USING COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP AND OPTIMIZING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES FOR IMPROVED STUDENT LEARNING

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family who sacrificed so much to allow me to achieve this goal. To my husband Mike, thanks for all you've done to hold our family together and to pick up the slack when I was unavailable. Your support has not gone unnoticed and I truly appreciate all you've done. I could not have done this without your encouragement. To my children, Chelsea, Brayden, and Tristan, I too appreciate the support you've shown me. You've adapted to not always having your mom there and you've put your own needs aside for my needs. You've inspired me to achieve the most I can from life!! You're all such amazing people and I cannot begin to express how much I love you and appreciate you!

Abstract

This paper provides a description of the successful changes made within my school over a number of years and an examination of the leadership practices that facilitated these innovations. Changing the culture of the school as well as improving teaching practices related to student assessment were shown to optimize student engagement and learning. Within this paper is an explanation of the leadership practices that we employed in order to enable this goal to be achieved as well as my reflections on my growth as a leader over time.

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Introduction

It can be argued that the leadership of any organization critically affects its success – including schools. Michael Fullan (2002) stated that "only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement" (p. 16). Throughout our study of educational leadership, we have seen the influence that leadership has on the success of schools. We have studied various leadership styles and theories and this has allowed me the opportunity to employ and reflect upon those leadership practices which seemed most appropriate to my school context. This paper will describe the journey toward school improvement upon which my school embarked and will examine how using a collaborative leadership style to optimize teacher efficacy in student assessment can improve student achievement.

Brief History of My School

Hallinger (2003) stated that "it is virtually meaningless to study principal leadership without reference to the school context" (p. 346). To truly understand the scope of the cultural changes and improvement that have occurred within our school, one must therefore look back to where we began our journey, a little over a decade ago. Around the turn of the millennium, there was a great deal of political unrest within the educational world in Alberta, and teachers were involved in an arduous labour dispute with the school boards and the province. This dispute, which eventually led to the teachers across the province going on strike, created a sense of mistrust between Alberta Education and the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). Following the political unrest, the relationship between the teachers and the community as a whole was strained, causing more conflict and upheaval to occur.

As all of the political upheaval was occurring, my school, a small, rural school comprised of grades seven to 12, had a well-established and fairly stable teaching staff. Most staff members had been there for the duration of their careers, and many were looking forward to retirement within the next five to 10 years. Despite the stability of the staff itself, the leadership within the school was not stable. It had changed four times in the previous 10 years and as a result, many different leadership styles were seen during those turbulent times. Because of this instability in leadership, the staff had become very cynical in their feelings towards leadership, both at the school level and at district level.

Because of the political unrest that existed internally and externally, as well as the instability and constant change in leadership, the leadership models that would best describe the situation within my school at the time would be the political models. Bush (2011) defined these models as follows:

> Political models assume that in organizations, policy and decisions emerge through a process of negotiation and bargaining. Interest groups develop and form alliances in pursuit of particular policy objectives. Conflict is viewed as a natural phenomenon and power accrues to dominant coalitions rather than being the preserve of formal leaders. (p. 99)

It was very common within the school organization to have seen "interest groups pursue their independent objectives which may contrast sharply with the aims of other sub-units within the institution and lead to conflict between them" (p. 103). The informal leaders of the high school teachers were said to be of "the old boys club", a tight and powerful coalition of male teachers who often politically influenced the formal leadership to gain the rights and privileges that they yearned.

The culture at my school was inconsistent and existed in a fragmented state that Robbins and Alvy (2004) defined as that "in which several subcultures exist – each with its own values, beliefs, norms, rituals, traditions, and symbols" (p. 28). This explanation of a fragmented culture described the disconnected culture and climate that existed within the staff of our school. Although they had worked together for many years, there was no solidarity or collaboration and very little collegiality between the junior high teachers and the senior high teaching staff. Both groups had different perspectives on teaching and learning which often led to conflicts or, at best, a sense of disdain, between the two groups. Even within the sub-groups of the junior and senior high, teachers often worked in isolation.

The high school teachers, as a group, were very competent teachers who were confident in their abilities as professionals. However, they were also quite departmentalized. While there was an element of collegiality between themselves as a group, little professional collaboration or pedagogical discussion happened between the various subject area teachers except to perhaps compare diploma examination results at the end of each semester. It was a culture that was primarily focused on results and teachers worked hard to ensure that their diploma examination results were high. The high school teachers, a group which was comprised mostly of males, had a strong focus on teaching but very little emphasis on learning. If students were perceived as possibly not being successful on their diploma examinations, they would often be placed in a lower-level class instead so as to maintain high performance on the exams. There was also an air of superiority amongst the high school teachers who often appeared to look down upon the junior high school teachers.

Within the junior high group, which was comprised mostly of female teachers, there was much less departmentalization but there was still little collaboration between the teachers.

Because of the negative feelings that emerged as a result of the labour dispute, as well as the overall negative culture that existed within the school itself, morale for the junior high teachers was at an all-time low. As was the case with the high school teachers, assessment practices were very traditional and student achievement was marginal at best despite the fact that they were all highly competent teachers. Contrary to the fairly high results on provincial testing that was occurring with the high school, results were marginal for the junior high students. Teachers were aware of the poor results that were being achieved on the provincial achievement tests and were searching for ways to implement improvement but were struggling for how to begin the change process.

Although the teachers from both groups truly cared about their students and developed strong relationships with them, the teaching was predominantly focused on student grades rather than on the learning. Teaching practices had remained the same for many years without a notion of change. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) explained that "it is not uncommon for a school (or any other complex organization) to keep certain practices in place and unchallenged for years and even decades simply because of their historical status" (p. 44). This mindset was prevalent within the workings of our school, especially at the high school level. Assessment practices were very traditional and teachers saw no reason to stray from these practices. Within these traditional methods, students were never given second chances on assignments or tests. We now understand that "grading as punishment does not work, and, in fact, can be counterproductive. Rather than motivating students, it demotivates them" (Reeves, 2006, p. 125). However, back then, if students did not complete an assignment by the set deadline, they would either lose marks on a per diem basis or simply receive a mark of zero as a punitive measure. Some higher achieving students were very motivated and engaged in their learning as a

result of this practice, but those in the middle and lower ends were often being lost. In reality, the teachers were not aware of alternative methods of assessment that would address this issue.

Adding to the negative situation, changes to the provincial testing process had occurred as a result of the conflict between the ATA and Alberta Education, and teachers were frustrated because they were being held increasingly more accountable to the results with less and less information about the tests being shared. The Alberta Teachers' Association (2004) wrote the following about the changes that occurred in 2003:

> At the start of the 2003/04 school year, the learning ministry announces significant changes to the testing programs: the written component will be moved forward to ensure that teachers mark diploma exams during the school calendar, test questions will be secured (despite opposition) and steps will be taken to increase test equating. (2003 section, para. 3)

This change was just one more thing that added to the adverse climate that existed within the school.

Establishment of a Collaborative Culture

It was at this point in time, September 2003, where the administration began to really see a chance to make improvements in the school, at least within the junior high area. With the encouragement of the school administration, the junior high teachers, me included, began to look for ways to improve student learning and wanted to improve their achievement tests results. The opportunity arose to access funds from the second cycle of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) which would thereby provide us with the financial means to make these necessary changes. Deciding that literacy was a commonality between all subject areas for the achievement tests, the junior high teachers formed a professional learning community and began

an action research project to improve reading in the content areas. This project was just the catalyst that was needed to implement change and develop collaboration and purpose within the junior high teachers.

In his book *Leading in a Culture of Change,* Michael Fullan (2001) discussed the process by which leaders can begin to implement change within their schools. He stated:

> When organizations are in a crisis they have to be rescued from chaos. But a crisis usually means that the organization is out of synch with its environment. In this case, more radical change is required, and this means the organization needs leadership that welcomes differences, communicates the urgency of the challenge, talks about broad possibilities in an inviting way, and creates mechanisms that "motivate people to reach beyond themselves" (Pascale et al, 2000, p. 74; see also Heifetz, 1994). (p. 47)

The change process that Fullan described above is similar to the process that the administration in our school followed in order to move the junior high teachers away from the chaos that existed and towards improvement. Teachers began to collaborate to resolve the problems and challenges they faced throughout their project. These challenges, along with the successes, brought teachers closer together and began to create a positive culture within the junior high staff.

As this action research project began to gain momentum, the administrators within the school began to relinquish more and more leadership responsibility to the teachers involved in the project. Some staff members, including myself, prominently demonstrated leadership traits and began to implement change within their own classrooms and throughout the school. Towards the end of the three-year AISI cycle, the culture of the junior high school teachers had shifted and student learning was being positively impacted. Achievement test results had improved slightly and teachers were motivated to continue the momentum they had gained.

As the next cycle of AISI was beginning, we once again had a new principal. The new AISI cycle saw our school district begin an initiative which focused on improving student learning through the implementation of assessment for learning practices. This concept was new to all of our teachers and the idea that students could no longer receive a mark of zero for an assignment that was not turned in was a foreign concept to everyone. We struggled with what it all meant and many wondered if this was just another fad that was being mandated from central office. Senior high teachers, who were satisfied with how things had gone for the past several years, saw no reason to change their practices and dismissed the idea altogether. Junior high teachers, although not totally convinced that these practices were in the best interest of their students, were more open minded to the idea and began to at least consider that there might have been some validity to what was being said.

The AISI coordinator for the district, with the blessing of our principal, keyed in on two informal leaders within the school and started to work with them. These leaders, a colleague and I, had worked together collaboratively with the reading projects and saw huge results. Because of this previous connection, we also began to consider how these assessment for learning practices might further improve our results. The AISI coordinator arranged for us to "visit schools in the Edmonton area where Assessment For Learning was being used. The impact was instantaneous" (Parsons & Harding, 2009, p. 19). We both were inspired after seeing these practices first hand. It was motivating to speak with teachers who had had the same doubts we did, who had experienced the struggles and pitfalls, and who had managed to rise above these struggles to make a difference in the success of their students using assessment for learning. We came back energized and armed with strategies that we could use to gradually implement these best practices.

Although we returned energized from this professional development opportunity, it was difficult to maintain that enthusiasm when faced with the negative attitudes of our staff which was still very much in turmoil. We agreed that despite the reception we received upon returning, we would work together. We began adding new strategies a little at a time and began to move forward. Sharing ideas, successes, and failures, became our norm and we learned from our mistakes as much as we did from the successes. Without the support of our principal, we probably would not have continued. Fortunately he provided the support we needed to continue the process by allowing us time to collaborate, as well as allowing us to make fairly drastic and rather trend-setting changes to our procedures and assessments.

At first, we were unsure what the reaction of the students and parents would be to our change in assessment practices. However, as we forged through and students began to feel that they were being more successful as a result of these new assessment practices, parents and students alike began to embrace the changes. Parsons and Harding (2009) wrote of our journey, stating that we had "become revitalized teachers, passionate about teaching and, more importantly, passionate about student learning" (p. 19).

Our journey towards assessment for learning quickly began to show positive results. Parsons and Harding (2009) explained our process:

Almost every day they talk together and act as sounding board [sic] for each other's teaching ideas. They share their successes and support each other in their journey. They realize Assessment for Learning has its critics, but its strategies have provided them with at least six transformational changes to their teaching practice. First, it helps students become more meta-cognitive about their own learning. Students have changed from "being done to" to "taking charge of their own learning." They have become more

engaged as they become aware of what they know and what they still need to learn.

Second, it creates an environment where students are encouraged to take risks in regard

to their learning. Third, students seek and use self, peer and teacher feedback to improve

their learning. Fourth, it developed a new marking system that encourages learning

rather than being punitive. Fifth, it encourages and provides parents and teachers the

opportunity to communicate about the student as a learner rather than just their mark.

Sixth, it encourages an entire school community to work together, even across the

curriculums. (p. 20)

As our enthusiasm and success developed, students began to realize just how much more success

they were achieving. They began to ask questions to their other teachers about why they were

not using the same assessment practices we were. Urged on by administration, our junior high

professional learning community started to join in on our enthusiasm and began implementing

assessment for learning strategies little by little. They too began to see the successes that we

were experiencing.

Leadership Qualities and Practices That Allowed This Improvement to Happen

Although I, as a classroom teacher, was not fully aware of the role of leadership in our

growth and improvement, I have come to reflect upon and appreciate the great leadership

qualities that our principal demonstrated throughout the process. Our principal knew that

"effective leadership and management are essential if schools and colleges are to achieve the

wide-ranging objectives set for them by their many stakeholders" (Bush, 2011, p. 18). He also

knew that in order for school improvement to occur, "continuous school improvement planning

must be based on improved student learning. Instructional practices must be aligned with high

standards" (NAESP, 2001, p. 5). Hence, all of the success and growth that we as a professional

learning community had experienced would not have occurred without the strong leadership of our administrative team and their clear student-focused vision. Robbins and Alvy (2004) explained that "principals can take comfort in knowing that as learning leaders, it is their responsibility to the teachers and students in the organization to model an inquisitive and questioning style of leadership" (p. 109). While our principal was not yet an expert in assessment for learning, he knew that "it is foolish to think that principals alone are school leaders" (Robbins & Alvy, 2004, p. 109). Our principal knew that he needed to allow our leadership to grow and develop so as to improve the culture of the school as a whole. Because our school was still reeling from all of the political turmoil of which we were in the midst when he joined our school, he also knew that cultural changes needed to happen school-wide and began to create opportunities for the momentum that the junior high teachers had to infiltrate into the high school group.

One key objective that our principal was able to achieve was to build relationships between himself and the staff. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) stated that "a case can be made that effective professional relationships are central to the effective execution of many of the other [leadership] responsibilities" and that "the responsibility of *Relationships* refers to the extent to which the school leader demonstrates an awareness of the personal lives of teachers and staff" (p. 58). Fullan (2002) supported this idea by stating that "the single factor common to successful change is that relationships improve" (p. 18). Our principal began to genuinely show interest in the lives of his staff members and built a trusting relationship between them and him, and as a result, the climate of the school began to improve.

Another key aspect that our leader was able to effectively do was to build relationships between the staff members themselves. Barth (as cited in Robbins & Alvy, 2004) stated "the

relationship among the adults in the schoolhouse has more impact on the quality and the character of the school – and on the accomplishment of youngsters – than any other factor" (p. 33). Fullan (2002) supported this idea by stating that "the Cultural Change Principal's efforts to motivate and energize disaffected teachers and forge relationships among otherwise disconnected teachers can have profound effect on the overall climate of the organization" (p. 18). Knowing this, our principal set out to build relationships in many ways. Removing the vast expanse between the junior and senior high was an important change that needed to occur so our principal began to create a professional learning community within the regular monthly staff meetings which encouraged collaboration between all grade levels. While there was resistance at first to this change in the way staff meetings were done, staff members began to see the validity of this practice. In his book *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Fullan (2001) discussed the work of Bersin and Alvarado and stated that they "know that principals and teachers will only be mobilized by caring and respect, by talented people working together, and by developing shared expertise" (p. 63). The caring, respect, and trust that our principal was able to develop with and within the staff were the hallmarks of our change process.

Because he was able to gain the trust of his staff and mobilize them toward a common goal (improved student learning), our principal was able to affect great change within the culture of the school. Probably one of the biggest changes that our principal implemented was in how he was able to "search for and identify common ground and unite staff members around common goals" (Robbins & Alvy, 2004, p. 28). His primary goal was to "transform the elements of each subculture to support rather than subvert the school's central purpose: serving children" (Robbins & Alvy, 2004, p. 28). While all of our teachers worked hard prior to this time, what they worked hard on was often isolated, fragmented, and lacked vision. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty

(2005) stated that "the downfall of low-performing schools is not their lack of effort and motivation; rather, it is poor decisions regarding what to work on. So the problem in low-performing schools is not getting people to work, it is getting people to do the 'right work'" (p. 77). By creating common goals focused on student learning, our once-fragmented staff moved to becoming a team with shared vision and goals.

As part of the relationship-building and culture-setting, our principal's presence became much more visible within the school. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) stated that:

> Visibility requires the principal to have frequent contact with teachers and students. These contacts would typically be evident as informal and unscheduled encounters as the principal walks through the building observing classes in progress, chatting with teachers and students, and observing sports events and other extracurricular activities. (pp. 102-103)

Many of our previous principals were rarely seen in the hallways and never seen in classrooms unless there were student discipline issues or if there was a formal evaluation occurring. By building trust with our staff, our principal was able to change this practice to allow regular, seamless classroom walk-throughs to occur. This increased visibility improved his relationships with students and staff alike and allowed more opportunity for discussion about teaching and learning to occur. It allowed him to address those areas that needed work and to celebrate those areas of success.

The Dawn of Success

Within five years, these collaborative leadership practices began to really show their power. The culture and climate of the school had drastically improved. It had become a collaborative school focused on student learning. Assessment for learning became the norm and

was accepted as best practice by both high school and junior high school teachers. The accountability pillars showed great improvement as did the results from the provincial testing program. The once large gap between the division three and division four teachers was now nonexistent. The morale of staff and students was now very positive and teachers shared a common vision for school improvement.

My Internship

"Successful schools are organized around student learning. The ability of the principal to guide instructional improvement is key to creating standards-based change" (NAESP, 2001, p. 29). This quote captures the focus for my internship which began at the same time as I became vice-principal of our school. This move into formal leadership allowed me to directly exercise many of the leadership theories and practices about which we were learning within our course work. Because the culture and climate were now so positive, my challenge was to not only sustain but to also further develop the steady improvement in student learning by implementing a collaborative instructional supervision program. Bush (2011) stated that "effective instructional leadership behaviour comprises three aspects: talking with teachers (conferencing), promoting teachers' professional growth, [and] fostering teacher reflection" (p. 17). These three aspects were the crux of both of my internships. As such, both internships involved trying to help teachers within my school improve their professional practice. This was done in various ways, some of which included directly observing the teaching that was occurring in our school, giving meaningful feedback about this teaching, and providing opportunity for teachers to reflect upon how they could move their own practices forward.

School Goals

One important aspect of my internship was to work with teachers on the creation and attainment of our school goals. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) stated that "no matter how good school goals are, they cannot be met if the school isn't organized to accomplish them" (p. 5). This notion is one of the reasons that we, as an administrative team, believed that the school goals should be based on data and should be created and met by teachers themselves. Conditions, therefore, needed to be set to allow this organization to occur. We started by having the teachers look at the data from the accountability pillars and then moved on to looking at areas in which we could improve. We also examined the results and trends of our provincial achievement tests and diploma examinations. Adding more data to the situation, we also examined the information that was gleaned from the school review that our school district initiated and carried out. This school review data was based on an adapted version of Lezotte's Effective Schools model (Lezotte & McKee, 2002) and provided direct feedback about various aspects of the school's performance from teachers, students, professional staff, community, and support staff. All of this data was for the most part very positive and keyed in on two or three main issues that needed to be addressed.

Once the data was analyzed, teachers began to brainstorm and discuss possible goals and strategies that would be effective in improving what and how our school does. Our school district mandates that we need at least two goals: One goal must be based on creating and maintaining a safe and caring environment; the second goal must be based on improving student learning. From the data and building on the momentum in assessment practices that had been previously created, teachers created the student learning goals and strategies around continuing to improve assessment practices. These assessment practices focused primarily on assessment

for learning and more recently assessment *as* learning. Because they created these goals themselves, teachers have taken a great deal more ownership in the school goal process and in seeing that the goals are met.

Professional Growth Plans

To ensure that the school goals were alive and that teachers were implementing the strategies that they created for the attainment of the goals, my principal and I began meeting with teachers to discuss their teacher professional growth plans (TPGPs). The practice within our school is that all teachers link some aspect of their professional growth plans to our school goals, particularly the goal regarding assessment for learning. Being able to engage in direct conversations with teachers about their goals within this area allowed me great insight into where they were currently and where they wanted to be at the end of the year in regards to their assessment practices. These conversations also showed me where we were in regards to reaching our school goals. As Townsend and Adams (2009) remarked, "Growth Plans that have been developed by teachers in collaboration with each other, and in harmony with school goals, are those that are most likely to be followed" (p. 117).

In conjunction to the conversations about teacher professional growth plans, I also had the opportunity to meet with individual teachers and discuss the assessment practices that they included in their course outlines. Not only did these meetings open up an opportunity for philosophical conversations about assessment, they also provided me insight into how we could best move teacher development forward.

Improving Professional Practice

Southworth (2009) stated that "learning-centred leaders add their influence to that of teachers in order to create a combined effect on students' learning" (p. 93). He also explained how school leaders can influence student learning through modelling, monitoring, and dialogue. My principal and I used these three strategies to further develop the professional practice within our teachers. Southworth claimed that "teachers watch their leaders to see if they do as they say because teachers do not follow leaders who cannot 'walk the talk'" (p. 95). Both of us truly believe this statement and have adapted this philosophy within our leadership practices. We do not expect our teachers to do any more or any less than what we ourselves are willing to do in our own classrooms. Assessment for learning strategies and practices, key foci for our school, are always being developed, used, and continuously evolving within not only the classrooms of our teachers but also within the classrooms of the administrative team.

Throughout my internship, I had the privilege of being able to see a great deal of remarkable teaching and learning that was happening within the classrooms of our school. It is the belief of our administrative team that when we see great teaching and learning occurring in classrooms, it is important to share these practices with others. Southworth (2009) stated that "staff learning also opens up many more opportunities for pedagogical development because the talents and experience of one's colleagues become a learning resource for everyone" (p. 106). Over time, our monthly staff meetings became less focused on the business and managerial tasks and became much more focused on student learning and staff development. During these meetings, we began to have teachers share their best practices with staff, thereby allowing everyone the opportunity to learn from each other. Teachers began to embrace these learning opportunities, allowing collaborative teaching and learning to continue to improve. As

Townsend and Adams (2009) stated, "much of the rhetoric about school improvement and teaching effectiveness is transformed into reality only when teachers are clearly focused on the quality of teaching and learning that is happening in their own classrooms, and openly sharing their knowledge" (p. 117). This continual professional learning is important because "if adults don't learn, then students won't learn either" (NAESP, 2001, p. 5).

Use of Instructional Supervision

Going into the classrooms of the teachers to formally observe the teaching practices was one of the main aspects of both of my internships. I focussed mainly on how teachers used assessment and differentiation as a means to inform their teaching and move student learning forward. Overall, being in the classrooms of my fellow teachers was an amazing experience. I was able to watch the growth and development of the assessment practices that were being used. The implementation of the strategies that were being gleaned and shared was increasing. Students were increasingly showing improvement in their learning and student engagement was improving as a result of the enhancements to assessment practices. Although the teachers were on various levels of understanding of assessment for learning, all of them showed steady improvement in their practice.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) stated that "teachers and other adults in the school must receive open, honest and fair communication when they are observed and evaluated" (p. 5). Therefore, after each observation, I left feedback notes for each teacher. I asked them to reflect on two questions about their particular lesson. One question asked them to reflect upon the formative assessment strategies that they used in their lesson; the second question asked them to reflect on the differentiation that they used within their lesson so as to meet the diverse needs of their students. Teachers were then asked to meet with me in a

post-observation conference so that we could discuss these reflective questions about their teaching. Through these conversations, I learned a great deal. I learned about the power of having conversations with teachers about pedagogical practice. I also learned how having administration come into classrooms can affect teachers differently and knowing this, I must be cognisant of how I approach this role with each individual. Most of all, I learned the power of reflection, both within myself and within the teachers, to push professional learning forward.

The post-observation conferences I had with teachers were learning opportunities for me in other ways as well. In retrospect, I realized that I did not take full advantage of the opportunity to push the thinking of the teachers as I might. At the time, I was focused on gathering the data of where they currently were on their assessment journey, and my rather short-sightedness of this focus prevented me from asking those probing questions that could really cause them to grow through the process. For my second internship, I took this opportunity and began to ask reflective questions that allowed teachers to really think about their practices and how to improve.

Staff Collaboration

Reeves (2006) stated that "time for teacher collaboration is essential for effective education" (p. 103). Knowing this, the use of collaborative planning and peer-observations is another form of teacher development that resulted from my second internship. Following my offer to cover classes for teachers so that they could do collaborative planning and peer observation, a few teachers began to really embark on the collaborative process. Peer observation and cross-curricular planning and idea-sharing, all based on sound assessment practices, began to occur. As teachers have begun to publicly share the successes they had as a result of this collaborative work, more teachers are beginning to see the value of working

together and sharing ideas. All of these groups found it a very worthwhile process and more and more people are seeing the value of collaborative learning.

In regards to this teacher collaboration and peer observation, Townsend and Adams (2009) stated:

As teams of teachers accept increasing responsibility for school improvement, they come face-to-face with a concern that goes deep into the culture of many school communities. They want to see each other teach, and they want to show others those aspects of their own teaching performance in which they have a fair measure of confidence but there are no appropriate structures in place to assist them in their efforts. (p. 124)

Through my own reflection, I realized that these lacking structures were preventing the peer observations from being as successful as I had hoped. One of the things that I will try to establish within the next few months is to provide the appropriate supports for these observations. Townsend and Adams explained that "they need to have all the possibilities for productive classroom observations and conferences explained to them in language that is as free from jargon as possible" (p. 124) and that "they need support and encouragement as they engage in their provisional attempts to master the skills of observing accurately, providing useful feedback, communicating clearly, and maintaining a disciplined approach to the whole process" (p. 124).

Building My Own Capacity as a Leader

As a new leader, I had many things to learn. I had the chance throughout my first year as a formal leader to participate in many different capacity-building opportunities. One such opportunity was in the first year Administrators' Induction and Mentorship program that our district orchestrated. This program allowed all new administrators within our district to learn

and grow together as we discussed our struggles, successes, questions, and experiences. Through this process, we were provided ample support from the senior administration from central office as they shared the insights and experiences that they had gleaned over the years. This induction and mentorship process also allowed us to learn the various leadership best practices, as we have been discussing in our coursework, and put them into practice. Some of the more experienced and exemplary principals from around the district shared their stories about various leadership aspects and it was very informative to be able to discuss leadership with the veterans of the profession. Pocklington and Weindling (as cited in Bush, 2009) argued that "mentoring offers a way of speeding up the process of transition to headship" (p. 379) and I truly feel that this opportunity, in conjunction with the learning that we were doing within our Masters' coursework, allowed me to gain much better and quicker insights into how best to lead a school.

Within my first year, I was able to attend various leadership conferences which provided me with essential insights into the world of school leadership. One such conference was the Alberta Teachers' Association's Leadership Essentials Conference. Of all the information I learned here, some of the most useful pieces of information were the tips and strategies to establish a learning culture within a school. The greatest impact for me was to learn about the legal responsibilities and ramifications that are bestowed upon principals in regards to instructional supervision and evaluation. I learned that although I am a school administrator who is regularly going into classrooms to improve teacher efficacy, my role as vice-principal has, in the eyes of the law, no power. Everything in regards to evaluation must be done solely through the principal. This insight has changed how we manage evaluative practice within our leadership team now.

In March of 2012, I was afforded the opportunity to attend, along with several other administrators from around our district, the Effective Schools Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. Again, I was able to learn some best practices regarding instructional leadership along with strategies to further improve student learning within our school. Many sessions within this conference focused on the main aspects of my internship (assessment for learning and improving teacher practices) and so the opportunity was invaluable to my own context.

Also in March 2012, my principal and I thought it would be good to further advance the assessment for learning practices within our school, as part of our school goals strategies, so we invited all staff members who could attend to the Solution Tree Assessment Institute in Ottawa, Ontario. We all combined our personal professional development funds as well as used the site-based funds allotted to our school. While this opportunity afforded the six of us who attended this conference to improve our own professional capacity, it has also created an opportunity to collaboratively develop professional bonds as we worked together to implement the strategies we learned. Our learning has since been shared and implemented as daily practices with the other teachers of our school.

Theory into Practice

Lezotte and McKee (2002) stated that "any profession committed to improving itself must define and justify its activities and systems on the basis of research and documented proven practice" (p. 6). So what does educational research tell us about how to best move student learning forward? Although various theories exist as to different leadership styles and best practices, research is beginning to show the value of the Leadership for Learning model as supported by Reeves (2006) who stated that "results can be improved through applying a comprehensive framework such as Leadership for Learning" (p. 3). Although there are many

definitions as to what Leadership for Learning is, it can best be summed up as a collaborative leadership approach that combines the use of culture, instructional leadership, and transformational leadership (Reeves, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Heck and Hallinger (2010) defined collaborative leadership as that which "focuses on strategic schoolwide actions, directed towards improvement in student learning that are shared among teachers, administrators, and others" (p. 228). For school improvement to occur, as demonstrated with the improvement of our school, the culture of a school must then allow for this change to occur. Barth (2002) explained that:

> A school's culture is a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization. It is the historically transmitted pattern of meaning that wields astonishing power in shaping what people think and how they act. (p. 7)

Glanz (2006) supported this statement by stating that "culture, or ethos, is central to school success. Culture is the glue that holds the elements of school together" (p. 1). As leaders, we cannot begin to implement change without changing the culture of our school. Robbins and Alvy (2004) explained that:

> Developing a vibrant, healthy, learning-centred culture… engages the leader in motivating staff and community members to coalesce around a common core of values including a safe, learning-focused environment, high expectations for student success and staff learning, a climate of joyfulness, a recognition of teaching as a calling, norms that encourage and celebrate the deprivation of practice, and routine that is focused on making a difference for all students. (p. x)

According to Fullan (2001) leadership is "not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed" (p. 3). It is important then for leaders to embrace change and establish a culture within their school where "people feel that even the most difficult problems can be tackled productively" (Fullan, 2001, p. 7).

So how does a leader go about changing the culture? Barth (2002) explained that "to change the culture requires that more desirable qualities replace the existing unhealthy elements" (p. 8). This feat is not so easy however. As Barth explained, the culture is often deeply embedded and people are resistant to change. Change in school culture "requires the will to transform the elements of the school culture into forces that support rather than subvert the school's purpose" (Barth, 2002, p. 8).

One key aspect of creating this will to transform is to establish a shared vision. Ultimately, principals and staff must discuss what the priorities of the school are and, from there, establish a clear vision for the school (Robbins & Alvy, 2004). According to Robbins and Alvy, "the process creates a commitment to a common direction and generates energy to pursue it" (p. 6). Within our school, a strong vision for improved student learning and engagement became the priority and the teachers were clearly focused on this shared vision which occurred as part of the cultural development.

Sahin (2011) found that "there is a positive relationship between instructional leadership and all the dimensions of school culture" (p. 1924). He also stated that "findings indicate that there are positive relationships between the school culture and the commitment, motivation, job satisfaction, communication, leadership skills of teachers (Canzine, 2002; Jones 1998)" (p. 1921). From his research findings, he suggested that "administrators should provide

opportunities for teacher collaboration, sharing of leadership and professional development in order to create a positive and collaborative school culture" (p. 1924).

Gülcan (2003) stated that "instructional leadership expresses the power and behaviors that school principals, teachers and auditors use to influence the individuals and situations with regards to school" (p. 626). He claimed that there are five roles that an instructional leader should demonstrate, including establishing a vision for the school, ensuring that a quality teaching and learning environment exists, ensuring the on-going professional development of teachers, monitoring teacher effectiveness, and creating a positive school climate.

Although it is important to understand the various leadership theories, we must keep our ultimate purpose in mind. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) conducted intensive research on the impact of various leadership models on learning and emerged with the following insight:

> It seems clear that if we are to learn more about how leadership supports teachers in improving student outcomes, we need to measure how leaders attempt to influence *the teaching practices that matter*. The source of our leadership indicators should be our knowledge of how teachers make a difference to students rather than various theories of leadership-follower relations. The latter reference point has generated much more payoff in terms of our knowledge of the impact of leaders on staff than on students. (p. 669)

Where leaders can have the biggest impact then is through helping teachers incorporate best practices within their professional teaching practice.

So how can leaders begin to help teachers incorporate best practices? In his discussion of instructional leadership, Glickman (2002) claimed that "fostering intellectual and self-motivated growth on the part of teachers means that the instructional leader, whenever possible, uses an approach that demands greater choice and thought on the part of the teacher" (p. 82). Glickman

shared four approaches, with varying levels of teacher autonomy, that leaders could use to move teachers towards this self-motivation. One approach is the directive-control approach, in which "the source of thoughts and actions to be taken comes unilaterally from the leader" (p. 83). He cautioned that this approach "should be used only in an emergency situation" (p. 83) where the goal is "to save the students by keeping the teacher from drowning in a sea of ineffectual practice" (p. 83).

The second method that Glickman (2002) discussed was the directive-informational approach. According to Glickman, this approach is used "in a minimal way to begin to push initiative from the leader to the teacher by asking the teacher to choose among specific alternatives" (p. 83). Within the experience of our school, this approach needed to happen with those who were most resistant to change. After a period of time, it came down to the fact that choosing ineffective practice was no longer an option; instead they were given the choice between a few best practices that they could implement. As teachers began to see success through this approach, they became more ready for the collaborative approach.

The collaborative approach, according to Glickman (2002) is "most often the desired choice in schools that promote learning as cooperative and collegial. Both leader and teacher approach the tasks of improvement as a meeting of equals, trying to generate together the best course of future actions" (p. 83). This collaborative approach allows everyone to work towards the common goals and vision in a way that is best for students and their learning.

The fourth approach that Glickman (2002) shared was the nondirective approach which he said "is best used when teachers themselves have greater knowledge and understanding of their teaching than does the leader" (p. 83). When teachers reach this point, the role for the leader is "not to leave such masterful teachers alone but to facilitate their own thinking and

improvement plan and to provide resources that assist in the attainment of the plan" (p. 83). As leaders, we hope that our teachers can reach this stage through the development of the teaching culture within the school.

Heck and Hallinger (2010) conducted intensive research on the impacts of collaborative leadership on student learning. They measured "three specific aspects of collaborative leadership" (p. 237). These aspects included "*shared school governance* which encourages shared vision, broad participation, and shared accountability for learning" (p. 237), "*collaborative decisions* focusing on academic improvement" (p. 237), and "*broad participation* in efforts to evaluate the school's academic development" (p 237). From their research, they found that "collaborative leadership was indeed an initial driver of change in school improvement capacity" (p. 246). They found that "in terms of increasing student learning outcomes, it mattered less where schools started than what they did to change key organizational processes over time" (p. 246).

Hallinger (2003), in his research on how leaders can impact change, found that principals should focus their attention on:

- Creating a shared sense of purpose in the school.

- Focus on developing a climate of high expectations and a school culture focused on the improvement of teaching and learning.

- Shaping the reward structure of the school to reflect the goals set for staff and students.

- Organise and provide a wide range of activities aimed at intellectual stimulation and development for staff.

- Being a visible presence in the school, modelling the values that are being

  fostered in the school. (p. 343)

Hallinger claimed that by following these "improvement oriented activities" (p. 343), leaders can

begin to move their school towards improvement.

From these findings, we can infer that understanding the implications that theory has on

school improvement is essential but it involves more than understanding; it also involves action.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) stated that we "know that if

we keep doing things the way we always have, we'll keep on getting the same results. Thus,

schools themselves require continual learning" (p. 9). Leaders must then not only help their staff

learn in a way that best works for them, but must also learn themselves what research says about

how best to move their school forward. Throughout our studies, we have learned that it is

important to apply theory into our actual practice. Sharratt and Fullan (2009) stated that "we

have always had a strong knowledge base, but theory is advanced best through purposeful

action" (p. xi). One must open-mindedly consider all of the theories and take those aspects

which best meet the needs of the specific contexts of the school. Davies (2009) stated that

"leadership can draw on many sources and be seen from many perspectives" (p. 2). He also

stated that "leadership is about direction-setting and inspiring others to make the journey to a

new and improved state for the school" (p. 2).

Leadership Competencies

The *Alberta Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders* (PPCSL) (Alberta

School Boards Association, 2011) is part of the Leadership Framework document which has

been "developed by an advisory committee of Alberta's education sector stakeholder

organizations and post-secondary institutions" (p. 1). Within this document are seven

competencies which school leaders across the province will very soon be expected to meet.

While these competencies are all equally important, the one competency in which I

predominantly focused for my internship was "Professional Practice Competency #4 – Providing

Instructional Leadership" (p. 6). This competency states that "a school leader must ensure that

each student has access to quality teaching and the opportunity to engage in quality learning

experiences" (p. 6). The instructional supervision I did and the conversations I had with

teachers allowed me to demonstrate that I was able to implement "strategies for meeting the

standards of student achievement" (p. 6) and ensure that "student assessment and evaluation

practices throughout the school are fair, appropriate and balanced" (p. 6).

Another example of how the Professional Practice Competencies (Alberta School Boards

Association, 2011) influenced my leadership practices was in regards to the improvement of the

quality of report card comments. As I began to look deeper into teacher practices, I noticed that

the report card comments were often not providing adequate feedback to students and parents.

The comments, if present at all, were often superficial. Within PPCSL #4, it states that a school

leader "ensures that teachers and other staff effectively communicate and collaborate with

parents" (p. 6). To meet this competency and to improve our practice, I led teachers in a

collaborative inquiry to examine what research about best practices, as well as district policies,

said about reporting student achievement. From the examination of these artefacts, we co-

created criteria for quality report card comments (see Appendix) that teachers consistently use

now to provide quality feedback to parents. We have received many positive comments about

how much more informative our report cards have become as a result of this change.

While PPCSL #4 was my main focus, other competencies were also addressed

throughout my internship. Professional Practice Competency #1 states that "a school leader must

build trust and foster positive relationships within the school community" (Alberta School Boards Association, 2011, p. 4). In order for my instructional leadership practices to be effective, I had to develop a sense of trust with the teachers in my school. Without this trust, the acceptance of me into teachers' classrooms and the professional learning would not have been as effective.

Another competency that was directly linked to my internship was Professional Practice Competency #2. This competency states that "a school leader must involve the school community in creating and sustaining shared vision, mission, values, principles and goals" (Alberta School Boards Association, 2011, p. 5). This competency states that a school leader "analyzes a wide range of data to determine progress towards achieving goals" (p. 5) as well as "meaningfully engages the school community in identifying and addressing areas for school improvement" (p. 5). The work we did with our school goals explicitly tied into this competency.

Although every competency was addressed throughout my leadership, another which was directly met through my internship was the third competency which states that "a school leader must nurture and sustain a school culture that values and supports learning" (Alberta School Boards Association, 2011, p. 5). Although the culture was established prior to my move to formal leadership, my leadership has allowed me to demonstrate that I can maintain this by fostering "a culture of high expectations for students, teachers and other staff" (p. 5) as well as promoting and facilitating "meaningful, collaborative professional development for teachers" (p. 5).

Examination of the Data:

Has This Collaborative Leadership Improved Student Learning at Our School?

When looking at school improvement, one must carefully examine both the quantitative and the qualitative data. According to Lezotte and McKee (2002), "while there is and always will be impassioned debate on how student achievement ought to be assessed, there is little doubt that the central standard for school evaluation will be student achievement – **results**!" (p. 5). Lezotte and McKee also stated that "*any model of school improvement that is going to be useful to schools must focus explicitly on results, evidence of student learning, and student achievement*" (p. 5).

Quantitive Data

Within our school context, quantitative data is important. We regularly use the information collected and provided to us by the Province of Alberta by way of the Accountability Pillars and results from the Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma Examinations to measure how student learning is being impacted as a result of our improvement efforts.

Provincial testing analysis and trends. One way in which we examine the data in order to see how our students are doing is comparing how our students have done in comparison to students in the rest of the province on both the grade nine achievement tests and the diploma examinations. We do this through the careful examination of the trends of the results of our own students over a five year period (when that data exists). This quantitative analysis has very evidently shown that in nearly every subject area, student learning has improved. (See figures 1-6.) Very often, our students do significantly better than their peers across the province. This difference varies from year to year and from subject area to subject area, but trends show that our

students are improving at a greater rate than the mean of students across Alberta. More

importantly, we also look at how our students did on their grade six achievement tests in

comparison to the province and then compare that to how that same group of students did in

grades nine and twelve in comparison to the province. Comparing and measuring the growth of

the same group of students over a period of time has been an interesting and worthwhile process

and has definitely showed very positive improvement in their learning (Annual Education

Results Report, 2012).

Just looking at the results of this data, in isolation, as simply a measure, is not enough

however. We must use this data to further improve student learning. Lezotte and McKee (2002)

explained that:

> To successfully reform themselves, schools must go much 'wider' and much 'deeper'
>
> with systems of data. For example, it doesn't do the school reformer much good to
>
> simply know the student's final scores on the state accountability tests. To improve
>
> student, and ultimately, school performance, teachers must know specifically what
>
> curricular objectives the student did or did not master. Furthermore, waiting to get such
>
> in-depth information until after the accountability test is scored and returned is too late to
>
> do any good. Schools must develop data-driven systems for monitoring student learning
>
> that are much more *specific* and *frequent* if they are going to succeed on the mission of
>
> "learning for all." (p. 6)

For this reason, our teachers collaboratively look at what curricular outcomes were less

effectively demonstrated and then create an improvement plan to address these shortcomings.

This is a collaborative venture that falls not just on those teachers who are directly linked to the

provincial examinations, but to all teachers because teaching and learning is a team effort. For

example, the achievement that grade nine language arts students demonstrate is as much to do with what they learn in grades seven and eight language arts as it is to their learning in ninth grade.

Accountability Pillars. Another form of data that the province collects and distributes is the yearly accountability pillar which is like a report card for each school and district based on student, teacher, and parent survey results as well as a wide breadth of other statistics such as the high school completion rate, the number of students writing diploma examinations, etc. Within the Accountability Pillars, Alberta Education reports school improvement based on a colour-coded system: blue indicates that there has been significant improvement, green indicates that improvement has been demonstrated, yellow shows that the current status is being maintained, orange shows that there has been a decline in that particular performance, and red shows that there has been a significant decline (Alberta Education, 2010). Before our journey to improvement began, many of our pillar descriptors came back within the red, orange, and yellow areas. However, over the past five years, as indicated in our current pillars we have shown tremendous growth and have since changed these results to an overwhelming amount of yellow, blue, and green (Annual Education Results Report, 2012). This data speaks volumes as to the improvement in student engagement (as noticed in the increase in high school completion and the increase in the number of students writing diploma examinations), an increase in student achievement, and overall improvement in the school culture and effectiveness. (See figures 7 & 8.)

Qualitative Data

As far as qualitative data, teachers have collected artefacts which include exemplars of student work to demonstrate improvement. Teachers strongly feel that student engagement has,

for the most part, improved as well. Formative and summative assessments show steady growth in student achievement. Student goals and self-reflections, current focal points within our school, indicate that students themselves feel that their learning is improving as a result of the assessment *for* learning initiatives that we have initiated within our school. As my principal and I do our walk-throughs and formal observations, we have noted the changes in student ownership of their learning and how the assessment and teaching strategies are improving overall performance school-wide. Even the assessment language that is commonly being used by students and teachers alike shows that we are advancing our practice.

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Reflections of What I've Learned

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Successes: What Was Successful and Why

Right from the very beginning of my first internship, and my new role as vice-principal, I was set up for success. Everything that we did was very successful and had wonderful implications for the future. Throughout the internships, I was fortunate to be able to work with an outstanding and supportive principal. Luckily for me, we share similar leadership styles, vision, and philosophies towards learning, thereby making it very easy for me to step into my new role. Although going into classrooms was somewhat of a difficult task initially, I discovered this transition was only difficult because I assumed it would be. The vice-principal previous to me had really never taken on the role of an instructional leader. She was always supportive of what we did within our classrooms as we tried to improve our practice, but she never came into classrooms for direct observation or discourse about what was occurring in regards to student learning; she had taken on other important leadership roles instead. I had assumed then that teachers, especially those who had been there for many years, might resent my going into their domain. This assumed resentment was not the case, however. To my surprise

and pleasure, teachers within my school were not only supportive of my being in their classrooms, they were also inviting.

Seeing the changes in instructional practices that have occurred as a result of my internship has been a highlight of my experience. Being able to engage in pedagogical conversations with teachers and helping to push their practice forward has been very satisfying. Knowing that I had a hand in helping beginning and veteran teachers move their way to greatness and thereby positively affecting the learning of many more students in the future also is satisfying to me. I look forward to being able to do this more in the future as my leadership experience develops.

Snags: Challenges I Faced

The biggest challenge I faced throughout my internship and within my new role as vice-principal was time management. Robbins and Alvy (2004) stated "one of the challenges the newcomer to the principalship often mentions is about how to be an effective, compassionate, productive, learning leader and still have a life" (p. 270). Juggling the role of teacher, administrator, parent, and student became my greatest challenge and at times, I felt that I was spreading myself so thin that I was ineffective in all my roles. As a school administrator, I have discovered that my own needs often tend to be put last as we put the needs of others ahead of our own. Although I became very proficient at organizing my time, I still feel that I have let my teaching and family suffer as I have focused more on my studies and leadership role.

Tied into this time management problem was the issue of feeling that I needed to solve everyone's problems. I found that people were bringing to my attention a whole range of issues and situations that they wanted me to handle and I became snowed under as I tried to deal with all of them. I soon realized that I did not need to be the one to solve all of these issues. More

often, by empowering the teachers and staff members to solve their own problems, we all gained. I became very proficient at asking the question "... And what are you going to do about this?", and teachers began to take ownership of their own problems and situations. Frequently, their coming to me was not necessarily for me to solve their problems but more for them to be able to share their feelings and have someone listen. Asking those probing and reflective questions again has come into play here as I help teachers solve their own problems. One of the struggles I still face is deciding what is within the domain of teachers and what is within the domain requiring me to address the issue myself as a formal leader. I still usually err on the side of taking on too much. Hopefully with time and experience, this will become less of an issue.

Another challenge occurred in Internship I. My inexperience with doing formal observations prevented me from realizing the importance of holding pre-observation conferences with the teachers prior to doing the observations. However, because of the support I received through our Administrator's Induction and Mentorship group, I was able learn how others with more experience were able to focus in on teaching practices with the use of these pre-conferences. These discussions allowed me to implement the pre-conference as part of my observation practices within my second internship, enabling me to better know and understand what the teachers were hoping to accomplish in their lessons and on what they wanted me to focus during my observations. The pre-conference also allowed teachers more opportunity to reflect on what they were doing within their lessons and why they were doing those things before they executed the lesson.

Another struggle that we have faced is in staff turn-over. Because we have had many teachers retiring in the last few years, we have had many changes to our staff. Our once older, close-to-retirement aged staff is now a younger staff with far less teaching experience. Aside

from this turn-over, several of the younger females have recently gone on maternity leave, requiring us to try to again hire teachers for shorts amount of time. While these are all common issues for staffing, it becomes a challenge for leadership to maintain the momentum that previously existed and to continue to effect the growth that needs to occur when the key players are changing. We have discovered that while collaborative leadership was important during the improvement stage, it is just as important now as we try to sustain and continue our growth. Establishing peer support and mentorship opportunities for our new teachers has been an effective strategy that has allowed those informal leaders within our school to coach those new to our team.

Next Steps

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) claimed that "everything a principal does in school should be focused on ensuring the learning of both students and adults" (p. 10). This claim remains ever true as we proceed to the next phase of our leadership domain. According to Lezotte and McKee (2002), "one of the fundamental beliefs that define continuous improvement is that excellence is always a goal and never a destination" (p. 9). Our school has shown immense growth over the past several years and the most difficult challenge we face now is sustaining this progress while still continuing to move student learning forward. My principal and I both feel that we cannot yet abandon the assessment for learning focus because for some teachers, it is still not intrinsically engrained within their practice. There is still much growth possible within the metacognitive assessment *as* learning piece that we can still pursue so as to improve student learning and engagement. I am certain that this will continue to be a goal that we will pursue for several years to come.

One of the critical next steps that we will be actively pursuing is a collaborative project involving the Alberta Assessment Consortium, the University of Lethbridge, Alberta Education, and district and school leaders from four school districts within southern Alberta.   This project, the Instructional Leadership in Assessment Project, uses the coaching model to assist formal school leaders in improving the assessment practices in their schools. It involves regional meetings with the leaders from all four districts and the other stakeholders, district meetings for leaders to directly work with schools from their own districts, and school-based coaching. All three of these different levels of meetings focus directly on using instructional leadership to improve assessment practices in schools. This initiative has been and will continue to be a clear and solid focus for our school and we are excited about the opportunity to collaboratively grow in this capacity with other leaders from southern Alberta.

Conclusion

Reeves (2006) declared that "just as student achievement results are variable, so too are leadership and teaching practices variable in their impact" (p. 135). Over the years, we have seen a variety of methodologies but those that had the greatest impact were those that created a collaborative culture of learning. Glickman (2002) stated that "the bull's-eye of all classroom and school efforts... is to enhance quality student learning that gives every child, regardless of race ethnicity, gender, class, or disability, the knowledge, skills, and understandings needed to become a valued and valuable member of a vital democratic society" (pp. 95-96). While our results are continuously improving, we still have a great deal of room for further improvement. The collaborative leadership that has occurred within our school over the last decade has allowed our staff to come together to make a drastic shift but we still have much more growth within this area for which we need to be accountable. Our experiences show that collaborative leadership

does affect positive change and can drastically improve student learning. The challenge, however, will lie in maintaining this rate of growth as we move into the future.

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Figures

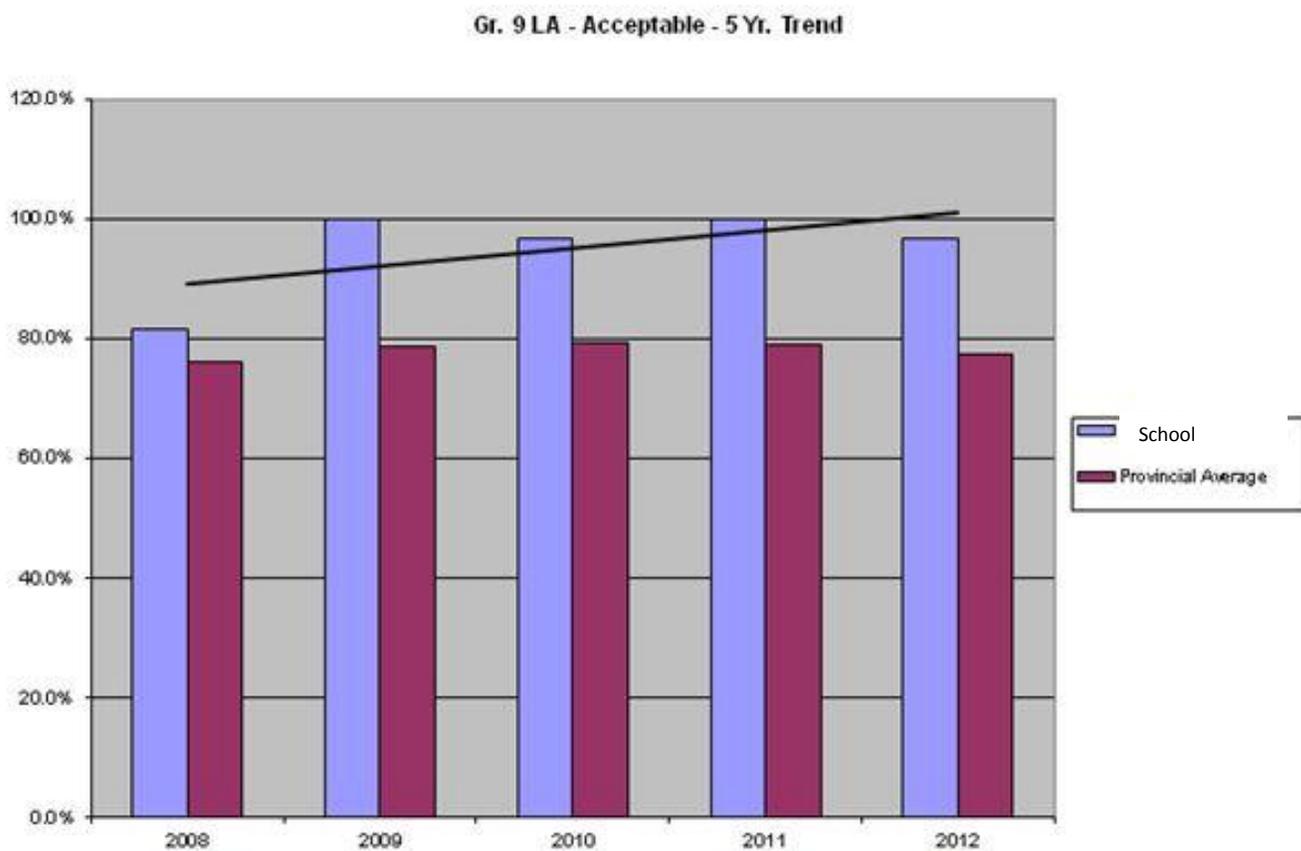Figure 1: Five-year Trends for Provincial Achievement Tests for Grade 9 Language Arts

Gr. 9 LA - Acceptable - 5 Yr. Trend

Figure 2: Five-year Trends for Provincial Achievement Tests for Grade 9 Mathematics
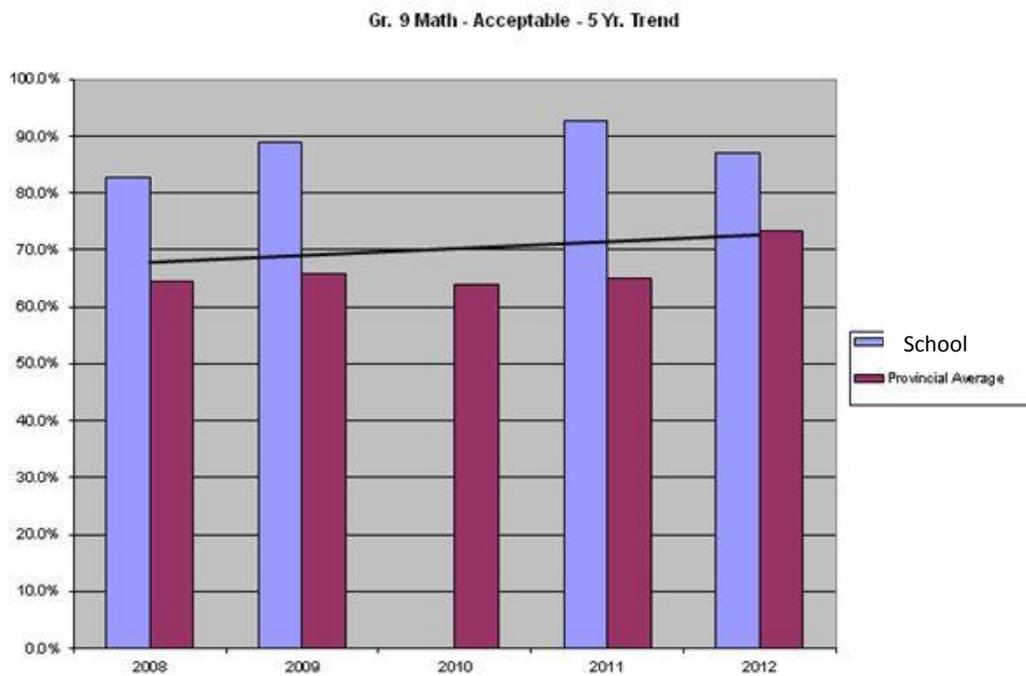

Gr. 9 Math - Acceptable - 5 Yr. Trend

Figure 3: Five-year Trends for Provincial Achievement Tests for Grade 9
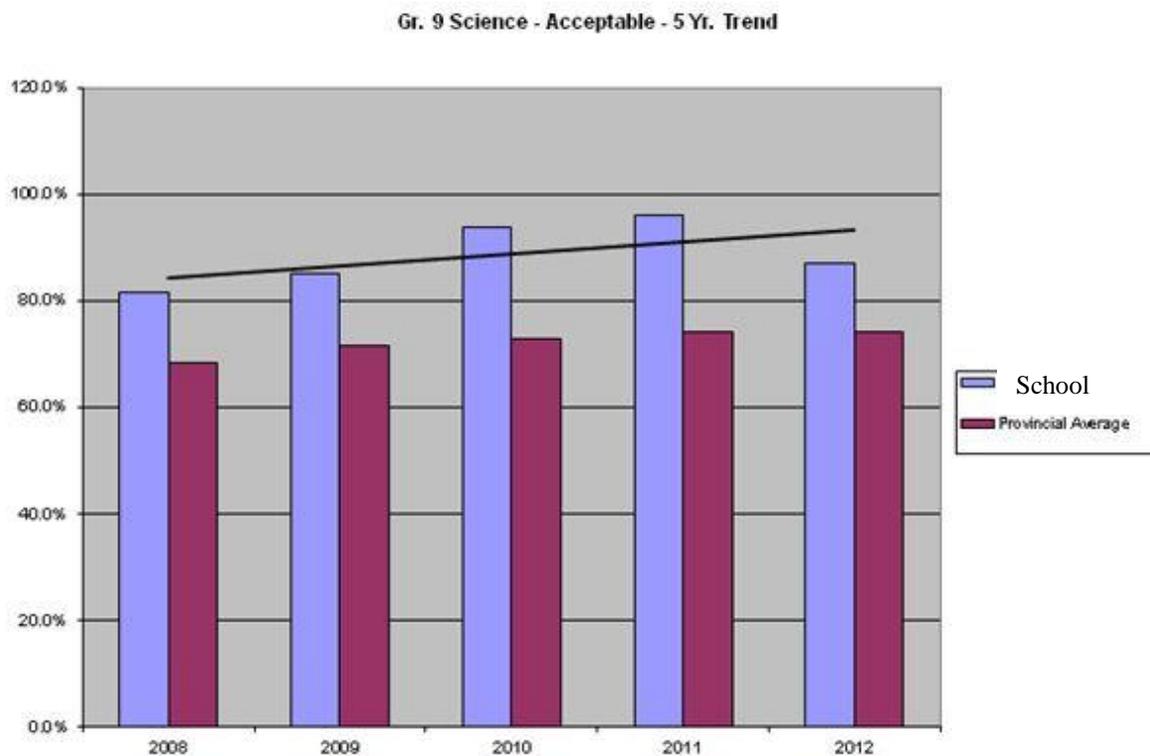Science

Figure 4: Five-year Trends for Diploma Examination Results for Pure Math 30
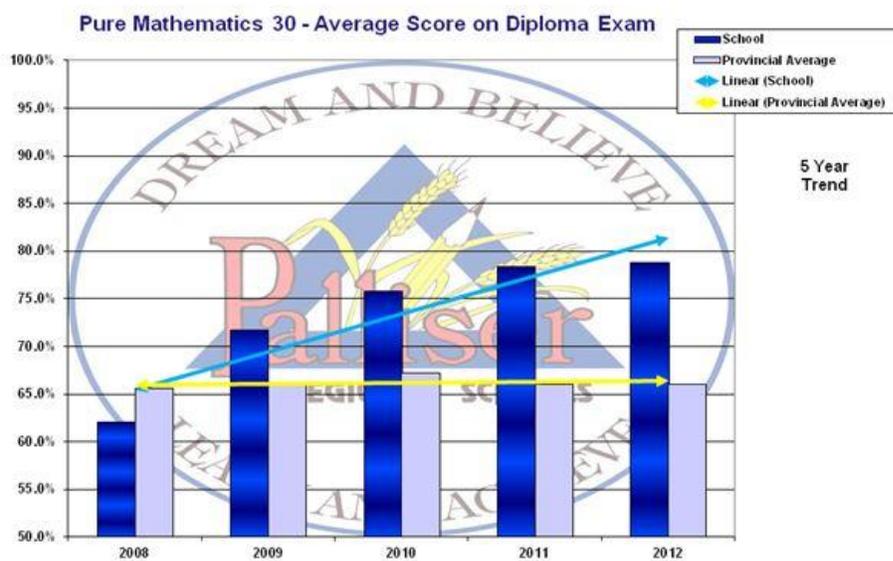
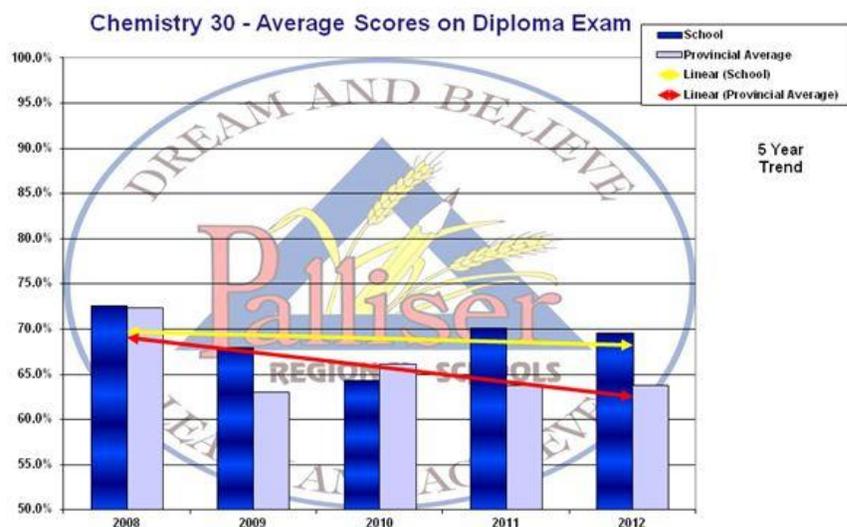Figure 5: Five-year Trends for Diploma Examination Results for Chemistry 30

Figure 6: Five-year Trends for Diploma Examination Results for English 30-1
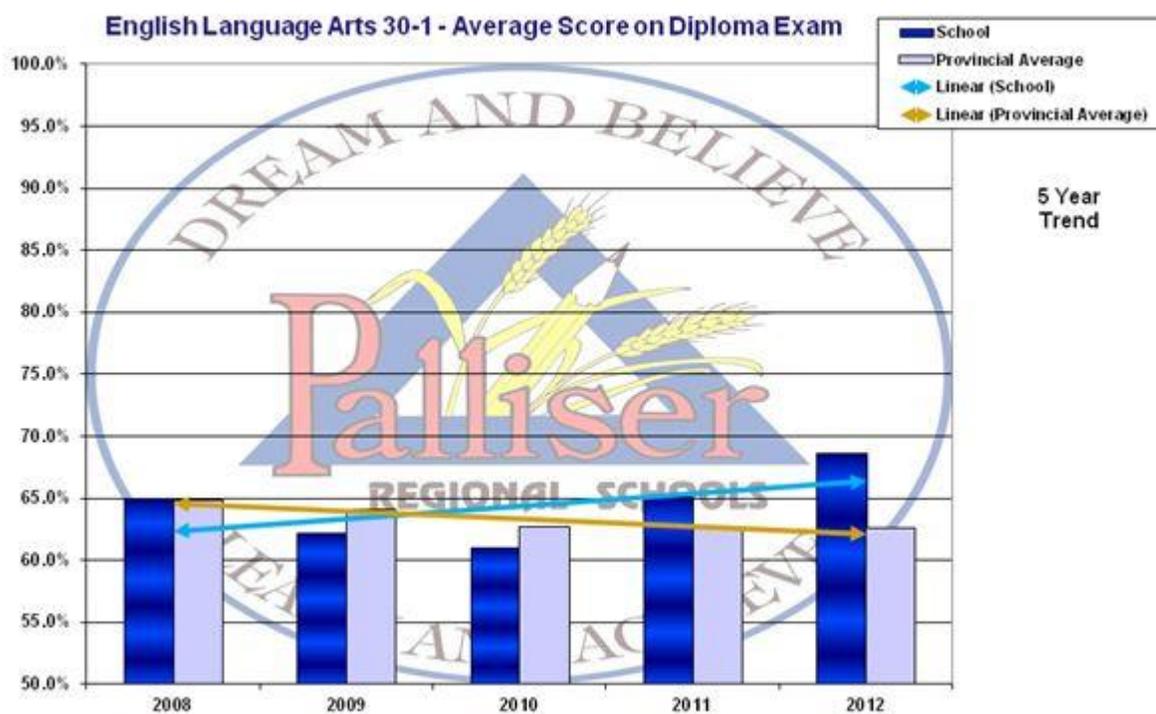
Figure 7: 2011 Accountability Pillar Overall Summary

Accountability Pillar Overall Summary
Annual Education Results Reports - Oct 2011
School: [_____] School   Government of Alberta ■ Education

Measure Category	Measure Category Evaluation	Measure	Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 yr Average	Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 Yr Average	Achievement	Improvement	Overall
Safe and Caring Schools	Good	Safe and Caring	87.5	92.6	89.7	88.1	87.6	86.6	High	Maintained	Good
Student Learning Opportunities	Good	Program of Studies	80.6	76.3	76.9	80.9	80.5	80.1	High	Maintained	Good
		Education Quality	87.1	91.0	89.3	89.4	89.2	88.9	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
		Drop Out Rate	0.3	2.8	1.9	4.2	4.3	4.7	Very High	Improved	Excellent
		High School Completion Rate (3 yr)	85.5	69.6	77.4	72.6	71.5	71.1	Very High	Improved	Excellent
Student Learning Achievement (Grades K-9)	Excellent	PAT: Acceptable	98.0	95.2	90.4	79.3	79.1	78.0	Very High	Improved	Excellent
		PAT: Excellence	28.6	9.5	12.3	19.6	19.4	18.5	Very High	Improved	Excellent
Student Learning Achievement (Grades 10-12)	Excellent	Diploma: Acceptable	91.5	88.8	84.8	82.6	83.4	84.0	High	Improved	Good
		Diploma: Excellence	24.8	17.6	16.9	18.7	19.0	18.9	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
		Diploma Exam Participation Rate (4+ Exams)	61.1	45.4	54.7	54.9	53.5	53.5	High	Maintained	Good
		Rutherford Scholarship Eligibility Rate (Revised)	81.0	74.4	71.1	59.6	56.9	57.0	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Preparation for Lifelong Learning, World of Work, Citizenship	Good	Transition Rate (6 yr)	81.1	62.1	61.2	59.3	59.8	59.3	Very High	Improved Significantly	Excellent
		Work Preparation	72.1	75.2	75.5	80.1	79.9	79.8	Low	Maintained	Issue
		Citizenship	78.9	88.6	82.5	81.9	81.4	79.9	High	Maintained	Good
Parental Involvement	Good	Parental Involvement	82.3	81.3	81.4	79.9	80.0	79.4	High	Maintained	Good
Continuous Improvement	Excellent	School Improvement	86.0	85.0	79.0	80.1	79.9	78.8	Very High	Improved	Excellent

Figure 8: 2012 Accountability Pillar Overview Summary

Accountability Pillar Overall Summary
Annual Education Results Reports - Oct 2012
School: [_____] School   Alberta Government

Measure Category	Measure Category Evaluation	Measure	Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 yr Average	Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 Yr Average	Achievement	Improvement	Overall
Safe and Caring Schools	Good	Safe and Caring	85.7	87.5	89.0	88.6	88.1	87.5	High	Maintained	Good
Student Learning Opportunities	Good	Program of Studies	77.2	80.6	78.9	80.7	80.9	80.6	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
		Education Quality	87.0	87.1	88.5	89.4	89.4	89.3	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
		Drop Out Rate	1.1	0.3	1.5	3.2	4.2	4.4	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
		High School Completion Rate (3 yr)	89.7	85.5	77.3	74.1	72.6	71.6	Very High	Improved	Excellent
Student Learning Achievement (Grades K-9)	Excellent	PAT: Acceptable	83.5	98.0	95.1	79.1	79.3	78.9	High	Maintained	Good
		PAT: Excellence	22.8	28.6	17.3	20.9	19.6	19.1	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Student Learning Achievement (Grades 10-12)	Good	Diploma: Acceptable	85.9	91.5	89.4	83.5	82.6	83.5	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
		Diploma: Excellence	20.3	24.8	20.3	18.6	18.7	18.7	High	Maintained	Good
		Diploma Exam Participation Rate (4+ Exams)	79.0	61.1	54.7	56.2	54.9	53.9	Very High	Improved Significantly	Excellent
		Rutherford Scholarship Eligibility Rate (Revised)	94.1	81.0	73.8	61.5	59.6	58.0	Very High	Improved Significantly	Excellent
Preparation for Lifelong Learning, World of Work, Citizenship	Good	Transition Rate (6 yr)	79.4	81.1	68.4	58.4	59.3	59.5	Very High	Improved	Excellent
		Work Preparation	69.5	72.1	72.5	75.7	80.1	79.9	Low	Maintained	Issue
		Citizenship	83.0	78.9	81.9	82.5	81.9	81.2	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Parental Involvement	Excellent	Parental Involvement	83.4	82.3	82.3	79.7	79.9	80.0	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Continuous Improvement	Good	School Improvement	79.9	86.0	81.7	80.0	80.1	79.8	High	Maintained	Good

Notes:
1) PAT results are a weighted average of the percent meeting standards (Acceptable, Excellence) on Provincial Achievement Tests. The weights are the number of students enrolled in each course. Courses included: English Language Arts (Grades 3, 6, 9), Science (Grades 6, 9), French Language Arts (Grades 6, 9), Français (Grades 6, 9).
2) Diploma results are a weighted average of percent meeting standards (Acceptable, Excellence) on Diploma Examinations. The weights are the number of students writing the Diploma Examination for each course. Courses included: English Language Arts 30-1, English Language Arts 30-2, French Language Arts 30-1, Français 30-1, Pure Mathematics 30, Applied Mathematics 30, Biology 30, Science 30.
3) Overall evaluations can only be calculated if both improvement and achievement evaluations are available.
4) Results for the ACOL measures are available in the detailed report; see "ACOL Measures" in the Table of Contents.
5) Data values have been suppressed where the number of students is less than 6. Suppression is marked with an asterisk (*).

Appendix

Appendix: Criteria for Report Card Comments as Co-created by Teachers

Criteria for Report Card Comments

	Include a general comment about the general outcomes, what we're working on and/or learning
	Include a specific comment about what the student is doing well
	Include a specific comment about the student's behavior → behaviour, social skills, citizenship.
	Include a comment that addresses areas in which the student can improve → Areas of Opportunity, goals & strategies
	If the student has an IPP, include whether or not their mark is based on modified or adapted programming and anything else of relevance
	Add your own voice to these comments and make them personal. Use the student's name in the comment.