noted that leadership coaching, as a form of professional development for and by administrators, was becoming a real focus of current research. Driscoll (2008) warned that although coaching was likely the best move to develop teachers, traditional professional development still had a place. The knowledge piece of teaching required traditional types of professional development, but coaching was necessary to impact the implementation and teaching itself. Both are complementary and essential. Knight (2011) explained that just knowing was not enough, as coaching sought meaningful commitment. "Ironically, telling a professional that he or she must act a certain way is often a guarantee that the person will not want to do that" (Knight, 2011, p. 2). When professionals do not understand or are not part of the thinking behind the pedagogy, they can feel insulted and perceive what they are currently doing as being judged as wrong. Peter

Block said it well, "If I can't say no, then saying yes doesn't mean anything" (as cited in Knight, 2011, p. 2). Bush was a pioneer in supporting leadership coaching. He conducted a five-year study in California and found the following evidence:

> When teachers were given only a description of new instructional skills, 10% used the skill in the classroom. When modeling, practice and feedback were added to the training teachers' implementation of the teaching practice increased by 2% to 3% each time. When coaching was added to the staff development, however, approximately 95% of the teachers implemented the new skill in their classrooms. (as cited in Knight, 2009, p.20)

This study confirmed that good coaching was needed in order to actualize good teaching. Marzano, Walters, and McNulty knew that a highly effective principal could have a "dramatic impact on overall student achievement in a school" (as cited in Dufour & Marzano, 2011, p. 37).

Challenges such as lack of coaching expertise, considerable time commitment, or coaching being viewed as something only for the needy, should never be seen as barriers, but rather acknowledged, and considered an investment in good teaching and learning by leadership.

## The Head Coach—What is the Role of the Principal?

Coaching is not for the weary. Just as in sport if there is no struggle, there is no growth. True leaders accept and welcome challenges. Zachary and Fischler (2010) explained that "leaders step out into the unknown and search for opportunities. They innovate, experiment, take risks, and welcome new thinking" (p. 55). They were the ones who enabled, or disabled, others to act. Principals could not accomplish a whole lot without engaging those around them.

**Leaders as coaches.** Not all researchers agreed that administrators should, or could be, coaches. Who that coach should be has traditionally been the work of someone external; someone other than the principal. There are some challenges with the power differential granted to a principal, and the supervisory role that an administrator has, that conflict with the idea of equality needed between coach and coachee; however, principals are tasked to embrace these dual roles. Rallying your team, whether the players are rookies or veterans, is equally as important. Sometimes inspiring someone who is reflecting a 19th hole attitude about work can find their spark again with the right coach. Through conversation, it may be discovered that the coachee is simply not playing the right sport, not on the right team, or perhaps simply needs to play a new position. "People work better for those who let others see them as a person rather than a title" (Bailey & Reilly, 2017, p. 65). Asking insightful questions is very different from issuing orders. Herrington (2013) mentioned that the coaching principal, "establishes norms of interpersonal communication and trust" (p. 50). Winning the game matters, but showing sportsmanship is what is respected and remembered.

Von Frank (2009) reminded educators that, "sometimes we get in the role as administrators and forget what it's like to be a teacher….[Coaching is] more a belief, a philosophy of how you want to be [as] a leader" (p. 7). Bonilla (2013) emphasized that coaching builds a culture, a common core in a school, and that needs to come from leadership setting the example and being a role model. Herrington (2013) suggested that "organizational culture matters. It is tied directly to student achievement….The campus leader is the catalyst that makes that happen" (p. 55). Schweitzer said: "example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing" (as cited in Bonilla, 2013, p. 2).

**Walk the walk**. Classrooms today are not like the classrooms adults sat in. We often hear of the many diverse needs of our students and expect teachers to adapt curricula to reflect the needs of their learners, but we rarely speak of leadership in these same terms. Losch et al. (2016) described coaching as differentiation at its finest. This is the leader's work—assessing what their teachers' needs are and coaching teachers for improved classroom instruction. Von Frank (2009) mentioned that coaching connected administrators to the classrooms. Principals who coach are aware of what is going on in their school, and what their own weaknesses are. They are

able to learn from their staff, who may have skills in areas that they need to develop. Effective practitioners are reflective. Coaching is a lesson in reflection with a thinking partner. Bailey and Reilly (2017) found that if leaders did not reflect, they could not lead.

Coaching creates accountability for both the leader and teacher. Roberson and Roberson (2009) saw the principal as the recognized leader in the building. They were the key person teachers sought for support and encouragement and were a critical factor in teachers' success.

McCarthy and Milner (2013) studied the principal as a coach and disagreed with those who thought that the principal did not have a place as a leadership coach, in fact, they found principals to be the best person for the head coaching position. There were things that a coaching principal needed to be aware of, absolutely, but the benefits far outweighed the challenges. When the principal was the coach they noted that the leader often possessed many of the skills needed for coaching seemingly innately, but more probably through self-development and experience. Principals already had a relationship with their team that was on-going and had access to daily interaction. This on-going connection allowed for regular feedback with many diverse observations. They were more able to follow through with the monitoring and commitments.

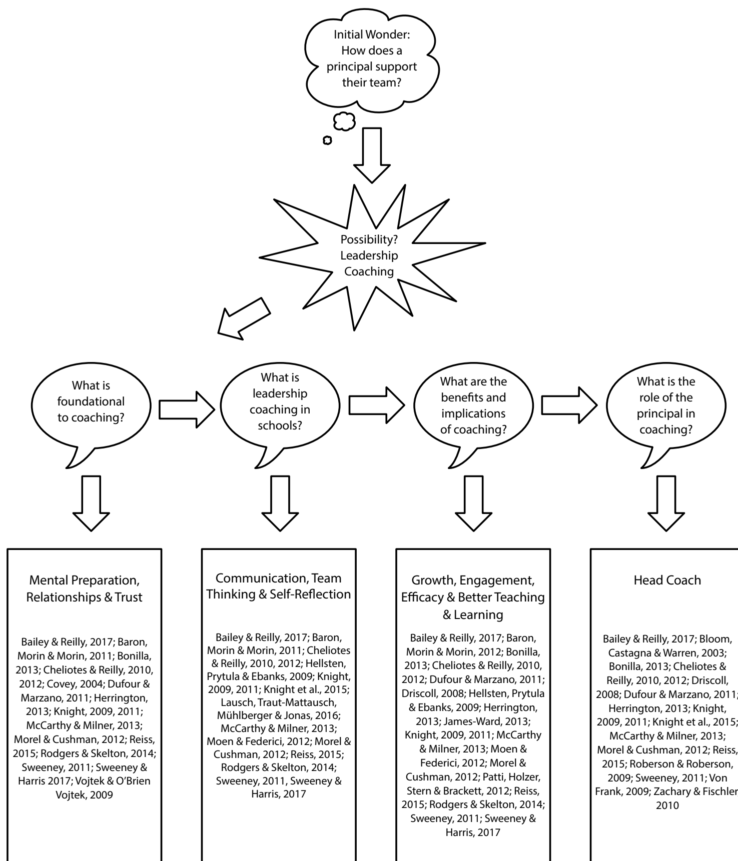


Figure 1. Framework of coaching literature

"They have an advantage in that the context, jargon, and performance of the coachee are familiar and they have existing relationships and credibility with the coachee" (McCarthy & Milner, 2013, p. 770). A challenge for the coaching principal was their supervisory role. There needed to be heaps of trust developed in order for the coachee to not feel they had to say what their boss wanted to hear. The role of the coach was non-directive, and many principals were used to providing solutions and solving problems. The coaching for a principal needed to be work-related, which was different from the coaching relationship that an external coach often had. If a coaching principal needed to role switch they needed to be explicit and tell the coachee that they were now acting as their supervisor, mentor, or friend. The above were not necessarily major concerns, but the coaching principal needed an awareness of possible challenges. The principal does have a certain amount of power, and the equality needed in a coaching relationship was crucial, however "the relationship with coaching managers [principals] places less stress on the positional power or status of the manager and more on the manager's willingness to listen to and accept the ideas of the employee" (McCarthy & Milner, 2013, p. 772). Bloom, Castagna, and Warren (2003) felt coaching done right insisted that coaching must enter the principal's office because the principal was the formal leader of the school and had the power to build a winning team. Hargrove wrote:

> [Coaching is] at the heart of management, not at the edges. It is everything you do to produce extraordinary results amid change, complexity, and competition. Coaching is everything you do to improve your strategic thinking about the future you want to create. Coaching is everything you do to ignite personal and team learning in solving organizational problems while building the capability you need to succeed. Coaching is everything you do to give you and your organization an edge and advantage. You don't need coaching for ordinary results. (as cited in Reiss, 2015, p. 2)

The leader of the past knew how to tell, but today's coaching leaders will know how to ask. Principals are among the best leaders to be trained and serve as coaches. Modeling what is best practice in classrooms should begin with school leaders who have an incredible influence on the biggest impact on student learning; their teachers.

## Reflections of Tackling School Leadership Coaching

I have come to see coaching as a powerful lifelong energy, or way of being with people. Approaching each interaction as an opportunity to coach, and learn together, stretches both people having a coaching conversation. Coaching is kinetic; in that it creates action.

### Coaching is a Lifestyle, Not a Diet

I am an administrator and parent who seeks to be the most effective I can be in both of these roles daily. It has become apparent that one of the most important roles I have is discovering talent and the development of others. Coaching is about discovering the gifts that people have, however it is extremely important to make certain that a person's strengths are congruent with their passions. Just because someone is good at something does not always mean they enjoy doing it or feel comfortable being an expert in the area. This tends to happen in both families and schools. Supporting my team is not always an easy challenge, at work, nor at home, but incredibility rewarding when students and children win in the end.

**Some personal stats.** The schools in which I have recently worked have been French Immersion schools. Demand for programming outweighs personnel able to deliver it. Increasing recruitment and retention of quality French Immersion teachers is critical to the integrity and success of the program, and Canada's linguistic duality. Rodgers and Skelton (2014) spoke of turnover in schools, which included both attrition and transfers, as being burdens for education, but developing average teachers into excellent teachers was financially, educationally, and morally critical. Principal support affects how teachers develop and whether they stay teaching.

I have learned that relationships are everything in education, and through them, amazing things can happen. Mentorship is what many people need to be successful; it is indeed an important and valuable leadership action, but coaching goes further, resulting in increased efficacy. "There are athletic coaches, instructional coaches, parent coaches, student coaches, financial coaches, and more" (Reiss, 2015, p. xv), but no matter the type or reason for coaching it is about reaching challenging goals and change. While I appreciate the literature and research about leadership coaching to date, it is seemingly in its infancy when it comes to the principal as the coach. More research specific in this area would be valuable and is recommended.

The process of coaching, in general, was well described in the literature and I have found that in order for responsiveness to transpire through coaching, groundwork must occur in many areas, such as relationships, communication, evidence-based decisions, feedback, modelling, instructional leadership, professional development, capacity building, succession planning, and growth mindset. Once these skills are in place, the principal's game plan as a coach can play out. Initially coaching was not viewed as the principal's work, but I have found that coaching must be embedded in schools through administrative leadership. I agree with Hargrove, in that, "I absolutely believe that people, unless coached, never reach their maximum capabilities" (as cited in Reiss, 2015, p. 68). Understanding how to coach has empowered me as a leader. Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) spoke to me when they said:

> Coaching is such a privilege. It allows leaders to work very closely with others to help them find their passions, rediscover their strengths, and build from there. In the process, leaders learn ever more about themselves, about ways of being with others, and are challenged to *be* more themselves. (pp. 95-96)

I look forward to the conversations that I feel privileged to have with my colleagues and family, and will hold onto Scott's quote: "while no conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a career, a relationship, or a life—any single conversation can" (as cited in Cheliotes & Reilly, 2012, p. 133).

## Conclusion

By trusting in others' abilities, leaders develop capacity, self-confidence, and talent in their apprentices. I found the conversation between Daniel and Mr. Miyagi from the film The Karate Kid as an example of a coaching leader believing his learner can think for himself and empowering him to do so:

> Daniel: "Hey - you ever get into fights when you were a kid?"
> Miyagi: "Huh - plenty."
> Daniel: "Yeah, but it wasn't like the problem I have, right?"
> Miyagi: "Why? Fighting fighting. Same same."
> Daniel: "Yeah, but you knew karate."
> Miyagi: "Someone always know more."
> Daniel: "You mean there were times when you were scared to fight?"
> Miyagi: "Always scare. Miyagi hate fighting."
> Daniel: "Yeah, but you like karate."
> Miyagi: "So?"
> Daniel: "So, karate's fighting. You train to fight."
> Miyagi: "That what you think?
> Daniel: "[pondering] No."
> Miyagi: "Then why train?"
> Daniel: "[thinks] So I won't have to fight."
> Miyagi: "[laughs] Miyagi have hope for you." (Weintraub & Avildsen, 1984)

Relationship was at the heart of this dialogue. Miyagi implicitly taught that it was important to take risks and that one person alone was not the keeper of all knowledge. "Leadership is

situational rather than hierarchical" (Lambert, Wallach, & Ramsey, 2007, p. 40). Miyagi asked simple, yet powerful questions, rather than giving answers, hence Daniel came to his own conclusion. Teachers learn how to co-construct expectations, develop routines, and master classroom management strategies, for example, so they rarely need to discipline students. Teachers must know when to pick their battles, and in case they sometimes do need to know how to *fight*, they do so firmly, yet fairly, and always respectfully. Coaching provides principals with a whole new way to win the game of teacher and student achievement. Gawande denoted, "coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance" (as cited in Knight et al., 2015, p. 11). By taking the time to prepare mentally, developing trusting relationships and deeply believing in a shared vision, leaders are ready to coach. Coaches who thoughtfully communicate through: committed listening, powerful speaking, and reflective feedback inspire themselves, and their coachees, to engage in teaching and learning, with unprecedented growth and efficacy. The principal is the head coach in schools, where coaching effectively can make them MVP.

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# Positive School Culture through Transformational Leadership

John Jamieson

## Abstract

This paper will examine the influence that transformational leadership can have on the overall positive culture of a school. The paper will focus on the following four research questions when examining the effects of transformational leadership on school culture: (1) How does transformational leadership increase teacher engagement in a school?; (2) How does teacher engagement affect student achievement and school culture?; (3) How can transformational leadership affect student achievement in a school?; and (4) How can transformational leadership enhance a schools' culture? Based on the investigation of these questions, this paper will establish that the characteristics of transformational leadership builds a collaborative school environment, strong relationships between teachers and principal, and increases teacher efficacy. From these aspects, which develop out of transformational leadership, teacher perception of the school can be positively influenced and the capacity for change in the school can be increased. Due to these reasons, it is possible to claim that a transformational leadership approach by school principals can foster a sustainable positive culture in schools.

## Keywords

*transformational leadership, teacher engagement, instructional leadership, student engagement, school cultures*

Educators have long been interested in implementing educative practices that promote positive post-school transitional outcomes for students with disabilities to flourish in their schools, workplaces, and communities (Carter, 2013). The role of secondary education has aimed to prepare all high school youth for their successful transition into either further studies at post-secondary institutions or directly into the world of employment. Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education (2015) has created a document entitled *Actualizing a Needs Based Model to Support Student Achievement* which establishes a structure for strategic, innovative and collaborative leadership for all students through the early years from Prekindergarten through Grade 12 education. Their plan promotes higher student achievement and wellbeing for Saskatchewan children and youth and improved literacy skills for all. This comprehensive strategy is designed to guide *all students* to develop their skills and abilities and is the foundation for the province's social and economic growth (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015). Saskatchewan also has a population of students with disabilities whose educational and transitional needs vary from the majority of school-age students. For this reason, these students require alternate approaches and supports in order to successfully transition into employment following high school completion.

## Purpose

To keep up with the world we live in today, organizations need to be able to incorporate rapidly changing and advancing environments; schools are no different. Managing an ever changing and adapting organization presents many challenges for school-based administrators. One of the most important, and potentially most difficult challenges is to maintain a positive work and learning culture in an ever-changing school. While everyone would agree that improving school culture and student learning are good things, change can be hard for both teachers and students to accept. Transformational leadership provides the best approach for school administrators to effectively maintain a positive school culture throughout the changes that keep a school

continually growing and improving. This paper will investigate the effects of transformational leadership on staff and student engagement to examine how transformational leadership can both enhance student learning and develop positive school culture.

## Research Questions

1. How does transformational leadership increase teacher engagement in a school?
2. How does teacher engagement affect student achievement and school culture?
3. How can transformational leadership affect student achievement in a school?
4. How can transformational leadership enhance a school's culture?

## Significance of the Study

Investigating transformational leadership in education is particularly relevant in today's' world as schools are continually changing to incorporate more modern organizational theories. Transformational leadership moves schools away from a traditional top-down organization structure to a bottom-up model, which creates a greater capacity for teacher engagement in the school and innovative teaching practices in the classroom. Thus, the investigation of transformational leadership and school culture is an extremely valuable topic of research in education today. Education has changed a great deal in the twenty-first century and in order to provide students with the best possible learning opportunities, it is vital for teachers to keep up with innovative approaches to education. By incorporating a transformational leadership style, school-based administrators can support innovation in the classroom and increase teacher commitment to school initiatives; both of these can have a tremendous influence towards a positive school culture.

## Limitations

This paper is developed as a literature review of a variety of works that examine transformational leadership, teacher engagement, student achievement, and school culture. As a literature review, this study is limited because it does not reflect any qualitative findings of its' own to directly link the effects of transformational leadership on school culture. While this has been the focus of other studies, this paper does not present any new data for this field. The focus of this paper is on scholarly articles and studies that have been done to find the various effects that transformational leadership can have in a school setting, but no research was done to investigate any educational policies to develop a better understanding of how school systems are working to promote transformational leadership in their schools. As the positive effects of transformational leadership become more prominent in education, it would be useful for more work to be done to demonstrate effective ways that transformational leadership can be supported by school boards through policy and training of administrators, both in school and at the division level.

## Defining Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a modern approach to leadership that focusses on decentralizing authority and encouraging all members of an organization to be involved in creating the long-term vision for the organization. By collaborating with colleagues, the leaders in the organization can implement innovative practices to reach goals that have been set by the stakeholders involved. Through these interactions, transformational leaders increase motivation and commitment to the organization (Kieres, 2012). When applied to schools, transformational leadership can affect student achievement in a positive way, as it encourages teachers to become more involved in the school and implement new and diverse teaching practices in their classrooms. Since this paper is intended to focus primarily on the effects of transformational leadership, the term positive school culture will be given a broad definition of a positive school environment that is able to effectively implement school improvement initiatives. This is done intentionally to

allow the focus of the paper to remain on transformational leadership rather than emphasizing the aspects of a positive school culture.

## Transformational vs. Transactional Leadership

Traditionally, transactional leadership was the dominant leadership model in schools. Thus, to understand transformational leadership, it is useful to first define transactional leadership. Transactional leadership focused on the rules and existing processes of an organization, giving limited people authority through the enforcement of rules and overseeing operating procedures (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). This approach to leadership encouraged top-down bureaucracy and did not seek input from subordinates or encourage the growth of individuals within the organization. Transactional leaders would set goals for the organization in isolation and followers in the organization would receive rewards for their work in achieving the goals of the leader. This set up a relationship of transactions between the leader and the follower rather than building any trust between members of the organization (Kieres, 2012). Transactional leaders function more as managers of the status quo rather than leaders that build capacity for improvement and innovation within their staff and in their organizations as a whole (Moolenar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010). The top-down structure of transactional leadership severely limits the capacity of the organization by rewarding those that work within the existing parameters of an organization rather than encouraging growth and development of ideas in the organization. These limitations made transactional leadership ineffective for modern organizations and created a demand for new leadership styles that encourage innovation in an organization. From these demands, transformational leadership began to emerge as a relevant theory in organizational leadership.

## Transformational Leadership in Education

The traditional hierarchical structure of education, that still influences schools today, comes from the early roots of public education systems, which developed during the industrial revolution. Transactional leadership fit very well into this system, as it was intended to maintain a steady labour force of factory workers and not develop the creativity and critical thinking skills that are now a necessity for the generations of the twenty-first century (Carr, 2016). Organizational structures, in all realms of society, are moving away from top-down hierarchies and moving towards bottom-up systems that encourage input from all members of the organization rather than orders being given from the top echelon of the organization. The bottom-up approach allows organizations to be innovative and to develop policies and practices that better serve the front line employees. In the context of education, teachers serve as the frontline employees. It is teachers who understand the needs of their students the best. With input from teachers, schools can structure policies and practices based on the needs of individual students, rather than the regulations that are put in place by senior administrators who are removed from the classroom. Principals that utilize transformational leadership are well equipped to work collaboratively with a bottom-up approach to gain insight into students' needs and incorporate ideas of teachers into creating the larger goals of the school (Hauserman & Stick, 2014).

While the importance of transformational leadership is apparent in developing modern school systems, the topic of transformational leadership has been very influential in educational research for the past 25 years. Since the introduction of transformational leadership theory to education in the early 1990s, there has been an overall increase in the number of articles written in the field of educational leadership (Berkovich, 2016). Based on Izhak Berkovich's (2016) findings, the number of articles published that focused on educational leadership doubled from 50 articles published per year in the mid-1980s to over 100 articles published per year by 1992. This trend of increased research in educational leadership has led to the development of a variety of leadership theories such as democratic leadership and distributed leadership, which have emerged alongside transformational leadership in the past two decades. Even with the advent of many new leadership theories, transformational leadership still accounts for approximately

30% of the research done on educational leadership in the 2000s (Berkovich, 2016). As a driving force in research, and influencing more modern leadership practices in education, transformational leadership has already played a significant role in advancing education.

## Criticisms of Transformational Leadership

As a result of the research that has been done on transformational leadership, some criticisms of the theory have come to light. These criticisms do not call into question the aspects of leadership that transformational leadership promotes, but question the ambiguous definitions that are applied to a transformational leader. Without a clear definition of transformational leadership, researchers struggle to reproduce studies that measure the effects of transformational leadership in schools. Studies developed to investigate transformational leadership can manipulate the loose definition and when the study does not achieve the desired results, it can conclude that transformational leadership was not properly implemented by the school leaders in the study (Berkovich, 2016). Conversely, transformational leadership can be applied as a blanket term for many modern leadership approaches and receive accolades that may be more fitting for other leadership approaches. The lack of definition of transformational leadership can cause this leadership approach to be blurred with other more defined leadership approaches, like distributed leadership, so critics claim that this can garner extra undo-credit for transformational leadership when positive results are actually achieved through other forms of leadership (Berkovich, 2016). While the criticisms of transformational leadership are significant, more scholarly work should be done to better define the term and to advance all research on this topic to its full potential.

## Key Aspects of Transformational Leadership

In order to examine the effects that transformational leadership can have on school culture, it is important to identify the aspects of leadership that define a school principal as a transformational leader. Many researchers identify four key characteristics that a transformational leader will display: idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and consideration for the individual (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). As mentioned earlier, transformational leadership involves collaboration with staff to set long-term goals for the school, encourages the growth of individuals within the school, and decentralizes authority in the school. If we combine the four characteristics of a transformational leader and the actions of transformational leadership in a school, we can see that the characteristics overlap with the approach that a principal would take to establish transformational leadership in a school.

All four characteristics of transformational leadership, influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and consideration for the individual, would be a part of decentralizing authority and effective collaboration with the staff on school goals. Encouraging teachers' growth would require consideration for individuals and intellectual stimulation. The basis for all of the positive effects of transformational leadership is the relationship that develops between principals and teachers. A strong relationship between principals and teachers is important for encouraging the personal and professional growth of each individual teacher (Kieres, 2012). Building a relationship with staff members also encourages trust in the principal, which is very important as the principal works to increase collaboration in the school. From a teachers' perspective, transformational leaders are trusted, respected, admired, and often seen as role models to their colleagues (Kieres, 2012). Through the characteristics of transformational leadership, a school principal can build trust and strong relationships among their staff; these relationships form the basis for collaboration and growth of individual teachers that serves as a basis for a positive school culture.

### Relationships and Trust

Developing relationships with staff will take time, as these relationships grow, transformational leaders can simultaneously work on establishing a collaborative environment in the school. The more collaborative that a principal is in the development of school goals and school vision, the

greater teachers will be in seeking strong relationships with the principal (Moolenar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010). As relationships grow, the principal will also develop a better understanding and consideration for individual teachers. From this understanding of the staff, the principal can begin to encourage the personal and professional growth of the teacher and intellectual stimulation for the teacher. The encouragement of growth and challenging teachers intellectually will have a cyclical effect on collaboration, as teachers should be encouraged to share their growth with the staff as they all work collaboratively for school improvement. This cycle of collaboration reflects the trust and relationships between principal and staff, as staff members who feel comfortable to contribute to a collaborative environment will be encouraged to share their ideas, discoveries, and beliefs to the whole staff (Williams & Jones, 2009).

Trusting relationships between administrators and teachers is a key difference between transactional leadership and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership was most effective with bureaucratic top-down organizational structures which inhibited trusting relationships between principals and teachers. Top-down bureaucracy fosters distrust between administrators and teachers because administrators take on the role of supervisors and rule enforcers. While a transformational leader structures the school around the knowledge and professionalism of the staff, this bottom-up approach builds trust between principal and teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). The collaboration that is involved in transformational leadership not only requires a different relationship than what was developed through transactional leadership, it fosters these relationships of trust between principals and teachers.

As trust, comfort, and collaboration increase in a school, the capacity for effectively implementing sustainable long-term goals in the school increases. Transformational leaders influence positive school culture by developing positive relationships with teachers (Litz, 2011). As teachers and administrators work collaboratively to achieve long-term goals for the school, the trust and relationships among staff members will positively influence school culture (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). As a transformational leader builds these strong relationships with staff members through a trusting collaborative environment within the school, the characteristics of idealized influence start to make stronger impressions on the school as a whole. In order to maintain the decentralization of authority and continue the growth of the school, it is extremely important that the principals' idealized influence is built into the collaborative vision of the entire school staff. The combination of collaboration, positive relationships, and idealized influence will create lasting effects towards a positive school culture.

## Communication

Communication is a key part of any strong relationship, but it has a particularly significant role when developing positive culture. Schools with a positive school culture consistently have open communication between teachers and principals (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). While communication has an obvious role in establishing a collaborative environment, it is also very important to the professional growth of individual teachers. The strong relationship that a transformational leader has with their staff members facilitates better communication that can, in turn, facilitate the principal in supporting teacher innovation (Moolenar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010). Supporting teacher innovation not only benefits the teacher and students in the classroom, it also has an indirect benefit on the entire school culture.

To effectively build a shared vision of the school, administrators need to be able to communicate with all staff members. Transformational leaders will communicate goals in such a way that motivates teachers to support the achievement of these goals (Allan, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). Increasing teacher motivation towards achieving school goals will not only increase the success rate of school goals, it will also increase further collaboration among the staff towards long-term planning for the school. Supporting innovation and increased collaboration will further enhance the relationships between principal and teachers in the school. So open communication can further develop and enhance the mutual relationships of trust between principals and teachers in a school (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

## Sharing Authority and Developing School Goals

Decentralizing the principal's authority in a school is a key aspect of transformational leadership and it is achieved by working collaboratively with the teaching staff. Working with teachers, rather than over teachers, allows principals to increase teacher motivation in school initiatives. By collaboratively building school goals with the staff, there will be greater staff engagement in implementing the school goals, which has a positive effect on school culture (Fridell, 2006). Developing school goals as a staff also develops more consistency in the implementation of school programs (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). This consistency benefits all stakeholders in the school and helps encourage positive school culture. When school goals are developed collaboratively, it not only allows for teacher input in school planning, it also allows teachers to see where they can contribute to school goals (Mehdinezhad & Mansouri, 2016). With increased teacher involvement, the school culture will reflect more than the goals and work of one person but will reflect the goals and work of the entire staff.

Working collaboratively on school goals will increase teacher engagement in the school as they become more involved in a variety of ways within the school. Decentralization of authority in the school increases teacher ownership of school goals and influences the practices of the teachers (Litz, 2011). The increased involvement in the school by teachers can be further supported by a transformational leader through the encouragement of professional development. With collaboration and support from the principal, teachers will become involved in the school beyond their classroom (Kieres, 2012). Increased teacher involvement in the school creates even more opportunities for principals and teachers to continue to build on the growing relationship of trust. Involving teachers in the decision-making process encourages engagement and commitment to the development of a positive school culture (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004). As teachers become more involved in developing school goals and implementing school change, they will have more opportunity for professional growth, which will be supported by the transformational leader.

## Supporting Innovation and Professional Development

The common school goals and vision that are created through collaboration as a staff, decentralizes the principal's authority in the school. Though the principal is no longer the exclusive figure in school planning, they still have a central role on the staff as a role model for implementing the collective school goals. Transformational leaders promote the common vision of the school in all of their actions and provide teachers with the resources they need to develop innovative teaching practices (Prelli, 2016). As principals work to implement school goals that the staff has created, they may need to seek professional development to gain a greater understanding of the diversity of experiences and knowledge that their staff brings to the school. By personally taking action to seek professional development, the principal is modeling and promoting professional development to their staff through these actions.

Beyond modeling professional growth, transformational leaders should create opportunities and provide resources for their staff members to seek professional development that is based on their own personal interest. When teachers perceive that a principal valued the differing perspectives of individual staff members, teachers were more inclined to seek out professional development based on their personal and professional interests (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). From the professional growth that individual teachers gain, they will, in turn, bring a greater breadth of knowledge back to the staff as they continue to collaborate on school improvement planning. In order to provide the opportunities and resources to support teachers to seek professional development based on personal interest, the principal must have an understanding of the unique interests and abilities that each teacher brings to the school (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004). Creating customized professional development opportunities is another example of the importance that the relationship between principal and teacher plays in transformational leadership.

## Instructional Leadership

Teachers who seek out greater professional development not only provide a benefit to the teacher and the staff, it also has a positive effect on school culture. Principals that work collaboratively with their staff and get involved to support innovative teaching practices build a positive perception towards the school that is reflected in a positive school culture (Allan, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). As the positive school culture develops, it will have a positive effect on teacher engagement as teachers will seek to become more involved in the positive growth of the school. By encouraging professional development, the principal plays a role as both an instructional leader and a transformational leader in the school. The principal is now facilitating growth and innovation in the classroom as an instructional leader, while also facilitating the growth and development of collective school goals as a transformational leader (Marks & Printy, 2003). While taking on the role of both the instructional leader and transformational leader, the principal is working collaboratively while still leading the development of a positive school culture.

As a school principal works collaboratively with the staff to create common school goals, they decentralize their authority, which is a key aspect of transformational leadership. Through the collaboration process, the principal will develop mutual relationships of trust with teachers on staff and gain a better understanding of each individual teacher. From these relationships, the principal can encourage greater personal and professional growth of each teacher. The professional growth will further support teachers as they continue to work collaboratively to accomplish school goals. While all of this work is good in developing a positive school culture, it will also increase teacher engagement in the school as teachers will be encouraged to pursue personal interests that they can use to benefit the entire school. Thus transformational leadership can increase teacher engagement in a school and teacher engagement can positively affect school culture.

As the principal spends less time and energy working to enforce school rules and supervise teachers, as was common in transactional leadership models, they can utilize this time to better support their staff members. By working with and supporting teachers, a principal can build strong relationships with them and gain perspective of the teachers and students in the school. The principal can work as an instructional leader to support teachers in the classroom and work as a transformational leader to support the achievement of school goals. Though instructional leadership and transformational leadership share many similar qualities, they will affect the school in different ways. Instructional leadership will help build teacher competency, while transformational leadership develops the capacity of the entire organization (Marks & Printy, 2003). Building teaching capacity in a school can positively affect student achievement and teacher engagement, both of which are important in a positive school culture. Furthermore, building the capacity of the school is important in developing the overall perception of the school, which is important for a positive school culture.

## Teacher Efficacy

Through collaboration, a transformational leader is able to increase teacher input in school planning and develop stronger relationships with teachers; this has a positive effect on the school. Through a collaborative environment, the principal is also able to gain greater opportunities to be involved as an instructional leader to the teachers in the school. Having a strong instructional leader has a direct positive influence on the collective teacher efficacy in a school (Mehdinezhad & Mansouri, 2016). The increase in teacher efficacy will have a long-term positive effect on school culture, which will further contribute to teacher engagement and professional growth. As professional growth continues to influence collaboration, a principal can further develop the collective efficacy of a teaching staff by sharing stories of the successes of individual teachers to the whole staff (Prelli, 2016). Thus, as the collective efficacy of the staff increases, it can become a source of personal inspiration and motivation towards further innovation in the classroom.

As the teaching staff continues to work collaboratively and motivate each other, the principal can continue to develop their relationships with staff members to further support their role as an instructional leader as well as a transformational leader for the school. As a transformational leader, the principal should encourage teachers to take risks by incorporating innovative teaching practices in their classrooms; the encouragement of innovation and risk-taking will drive the capacity of the school as a whole. Transformational leaders can support risk-taking and innovation on their staff by redefining failures and successes as equal opportunities for innovation (Ross & Gray, 2006). A principal can do this by reflecting on successes and failures collaboratively with the staff and treating both as opportunities for growth in the school. Similarly, in a classroom, a teacher may celebrate a correct answer, but also revel in a students' mistake, because they both reflect student learning. A principal will need to model to the staff that innovations that do not create the desired results can direct school improvement just as much as an innovation that goes exactly as planned.

When a teacher is engaged in their work in a school they are more likely to take an active role in the school and pursue professional development to enhance that role in the school. Teachers that enjoy their role in a school are shown to feel a stronger connection to the students in a school and this often leads to better instructional practices (Allan, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). As a transformational leader, the principal should support and facilitate teachers as they pursue professional development. Collaboration and strong relationships with staff members will help the principal to support teachers as they seek out professional development opportunities. Having a strong relationship built on trust will encourage teachers to take risks and be innovative in the classroom; this will increase teacher efficacy in the school. As teacher efficacy increases, the staff will be able to improve upon their current teaching approaches and student achievement in the school will be directly influenced in a positive way.

## Motivation through Transformational Leadership

As the principal builds better relationships and more trust with their staff members, they will become more established as a transformational leader and the schools' capacity for collaboration and innovation will grow. As the collaborative environment amongst the staff increases, the staff will feel more comfortable on expanding the collaboration beyond school goals and improvement planning. Teachers can utilize their colleagues collaboratively to work on improvements to their instructional practices, assessments, and curriculum implementation. As the collaboration of staff moves beyond the focus of school goals and into classrooms, there will be more alignment between school goals and innovative classroom practices (Marks & Printy, 2003). This authentic alignment of school goals and teaching practices will have positive effects on student achievement and school culture. At this point, working as a transformational leader, the principal can encourage the expansion of school collaboration by blending the goals of the school and the goals of the teachers. Based on the knowledge and understanding of their staff members, the principal can work to incorporate the personal needs and goals of the staff members with the needs and goals of the school (Wang, Wilhite, & Martino, 2016). As teachers see their personal goals being reflected in the larger school goals, they will be more committed to school improvement and motivated to implement school initiatives.

When a teacher sees their own personal goals reflected in an organization it works as a motivator, but it can also be intimidating and make an individual feel vulnerable. The principal can keep a positive focus on the merger of personal and organizational goals by highlighting the successes of the individuals on staff and expressing appreciation for their contributions. By showing appreciation for the contributions of staff members, transformational leaders can motivate their teachers (Allan, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). When a principal focusses on positives, they promote constructive experiences amongst staff members and the collective attitude of the staff is positively influenced (Mehidinezhad & Mansouri, 2016). Maintaining an overall positive atmosphere is important as it allows the staff to honestly reflect on the goals and initiatives, both personally and of the entire school. Reflecting on goals should provide both a motivation and a challenge for improvement planning. As a transformational leader, the principal needs

to both challenge and motivate their staff to improve on existing practices in the school; this honest reflection will have a positive influence on student engagement and learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

As teachers take greater risks and apply more innovative approaches to solve issues that have arisen from the reflection of practices, the staff may seek solutions collaboratively or through professional development. Whether from professional development or collaboration with staff members, the continued personal and professional growth will help to build greater confidence and capacity for pedagogical change (Moolenar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010). In order to help support the capacity of the school, it is important that the principal facilitates the growth of the teachers and continued innovative practices in the classrooms. Transformational leadership in a school increases the chances that teachers will adopt innovative practices in the classroom and innovation in the classroom supports greater student success (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). As the instructional leader and the transformational leader, the principal needs to model a willingness to bring innovation to the school.

## Modeling of Expectations for Student Achievement

By collaborating with staff when developing long-term goals, a transformational leader works to establish a standard of expectations for an organization. When principals model high levels of ethical standards, they gain the trust and respect of the staff (Mehdinezhad & Mansouri, 2016). Trust and respect are important when establishing standards in a school as they form the basis for teacher commitment to the expectations that are being set. The high level of ethical standards that a principal sets in their collaboration with staff members, serves as a consistent basis for the standards that teachers will adhere to and further establish for their students. By modeling standards, the principal is not only setting an example of what to expect in the school, they are also modeling what can be accomplished within the school (Prelli, 2016). Strong school administrators model high expectations, which are then reflected by teachers in their instructional practices and students in their academic performance (Allan, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). While the teacher has the most direct influence on expectations of student performance in the classroom, the principal plays a large role in establishing student expectations in the school and this has a direct influence on school culture.

The behaviors and standards that principal models in their school can influence an assortment of things in a variety of ways, the leadership that they provide has direct influences on the school. A principals' leadership ability has a direct influence on teachers' motivation, engagement, and their perception of working conditions; all of which have an indirect influence on student learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). The leadership approach that a transformational leader takes in a school can serve to model many positive characteristics for a classroom teacher. Transformational leaders will model their expectations of utilizing innovative ideas and practices to their staff on a regular basis. By basing the support that they provide to each teacher on the knowledge and relationship that the principal has with each individual teacher, the transformational leader is modeling differentiation and relationship building for teachers to utilize in their classrooms (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). When using a transformational leadership approach in a school, the principal also models their expectations for teachers to seek out continuous opportunities for professional growth. Professional growth and development become more prioritized by teachers when it is modeled by the principal (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). By supporting teachers to seek professional development and encouraging innovation in the classroom, the principal can model their expectations of staff members to utilize professional development. The use of professional development to increase innovation in the school is a key part of transformational leadership.

A principals' leadership can directly influence a teachers' commitment to the school, engagement in the school, and capacity for innovation in the classroom, but the principals' leadership does not directly influence student achievement. Identifying the influence of transformational leadership on student achievement cannot be accurately measured by studies as teachers have

a much more direct effect on student achievement and can thus work as a buffer or barrier between a principals' leadership approach and the achievements of students (Berkovich, 2016). The positive influences that transformational leadership can have on teacher efficacy can contribute to student achievement, but ultimately do not directly increase student academic success in a school. While student achievement is an important part of educational leadership, it is not the only measure of positive school culture and this should not deter from the important role that transformational leadership can play in creating positive school culture.

## Opportunities for Success

As principals work collaboratively with their staff to create long-term goals for the school, they are continually developing the relationships with staff members and supporting them as they pursue personal and professional goals. Through positive interactions and regular communication, principals are able to involve teachers in innovative change throughout the school (Prelli, 2016). As the principal works with teachers to bring positive change into the school, it is important for the principal to be aware of each teachers' comfort level with the changes that are being implemented. Every individual has a different capacity for change; some see it as an exciting opportunity, while others see it as a potential threat to the existing practices that they are confident with (Fridell, 2006). While change and innovation are important in developing a positive school culture, pushing changes onto staff can be detrimental to staff motivation and commitment. Once again, collaboration and the principals' relationships with the staff are important to ensure that implementing innovation does not negatively affect the school. Strong school leaders work to reveal the potential that exists in the members of their staff through support and opportunities (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

By using their knowledge of staff members and working collectively with the staff, a transformational leader builds up the capacity of individuals and the capacity of the organization. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each staff member and including staff members in the goal setting in the school, a transformational principal will increase the opportunities for success amongst the staff. The successes that staff members achieve while working towards school improvements, will increase motivation and commitment to the school (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004). In contrast, if a teacher feels that they are given a task that they cannot be successful with, they will have little motivation and commitment to the task (Mehdinezhad & Mansouri, 2016). Additionally, the relationship and trust that the teacher has with the principal will deteriorate if they continue to feel that they are not given opportunities for success in the school. As the relationship between teachers and principals begins to break down, it will begin to negatively affect teacher collaboration and eventually, if not stopped, hurt the overall school culture. When teachers are successful in the tasks that they are given, they are likely to set more challenging goals for themselves and persevere through challenges as they arise (Ross & Gray, 2006). With teachers persevering through obstacles and continually pushing themselves to achieve greater things, they will have an overall positive influence on the collective efficacy of teachers on staff, which will support a positive school culture.

## Staff Perceptions of Transformational Leadership

The perception of a school, as held by the staff and students, can have a major influence on school culture. As a schools' capacity for innovation grows, it is important for the principal to continue to challenge the staff to find more areas of improvement and opportunities to be innovative. If the staff no longer feel that their contributions are playing a significant role in school improvement, they will stop seeking out areas of improvement, which provide opportunities for innovative solutions (Mehdinezhad & Mansouri, 2016). Since the school goals have been created collaboratively with teachers, the teachers should have personal motivation to get involved in school initiatives as they will reflect personal areas of concern or interest. As people grow professionally in the institution, it will be important for the principal to continue to actively maintain their relationships with staff to keep the shared vision of the school fresh and current.

By working with the staff to support their involvement in the school, the principal is continually building a perception of themselves and the expectations of the school to the staff.

The teachers' perception of the principal greatly impacts the work that they do every day in a school. Teachers that perceive their principal to take a strong, active role in instructional leadership become more ambitious to incorporate innovative teaching practices in their classrooms (Marks & Printy, 2003). Taking on innovative approaches in the classroom not only enhances student learning, it also increases the teachers' capacity for innovation in larger school initiatives, which is a goal of transformational leadership in schools. Research has shown that teachers perceive transformational leaders to be more effective principals who, in turn, provide more job satisfaction and greater motivation for teachers to be involved in shaping school culture (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). The involvement of the entire staff in building a school culture is one of the first steps that a transformational leader will take in a school, but this step has lasting effects on teacher perception of the school. Transformational leadership can affect teacher perception of school culture and their desire to commit to developing a positive school culture (Allan, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). The decentralization of authority from the principal alone, to the entire staff, is a central aspect of transformational leadership and directly influences the development of a positive school culture that is built by the whole staff rather that one person.

When a positive school culture is developed by an entire staff rather than one person, it is more likely to be sustainable in the school, even after the principal leaves the school. The long-term effects of transformational leadership can be the empowerment of the entire school staff to continually build up school standards, expectations, and positive school culture. Teachers working with transformational leaders recognized the positive influence that they had on the school as a whole (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). Whereas, teachers working under transactional leaders expressed frustration with the principals' negative influence on school culture (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). Transformational leadership fosters the development of a positive school culture in a school because it reflects the positive growth of the entire staff. The positive contributions that every individual makes to the overall school culture influence the perceptions that teachers have of the school. Teachers view their school to have a positive culture when they are involved as an equal contributor to school goals, rather than an enforcer of school policy (Allan, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). The perception of teachers will heavily influence a schools' culture; therefore, the bottom-up approach of transformational leadership positively affects teacher perception and school culture.

## Continuous Growth and Improvement

As organizations in various industries all around the world move away from top-down organizational structures, schools that keep traditional leadership models will quickly become outdated. The current education system is under pressure to develop more effective and efficient learning environments in order to effectively educate the students of today (Allan, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). School administrators will especially feel the burden of this pressure because they sit in a key position to implement these improvements to schools and to the education system. Improving the learning environments of modern schools will require innovation from both administrators and teachers. Through innovative approaches to education, schools will improve school culture and student achievement, which will answer the demands for change. Schools that do not implement changes to their organizational structure and keep trying to enforce blanket rules and policies from a top-down approach will continue to become outdated, having a negative influence on school culture (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Every school has a different culture and a different capacity for change, but the implementation of transformational leadership is crucial to encouraging schools to be more innovative and thus better suited for the world today.

Transformational leadership provides a good approach for positively influencing school culture in the modern educational context because it incorporates the strengths and weaknesses of teachers in the school as it increases the schools capacity for innovation. When the principal works collaboratively with the staff to implement long-term changes as a sequential process,

they can alleviate the strain that change can cause on an organization and its members (Fridell, 2006). With the input from all staff members, the transformational leader is able to custom build plans for long-term changes in the school, based on the schools' current state and the comfort level of the individual staff members in the school. This customizable approach to school planning is a constantly reoccurring process that also increases the sustainability of positive school changes. Organizations need to continually seek out improvements and incorporate innovative solutions in order to maintain a positive school culture; this should be seen as a reason to implement transformational leadership (Litz, 2011). In order to maintain a positive culture, schools need to be flexible and innovative in their long-term planning and goal setting.

The demand to keep up with all of the innovative aspects of education that exist today is unrealistic for one person alone; transformational leadership provides a realistic approach for this task. This is not to say that the principal is simply diverting their work to the teachers in the school, but instead, they are building relationships with each person and encouraging teachers to embrace different innovations that they see a need for in the school. Transformational leaders will constantly be involved in the process of change in the school. From working with teachers to building common goals, providing teachers with resources and opportunities, to collaborating on school goals and finding more ways to incorporate innovative solutions to the school, transformational leaders play a large role in implementing change effectively (Prelli, 2016). Transformational leadership provides the best approach for increasing a schools' capacity for innovation in a sustainable way and through the various processes of this approach, positively influence the overall culture of a school.

## Conclusion

Since a positive school culture requires a continuous need for reflection, improvement, and innovation in a school, transformational leadership provides a good approach for school principals to take to build a positive school culture. The central characteristics of transformational leadership; idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and consideration for the individual, can help schools build their capacity for change. These same characteristics also match the requirements of a good instructional leader. Thus transformational leadership is a good approach for school principals to take in order to best meet the needs of their school.

By using collaboration to build long-term goals for the school, the principal is able to build relationships with staff members and increase the collective teaching efficacy of the staff. The understanding of teachers on staff also gives the principal a better understanding of each persons' individual strengths; this helps to create opportunities for success in the school as teachers see successes in their professional lives. With more successful involvement in larger school initiatives, teachers will develop more trust in their principal and their overall perception of the school will be positive. Furthermore, the positive perception of teachers increases motivation to be involved in the school, which then increases the schools' capacity for innovation and change. The continuous innovative work of the entire staff will develop and maintain a positive culture in the school. Transformational leadership is a modern leadership approach to educational leadership that encourages sustainable change in a school and thus facilitates a positive school culture.

## Personal Reflection

Educational leadership is taking on an increasingly important role in education every day. As both instructional and organizational leaders, principals need to be innovative in their approach to leadership. Transformational leadership is a highly applicable approach for school-based administrators to take in schools today as technology and societal changes place schools in a position that requires them to undergo a great deal of change in their organizational structure. Thus, principals will need to use modern leadership approaches if they are to create positive and sustainable change in their schools.

As organizational leaders, principals need to find a balance for their school between innovation and unrealistic change. Transformational leadership focuses on building the capacity for change in a school, which will help principals to affect long-term improvements to the school without overwhelming the staff, students, and parents. The collaborative aspects of transformational leadership will help ensure that the principal is working with the staff to develop the schools' capacity for innovation, rather than demanding changes that will be ineffective. Transformational leadership can help support schools as an organizational leadership approach and support principals as instructional leaders to their staff.

In order to deliver the best educational practices that meet the needs of their students today, teachers are put under a great deal of pressure to be innovative in their classrooms. This need for innovation can be overwhelming and difficult for teachers to maintain on their own. As instructional leaders, principals will need to model innovation in their leadership practices and work hard to support teachers to meet the demands of the modern classroom. The support that the principal gives to the teacher will be returned by increased teacher motivation and greater innovation by teachers. In turn, these effects on classroom teachers will positively affect student achievement and school culture.

While supporting teachers through transformational leadership will have many start-up challenges, as will trying a new approach to anything, principals will need to work with teachers to get past any obstacles, as it will serve for the long-term betterment of the school. As transformational leadership receives more attention through scholarly work in the field of educational leadership, it will become more clearly defined as a leadership approach and the positive aspects of it will make it a more sought after approach for school leaders. School divisions would benefit from working with academics, in the field, to develop training programs that can support principals as they work to develop the transformational leadership approach in their schools. The more that principals receive support in developing transformational leadership skills, the more it will be applied in schools. Likewise, the more transformational leadership is applied in schools, the better divisions will be able to support administrators to effectively become transformational leaders. As the effectiveness of transformational leadership increases, there will be a positive result on classroom teachers and students throughout school divisions.

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# Responsive Instruction: Meeting the Needs of Every Student

Jennifer L. Haywood

## Abstract

Responsive instruction allows teachers to meet the needs of every student by understanding where they are and then moving them forward in their learning. Teachers need to be responsive to all of their students' needs and have a solid understanding of what it means to be responsive. They need to be able to differentiate, use formative assessment, and believe that every student has the ability to learn. This is not an easy task as classrooms are filled with students who have a variety of academic needs and abilities. Teachers must be aware of and focus on the individual needs of every student. They must get to know their students, listen to their thinking, and be able to make decisions about their instruction. It means thinking differently about teaching and learning from what most teachers experienced in school themselves. Administrators must also consider their role in responsive instruction as they guide teachers and support the success of all students.

## Keywords

*responsive instruction, differentiation, formative assessment, student success*

## Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore the meaning of responsive instruction and how this way of teaching and learning successfully meets the needs of individual students. It will examine not only the importance of responsive instruction but also the different aspects of what it means to be responsive. Differentiation and formative assessment will be discussed as part of responsive instruction as well as the need to believe that all students are capable of success. The role of students will be considered as it is important to understand the unique needs of students as well as the relationship between student and teacher. These relationships have changed over the years along with what we know about teaching and learning, understanding this helps teachers and administrators be more responsive to individual students. Finally, this paper will also look at the roles of teachers and administrators and how they can develop and nurture a more responsive instructional environment.

## Research Questions

The following research questions will help explore this in more detail:

1. What is responsive instruction and why is it important?
2. How does differentiation, formative assessment, and student success play a role in responsive instruction?
3. What role do students, teachers, and administrators play in responsive instruction?

## Significance of this Study

Responsive instruction is not a set of strategies but rather a way of teaching and learning. It is a shift from traditional views of teaching and moves towards the teacher's understanding of and relationship with every student. These changes take the teacher away from the central viewpoint

and focus more on every student and their needs. Responsive teaching addresses the needs of every student and helps them achieve their potential. Student learning is key to education, and understanding how to teach in a responsive manner enables educators to reach this goal. It is important to make sure that teachers are prepared and understand how to teach responsively. The job of being responsive is not an easy one and there is no one way to do it. Teacher training needs to focus on this as well as the professional development of teachers that are already in the classroom. Teachers and administrators need to work collaboratively in order to develop these skills to create a more responsive instructional environment and to best support students as they learn.

## Limitations

There were a few limitations that were considered during this literature review. First of all, the majority of the articles on responsive instruction were subject focused. It was difficult to find many articles that looked exclusively at responsive instruction and how to implement it successfully in all teaching areas. Many of the articles presented here focused specially on one subject area such as science, reading, and mathematics.

Much of the research was based on the United States. It would be interesting to look at and find more research based on other countries, especially Canada. The research presented here also looked at a variety of students of many ages. They were on smaller scales over shorter periods of time. It might have been of benefit to look at larger and more longitudinal studies.

Other limitations included a need to consider my own biases. In researching articles, I found that I was looking for positive information on responsive instruction. Continuing to keep an open mind for both what works in responsive instruction and what does not helps for the literature review to be more critical.

## Literature Review

Responsive instruction represents a shift in education from a focus on the teacher to a focus on the students. Latham (2013) stated that when teachers listen to students, they create a "purposeful change" (p. 62). Students achieve greater gains in education when their instruction is responsive to their needs (Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor & Walker-Dalhouse, 2012). This new approach to learning helps to "improve students' conceptual understanding more so than more traditional approaches" (Goodhew & Robertson, 2017, p. 3). If the goal of teaching is for students to understand a concept, then it is the teacher's job to know when students don't understand it and to address those needs (Levin, Grant, & Hammer, 2012), this is responsive instruction.

### The Evolution of Responsive Instruction

This idea of focusing on students has been around for a while as Confucius once stated, "to teach them … you have to start where they are" (as cited in Tomlinson, 2005, p. 8) yet teachers today still struggle with this concept of responding to individual student needs. Responsive instruction has not always been understood in the same way that it is now. Some of its beginnings, at least in the way of differentiation, were evident in the time of one-room schoolhouses. Teachers needed to be flexible and could not simply teach in one way to effectively meet the needs of their students (Tomlinson, 2005). But over time, classrooms changed to grade or age-based groupings with the idea that teaching would become easier as teachers could simply plan and deliver one lesson plan to a specific grade level. While this was an attempt to make things more systematic, this one-size-fits-all teaching did not consider the needs of students but rather focussed on "uniform instruction to produce uniform outcomes for students of a given age and grade" (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 9).

In this traditional grade alike model, responsive instruction was around but focussed more on the needs of teachers and the decisions that they had to make (Sherman, 1980). Things like what materials to use, which methods to teach by, what feedback to give, and whether to encourage students or not. Many of these decisions were made before entering the classroom especially in regards to content, use of resources, and how to group students (Sherman, 1980). Some decisions were also made in class on how to answer student questions, when to continue with the lesson, and after the lesson to decide if students had learned the objective. The teacher was seen as decision-maker, and their main job was "to make decisions which result in students learning effectively" (Sherman, 1980, p. 5).

Responsive instruction back then focussed more on what happened before entering the classroom, what would be instructed, and how to develop, deliver, and evaluate that lesson (Sherman, 1980). Teachers were expected to be aware of any possibilities that might arise in the class in order to make proper decisions when deciding on, and planning for instruction. Teachers did consider the needs of their students and were expected to be aware of current research on best teaching methods. These decisions, however, were made beforehand and not in the moment. Teachers planned for alternative teaching methods before entering the class and were not as adaptive in the moment. The main focus was on the systematic and purposeful arrangement of the instructional setting to respond to student needs (Sherman, 1980). It is hard to view education as a system when the needs of students can vary so much. As we look at more recent research on responsive instruction, there has been an evolution from decision maker in planning to decision making in the moment with an increased focus on each of the individual student needs and their differences.

## Responsive Instruction

There are not many articles of research that focus exclusively on responsive instruction but rather discuss it within the context of teaching specific subjects such as science, math, or reading. Within these articles, there are common themes and some differences. James (2014) stated that responsive instruction is what you do when students do not understand something. It is crucial that all teachers not only be able to support students that do not understand but they must also know how to support them especially since student learning is the ultimate goal. Students that enter into school are from a wide variety of homes and have a diverse set of needs. It is inevitable that not all of these students will be able to learn the concepts taught at school in the same way. Educators, therefore, need to know how to be responsive. They need to understand that being responsive is "a process that effective teachers use to ensure every student has a real opportunity to complete the learning" (James, 2012, p. 1).

While some definitions of responsive instruction in the research were put more simply, others involved more detailed and lengthier descriptions. However, there was an overlapping theme in all of them that acknowledged the important role of students. A focus on the student and their learning was clear in all of the literature; teachers need to consider student thinking, see students as individuals, and gather information to make decisions each day to respond to their needs.

**Student thinking**. In order to understand responsive instruction and to help students who don't understand, teachers must first value and appreciate the thinking of their students. Students come to class with their own ideas and abilities and it is important to understand each students thinking (Goodhew & Robertson, 2017). Responsive instruction is based on the student's ideas as "teaching begins with listening and seeking to understand" (Goodhew & Robertson, 2017, p. 1). Hammer, Goldberg, and Fargason (2012) said that this approach to teaching "is to adapt and discover instructional objectives responsively to student thinking" (p. 55). It is when teachers consider the thinking of students that they are able to respond (Empson, 2014). Empson (2014) went on to say that the teacher needs to know what their students are thinking, be able to interpret it and respond to it. It is this awareness and response to student thinking that then results in student learning (Levin et al., 2012).

**Student individuality**. The idea of student individuality was also prevalent in the research. Kronenberg and Strahan (2010) believed that students needed to be seen as individuals. Tomlinson (2014) saw students as individuals too and believed that "teachers who seek to reach each learner also seek to respond to the cognitive and affective variance that is inevitable among learners" (p. 16). Teachers need to understand and appreciate that every student is different, and that in understanding those differences teachers are better able to understand the individual student. It is important that every teacher be able to articulate the needs of every student (Tomlinson, 2014). As teachers identify each student's needs, they are then able to match the instruction to the need, and that is defined as responsive instruction (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). Student instruction is most effective when it is "designed to fit each learner" (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012, p. 305). Teachers make the most impact on student learning when instruction is created for individual student needs.

**Teacher as a decision maker**. Once a teacher understands a student's thinking and their needs, the teacher then can make decisions about what are the next steps. A responsive teacher is a good decision maker during planning, instruction, and after. This idea was not as common in all of the research articles but was still apparent in more than one article, and it is an important part of the teacher's job. Teachers need to plan for and adapt learning based on student's needs and this is often done in the moment which requires good decision-making skills.

This decision making happens most often during the teaching as students are responding to instruction (Empson, 2014). The teacher needs to be attentive at all times to student thinking and how they are responding (Empson, 2014). This ability to be responsive "occurs at the finer-grained size of moment to moment interactions" (Hammer, Goldberg, & Fargason, 2012, p. 58). Goodhew and Robertson (2017) said that it is impossible to understand the diversity of their students' abilities beforehand. Teachers are making decisions based on what comes from the student discussions, which cannot be planned out in advance. Signs of responsive teaching include when decisions are being made based on the students, what they are sharing, and what is emerging from the conversations. This brings to mind an old saying of a teachable moment. Teachers can plan out their lessons and be as prepared as they like but it can all change and should change the moment that they are in front of their students.

**Responsive instruction: Instructional strategy or way of teaching?** There was not one clear answer as to whether responsive instruction was a strategy or something else. Responsive instruction was sometimes defined as a type of teaching strategy or instructional practice while other research believed it was an approach to or a way of planning, instructing, and assessing. If students play an important part in responsive teaching, it would be hard to simply define it as an instructional approach or practice with sequential steps to follow. One must consider the students involved and the fact that they are a constantly changing variable, therefore, there cannot be one simple set of instructional steps to follow in responsive instruction.

James (2012) defined responsive instruction as a large larger cycle that included teaching, planning, and assessing (see figure 1) with students driving the way. It is a "proactive response to learner needs" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 20). The students' needs must be considered in all aspects of teaching from planning, to teaching, and assessing. Responsive teaching then becomes not a specific strategy but a way in which we do everything. Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) believed it was much more than just an instructional strategy as well. They believed that responsive teaching involved the teacher deciding where each student is in their learning, on what teaching practices to use based on relevant research, and then having the ability to select best instructional strategies to fit those needs (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012).

Tomlinson (2003) perhaps best summed up all of the research with this definition of responsive instruction that is closely connected to differentiation:

> It occurs as teachers become increasingly proficient in understanding their students as individuals. Increasingly comfortable with the meaning and structure of the disciplines they

> teach, and increasingly expert at teaching flexibly in order to match instruction to student need with the goal of maximizing the potential of each learner in a given area. (p. 3)

**A closer look at responsive instruction.** The above quote leads into the next part of taking a look at the different parts of responsive teaching and what needs to be in place in order for it to have an effect on student learning. Differentiation, formative assessment and the belief that a student can succeed with the proper supports play a role in responsive instruction.

*Differentiation*. Responsive teaching and differentiation are closely related. In fact, most of the research presented here stated that differentiation is responsive teaching. Watts-Taffe et al., (2012) stated that "differentiation is responsive instruction designed to meet unique individual student needs" (p. 304). Tomlinson (2005) argued that based on research and simple common sense, differentiation, which she also referred to as responsive instruction, supports the learning of students. Studies on differentiation have developed various definitions and have shown that differentiation is complex (Strahan, Kronenberg, Burgner, Doherty, & Hedt, 2012) but when teachers understand and use differentiation in their classroom, it is an effective way to respond to the needs of their students.

There are many similarities between differentiation and responsive instruction; students play a central role as their individual needs are identified and addressed with teachers deciding how to best meet those needs. Differentiation incorporates a variety of strategies and is a "responsive instruction designed to meet unique individual student needs" (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012, p. 304). It is a dynamic approach to teaching that involves analyzing student needs during instruction and then using those identified needs to plan for further instruction (Shea, 2015). It is a "daily need to examine learner status with regard to desired outcomes so that instruction can be tailored for success" (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 10). Shea (2015) went on to say that "effective differentiating integrated teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical expertise" (p. 81). Teachers also need to understand the abilities of their students and then match the amount and type of instruction to those needs (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012).

Carolan and Guinn (2007) spent a school year observing in five teacher's classrooms, they referred to them as "master" teachers. They came up with four common characteristics that teachers used in order to differentiate for individual student needs. First, the teachers all offered personalized scaffolding which were temporary supports based on the needs of students (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). These were temporary supports to take the student from where they currently were working to the next level in order to succeed. The teachers were also flexible in their instruction. They showed that there was a clear learning goal but allowed for multiple ways to accommodate the different ways in which their students think. Teachers were also seen as experts in their subject areas and "showed multiple ways to navigate it" (Carolan & Guinn, 2007, p. 16). They not only showed that they understood the content but that they knew how to match that content with effective teaching strategies to specific student learning styles and levels (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). Finally, the teachers in this study created a caring classroom that honoured individual differences. These differences were seen as assets to the class and were valued (Carolan & Guinn, 2007).

Carol Ann Tomlinson (2003, 2014) is known for her research on differentiation and has published a lot of work in this area. She states that differentiation is "a teacher's proactive response to learner needs" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 20). Differentiation works around the idea that a teacher is successfully able to differentiate when they modify the content, the process, the product, and the environment which are based on the student's readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2003).

The content refers to what students are learning which may refer to the facts, concepts, ideas, and materials used to represent the concept (Tomlinson & Demirsky Allan, 2000). In classrooms, the content is most often the same for every student but the way that students gain access to it might change. For example, using math manipulatives for some, reteaching others, and using a video recorder, computer programs, or videos might represent another way. The process

is where students come to understand and make sense of the content. This is more commonly referred to as the activity. Some ways to differentiate the process might be to vary the levels of difficulty, the amount of work, or the support that is given (Tomlinson & Demirsky Allan, 2000). The product is what students are able to produce with this new knowledge in order to show what they have learned. A good product asks students to take what they have learned and apply it in another way so that they have to think creatively and critically. Finally, the learning environment is important in differentiation and is both how the class is set up to the tone that one feels in the classroom. These four areas do not work in isolation of one another but will often affect each other (Tomlinson, 2003).

It is also important for teachers who differentiate to remember that students vary also in their readiness, interests, and learning profile (Tomlinson, 2014). Readiness refers to a student's entry level in a particular subject or topic at a given time. How much do they already know about a particular topic? It also acknowledges that students are at different levels and that the work should be at an appropriate level of challenge (Tomlinson, 2005). Teachers must also consider a student's interest in a particular area or topic. In order to differentiate, teachers must consider how to engage and intrigue students on a particular topic (Tomlinson & Demirsky Allan, 2000) and this is best done when student's interests are linked to the task. The learning profile looks at how a learner learns and can be affected by many things such as culture, preferences, and/or past experiences. When teachers address the learning styles of students, it is more likely that there will be an improvement in achievement and attitude (Tomlinson, 2005). Teachers considering the learning profile might opt for a flexible learning environment, present information in a variety of ways, and allow choice. (Tomlinson & Demirsky Allan, 2000). All of these things should be taken into consideration as a teacher decides how to differentiate (Tomlinson, 2014) as well as the individual student.

These individual differences are also important as differentiation honours diversity. Teachers understand that students are all different and are constantly changing and growing (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). It is also important for teachers to embrace many ways of learning and not to believe that certain ways of learning are superior to others. Diversity is embraced and seen as part of everyday as differentiation acknowledges "differences in interests, background knowledge, or needs, facilitating the recognition of learning glitches" (Shea, 2015, p. 81). This only works in classrooms that acknowledge and celebrate these differences.

Teachers need to realize not only what differentiation is but also what it is not. It is not simply teaching everything in three different ways. This would not only be too time-consuming but also not very practical, especially if the teaching did not reflect the needs of the students (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). Strahan, Kronenberg, Burgner, Doherty, and Hedt (2012) also spoke about teachers as just seeing differentiation as teaching something in a different way. This creates a negative view of differentiation and has the risk of being just another educational fad. Differentiation is seen as a problem or just another thing to do as teachers feel that there is no time, that there are not enough resources, and that they lack the proper training (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). Teachers need to change how they see differentiation and instead view it as a "goldmine" (Carolan & Guinn, 2007, p. 44). When instruction is matched to the learning needs of the student, results will show. It is a dinner buffet that offers a variety of teaching to a variety of learners (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). It "does look different from a one-size-fits-all classroom" (Carolan & Guinn, 2007, p. 44). If differentiation allows for the needs of all students to be met, then this is not just another thing; it is a way of teaching to respond to the needs of students.

*Formative assessment.* Another important part of responsive instruction is formative assessment; instruction and assessment go hand in hand where one should not be done without the other. Assessment of any kind is often viewed in competition with teaching when really it is an "integral part of teaching and learning" (Heritage, 2007, p. 140). Black and William (1998) argued that formative assessment "is at the heart of effective teaching" (p. 1) and that instruction and formative assessment are connected. "Assessment is today's means of understanding how to modify tomorrow's instruction" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 17). Assessment guides the instruction as it lets teachers identify student needs and how to move forward.

When formative assessment is used, it shows significant student gains and helps support the students that are struggling most which in turn reduces the achievement gap (Black & William, 1998). It is "one of the most powerful instructional tools available to a teacher or a school for promoting achievement" (Stiggins & DuFour, 2009, p. 640). Heritage (2007) argued that "if used effectively, [formative assessment] can provide teachers and their students with the information they need to move forward" (p. 140). Formative assessment is the heart of responsive teaching because if teachers do not know where their students are then how can they move the learning forward. Formative assessment is an integral part of responsive instruction so it is important to know exactly what it means and how to best use it.

Assessments are the activities done by teachers and students to receive information that is then used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities. Formative assessment is when this evidence is specifically used to adapt the teaching in order to meet the needs of students (Black & William, 1998). It is a "systematic process to continuously gather evidence about learning" (Heritage, 2007, p. 141). Data is used to see exactly where students are and then it is used to adapt lesson plans in order to help students better reach the learning goals (Heritage, 2007). Effective teachers know that "each new instructional step is based on information gathered from valid, reliable data collected during responsive teaching" (Shea, 2015, p. 114). Hattie (2012) defined formative assessment as part of everyday classroom activities that is integrated into teaching. Students are also actively participating in this form of assessment as they work with their teacher, share their learning, and help decide on the next steps to take (Heritage, 2007).

Margaret Heritage (2007) discussed the importance of formative assessment and described how it can "transform both teaching and learning" (p. 140). She identified four core elements that she felt were important for a teacher to understand: identifying the gap, providing feedback, student involvement, and learning progression. First, teachers need to identify where students are currently and where they need to go. This gap will be different for each student and needs to be identified, too large and the task will seem too difficult and too small will be too easy. Feedback is also seen as an important part and needs to be used at a variety of levels (Heritage, 2007). Feedback helps guide students to where they need to go and should improve their learning. Another important aspect is the involvement of students, they need to be aware of the process and be able to assess themselves as well as peers. Schools can be transformed when students help track their own improvement and develop their own confidence (Stiggins & DuFour, 2009). Finally, the learning progression needs to be clearly outlined with precise learning goals so that students can see the big picture (Heritage, 2007).

John Hattie (2012) discovered a way to rank the effect size of various things on student achievement through his meta-analyses. He found that "among the most powerful of all interventions is feedback or formative evaluation" (p. 182). It provides teachers direction as to where to go next, how they need to get there and when. The data that is collected also needs to be interpreted in a successful way that does indeed have an effect on what teachers and students do next. It is not as simple as performing assessments in the moment.

A few similarities have been discussed that connect formative assessment and responsive instruction: the importance of listening to students and decision making. Black and William (1998) felt that student thinking was important and that teachers need to listen to and allow for students to share their understanding. If teachers listen carefully to students, then teachers can respond effectively to that thinking (Duckor, 2014). Duckor (2014) wrote about seven good moves to help teachers become better at formative assessment. They involved first asking good questions, listening to student responses and asking more questions to dig deeper (Duckor, 2014). When a teacher really listens to their students, they will have a better understanding of them and their thinking. Teachers can then decide on a number of things: how to help struggling students, how to inform and improve their own teaching, or whether they need to allow for more practice.

Decision making is also prevalent in formative assessment. Here both teachers and students make decisions (Hattie, 2012). Information gathered from the formative assessment can help

teacher and students to decide to redo something, practice more, whether the content is mastered, and where the strengths or gaps are. It is important to understand the different needs of the students so that the best decisions can be made in the moment to meet these needs (Hattie, 2012).

*Success.* Another important part of responsive instruction is that there needs to be a belief that all students are able to succeed given the right supports and time (James, 2014). This belief starts by building a culture in the classroom that all students can succeed (Black & William, 1998). James (2014) referred to this as a success mindset, that all students can learn when they have the right amount of support and time. She identified five key elements to having a success mindset: reteaching, allowing for a student to have multiple opportunities for success, increasing choice and relevance, adjusting pace, and providing additional support (James, 2014). This allows students to be best prepared in order to share their learning in a summative task and allows for the best learning possible.

In a responsive classroom, learners need to experience both successes and challenges. In developing this culture, teachers need to model the use of a language to help students decide what is successful and what is unsuccessful (Johnston, Dozier, & Smit, 2016). It is important that students learn that failure is a part of learning and that through these failures, they learn. The success is built when teachers plan for authentic tasks that relate to students and engage them in the learning without giving up (Shea, 2015).

Responsive teaching is really a mixture of many things. It is seen in the instruction, assessment, and planning. It involves knowing where students are at through formative assessment and then differentiating for those needs. Teachers need to also see the potential of individual students and believe that they can succeed. Figure 1 represents how all of these things are interconnected and work in a cycle (James, 2014).

## The Role of Students

The role of students and teachers in responsive instruction sometimes overlaps but it is important to first take a look at how these roles have changed. Students are now seen as more active participants in their learning as they contribute to and create their own understanding.

**Changes in student roles.** Students can sometimes be confused when walking into a responsive instruction class if they are used to a more traditional form of teaching (Levin et al., 2012). In the past, students were simply given the answers and were used to being spoken to all day. Their job was to sit, listen, and take notes. After all, a quiet classroom was a well-behaved class where all students were learning. This role has begun to evolve as educators have realized that information is not simply transferred from teacher to student.

Students are no longer expected to sit and be quiet but are asked rather to take on a more active role in their education. They need to come to their own genuine understanding of the content, students "should learn how to learn" (Levin et al., 2012, p. 16). Instead of just memorizing facts and information, students need to make sense of it and connect the learning to what they already know and come to their own understanding (Levin et al., 2012).

**Students as active participants.** Students need to consider their role in the classroom as they move from a more passive learner to an active one. Hammer et al. (2012) stated that students "are capable of participating in a variety of kinds of conversations" (p. 65). Students can reason and understand but need teachers to tap into, recognize, and support these learning opportunities (Hammer et al., 2012). Students have a lot to contribute to their learning in the classroom as they help establish rules and expectations, help each other, let teachers know if work is too hard or too easy, when it is boring, or when they need help (Tomlinson, 2014). Students become partners and "develop ownership of their learning and become more skilled at understanding themselves, appreciating one another, and making choices that enhance their own learning as

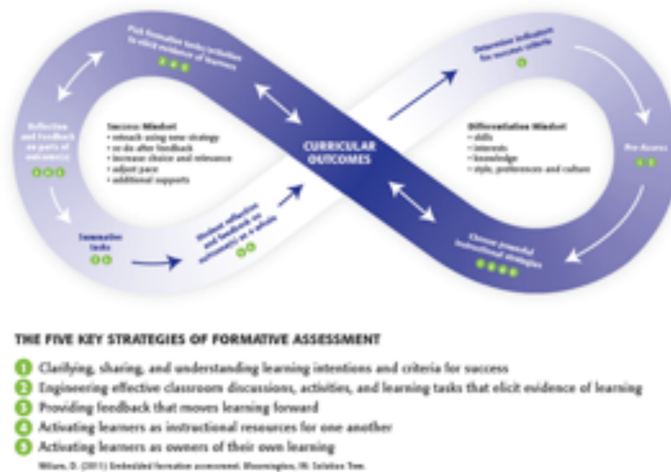


Figure 1. Responsive Instruction (James, 2014). Retrieved from http://schools.spsd.sk.ca/curriculum/blog/2014/05/06/understanding-responsive-instruction/

well as that of their classmates" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 21). It will take time to switch from a more passive to an active role as students take on more responsibility in this new way of learning.

**Student collaboration.** Students must also learn to collaborate and work together. In a responsive learning community, students collaborate together as they think out loud, share ideas and knowledge, even when the teacher is not present (Johnston et al., 2016). The authors of this article stated that students that work together have more advantages compared to those that do not. They understand the content better, can express themselves more clearly, think better, and can provide evidence for their thinking (Johnston et al, 2016). Empson (2014) also found in her study on teaching math that when students were asked to problem solve and express their reasoning, the teacher was better able to respond in the moment. Students need to experience both successes and failures and appreciate that both are a part of learning (Johnston et al., 2016). Students need to identify what experiences are successful in order to progress. It takes time to develop a trusting environment where students feel comfortable to take risks and make those mistakes.

## The Role of Teachers

The role of teachers can be as busy and complex as they need to understand and do a wide variety of things at the same time as they respond, make decisions, and reflect on their decision in order to push the learning further (Hammerness et al., 2005). It is important for teachers to have a good understanding of this role and how it has changed.

**Changes in teacher roles.** The role of teachers has changed just as the role of students has changed. Teachers need to be lifelong learners themselves as education is "constantly being refined as our world change[s]" (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 358). This is not always an easy task as teachers have been involved in classrooms from a young age and the "old" way of teaching had been the only way that they have learned. Teaching and learning need to be different from what they experienced. Teachers need to break the habit of past generations which may be hard and uncomfortable (Latham, 2013) when going against what has been the normal for so long. In the past, teachers did their planning beforehand and usually stuck to those plans, these plans were

often used from one year to the next. Learning targets were preplanned in advance and success was based on whether the targets were met (Hammer et al., 2012). They themselves have not seen or experienced effective responsive instruction as students (Tomlinson, 2005). Teachers need to take on this new role in order to respond to the needs of students today.

**The adaptive teacher.** Along with acknowledging that the role of teachers has changed, teachers need to continue to change. Hammerness et al. (2005) described teachers as "adaptive experts" (p. 359) who need to embrace change. Latham (2013) stated that "teachers need to become adaptive experts who continually expand their expertise rather than maintain their status quo as routine experts" (p. 63). This highlights the need for teachers to think differently about their students and teaching practices. Teachers should not be excited to teach the "same grade" or a "straight class" as teaching practices should not just replicate past practices. They need to be current and reflect the needs of the students sitting right in front of them. This means adapting to the student needs every year and every day.

Johnston et al. (2016) also spoke about the need for teachers to be adaptive. They stated that "students are at different points in their development and bring a wide range of experiences to their learning" (Johnston et al., 2016, p. 189). In order to meet all of these needs, teachers must learn to be adaptive and respond to them. It is through the differences that teachers adapt and create a responsive learning culture (Johnston et al., 2016).

**Listening to students.** The importance of the student and student thinking has already been highlighted. This needs to be discussed again as part of the role of the teacher. Teachers need to talk less and listen more to student thinking (Latham, 2013). In order to address the needs of the students, teachers need to learn to listen. They need to think about what their students are thinking, why they might be thinking that, and how they are reasoning things (Levin et al., 2012). Learning has moved past simply memorizing the answers through direct instruction, text work, reading, and memorizing (Hammerness et al., 2005). Teachers now need to listen more and try to understand if the students are indeed learning what is being taught. This also helps them to address individual needs when they really understand where each student is. There is no one-size-fits-all model.

Listening to students was common in many of the articles. Goodhew and Robertson (2017) said that "teaching begins with listening and seeking to understand" (p. 1). Teachers must listen to their students, and lessons cannot be preplanned (Strahan et al., 2012). There are three steps teachers can do: learn about each student, create more personalized instruction to develop concepts, and help students to make connections with the teacher and the ideas. Teachers need to make sure that students know, understand, and are able to use this new information (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015). This will take some time and some work as students just as teachers need to learn in a new way (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012).

Hammer et al. (2012) believed that teachers need to support student engagement as well as listen to student thinking. The planning and teaching can be built from there. Teachers make decisions based on student ideas and reasoning. A teacher needs to "listen carefully to the substance of students' ideas, assess the merits of those ideas, and make next-move decisions accord-ing[ly]" (Hammer et al., 2012, p. 68).

**Collaboration**. Another part of responsive instruction is the ability to work collaboratively with other teachers. When teachers work together as a team, they are better equipped to look at and use formative assessment and help each other to meet the individual needs of students (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). When teachers work together to improve practice, they hold each other accountable for improvement (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015). Too often teachers work solely within their four walls and they need to "open those doors and see the dynamic and complex nature of differentiation in practice" (Carolan & Guinn, 2007, p. 18). This involves collaborating with others. Just as students need to work collaboratively together so do teachers. Johnston et al. (2016) spoke about setting ground rules with the focus on improving teacher practice together. In order to continue to improve student learning "teachers and coaches need to invite

not only problem solving, but also problem finding" (Johnston et al., 2016, p. 194). This type of collaboration looks to solve problems in a variety of contexts. Responsive instruction is a big job, in order to do it successfully, teachers must work together and rely on the knowledge of one another.

Another example of collaboration needs to take place between the teacher and the student. The teacher is the leader and "attends closely to her followers and involves them thoroughly in the journey" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 21). They plan, set goals, monitor progress, successes, and failures as some decisions are made for the whole group while others are made for individual students. Tomlinson and Demirsky Allan (2000) said that "students in differentiated classrooms are critical partners in classrooms success" (p. 7). It is the students that can share the vital information about what does and does not work for them and they can make choices that both help and impede their learning (Tomlinson & Demirsky Allan, 2000). Students are also involved in making decisions and take on a more independent role.

## The Role of Administrators

Administrators cannot be left out of this equation as they play an important role in responsive instruction as well. There was not a lot of mention of the role of administrators in the articles about responsive instruction. However, the research on differentiation included more information on the role of administrators.

**Nurturing change.** It is evident that education needs to continue to change and adapt in order to find best practices to meet the diverse needs of students. Administrators play an important role in this as they model and lead the change. Tomlinson and Murphy (2015) talked about this change in their book and acknowledged that this kind of change requires looking at and developing individual teaching and learning practices. This is sometimes a difficult job as teachers are sometimes reluctant to change and have negative ideas in regards to differentiation and how to respond to student needs as they feel that it is too time-consuming, that they lack training, professional development, resources, and support (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). Teachers need to start with making changes in their own practices, and leaders need to create the conditions that support their teachers and build relationships as teachers work together and hold each other accountable for improvement (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015).

Support from administrators is necessary to support this change if teachers are going to respond to the needs of students. Administrators need to acknowledge that there has been a change in the roles of teachers and students. They play a crucial role in developing and supporting this change in their schools which might be met with resistance. Tomlinson and Murphy (2015) stated that "teachers will have to give up some familiar and comfortable ideas and practices" (p. 17). When asking teachers to look at teaching in a different way, changing what is normal can take some time.

**Student success.** The importance of student success comes up again and needs to be seen as a belief starting with the administrator. Everyone needs to adopt the idea that "to respect students is to serve each of them" (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015, p. 17) which ties directly to the very idea of responsive instruction. Teachers "must learn to trust in every student's capacity to grapple with profound ideas and complex skills and provide all students the level of support they need to become what they should be" (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015, p. 17). Teachers will not believe in this if it is not modeled from their leader.

Administrators need to work with staff to focus on students and how to best meet their needs. Learning to differentiate can be difficult and challenging for teachers and for administrators but it will improve leadership skills and pedagogical skills that will benefit everyone (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015). Every school needs to say to students that "we see you, we hold you in high regard, and will give ourselves to your success as learner and as a human being" (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015, p. 18).

**Being responsive.** Administrators need to not only have a solid understanding of what it means to be responsive in classrooms but to also model this with their staff. They cannot support responsive instruction "without a comprehensive and accurate understanding of differentiation" (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015, p. 13). It is important that administrators be able to clearly articulate to teachers what they need to know and understand in order to differentiate and be responsive. They too must model differentiation "that supports individual teachers as they develop the skills of responsive instruction" (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015, p. 21). Just as a teacher would in a classroom, the administrator needs to monitor teacher growth and provide feedback based on their abilities and needs. This might involve working with the whole staff, small groups, or individually (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015). This looks a lot like how teachers plan for students, knowing what the need goal is, planning from where your teachers are, and using formative assessment to plan for next steps. This means getting into classrooms, doing observations, talking with teachers about how they are meeting student needs, and monitoring student data.

**Teacher professional development.** When considering student change as already mentioned, it is the teacher practices that create this change and not the school. Tomlinson and Murphy (2015) stated that it requires "a shift away from thinking of the school as the target of improvement (traditional thinking) and toward individual teacher development" (p. 20). Teachers may see an increasing need and value the importance of differentiation and being responsive but lack the skills to do it (Tomlinson, 2005). Teacher development, therefore, plays a part in responsive instruction and so do the leaders that plan for this. Good professional development applies pressure while building capacity in teachers (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015). This requires leaders to have a vision while monitoring the data.

Tomlinson and Murphy (2015) looked more deeply at what is good professional development for teachers and how it needs to change. First of all, it needs to model the idea of differentiation. The same professional development will not work for every teacher, it needs to be embedded in the year as needs arise and not all upfront. They also spoke about the importance of collaborations and that it is better when teachers work together, support, and learn from one another (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015). It is important that each "teacher feels valued, challenged, supported, and part of a team working together for success" (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015, p.14).

Carolan and Guinn (2007) based their research on "master" teachers and believed that these teachers played an important part in building teacher capacity to be responsive. Experienced teachers can provide mentoring relationships that allow for observation and time to plan together. Teachers who can observe other teachers can see differentiation in action and allows expert teachers to reflect on how they meet the diverse needs of their students (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). These observations also create an opportunity for teachers to discuss what they are seeing and pinpoint exact ways that teachers are responding to student needs (Carolan & Guinn, 2007).

**Barriers to responsive instruction**. In all of this work, administrators need to also be aware of potential barriers to effectively differentiate. If these barriers are not addressed, differentiation has the risk of being just another education fad (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). Tomlinson (2005) talked about four barriers that exist even when teachers want to be more responsive: not looking at students as individuals; not understanding what students should know, understand, and be able to do after the learning; display a limited knowledge of effective teaching strategies; and an inability to be flexible to the needs of students. It is important just as needs of students vary so do the needs of a teacher. Administrators need to be aware of what their teachers need and this list of barriers might be a good place to start.

## Implications

All of the research presented in this review was clear that education needs to change in order to address the needs of our diverse students. Teachers need to be constantly looking at best practices as "learners are understood to be constantly growing and changing" (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012, p. 305). It has also given me a reason to reflect and think more critically about myself

as a teacher and how this role has changed over the years. This shift has brought more of a focus on students and has challenged me to think about best teaching practices to help students move forward on their learning journey. Finally, this research has me reflecting on my current role as administrator and how it might help benefit me to better support my teachers.

**Breaking the cycle.** Teachers are a product of their education just as John Maynard Keynes said that "the difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from the old ones" (as cited in Latham, 2013, p. 62). Just as I attended school in a more traditional environment where I was taught to be quiet and listen, many teachers have spent the majority of their life doing the same thing. Many of us have not experienced or seen responsive instruction in action. It is no wonder that teachers continue this teaching cycle when they enter the classroom. It is hard to say exactly where this change should start, is it with the chicken or the egg? Work can be done in teacher colleges to better prepare teachers to be responsive to individual student needs. But it can also be done in classrooms so that these future teachers experience a different kind of education. This will take some hard work to break the cycle as teachers are used to doing something one way and it is more comfortable and easier to continue doing something in the same way.

Too many classrooms are aimed at what the "average" student needs (Tomlinson, 2014) which often results in not meeting the needs of the weaker and stronger students. I fell into the "average" category; going to school was not difficult for me and I did well. Teachers who continue to follow the one-size-fits-all model of teaching and learning are not meeting the needs of all students as many are left feeling bored, ignored, and uninspired. While others are struggling to get by and feel that they are not good enough to keep up with the rest of the class. Instead, teachers need to look at their classrooms in a different way with "flexible classroom routines that allow and invite attention to students' diverse learning needs" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 39). This allows for all students to learn even when they don't fit into that average range.

**Student-centered thinking.** As teachers move from traditional views, it will require them to think differently about their classrooms and their students. For example, instead of thinking of a grade four class full of similar age and abilities, they will need to look deeper and consider each and every student that exists in the classroom. Teachers can no longer assume that because they have a certain grade that they have the year planned. The planning and work begin when you meet the students. Students differ in their learning needs as they come to us from a variety of backgrounds with a variety of experiences. Teachers need to treat each and every student with respect and have the belief that they can be successful. It is the job of the teacher to find out how to support every student.

I can remember being a new teacher and finally teaching the same grade two years in a row and being excited as my planning was already done. I learned fast by experience that teaching the same grade over again with a whole new group of students can bring about just as much change as a new grade. Each new group of students needs the focus and attention that teaching a new grade might need. This can seem like a daunting task as teachers need to first find out the needs of their students and then find ways to meet those needs. I have also learned that working outside of my classroom walls with the support of colleagues helps. It takes a village to raise a child and to educate them. I am thankful as an administrator to have my team of teachers, resource, counsellors, superintendents, and more to support addressing the needs of the students in my school.

**Best teaching practices**. The best way to respond to all of these needs is with best teaching practices. Once teachers are aware of their students' needs, they need to adapt their teaching to meet those needs. Teachers need to be armed with a number of teaching practices that they can use with the whole group, small groups, or individually. Teachers need to constantly challenge and think about the way that they are teaching and ask themselves if they are meeting student needs. Some of this support will come with collaboration with other teachers as they share ideas and support one another. Administrator's play a role here as well as they can model and discuss what these best practices are based on research.

Education for teachers needs to also support this work. Not only can the training examine best teaching practices but it can also ask teachers to challenge and think about what their education looked like. Teachers need to think about old versus new teaching practices and challenge themselves to do the work that meets the needs of the students. This is hard work and can be more time consuming but the benefits are too important.

**Leading for change.** Administrators cannot forget about their important role in responsive instruction. Their "support for teacher change is a precursor to student change" (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015, p. 21). If teachers do not change then neither will the learning of students. Administrators need to first get to know their classrooms just as a teacher would get to know their students, especially if someone is new in a building, and spend time in classrooms talking to teachers and getting to know what is going on in each classroom. Who are the struggling students? How are their needs being met? How do your teachers respond to those needs? It is our ethical responsibility to teach every student, and leaders have the opportunity to help their teachers do this (Tomlinson and Murphy, 2015). Responsive instruction is challenging with no easy to follow steps but administrators must support teachers in order to meet the needs of every student.

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