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# Understanding Instructional Leadership: Perceptions of Elementary Principals

Georgia M. Powell

*The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor

Pollock, Katina

*The University of Western Ontario*

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### **Abstract**

With a proverbial finger pointing to principals as the school leaders responsible for overall student success, there is some increase in the accountability measures leadership provides. There is then more emphasis placed on principals' capacity to take charge of the teaching and learning processes at the school level. The practices associated with the planning and guiding of the learning within schools is classified as instructional leadership. As part of their work. Principals are expected to be instructional leaders. This study explores how elementary principals in Ontario schools approach instructional leadership work especially since there is much ambiguity that exists about the phenomenon. Instructional leadership has been understood and carried out in many different ways according to current literature which makes it interesting to find out how principals respond to being instructional leaders. By examining how they understand instructional leadership, looking at the strategies incorporated in their practice, the supports they use as well as inspect the challenges they encounter, this study brings to light the clarity with how principals do the work. Using a general qualitative approach as the methodology, 12 principals were interviewed and their experiences documented. The analysis of their expressed personal practices assisted in explaining the phenomenon of instructional leadership work using a combined perspective of Hallinger and Murphy (1985; 2013), Dwyer (1984) and Kurg (1992) behaviours of principals as instructional leaders. The common components included vision and mission, management, positive environment as well as staffing and resources. The findings determined that principals in the study practiced much of the components outlined as instructional leadership behaviours while their varied understandings determined their actions. Some principals understood instructional leadership as a systematic way of leading schools, incorporating all component behaviours as a leadership style (i.e. a

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progressive view). On the other hand, some principals saw instructional leadership as completing tasks needed as an agent of change associated with the job (i.e. the traditional view). With an awareness of this variation in approach, system leaders can determine the best approach based on context and provide the necessary resources as well as the clarity needed about instructional leadership. This study provides the medium to restart a discussion about the understanding principals have about the role and the work they are expected to do as instructional leaders.

**Keywords:** instructional leadership; Ontario elementary principals, principals

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Leadership in education is a topic that is being studied by researchers and educators alike and is a complex notion, involving many ideas and concepts. In fact, a concrete set of criteria to define educational leadership continues to elude researchers, even as they try to identify specific attitudes, skills, and behaviours common to successful leaders (Leithwood, 1994). For this study, leadership will be defined as “a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes” (Bush & Glover, 2014, p. 554). Within the context of this study, the influence of which the authors speak is specific to that of principals on the learning with the school community. Also, leadership is an act where the “leader applies motivational strategies to energize the interests and support of the group or followers towards action” (Pansiri, 2008, p.474). Within the last decade, demands on the school principal regarding educational leadership have increased significantly. At a time when education has been deemed one of the most important institutions in determining the direction of any country, the need for proficient school leaders has been the focus of many school reforms. Mulford (2006) points to the “pressures of a growing societal reliance on education” (p. 150), which increases the accountabilities placed on leaders within schools – specifically, principals. School reform efforts rank leadership as a top priority, identifying some relationship between student achievement and school leadership efforts (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Consequently, for some principals, their work has increased to include more teaching and learning responsibilities. These increased demands require more from principals; they need to be more than instructional leaders, “leaders of learning who can develop a team delivering effective instruction” (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 6). With the increase in expectation, principals need to be able to navigate what is involved in being

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educational leaders and have an understanding of how to move forward within traditional practices of leadership (Mitchell & Castle, 2005).

The increase in school principals' responsibilities is affecting the way they understand their role. Within the province of Ontario, principals are accountable to provincial laws written in the Education Act, board policies, strategies, and various initiatives (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015); these guidelines were created to direct principals in their pursuit of moving from theory to practice. The diversity that exists within Ontario school boards (e.g. ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background, and geographical location) – means there is a significant amount of variation regarding how individual principals perform their duties as instructional leaders. However, regardless of the context, leadership expectations for student success remain present. Despite existing pressures of school reforms mandated at various levels and times, the political and policy context saw the birth of a 1998 standardized test in Ontario. There is political interest in numeracy and literacy adding pressure to school leaders (Hardy, 2010). The Ministry of Education has created many documents which outline expectations of leaders including the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) and Ontario Leadership Strategies (OLS).

This study explores how elementary principals approach instructional leadership work by examining how principals understand instructional leadership, looking at the strategies incorporated in their practice, viewing the supports they use, and discussing the challenges they encounter. Using a qualitative methodology with an interpretative framework, this study explores how elementary school principals approach instructional leadership work. The aim is to extract meaning from the experiences of the participants; their interpretation of instructional practices was collected and used to determine principals' understanding of instructional leadership and how they use this knowledge to navigate the learning in their schools. The study further aims to

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document how elementary principals in Ontario are addressing the work of instructional leadership. With the increased pressure on school principals in Ontario, the interest in and purpose of this study are necessary and timely.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Instructional leadership (as one of the many areas of leadership in schools) is necessary if schools are to be successful. Along with traditional practices such as ensuring teaching and learning, school principals need to fully understand instructional leadership if they want to create and maintain effective leadership in their schools (Joyner, 2005). In general, instructional leadership involves thoughts and actions directly related to learning processes (Pansiri, 2008). Jenkins (2009) explains that the revival of instructional leadership in the Western world is as a result of demands for high academic standards and school accountability. The issue taken in this study with instructional leadership is not about the importance of various practices or who is responsible for getting the job done but rather is the disconnect and variation in its understanding and execution. This study will look at how elementary principals in three Ontario urban school boards approach instructional leadership work. There has been, and still is, misunderstanding underlining the concept of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005; Jenkins, 2009; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). While the principal is likely to be the core instructional leader within a school, there are obstacles like accountability expectations that make leadership difficult (Hume, 2010).

Principals in Ontario are subjected to provincial laws and policies. In a recent Ontario study about principals' work, more than 60 percent of the 70 principals interviewed reported wanting to be more involved in instructional leadership (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015); this type of result prompts a need to examine how principals approach instructional leadership work. In an

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average 59-hour workweek, principals in Ontario English speaking public schools spend only 5 hours on instructional leadership; that amounts to only 8% of their time (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014). Similarly, in another Ontario study of principals' and vice principals' workload, researchers asserted there had been an increase in the work, citing a variety of different reasons. The study highlighted the fact that principals are expected to go above and beyond acting as instructional leaders (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). Moreover, the creation of the Education Quality Accountability Office (EQAO), which administers annual numeracy and literacy standardized tests, has increased academic accountability through school ranking in Ontario (McAaffrey, 2010). The results of the EQAO tests are reported publicly on a school-by-school basis (Hardy, 2010) adding further scrutiny from the public about school success. The open display of results can effectively pressure principals to focus on the teaching and learning (as opposed to the myriad of other things for which they are responsible). Consequently, this study's intent to look at the approaches used by English-speaking Ontario elementary school principals from both public and Catholic boards is necessary and timely.

Over the last two decades, the expectations of principals as instructional leaders in Ontario have changed. Leithwood and Poplin (1992) supported a notion that instructional leadership, as an idea, is not sufficient for principals as they lead schools into the future. Additionally, educational reforms require principals to move from being solely instructional leaders to being leaders equipped for transforming the school organization for sustainability (Fullan, 2002). While instructional leadership is not as much a focus like school reform, much of what successful schools have are principals who use instructional practices to direct change. Therefore, there is a need to examine how principals approach the task of leading instruction. Fullan (2010) identified elementary school principals in Ontario who performed key steps in

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transforming theory into practice, achieving great success within their schools. These key steps affect how principals lead schools. Principals are responsible for improving overall student achievement, as well as reducing student achievement gaps – a shift that ultimately makes principals more accountable (Leithwood, 2010). This research will provide insight into the ways elementary principals practice as instructional leaders, specifically focusing on their understanding, their use of strategies and supports, and the challenges they face. To fully explore the topic as both a researcher and an educator, it is essential to outline my position within the study.

### **Positionality**

I am currently an Ontario educator working as a classroom teacher. I am pursuing my doctorate while I work full time. In the next phase of my career, I aspire to become a principal. As the role evolves, I am aware of expectations both as a teacher and as a potential principal. My career as a teacher started 13 years ago, and I have worked in many different areas in the education arena. I have taught kindergarten through grade 9 in three different countries, which afforded me the opportunity to work in many different contexts with various leaders, thereby experiencing a variety of leadership styles and practices. I have also worked as a supervisor and program coordinator for an after-school tutoring program in Toronto, Ontario. This position required the development of an instructional and social program to support over 45 students as I collaborated with 11 staff members. A simple analogy for this role is that of the principal of a small school, guided by similar provincial policies and laws. While reflecting on these experiences and on the possibility of taking on a principalship, I realized I felt unclear about the expectation of the role as it related to teaching and learning. The previous principals I had

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worked with each approached the role differently, so I had little point of reference as a learner. It was in this reflection that I saw the chance to study this topic for my doctorate.

My past and current professional experiences influence my position within this study. As it refers to this research study, it is important to understand my role as both a researcher and an educator and examine the distinction between two (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2010). I embody a location in which objectivity and subjectivity meet (Bourke, 2014) by being a teacher working with different principals while also having experience in a similar leadership role. My intent to become a principal in a school in Ontario must also be considered in light of my research; this creates multiple perspectives of instructional leadership. With regard to this study, I view myself as both an insider and an outsider (Bourke, 2014). I share commonalities with principals in the realm of instructional practices as a teacher, and yet I am an outsider because I am not yet a principal in Ontario. As Moore (2012) mentioned, “Insiders are individuals who have a place in the social group being studied before the start of the investigation and outsiders are non-members of the group” (p. 11). To address potential issues of preference, I will account for the position I take within the study through reflexivity, taking note of the various ways I can influence my study (Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012; Morrow, 2005).

As I begin my research to explore how principals approach instructional leadership, I am aware that my position will affect the outcome of the study. Moore (2012) explores social and recruitment dilemmas, identifying that a researcher’s physical and psychological state can impact research results. As a teacher with a previous and growing knowledge of instructional leadership, I am aware that I can potentially affect my data by acting as a participant, agreeing or disagreeing while conducting the interview. While I want to build a rapport with participants, I also need to be aware of my own ideas about the topic being studied (Moore, 2012).

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Additionally, I am aware of the potential to exploit relationships with participants in the social and recruitment process. My worldview and system of belief create the basis for my study; knowing that my positionality contributes and affects the way I view and understand the world (Takacs, 2003), it is best to explicitly state my stance. Making use of a constructivist lens through which to view the issue of instructional leadership, much of the research process requires a self-reflective attitude. This includes “listening with open minds and hearts, learning to respect different ways of knowing... and learning to examine and re-examine one’s worldviews” (Takacs, 2003, p. 38). These attitudes and beliefs guide this study of how elementary school principals in Ontario approach instructional leadership work, which stem from what I view as a problem of practice.

### **Problem of Practice**

It does not appear as though the growth in expectation for principals to be instructional leaders will be slowing down anytime soon. The problem is that *instructional leadership* is evolving into *leadership for learning* in the literature. What then are principals practicing in schools as instructional leaders? As such, some concern about the way instructional leadership is approached, understood, and delivered arise. Fullan’s (2010) study of two elementary school principals who, against all the odds, had great success in school turnaround, described “powerful principals obsessed with the instructional core of personalizing learning and getting results for each student” (p. 12). My interest in exploring this “instructional core” was piqued after reading Fullan’s work, especially since I was not readily able to observe it in my context. My experience working in schools in Ontario, Jamaica, and the United States created a distorted understanding of the instructional core and the leadership supporting it. After having completed the extensive reading of the instructional leadership literature, the approach seemed very abstract to me.

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Considering the fact that principals have the power to affect up to 30 teachers (Fullan, 2010), and that they are second to teachers regarding the impact on students (Leithwood et al., 2004) I wondered: What are principals *doing* as instructional leaders? According to the literature, some principals struggle to find the time to be instructional leaders (Pollock et al., 2014) while others, like those mentioned in Fullan's (2010) study, experience great success – why? How are the successful principals tapping into the power they have of the instructional core? There are three areas that I believe potentially contribute to a disparity in instructional leadership practices within schools. These include: 1) behaviours stemming from personal beliefs and ideas about instructional leadership; 2) a lack of a clearly and consistently defined conception of instructional leadership demonstrated in the school system; and 3) the principals' ability, as well as their capacity, to do the work especially when dealing with competing demands.

My concern about instructional leadership practices stems from observed behaviours. First, as an idea, instructional leadership is not clear (Hornig & Loeb, 2010). Having conducted a thorough investigation of the literature, I can infer that instructional leadership is viewed as both a leadership typology and a collection of tasks completed as an agent of change. This is further explained in the literature review. The division in the understanding of instructional leadership creates a disconnect between the work performed by principals and the expectations required of them. The disconnect also creates a perception of a top-down model of instructional leadership practices among principals and teachers (Graczewski, Knudson, & Holtzman, 2009). The notion is that principals get directives from school boards and the Ministry of Education, and hand them down to staff as mandates, which can add pressure to instructional leadership processes. These behaviours are easily identified as a result of principals' beliefs and ideas about instructional leadership. One of the many understandings of instructional leadership is that it has a “purpose”

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of leading rather than a “how to lead” interpretation (Bush & Glover, 2014). Bush and Glover identify “instructional leadership, and leadership for learning, [as having a] focus primarily on the direction and purpose of leaders’ influence; [and] targeted at student learning via teachers” (p. 556). In general, principals’ perceptions on instructional leadership affect their actual practice in schools. The question, then, is: Are principals able to define (an) instructional relationship to prevent a misunderstanding that it involves a top-down system? If instructional leadership is more of a resolve, then how do principals know what to do as leaders? Principal, as defined in an Ontario perspective, is: “the person responsible for administering the school and for providing instructional leadership” (School Improvement Planning Handbook, 2000, p. 7). The Ontario Education Act highlights principals as being “in charge of the instruction of pupils,” and required to “supervise the instruction in the school and advise and assist any teacher in cooperation with the teacher in charge of an organizational unit or program” (R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 298). The issue of instructional leadership work lies in the unanswered questions surrounding principals’ practice.

Another reason there may be a difference regarding instructional leadership practices in schools is that instructional leadership does not have a consistent, precise definition – not in the literature, and ostensibly not in school practice either. This lack of definition supports the need to examine how principals are approaching the role. Being that instructional leadership is considered one of the most important aspects of a principal’s job (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Bush & Glover, 2014), a greater understanding of the role is required. The difficulty constructing a definite meaning for instructional leadership can result in principals conjuring their own interpretations. The consensus in the literature is that instructional leadership is not done in any one way and has many classifications, with no precise definition to guide practice (Graczewski,

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Knudson, & Holtzman, 2009; Hoerr, 2008; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Neumerski, 2012; Rigby, 2014). Principals are therefore encouraged to understand the concept of instructional leadership fully so the notion can be applied to their daily work (Terosky, 2014). Additionally, “A defined understanding of instructional leadership is imperative if that leadership is to be effective” (Joyner, 2005, p. 1). To further complicate the issue, instructional leadership has recently been rebranded as “leadership for learning” (Bush & Glover, 2016; Hallinger, 2011) creating more confusion amongst schools using instructional leadership terminologies, while the literature has moved forward with another concept called leadership for learning.

Finally, while individuals typically enter the principalship with some ability to lead and knowledge about their role, a question still exists around the issue of capacity to lead an instructional program. This haziness adds to the disparity of instructional leadership practices in schools. Capacity speaks to the degree to which principals can perform as instructional leaders, and is dependent on various limitations. There are multiple reasons why the ability (or lack thereof) of a principal to lead instruction could be problematic. Regardless of leadership abilities and skill sets, there is some likelihood that a new principal’s body of knowledge will be limited to subject disciplines, and pedagogical knowledge will therefore not be at a peak level (Graczewski et al., 2009). Ability and capacity can affect how a principal performs and approaches instructional leadership work. Jenkins (2009) speaks to the in-depth knowledge principals need to perform effectively as instructional leaders. Principals also tend to focus on administrative duties rather than the core business of teaching and learning, which in itself can be problematic (Marshall, 2008; Pollock et al., 2015).

While the role of the principal is changing, there is evidence that the components have become competing factors. In Ontario, principals’ work linked to provincial and board policies

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are among the tasks that require the longest hours – an average of 59 hours per week – limiting the time principals have to spend on instructional leadership (Pollock, Hauseman, & Wang, 2014). Researcher describes the disruption that ‘work intensification’ has on the principals’ instructional leadership practices. Even if principals are motivated to be instructional leaders, the actual work day leaves little to no time for instructional practices (Ginsberg, 1988; Goldring, Huff, May, & Camburn, 2008; Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Wildy & Loudon, 2000). In Ontario schools, principals are overwhelmed with workload increases and new responsibilities, expectations, and accountabilities, along with changes in the regulatory environment (Leithwood & Azah, 2014), all of which make it difficult to lead instructional practices. With the increase in expectations, the principal’s role has evolved to include much more than the day-to-day activities that are required to run a school building. Principals’ work is defined as behaviours exhibited while on the job (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015) and, in most cases, outside of the job as well. This work encompasses routine behaviours and accountability measures required by law, especially in Ontario. Goldring et al. (2008) point to “the contexts within which principals’ work presents multiple, often competing, demands for principals’ attention” (p. 332); which speaks to the depth of the work. Work is defined as “the practices and actions in which principals engage to fulfill their responsibilities as school principals” (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015, p. 2). Principals’ work can also be described as “enormous numbers of very short tasks... varying in content, purpose, complexity and efficient component of the tasks” (Peterson, 1986, p. 153). Peterson (1986) painted a picture of the work principals do as hectic and unpredictable, fragmented in discourse, and pressuring. Often identified as a challenge to principals in the literature, a lack of time (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012; Kmetz & Willower, 1982; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015; Vadella & Willower, 1990) leaves most leaders to want to do more when it comes to instructional

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leadership. In Ontario, more than half of a selected sample – 65% – reported wanting to participate in more instructional leadership (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Again, this statistics points to a lack of time being a major barrier for principals when it comes to instructional leadership. There is also an awareness that while principals are essentially responsible for instructional leadership, they will have little success if they try doing it on their own (Graczewski et al., 2009; Harchar & Hyle, 1996; Quinn, 2002). There is a problem with competing factors when it comes to the work principals do, which is why this investigation into how principals approach instructional leadership work is necessary.

The three areas that potentially contribute to a disparity in instructional leadership practices within schools are behaviours stemming from personal beliefs and ideas about instructional leadership, a lack of a clearly and consistently defined conception of instructional leadership demonstrated in the school system, and principals' ability and capacity to do the work. Some research examines how principals view instructional leadership (O'Donnell & White, 2005; Stronge, 1993), others examine instructional leadership as a vital role of the principal (Mitchell & Castle, 2005). This study aims to look at how instructional leadership is enacted, in light of the literature that has shifted toward a reincarnated "leadership for learning."

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has the potential to benefit various stakeholders in the field of education. Knowing that there is an increase in expectation for principals, the role is now examined with increased scrutiny (Hardy, 2010). Since leadership is a socially constructed concept, the ideas discussed by the principals interviewed in this study will vary from setting to setting (Southworth, 2002). The social nature of leadership broadly creates a platform for instructional leadership, specifically, to be explored. This study has the potential to impact teachers,

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principals, school boards, and the Ministry of Education in different ways. I will outline how each of these groups stands to benefit below. In general, I believe that this study will have a positive impact on teaching and learning.

**For the Ministry.** The Ministry of Education creates policies that guide school boards when dealing with education in Ontario. Some policies are created and changed as a result of political interests of the government. Schools are directly impacted by these policies (Hardy, 2010). As it relates to instructional leadership, the Ministry would be able to use this study to better understand principals' practice. The knowledge gained could then act as a platform to craft mandates and policies that will require a change in principals' practices. After all, the Ministry of Education emphasizes the importance of paying attention to instructional strategies as well as focusing on the community aspect of instructional leadership (Leithwood, 2010). The introduction of EQAO created tension for principals, and increased the need for communication between bureaucratic and school communities. This study will include practical information about principals' instructional leadership practices that can provide the government with facts so that necessary resources and development can be given to school boards. In his conversation with Deputy Minister of Education Kevin Costante, Leithwood (2010) discusses the need for principals to move beyond the idea of simply providing opportunities for learning but rather focus on the liability of the learning itself. This study can provide more information about what principals are doing about instructional leadership since the literature is morphing into "leadership for learning" (Bush & Glover, 2014). Are principals aware? What can the Ministry do to keep knowledge consistent? The responsibility for this mandate must be a joint effort between the Ministry and the school boards.

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**For School Boards.** School boards are tasked with guiding principals as they enact the role of instructional leaders. While a supervisory officer (SO); (a superintendent in Ontario) oversees principals regarding job effectiveness, many SOs struggle with the concept of instructional leadership themselves. In a recent study, SOs admitted that while their main role involved helping principals strengthen their instructional leadership skills, there was no formal definition of instructional leadership, and no clear idea regarding how they wanted principals to understand it (Honig, 2012). The recommendation from the above study was to have SOs examine the day-to-day supports they give to school principals for instructional leadership development. My research can assist regarding the methods and direction SOs use to guide the instructional practice of the group of principals they oversee. In their role as supervisory representatives from school board working with principals, this study will enable SOs to identify any disconnect between theory and practice about instructional leadership work. This study could also serve as a reminder of the various ways of approaching the instructional leadership work utilized by the principals. School districts could use study findings to provide professional development, mentoring, and additional resources for principals in their task of practicing instructional leadership. Finally, this study can serve to start a conversation about instructional leadership practices among like-minded educators. Honig (2012) recommends implementing job-embedded professional supports for school principals and using data from this study, SOs in Ontario could initiate a process of refocusing on direct instructional leadership practices.

**For Principal Preparation Programs.** Principal preparation programs could also benefit from the information presented in this study. In Ontario, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) endorse course providers like the Ontario Principal Council who delivers programs on principal qualification. Gray and Lewis point out:

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The most effective way to train instructional leaders is through extended assignments in schools where they will share the intensity of the principal's day and the complexities and rewards of leadership that attend to working with students, teachers and the school's community. (2013, p.149)

Programs in Ontario can benefit from this study as the findings will inform them about the current approaches taken by principals with regards to instructional leadership. Principals will essentially profit from these programs and progress with more awareness as instructional leaders.

**For Principals.** Principals, as practitioners, bring leadership theory from research to action in schools. While principals do their best work to ensure school success, the Ontario Principal Council (OPC) reports deficiencies in leadership when the principal is held accountable for closing the gap in student achievement (Robinson & Evans, 2012). This study can bring more awareness to what principals do as instructional leaders to both address and eliminate reported deficiencies. The foundation of any instructional program implemented by leaders is proper knowledge of the concept of instructional leadership (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013). This study can serve as a tool for knowledge mobilization for instructional leadership practices. Knowledge mobilization involves the use of new research information garnered and then communicated, adapted based on context, applied through practices and policies, and then integrated to achieve sustained knowledge (Campbell, 2011). Through knowledge mobilization, the information from this research can bridge any gaps between theory and practice as they relate to instructional leadership practices.

**For the field of Leadership.** In addition to providing information to major stakeholders, this study adds to existing research in the area of instructional leadership. The major contribution of this study is its intention to locate the disconnect between theory and practice in instructional

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leadership practices. It also gives principals in Ontario an opportunity to identify their stance as instructional leaders by relating their practices. This research is directed with specific, guiding questions that allowed me to explore instructional leadership work among elementary school principals in Ontario.

### **Research Questions**

This study aims to explore the practices, which includes thoughts and actions, of elementary principals in Ontario toward instructional leadership work. The main question I posed in this study is: How do elementary principals in Ontario approach instructional leadership work? This question enables me to examine the instructional leadership currently practiced by principals in elementary schools. The varied ideas currently surrounding the notion of instructional leadership and what it means and looks like (Hallinger, 2005) drive the need for this study. Recent reforms in education have called for more leadership from principals, requiring them to spend more time on teaching and learning in schools (Leithwood, 2010). The central research question enables me to understand how principals enact their jobs as instructional leaders. Subsequently, some sub questions further permit me to examine the practices of principals as instructional leaders. I ask:

- 1) How do principals understand instructional leadership?
- 2) What are the strategies used to do instructional leadership work?
- 3) What supports do principals use and incorporate to carry out instructional leadership work?
- 4) What challenges do principals experience when practicing instructional leadership work?

Through qualitative methods, this study aims to garner principals' perspectives on instructional leadership work to provide additional information on school leader understanding and practices

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of instructional leadership. The sub-questions are used to both focus on and document participants' actions and thoughts about instructional leadership. The goal of the study is to examine how elementary principals deal with instructional leadership work. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines strategy as “a plan, method, or series of maneuvers or stratagems for obtaining a specific goal or result.” Additional definitions are provided in the following section.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the study, I will clarify some terms that will frequently be used:

- Principal: “The person responsible for administering the school and for providing instructional leadership” (School Improvement Planning Handbook, 2000, p. 7).
- Instruction: Activities within a school situation; interactions between and among staff and learners, school and community, teachers and curriculum, all with the aim of creating an effective learning environment (Pansiri, 2008).
- Leadership: “Ultimately, leadership is about power [influence]. It is about how we govern and are governed in our organizations and communities, and about what kind of world we want these governance practices to uphold. This is why it is so important that we understand the leadership perspectives that we favour” (Ryan, 2005, p. 25); an act wherein the “leader applies more of the motivational strategies [influence] to energize the interest and support of the group or followers towards action” (Pansiri, 2008, p. 474).
- Work: The things that you do, especially as part of your job (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).
- Job: A task or behaviours done in a specific work content (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991).
- Role: Expected pattern of specific types of behaviours; the process that establishes expected behaviours (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991).

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- Instructional leadership: The evaluative focus of leaders on teachers' behaviours as they interact with and navigate the various learning opportunities provided for students (Bush & Glover, 2014).

### **Outline of Dissertation**

In Chapter 1, I outlined the purpose of exploring the instructional leadership work of principals. I explained the problem and its effect on the practice of school leaders while referring to my position to an interest in the study. In the following paragraphs, I will outline the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 looks at instructional leadership in existing research. Because I worked as a classroom teacher and school program supervisor, the area of instructional leadership piqued my interest. The review of the literature in this study highlights what other researchers have shared about instructional leadership; and helps to situate my study. The literature also provides various perspectives to understand instructional leadership. Using these ideas, I created a conceptual framework for my study that I describe in Chapter 2. The framework helped to underpin the study while also identifying existing concepts that surround instructional leadership practices.

Chapter 3 describes the study methodology. I first outline qualitative research and how it fits regarding looking at how principals approach instructional leadership work. I then explain the specific methods and the data collection, which involved using semi-structured interviews. The outline of the sample, data collection and data analysis illustrate my process. Finally, I describe the ethics, trustworthiness, and limitations of my research design.

Chapter 4 looks at the findings collected from participant interviews. The findings are divided into master and sub-themes. The themes include 1) an understanding of instructional

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leadership, 2) strategies used by principals, 3) supports, and 4) challenges. Within each theme, I describe the related sub-themes.

Chapter 5 explores the relationship between my findings and the existing literature. The chapter discusses the participants' responses and explains their meaning in light of the research. The findings relate to understanding instructional leadership either as a leadership style or as an agent of change. This chapter also examines the strategies, supports, and challenges principals encounter as they engage in instructional leadership work.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions based on my analysis of the findings and connects them to the existing literature. The assumptions under which the study was conducted are further outlined. The chapter ends with recommendations based on the findings of this study and a brief reflection.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The purpose of this study is to explore the research question: How do elementary principals approach instructional leadership work? This chapter looks at the existing research to situate my study in the broader literature. This review will describe how principals approach instructional leadership work in seven sections. The first section looks at the principal's role as it relates to instructional leadership. Next, there is an exploration of instructional leadership: its definition and its theoretical development are outlined, as well as a brief history of the concept. The third section provides a synthesized perspective of the components of instructional leadership in the context of the concept. Here examinations of instructional leadership practices are found in the thoughts and actions of the principal (which, again, is the focus of this study), including definitions, strategies, supports, and challenges. The next three sections examine these thoughts and actions as applied instructional leadership practices common in the literature. The sections describe in detail various strategies, supports and the challenges principals face constructed on what it looks like in schools, as well as the effects on the teaching and learning processes. The final section is an overview of the conceptual framework used to ground this study. Specifically, the final section explores the notion that instructional leadership is a social construct acted on by principals and educators in their respective context (Mestry & Pillay, 2014), making the very nature of clarity and the clarity of instructional leadership a phenomenon.

In an attempt to capture the views of elementary principals in an Ontario context, it is helpful to understand and incorporate what already exists within educational practices. The first task, therefore, is to begin with the principal.

### **The Principals' Role**

The school principal is the main facilitator for what happens daily within a given system. The job has no doubt grown regarding responsibility and accountability with the coming of many school reform efforts. The principal's demonstration of specific leadership qualities to bring learning to its highest level is critical. Principals need to create a culture where teachers and students can appreciate and benefit as they progress as lifelong learners (Klocko & Wells, 2015). While the principal assumes the role of lead learner along with instructional leadership responsibilities, there is still the need for management (Lemoine, Greer, McCormack, & Richardson, 2014). With this increased demand, principals need to perform as instructional leaders regardless of how they understand the role (Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Quinn, 2002). The idea aligned with this notion is that instructional leadership is essential to student success (Hallinger, 2005; O'Donnell & White; Quinn, 2002). As a result, it is necessary to examine the principal as a lead teacher and as a manager and then compare these roles to provincial expectations.

**Principals' work.** There is no question that the work of principals can be extremely strenuous. Goldring et al. (2008) point to the fact that "the contexts within which principals work present multiple, often competing, demands on principals' attention" (p. 332). This speaks to the depth of the work. Work for principals can include "enormous numbers of very short tasks... varying in content, purpose, complexity and efficient component of the tasks" (Peterson, 1986, p. 153). Peterson describes principals' work as hectic and unpredictable, fragmented in discourse, and a potential to cause mental distress. The literature also highlights limited time within the school day for principals to perform as instructional leaders; this limitation is one challenge faced by principals (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012; Kmetz & Willower, 1982; Sparks, 2016;

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Vadella & Willower, 1990). This, of course, begs the question of when principals act as instructional leaders. There is limited literature that identifies how principals act as instructional leaders. Hallinger and Murphy (2012) are concerned that while principals have the potential to be instructional leaders, there is some apprehension for the context of the possible workload. In the literature, work (specifically, the work of principals in the elementary school system) is defined as comprising an average of 49.7 hours per week with a load of “3,058 activities, averaging 611.6 each week and 122.3 each day” (Kmetz & Willower, 1982, p. 65). The research points to an additional eight hours spent working during evenings and weekends. In a more recent study, Sparks (2016) reported that principals at the elementary level are currently working closer to 60 hours per week within the last ten years. The workload of principals has increased creating the need for the additional requirement of time. Goldring, Huff, May, and Camburn (2008, p. 340) use an end-of-day (EOD) weblog to create a selected priority based list of “nine major realms of responsibility during each hour of a day between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m.”:

- 1) Building operations: schedules, building maintenance
- 2) Finances and financial support for the school: budgets, budget reports, grants
- 3) Community or parent relations: formal meetings and informal interactions
- 4) School district functions
- 5) Student affairs: attendance, discipline, counseling, monitoring
- 6) Personal issues: supervising, evaluating, problem-solving, hiring, recruiting.
- 7) Planning/setting goals: school improvement planning, developing goals
- 8) Instructional leadership: monitoring/observing instruction, school restructuring or reform, supporting teachers’ professional development, analyzing student data or work, modeling instructional practices, teaching a class

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- 9) Professional growth: formal professional development, attending classes, reading books/articles.

The principal's work day varies day to day but, encompasses many activities. Klocko and Wells (2015) identify desk work, phone calls, tours, trips, and unscheduled meetings as activities included in principals' workdays as well as personal tasks, instruction, and conflict management. While these may be classified as physical work, it is also necessary to consider the emotional, cognitive, and conceptual aspects embedded within the principals' roles. The mental effort involved in principals' work is demonstrated through stress and burnout (Friedman, 2002; Klocko & Wells, 2015; Vadella & Willower, 1990), and can affect the role of instructional leader. Conversely, Goldring et al. (2008) were able to find and categorize principals' participation in instructional leadership activities concerning allotted time. In this study, activities were distributed by instructional leaders and student-centered leaders. The conclusion, for Goldring et al., was that context contributed to the time principals allotted to their work in instructional leadership. However, no clear behavioural expectation was established. A gap in the literature exists where there is no information to explain how principals practice instructional leadership amidst the demands of their work.

In their research, Valella and Willower (1990), as well as Pollock et al. (2015), mention that it is a struggle for principals to find time to focus on instructional leadership, but that they have found principals to be willing to and interested in doing so. In his work, Walker (2009) explores the notion of allotting time to principals so they can focus exclusively on their practice as instructional leaders. However, this is a questionable solution as it depends heavily on district decisions that are not readily predictable. Principals' days are already tightly packed, and there

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are many roles they are expected to take on in addition to that of instructional leader. One such role is that of the lead teacher.

**Lead teacher.** There is a clear expectation from educators and system leaders that principals will be exceptional teachers. To guide teachers, principals are encouraged to be aware of model behaviours, especially in regards to learning and the other facets of the job such as instructional order and discipline (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; DuPlessis, 2013). Knowledge of the curriculum, efficient and current teaching pedagogy, learner style consciousness, as well as time management and creativity with resources, are all critical to having a handle on a given learning environment (Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman & Simieou III, 2010; Hallinger & Murphy, 2012). A lead teacher is required to work with teachers, building their capacity as they work with students. Researchers believe principals as lead teachers can “organize and strategize their instructional leadership activities based on their knowledge of their staff and their school context” (May & Supovitz, 2011, p. 348). While instructional leadership takes precedence and is the main role of the principal, the role of manager often cuts into the principal’s time (Grissom, Loeb & Master, 2013).

**Manager.** A manager is usually responsible for controlling and administering the affairs of an institution. Arguably, monitoring and management are essential parts of the role played by principals as instructional leaders within schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; OLF, 2013; Terosky, 2014). The management component of instructional leadership deals with aligning activities associated with curriculum/assessment and the supervision of the teaching and learning that happens in the building. Consequently, principals are expected to be knowledgeable regarding data analysis, effective classroom instruction, and the creation of different lesson content. Mitchell and Castle (2005) highlight principals’ understanding of instructional

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leadership as requiring competency in establishing an intellectual climate that speaks to the need for superior knowledge in content and instruction. Principals can see the role of manager with a very different lens. While there are many aspects of managing within schools that force principals to redirect their focus, many contend that the management work keeps them too busy (Hallinger, 2005). One could argue that all aspects of being a manager could be considered instructional leadership work; it depends on how individuals understand the concept. Laws within Ontario help with the comprehension of the role of the principal.

**Ontario laws.** In Ontario, the Education Act serves as the guideline for what principals are expected to do as school leaders among many other activities. Principals are obligated to provide “the instruction and the discipline of pupils in the school, and the organization and management of the school” (Education Act R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 298, s. 11[1]). The law connects the principal as responsible for the provision of instruction as the first mandate, propagating an inference that learning is the primary business of principals. How principals ensure this learning happens is not dictated, leaving the discretion to school boards and individual schools. The role of lead teacher and manager is also not specified, inferring a constructivist nature of principals’ work. Mestry and Phillay (2013) remind us that the role of an instructional leader is often mutually exclusive (because of their role as lead teacher) to principals regardless of pressures to have these school leaders bearing the weight.

**The Ontario Leadership Framework.** The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) was developed for the Ontario Ministry of Education. The document, currently, is used as a “touchstone for the guidance the Ontario government provides to [school] districts and other professional agencies engaged in leadership recruitment, selection, development, and appraisal” (Leithwood, 2017, p. 31). The framework outlines standards and expectations for educational

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leaders to follow as means of attaining school success as it is “sufficiently detailed to describe good leadership” (OLF, 2013, p.6). The OLF widely used document in Ontario as the platform for describing leadership as it “incorporates evidence from recent research and provides new insights into what effective leadership looks like” (Ideas into Action, 2013, p.18). As it stands, the OLF is the most current administrative document for educational leaders in Ontario, and is used in developing other Ministry documents and preparation courses for principals. An Ontario government issued magazine, Ideas in Action (2012) outlines it as:

“an essential resource that school and system leaders have available to them to guide their individual leadership development. The framework is an integral foundation of the OLS [Ontario Leadership Strategy] and provides leaders across the province with a clear roadmap to successful leadership. For the past two years, school and system leaders across the province have been using the Framework as a resource to reflect on their practice and build their expertise in a wide range of leadership capacities” (p.2).

The question then is how this document is used in Ontario.

The OLF has a specific purpose and is organized to include domains which further guides leadership competency. One of its purposes is to “promote a common language that fosters an understanding of leadership and what it means to be a school and system leader.” (OLF, 2013, p. 6). The Framework intends to direct principals in Ontario toward a shared thinking on leadership. The OLF also assists school leaders in Ontario to identify what is necessary for effective leadership. It would appear, based on the literature, that the Framework hinges more on the side of instructional leadership, as a typology rather than a general sense of school and system leadership. There seems to be a close alignment of the OLF and what researchers identify as components of instructional leadership. Further, the Leadership Framework is used to “identify

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the practices and competencies that describe effective leadership” (OLF, 2013, p.6). While the purpose seems inclusive of other leadership styles, the five domains included in the OLF (i.e. setting direction, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization, leading the instructional program and securing accountability” (OLF, 2013, p.10-11) appear specific to the ideals of instructional leadership. It is hoped that school and system leaders in Ontario understand the importance of the OLF since

“the best possible instructional leadership cannot be accomplished simply by having a leadership framework of effective leadership practices and personal leadership resources in place. Rather, there is a need to provide continuous guidance and support to help Ontario's leaders further develop and strengthen their practice, with a particular emphasis on the ‘deep instructional practices’” (Ideas into Action, 2012, p.2)

Within each of the five domains, the OLF outlines a vision of the effective leader and suggests methods of developing the vision. These thoughts and actions mirror those of the components of instructional leadership. The OLF leadership strategies are aligned with foundational research about effective leadership and are accepted in the Ontario context as a means of direction.

Leithwood (2012) explains that the OLF

“reflects two distinct approaches to the description of successful leadership practice, one focused on the work of individuals and small groups (Successful Leadership Practices). The other [is] concerned with the effectiveness of the organization as a whole (Successful Organizational Practices), consistent with the claim that leadership is an “organizational property” (p.3).

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Consequently, with this understanding of the importance of the OLF it will be interesting to see if and how the OLF impacts the perspective, elementary principals adopt toward instructional leadership work in the province of Ontario.

### **Instructional Leadership: Understanding its Meaning**

Instructional leadership is largely based on the social interactions within teaching and learning. Principal, defined from an Ontario perspective, is “the person responsible for administering the school and for providing instructional leadership” (School Improvement Planning Handbook, 2000, p.7). In the Ontario context, there are many unanswered questions about instructional leadership and what, specifically, it means. The Ontario Education Act (R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 298) highlights principals as being “in charge of the instruction of pupils” to “supervise the instruction in the school and advise and assist any teacher in cooperation with the teacher in charge of an organizational unit or program.” The principal is responsible for instruction, but with no precise definition of instructional leadership, the interest in how this phenomenon is approached grows with the passing of time.

**Development of instructional leadership.** Principals have long been expected to be instructional experts; the term “instructional leadership” was coined in the 1970s after Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985; 2013) examination of instructional management. Since then, many researchers have been preoccupied with identifying some commonality in defining instructional leadership (Graczewski, et al., 2009; Hoerr, 2008; Hornig & Loeb, 2010; Neumerski, 2012; Rigby, 2014). There has also been some attention given to strategies that principals have applied as instructional leadership behaviours (Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Lee, 2014), or as part of the work they are required to get done. Additionally, there is a focus on the professional

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relationships that exist among principals and other educational participants. These relationships include those with teachers and coaches as well as with the supports offered to help with instructional leadership (Spillane, Camburn & Pareja, 2007; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 2012; Hardy, 2010; O'Donnell & White, 2005).

The term instructional leadership was used synonymously with instructional management in the 1980s but continues to evolve. In 1985, Hallinger and Murphy attempted to identify the behaviours displayed by principals which could also be considered those of instructional managers. Their findings created an instrument for researchers interested in principals as instructional leaders. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) was established to give principals an idea as to what they were expected to do to be considered effective instructional managers (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Historically, principals believed they should spend much time in classrooms working with students and teachers. The reality, however, was that time dedicated to this purpose was not allocated, and principals did not have the time to dedicate to it themselves; there were too many extra things to be done (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). If an effective school is where principals are instructionally effective by maintaining a tight link between goals, knowledge, and the outcome of schooling then, as per Hallinger and Murphy (1985; 2013), principals are primarily responsible for achieving institutional goals. The strains of performing as instructional managers led researchers to a focus on the teaching and learning rather than the idea of monitoring principal's behaviours. Dwyer (1984) maintained that there was "no single image or simple formula for successful instructional leadership" (p. 33). To help principals understand their role as instructional leaders, Hallinger and Murphy (1985; 2013) described three dimensions of instructional leadership: defining a mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting the school climate. These categories

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were then further divided into ten observable behaviours. The inference was that principals could use the PIMRS as a guide for being effective instructional leaders as per the expectations of the era. Dwyer (1984) described the principal's role in instructional management as taking the community, the school, and personal beliefs as guidelines for behaviours that create a specialized aspect of the planning, delivery, and school climate. Additionally, Krug (1992) was able to shape ideas of instructional leadership in the late 1980s into five dimensions that mirror notions from many researchers. In essence, findings from Hallinger and Murphy (1985; 2013), Kurg (1992), and Dwyer (1984) suggested behaviours that principals could adapt to create their own meaning of instructional leadership. Today there are still some core competencies aimed at "promoting students' cognitive growth" (Leithwood & Mountgomery, 1982, p. 333-334).

As the times and expectations of schooling changed, other researchers put forward their ideas about instructional leadership. Reitzug, West, and Angel (2008) identify four instructional leadership conceptions: relational, linear, organic, and prophetic. These concepts highlight principals' behaviours, similarly to those of Hallinger and Murphy, (1985) and Hallinger, (2005). Educators came to believe there was "no right or wrong way [that] exists to enact instructional leadership" (Mitchell & Castle, 2005, p. 430), which fostered context and allowed principals to "reflect on their conceptualization and practice of instructional leadership" (p. 430). The consistency regarding meaning and understanding within the literature suggests there are other underlying ideas (eg. goal setting, relationship building) that are equally foundational for instructional leadership. The inference of "no generalization" in instructional leadership supports the need for an investigation into how principals approach the work of leading instruction.

**How instructional leadership is understood.** Instructional leadership is not a new concept making it no stranger to the world of research studies. The complexities that exist with

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instructional leadership work, even after many years, means there is still room to examine how principals practice (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood, 2013). In the literature, I found that instructional leadership is viewed either as a leadership style (i.e. progressive view) or separately as an agent or instrument for learning change (i.e. traditional view).

***Leadership style.*** In the educational sector, like all organizations, leadership is critical to success. The concept of leadership itself has a plethora of definitions which varies depending on what one is looking for and where one is looking (Western, 2013). Krug (1992) explains, “leadership is the process by which the actions of people within a social organization are guided towards the realization of specific goals” (p. 430). This quote is 25 years old, and yet still holds true.

Leithwood (1994) examined leadership qualities that could aid in school restructuring. In 2004, Leithwood et al. sought to define and explain what actions were considered useful within schools. The search for these desirable actions is ongoing as according to the 2009 work of Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd. They presented eight leadership dimensions they imagine would “support and develop the qualities of leadership that will enhance student success” (p. 35). The qualities aligned with those desired actions of leaders. The dimensions include:

1. Establishing goals and expectations
2. Resourcing strategically
3. Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment
6. Creating educationally powerful connections
7. Engaging in constructive problem talk

### 8. Selecting, developing and using smart tools (p. 49)

Previously, in 1992, Krug presented instructional leadership as the “approach to work that is guided by a distinct set of beliefs about what is possible” (p. 441). According to Krug (1992), principals could use instructional leadership as the basis for what they do as leaders. Similarly, researchers have identified multi-dimensional constructs within instructional leadership and suggested principals use them as underlining guidelines for their practice. Included in the theoretical constructs are three essential dimensions: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school climate (Grobler, 2013; Hallinger & Lee, 2014; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Lunenburg & Lunenburg, 2013; Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy, & Schmidt, 2013; Townsend, Acker-Hocevar, Ballenger, & Place, 2013; Southworth, 2002). The consensus among researchers is that instructional leadership practices are more efficient when leaders use these three dimensions as the basis for actions within their schools. Leithwood et al. (2004), on the other hand, are not entirely convinced that these three dimensions, packaged as instructional leadership, are common to favorable school leadership. They argue that school leaders are “being admonished to be instructional leaders without much clarity about what that means” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 4). Hallinger (2005, 2009) proposes that instructional leadership evolves into leadership for learning as a means of approaching leadership typology within schools. Additionally, many researchers agree that “leadership contributions to school success may be better characterized as a layered, multidimensional process rather than a linear one” so “instructional leaders give multi-focal attention to academic improvement, accountability policies, and democratic education” (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2014, p. 184).

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The understanding of instructional leadership as a leadership style includes a variety of ways to reach success and can be classified as a more progressive view of approaching teaching and learning work. Hornig and Loeb (2010) in their thinking about the topic point to the ideas of organizational management which connect closely to instructional leadership as a style. However, instructional leadership can also be taken up as an element of educational change rather than a leadership approach.

*Agent for change.* It is thought unequivocally that change is necessary for leadership and student success. As schools emerge as mediums for modern development, the shift in thinking is a must. Instructional leadership is needed to support the changes required in teaching and learning. In their study, Coldren and Spillane (2007) explore the tools used by administrators to improve teaching and learning. These researchers assert that instructional leadership is a tool used to “sustain a connection between all activities and teaching practice” (p. 392). Similarly, growing accountability expectations have pushed schools to examine teaching and learning practices, and as such exploring instructional leadership as a means of addressing the possible issues (DuPlessis, 2013; Ediger, 2014; Timperley, 2005). Other researchers study the elements of the school affected by teaching and learning as a way of securing change within the organization. Neumerski (2012) examines the knowledge of support staff and their contribution to the shift in teaching and learning. Rigby (2014) discusses multiple conceptions of what it means for principals to be instructional leaders, identifying three logics. Each of these authors look at institutional leadership in ways, other than as a theoretical concept. With all the variations in the use of the term instructional leadership, it is clear that it is used only when there is a particular need. As such, thinking of instructional leadership as an agent for change is more a ‘traditional’

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way to consider instructional leadership. Traditionally, it appears from the literature that instructional leadership was about the specific leadership functions enacted to affect change in teaching and learning within schools (Marks & Printy, 2003).

As demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, there is no set or prescribed way to understand instructional leadership. While school leaders try to find the means to improve schools through leadership practices (Leithwood et al., 2004), much is still unclear. This ambiguity sometimes cripples the implementation of whichever model of instructional leadership various school boards finds suitable. As it stands, many principals remain unsure about how to understand and approach instructional leadership (Hornig & Loeb, 2010; Mitchell & Castle, 2005). In Ontario, the Leadership Framework provides much guidance.

### **Components of Instructional Leadership**

Certain aspects of instructional leadership are common across different models; my study focuses on such components. In examining the early models of instructional leadership proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985; 2013), Dwyer (1984), and Kurg (1992), I noted four common components. These include vision and mission, management of the program, positive environment, and staffing and resources. While these components are named and explored differently within various instructional leadership practices, their core attributes remain consistent. In this section, I explore these components using as the lens the goal of this study, which is to explore principals' approaches to instructional leadership work. I use the components of instructional leadership to explore how principals think about and act on their work as instructional leaders. Each of the components above is discussed in their section below, and each is further divided into four subsections: understanding (which looks at how principals understand

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instructional leadership about the mentioned component), supports, strategies, and challenges. To begin, Leithwood et al. (2004) contend that the creation of vision and mission is essential to the success of leadership.

**Vision and mission.** “Vision and mission” describes a plan of action or a set of desired goals critical to success. Identified as one of the basic elements of leadership success, for Leithwood et al. (2004) the creation of a vision and mission is the first step to academic achievement within schools. Leaders are expected to be visionaries if they are to guide others, and there is, therefore, a need for principals to be effective in creating and sharing a vision and mission for their schools (Leithwood et al., 2004). For Hallinger (2005), this component of instructional leadership focuses on the role of the principal in the creation and communication of clear, measurable, and time-based academic goals for their school. Learner achievement, identified as the desired goal for instructional leaders (Mestry & Pillay, 2014), cements the notion that the development of a vision and mission is crucial for the success of students and teachers. Principals’ understanding of instructional leadership is central to the development and execution of a vision and mission.

**Understanding.** It is thought that the construction and distribution of a vision and mission are integral parts of what principals do as instructional leaders. The mission and vision are typically focused on shared goals, and communicated as principals leading by example and setting high expectations for teaching and learning (Wallin & Newton, 2013). When principals are committed to instructional leadership, there is a need to define a school mission geared towards instruction (Hallinger & Lee, 2014). To understand instructional leadership, Hallinger (2005) speaks to the principals’ sense of purpose regarding setting clear goals focused on student

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learning. Principals may also create a vision and mission that support instructional leadership operating from a strong belief in instructional quality (DuPlessis, 2013).

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) reported that often principals' objectives regarding vision and mission are geared towards student performances and "include dates and staff responsibilities" (p. 227). In other cases, goals having to do with the vision and mission of a school are set so teachers can be made aware of their expected involvement in activities related to teaching and learning. Du Plessis (2013) identifies those activities as "matters of instruction, curriculum, and assessment" (p. S85). Some principals are encouraged to take visioning to the next level by calling on their strengths as instructional leaders. To achieve this goal, principals include the school community in their vision and mission. This is done by actively engaging the community in the values and principles of the teaching and learning that occurs within the school; in the literature, this is known as "prophetic instructional leadership" (Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008).

**Strategies.** The creation of a school's vision and mission often requires staff discussion, meetings, and reaching out to other stakeholders. Dialogue with a variety of parties, where vision and mission are concerned, allows for meaningful feedback in a collaborative space (Wallin & Newton, 2013). Principals are therefore expected to provide opportunities for such dialogue to occur. They are required to stimulate and facilitate conversation while changing policies and practices to match the created vision and mission of a school (Reitzug et al., 2008). To create the space for dialogue, principals use staff meetings, memos, face-to-face communication with teachers, and other informative tools (Harchar & Hyle, 1996). To create and share a successful school vision and mission, principals may also require some supports.

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*Supports.* Once principals formulate a plan for creating a school vision and mission, they can solicit support systems to carry out their goals. Some principals use strategic planning and organizing frameworks as supports to ensure that discussion of school vision and mission occurs in staff meetings. They use the organizational structure of the school to design school days, various another programming, and flexible teaching times (Wallin & Newton, 2013), all to promote their school’s vision and mission. Similarly, Harchar and Hyle (1996) discuss “collaborative structures,” in which teachers and other stakeholders are encouraged to contribute to the development of the vision and mission. Harchar and Hyle (1996) describe such structures as “fostering problem-solving, constructive discourse and ownership in an equitable school environment” (p. 27). Including staff in discussions, sharing the power to establish the goals of the school, and linking stakeholders’ values empowers others and encourages positive relationships (Harchar & Hyle, 1996), which in turn serve as supports in the creation and sharing of the vision and mission. Findings such as those of Neumerski (2012) and Rigby (2014) suggest that instructional leadership involves connection to teachers and others within the teaching and learning process; this connection acts as a support to the development of a school’s vision and mission.

In Ontario, the OLS has added a component to help guide schools in the creation of their vision and mission: the Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS). The strategy focuses on building infrastructures and assessing their impact on the teaching and learning process (OLS, 2013). School principals are encouraged to work with boards in aligning vision and mission to those infrastructures. Similarly, Cross and Rice (2000) highlight a standards-driven system in which principals can perform as instructional leaders; this system relies on the principal’s effort in committing to specific learning outcomes for their school. With that commitment, mission and

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vision are created as the result of a familiarity with “the theory of change that emphasizes the movement of standards-based programs” (Cross & Rice, 2000, p. 62). This type of structure forces principals to put academics first, which supports high expectations and trust along with effective communication. However, it is important to note that the creation and implementation of the vision and mission are not without their fair share of difficulties.

**Challenges.** The creation and execution of the vision and mission of a school come with some difficulties. To begin, a principal’s lack of capacity as an instructional leader can affect their ability to guide staff in creating overall goals for teaching and learning (Graczewski, Knudson, & Holtzman, 2009). For some principals, the evolution of their role challenges them regarding including others in the creation of the vision and mission. This exclusion, in turn, creates a disparity in belief, and hence a separation in goals. Additionally, there can be issues of autonomy as it relates to enacting a school’s vision and mission. When principals need staff to be active in the process, and individual participation declines, the result is fewer available supports (Wildy & Loudon, 2000). Principals also experience challenges with autonomy when directives come from executive teams or board officials. This challenge then affects the mission and vision alignment, especially when there is a difference in beliefs and understanding of the very aims of education (Townsend et al., 2013). In addition to the vision and mission, instructional leadership includes ideas of management.

**Management.** Management is one component of instructional leadership. To examine this element, I looked at it as per the thoughts and actions of school leaders. Arguably, monitoring and management are essential parts of the role principals play as instructional leaders within schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; OLF, 2013; Terosky, 2014). The management component of instructional leadership deals with aligning activities associated with

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curriculum/assessment with the supervision of the teaching and learning that happens in the school building. Hallinger (2005) outlines it this way:

...this dimension requires the principal to be deeply engaged in stimulating, supervising and monitoring teaching and learning in schools. Obviously, these functions demand that the principal has expertise in teaching and learning as well as a commitment to the school's improvement. (p. 226)

Consequently, management includes intelligent data analysis, modeling of classroom effective instructions, and knowledge of lesson content. Mitchell and Castle (2005) highlight principals' understanding of instructional leadership as being necessary for establishing an intellectual climate that speaks to the need for superior knowledge in content and instruction. Their understanding of management plays a major role in how principals approach instructional leadership work.

***Understanding.*** There are different ways to view management as it relates to instructional leadership. Instructional leaders can be perceived as supervisors, responsible for the teaching and learning in schools, and for ensuring teachers do everything necessary for student learning (Townsend et al., 2013). In that way, principals' interaction with teachers adds to the synonymizing of management and instructional leadership. Management covers aspects of instruction as well as curriculum coordination (Hallinger, 2005). Consequently, principals supervise, evaluate, and monitor student achievement. Management, it can be argued, addresses more of what principals do as instructional leaders than anything else. Traditionally, principals were administrative managers and not so many instructional leaders (Lemoine, McCormack, & Richardson, 2014). As time has progressed, however, it has become a common expectation that principals engage in a management aspect within their roles as instructional leaders. There is no

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doubt that ambiguity still exists when it comes to understanding management as a function of principals' work. Principals therefore, will act concerning how they understand their management role in instructional leadership.

*Strategies.* Management of instructional activities within schools requires principals to be present and available to oversee whatever happens in the teaching and learning environment. Some principals equate supervising with being present in the classroom and conducting walk-throughs, including those with peers. Management can also entail having a hands-on approach regarding lessons and terms of teaching approaches within the school (Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2009; Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, & Simieou III, 2010; Reitzug et al., 2008; Walker, 2009). Some principals see their role as linear, (taking actions that support a direct relationship between curricular/instruction to student test achievement) or organic, (actions that encourage inquiry about teaching and learning). This view is determined using available data to determine instruction within classrooms, aligning teaching with criterion tests, and monitoring lesson plans (Cross & Rice, 2000; Reitzug et al., 2008). Some principals follow curriculum management programs and teacher assessment rubrics, along with other procedures used to monitor learning progress (Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy, & Schmidt, 2013). Thought of as practical ways to conduct management effectively, principals consider this instructional leadership work.

Another practical strategy involves meeting with department heads after tests to discuss results and determine potential methods of improvement. Visiting curriculum writers, conducting walk-throughs, modeling lessons for teachers, providing professional opportunities and gathering feedback from teachers about teaching and learning are all essential to effective management (Grigsby et al., 2010). These tasks can be perceived and executed differently by different principals. Some principals prefer to monitor lesson plans and implement formal curricula as a

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means of ensuring teachers perform while using this management strategy to classify themselves as instructional leaders (Reitzug et al., 2008). Other principals use instructional leadership teams to monitor and report on the teaching and learning processes (Weiner, 2014). Consistent and efficient supports are vital to a principal's ability to perform management tasks successfully.

*Supports.* Principals are considered lead teachers within schools, so managing the teaching and learning is obviously a large part of their job. One efficient way to support managing instruction involves establishing collaborative practices within the working environment (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Hallinger & Murphy, 2012; Harchar & Hyle, 1996). This cooperative configuration supports team leadership structures, curriculum frameworks, and coaching potentials (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012). Other strategies include action investigations, staff development programs (Blasé & Blasé, 2000), and information networks (Spillane & Kim, 2012). For some principals, instructional networks are a necessary and helpful support. These networks are created to provide advice and information for knowledge development; the creation of these networks depends entirely on the needs of the school.

Similar to collaborative efforts, some principals depend on structures set up with distributive thinking. Spillane, Camburn, and Pareja (2007) found that when principals use distribution actions for administrative and other responsibilities within their schools, instruction and curriculum activities increased with half the amount of work. Notably, the academic leaders, coaches, supervisory officers, non-formal leaders (like teachers), and even students in Spillane and Kim's (2012) study about instructional networks provided support for principals in instructional processes using valuable advice and information. Principals established collaborated distribution that co-performed the work they were expected to do, allowing capacity building and time for instructional practices. Some principals rely on supports created because of

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community involvement, as this allows them to access external help through grant writing opportunities and fundraising (Wallin & Newton, 2012). Additionally, principals “creatively organize internal supports to share resources that provide professional development and utilize targeted staffing initiatives to achieve local goals” (Wallin & Newton, 2012 p. 26).

Simultaneously, some principals promote a “learning imperative,” which is an idea grounded in learning rather than managing, focusing on the need to lead learning (Terosky, 2014). With this type of structure, principals can navigate priorities, establish a learning focus, support professional learning, and make informed decisions.

Within the Ontario context, principals use various government policies and documents as supports for their instructional program. The OLS and the OLF are used to guide and help principals design and implement professional learning and development within schools (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). As directives about adhering to laws and policies normally come from school boards to principals, board officials and superintendents are chiefs in the process of instructional leadership. Honig (2012) explored the role of district leaders providing job-embedded supports for principals’ learning, ensuring principals develop the skills necessary to be effective at leading their instructional program. He put the spotlight on role creation to promote system supports. Support included school boards ensuring there was help available for principals as they practiced being instructional leaders; this is known as a “Principal Support Framework” (Fink & Silverman, 2014). It will likely come as no surprise that when it comes to management, there are many barriers to implementation.

**Challenges.** There are some challenges associated with ensuring management occurs within the instructional program. The issue of work intensification is one of the greatest challenges to management in instructional leadership. Pollock et al. (2014) demonstrated that in

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recent years the volume of work principals are expected to perform has increased; they term this phenomenon “work intensification.” Because of principals’ workload, time becomes a huge problem. Having “the time and capacity to lead learning” (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012, p. 17) is tough, and this is considered one of the biggest challenges facing principals today. While principals are more than willing to perform duties such as classroom walk-throughs, they are simultaneously bombarded with all the other aspects of their work, and so some tasks are inevitably left undone.

Another challenge faced by principals has to do with the issue of autonomy on the part of their teachers; this often happens when principals immerse themselves in the learning processes in classrooms (Timperley, 2005). If teachers feel their principal is not as knowledgeable and skillful as they are regarding instruction, they can be adverse to the idea of being managed concerning teaching and learning (Harchar & Hyle, 1996). The barrier associated with lack of knowledge is related to expertise principals are expected to possess (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012).

A final challenge that affects principals’ ability to manage the school program involves a misunderstanding of instructional leadership. Having a lack of understanding of what instructional leadership is as a concept and what it requires makes the practice of managing difficult (Mitchell & Castle, 2005). This lack of clarity forces principals to shy away from ideas classified under “managing the program,” such as entering classrooms and providing constructive feedback. Like management, creating a positive learning environment is another essential aspect of instructional leadership.

**Positive learning environment.** Learning happens in an atmosphere set up to complement success. As a component of instructional leadership, Hallinger (2005) classifies a positive learning environment as “promoting a positive school learning climate that includes

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functions such as protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers as well as providing incentives for learning” (p. 226). Krug (1992) states that the principals’ primary job is “motivating people by creating the conditions under which people want to do what needs to be done” (p. 433). The environment helps to foster a sense of shared purpose, and so an attitude of excitement for learning that supports both teachers and students; this is the responsibility of the principal (Krug, 1992).

***Understanding.*** For some principals, instructional leadership involves being able to provide a positive learning environment within a school. Townsend, Acker-Hocevar, Ballenger, and Place (2013) identify a learning environment as the place in which all the activities of schooling happens; i.e., the school grounds and the school building. O’Donnell and White (2005)’s study concluded that improvement of a school’s learning environment might help improve students’ achievements while developing higher levels of both risks taking and trust among teachers. In essence, instructional leaders create “an atmosphere that supports efficient and engaging teaching that corresponds with students” (Quinn, 2002, p. 459). This understanding of instructional leadership establishes the need to focus and act on making both teachers and students comfortable at school. This comfort relies on the strategies employed by principals.

***Strategies.*** Principals lead their instructional programs using varied strategies. A positive learning environment is essentially built on honesty and relationships (Crum et al., 2009). Strategies used to establish positive learning environments are based on principals’ school contexts, highlighting the creativity of each leader while addressing the needs of their environment (Krug, 1992). Strategies chosen by different principals are also based on each principal’s understanding of instructional leadership and the role the learning environment plays regarding instructional leadership. A school’s learning environment can also support

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collaboration with stakeholders (Lunenburg & Lunenburg, 2013; O’Doherty & Ovando, 2013).

To construct a positive atmosphere, research has proposed varied techniques. One technique focuses on principals using “capacity building” (Hallinger, 2010).

A positive learning environment is established when principals believe in capacity building and encourage improvement in teachers’ instructional skills. To build capacity and improve skills, professional development (PD) is often offered in schools. In his 2013 study, Du Plessis identified providing PD for staff as one of the key components of principals’ understanding of instructional leadership. Comparably, Quinn (2002) believes instructional leadership is taught and, therefore, can be learned. The notion, then, is that the promotion and provision of PD activities for teachers will foster a positive learning environment. To improve the learning environment within a school, principals see their role as leading by example; to this end, they may offer PD for teachers and seek out PD experiences for themselves as well (Mitchelle & Castle, 2005). PD not only encourages learning but also makes the principal an asset to the teachers when they need direction and constructive feedback. To achieve a positive learning environment through PD, researchers suggest training and support through in-service educational experiences for teachers. Additionally, some principals delegate curriculum and instructional responsibilities to leadership teams (Grigsby et al., 2010). This strategy validates the evidence that communication and PD are effective instructional leadership practices (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). In the Ontario context, instructional leadership is embedded in the role principals are expected to assume in schools as is evident from the OLF. Instructional leadership entails ongoing, two-way collaboration within the educational environment through the creation of a positive learning space (Ontario: Leading Education, 2005). To enact the strategies above, principals require some supports.

**Supports.** Principals need facilitators and strong supports to create and maintain a positive learning environment. Some principals restructure programming to benefit student learning (Wallin & Newton, 2013); this involves flexible timetabling and providing teachers with preparation time. In Ontario, principals are encouraged to use the OLF document as a support for establishing a positive learning environment. The provincial document explores building relationships, developing people, and the organization as essential themes or dimensions in leadership. With this knowledge, principals are expected to create activities that align with the mentioned OLF domains. One research team believes instructional leadership is effective through mental models (Ruff & Shoho, 2005), which are a means of communicating aspects of the cognitive structure or mental processes of the handling of information. Conversely, mental models can “decrease the efficacy of the principal as well as assumptions promoting organizational effectiveness throughout the school” (Ruff & Shoho, 2005 p. 574). This type of structure clarifies meaning, which promotes communication and trust. Although there are many benefits to creating a positive learning environment, there are challenges faced by principals when it comes to attempting to implement the strategies discussed in this section.

**Challenges.** There are many problems associated with relationship building and trust. Principals have to advocate for open communication (Ediger, 2014), as a lack of communication could cause mistrust and ultimately result in teachers who chose be to uninvolved at school. Some principals experience tension among staff arising from a lack of communication and dialogue (Graczewski et al., 2009). The key to the challenge of building a positive learning environment lies in the relationships that exist in the building: negative relationships and teacher cynicism can create isolation, negativity, and defeatism, along with teacher resistance (Wallace

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Foundation, 2013). Instructional leadership work is difficult when there is no trust, and there are no structures in place to make provision for teamwork.

Principals may face additional challenges in the specific area of supporting PD. Timperley (2005) points out that “developing internal systems for promoting professional learning (PD) that impacts on student achievement present a multifaceted challenge for school leaders and maybe an unrealistic one if not supported by the necessary expertise” (p. 16). The leaders in the Timperley (2005) study also faced issues when creating a professional learning context where the staff pushed back because they did not think they needed the PD. Quinn (2002) identified challenges associated with principals having to provide resources for PD activities. The lack of availability regarding internal and external professional activities is a huge issue for principals who are expected to promote PD. Relationships are necessary for instructional leadership practices, and so staffing and resource provision are required elements as well.

**Staffing and resources.** As elements of instructional leadership, staffing the instructional program and providing resources are essential to teaching and learning in schools. Some principals view instructional leadership as having to do with making decisions about staffing and other resources related to the learning process. Like the previously explored elements, for this study, I look at the thoughts and actions of principals as they relate to instructional leadership.

**Understanding.** For some, instructional leadership is about providing the necessary conditions for learning: resources and great teachers. Horng and Loeb (2010) introduced “organizational management” as one structure through which to think about and explore instructional leadership. Within that structure, principals “strategically hire, support and retain excellent teachers while developing or removing less efficient ones” (Horng & Loeb, 2010, p.

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67); this opens principals up to various activities like intentional hires and resources planning. In 2013, Du Plessis determined that instructional leadership should be thought of as a principle used to guide principals and other leaders in making decisions. The OLF (2013), meanwhile, identifies staffing the instructional program as one component of instructional leadership. Decisions made in regards to resources and supports for staff are a crucial part of the process.

***Strategies.*** Principals are entrusted with providing the best learning situations for teachers and students within schools. In Ontario, principals' work is mediated by legislation, policies, and various amendments to the provincial Education Act (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). This affects work expectations and spotlights the "how" of instructional leadership practices in Ontario schools. The OLF (2013) suggests principals recruit teachers who are capable, skillful, and willing to adhere to a desired vision and mission. The document also outlines the importance of the retention of such teachers through "providing support and time for collaboration, sharing leadership, creating a shared vision and building trusting relationships" (OLF, 2013, p. 13). In addition, principals also have to adhere to laws and policies supporting hiring. Regulation 247/12 once Bill 107 outlines the need for principals to contend with seniority hiring versus 'best fit' candidate. Some principals act strategically, placing stronger teachers in lower performing classes with constant supports, as per teaching staff' requests (Clark, 2013). In 2010, Horng and Loeb addressed the need to have resources allocated to certain areas, which requires organizational management on the part of instructional leaders. There are also some leaders who "provide resources and supports for the redesign of [instructional] programs" (Blasé & Blasé, 2000, p. 138). This type of planning requires collaboration with teachers; the need for supports is critical for these strategies.

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*Supports.* Securing any resources is often an ordeal that requires strategic decision-making. For staffing and resources, support for principals come for the most part, from laws and policies provided by the province. The process of hiring and retaining teachers is supported by various laws and policies, which dictate the allocation of other resources mandated by school boards. As board members are thought of as decision makers, and principals are thought of as policy enforcers, the relationship between the two groups should be a mutually beneficial one (Pierce, 2001). It has been suggested that board officials and superintendents share leadership with principals, much as principals do with teachers. In Ontario, Regulation 274/12 determines hiring practices, and 77.7% of principals say this policy affects their work (Pollock et al., 2014). Regulation 274/12 created a tier system for hiring teachers for both temporary and permanent positions. While it has its challenges for principals, its fairness supports interviewing and hiring decisions. The Education Act is also responsible for other legislation, such as the Ontario College of Teachers Act, S.O., 1996, c. 12. (regulations made under the Act), Employment Standards Act, S.O., 2000, c. 41, and the Teaching Profession Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. T-2. (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015), all of which have to do with hiring. The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) Act outlines the ethical and moral conduct of teachers. As a regulatory body, it helps principals determine how teachers are expected to behave both as temporary and permanent hires. Similarly, the Employment Standards Act “provides the minimum standards for most employees working in Ontario. It sets out the rights and responsibilities of employees and employers in most Ontario workplaces” (Ministry of Labour, 2016 p.1) which includes the use of unions that often works with principals in the interest of staff. School boards and subsequently principals ensure hiring processes comply with the Act. Lastly, the Teaching Profession Act outlines the expectations of being and acting as a teacher. The Act provides similar information

to the OCT Act. These laws and policies determine how principals behave in regards to staffing, which, ultimately, can create problems.

**Challenges.** Staffing and resources are affected by both external and internal issues, making the hiring process challenging. Some principals face shrinking budgets, which makes it hard to hire and retain the staff they need (Wallin & Newton, 2013). Bounded by laws and policies, some principals find themselves restrained from hiring whom they would like. Ontario Regulation 264/12, amended to become Regulation 148/13, dictates hiring practices and is one of the many policies that direct principals' decisions on hiring (Pollock et al., 2014).

Another challenge faced by principals on staffing has to do with performance conversations. Le Fevre and Robinson (2015) found that “principals struggled to find respectful ways [to deal with] challenging staff as well as with teacher’s taken-for-granted assumptions, and [had a] limited robust examination of competing views about the nature of the problem and how to resolve it” (p. 86). As a result, principals are better off retaining good teachers while finding suitable replacements for those who are not performing adequately.

Throughout the previous sections, four elements of instructional leadership (vision and mission, management, positive learning environment, and staffing and resources) were examined based on the thoughts and actions of school principals. The section that follows will examine popular strategies, supports and challenges (thoughts and actions) that affect all the four components of instructional leadership.

### **Common Strategies**

The ideas of instructional leadership practices have varied meaning for both principals and researchers alike. There is no doubt that strong instructional leadership is necessary for school success (Naicker, Chikoko, & Mthiyane, 2014). Therefore, it is essential to understand

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and explore instructional leadership practices. The literature emphasizes that context and need determine specific instructional leadership practices (Naicker et al., 2014; Ng, Nguyen, Wong, & Choy, 2015). In this section of the review, there is an emphasis on several strategies that appear within the four components. These include professional development, capacity building, and building relationships. To begin, I will look at professional development.

**Professional development.** Understanding professional development (PD) and its effectiveness are important parts of a principal's knowledge bank. Professional development (a term often used interchangeably with "professional learning" and other terms such as "staff development") is the basis for learners' development (Mizell, 2010). PD intends to promote ongoing learning and development of the professional – in this case, educators. Principals depend on teachers to carry out day-to-day learning imperatives regarding students, and Mizell (2010) points out that "professional development is the only strategy school systems have to strengthen educators' performance levels" (p. 4). With that perspective, instructional leaders are smart to have PD as one of their main strategies for practice. Given that there are multiple types of PD, it is necessary for principals to be strategic and consider the needs of their schools to promote and encourage the most effective PD possible. Pena-Lopez's (2009) report for The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on effective teaching and learning environments outlines the following types of professional development:

- Courses and series of workshops (e.g., on subject matters, methods and other education-related topics)
- Education conferences or seminars (at which teachers and researchers present their research results and discuss education issues)
- Qualification program (e.g., a degree program)

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- Observation visits to other schools
- Participation in a network of teachers formed specifically for purposes of PD
- Individual or collaborative research on a topic of professional interest
- Mentoring and peer observation and coaching, as part of a formal school arrangement
- Reading professional literature (e.g., journals, evidence-based papers, thesis papers)
- Engaging in informal dialogue with peers on how to improve teaching

These types of PD, also linked with Mizell (2010), have been demonstrated to be effective, which highlights that PD can be both formal and informal and that one-time workshops have a little long-term impact if there is no follow-up by principals. Instructional leaders choose PD that supports learning outcomes for both teachers and students; researchers argue that PD has a powerful impact on teaching staff, and this impact will, therefore, affect student achievement (Mizell, 2010; Pena-Lopez, 2009; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2008). Principals who are instructional leaders are aware of PD's effectiveness when the implementation is a collegial community focus. Timperley et al. (2008) mention that "findings from many studies suggest that participation in a professional community with one's colleagues is an integral part of professional learning that impacts positively on students" (p. 19). Subsequently, PD can be viewed as an extended aspect of instructional leadership practice and is embedded within all the components mentioned earlier in the chapter. Like teachers, principals also participate in PD, both with and without staff members. Principals require PD that supports their roles and responsibilities – in particular on those of instructional leaders (Mizell, 2010). Similar to PD, capacity building is noted to have positive effects on the practices and is fully encompassed in the components of instructional leadership.

**Capacity building.** A principal cannot be solely responsible for the instructional development in a school. As principals learn, they can foster learning and leadership in others; this is known as capacity building. Capacity building “strives to find better and more efficient ways for different actors to access and use knowledge in local educational contexts to achieve desired outcomes” (OECD, 2012, pg. 2). To support leadership and instructional effectiveness in Ontario schools, the Ontario Ministry of Education established a capacity building series, produced by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. The series, first published in September of 2007, is still being distributed in schools today. The OECD (2012) speaks to the horizontal dimension of the capacity building, where experiences and knowledge are shared efficiently for success. Instructional leaders are in a position to provide such experience and expertise to teachers and often do so through PD. “Systems with strong school leaders deliberately seek to build a cohort of exceptional leaders both through ongoing formal training and through venues where they can update their skills through research-based knowledge and also by sharing experiences with others in similar positions” (OECD, 2012, p. 4). One crucial matter in the capacity building comes from the training of school leaders and the potential autonomy given them in their role to train others. As leaders of learning, principals can build capacity by developing a team to cultivate effective instruction, and by nurturing leadership in others. Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, and Portin (2010) speak of capacity building as requiring a learning leader who communicates the business of their school, allocates resources, and builds relationships. Trust is needed to strengthen capacity and this confidence comes from building relationships.

**Building relationships.** As leaders within a school, principals have to communicate and model social behaviours, resulting in a need to build relationships. “The educational leader needs

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to recognize that relationships are fundamental, and an intrinsic part of being and existence of self that cannot be separated” (Rieg & Marcoline, 2008, p. 1). Lunenburg (2010) reports that 70 to 80% of a principal’s time is spent engaging in interpersonal communication. Leaders use relationship building for many purposes, one of which is to support the development of teams. In-depth knowledge of staff members can be helpful for principals when it comes to creating personalized teaching and learning programs. As part of their administrative role, principals also seek to build external contacts with other principals, school board members, legislators, and Ministry personnel. Additionally, human or ‘soft’ skills are necessary as principals spend lots of time interacting with, students, parents, and other stakeholders (Lunenburg, 2010). Human or soft skills according to Gillard (2009) include the interpersonal nature of leadership, which involves “communication, negotiation, conflict management and persuasion” (p. 725). These soft skills are necessary for relationship building even though relationship building is not necessarily an easy skill to master. However, it is of vital importance, since “if relationships improve, things get better” (Fullan, 2002, p. 7). Positive relationships lay the foundation for a climate of trust, especially regarding addressing the needs of teachers, where principals can “seek out and provide differentiated opportunities for their teachers to learn and grow” (Louis et al., 2010, p. 86). As an instructional leadership practice, building relationships serve as a means to focus on goal attainment.

Attaining specific goals is dependent on the climate of a learning environment.

Relationship building contributes to an atmosphere of communication; it promotes thoughtful discussion where school leaders can navigate the needs of staff (Habegger, 2008). As a result, “principals consistently remind teachers that they are engaged in practicing, studying and refining the craft of teaching through the sharing of latest readings, action research and inquiry

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groups [principals] model being the lead learner” (Fullan, 2002, p. 8). Professional conversations and the use of investigations empower educators to try new approaches to learning, which then maintains a culture of ongoing improvement. Taking initiatives allows principals to value and respect the expertise teachers bring to a learning community (Habegger, 2008).

There are many ways in which principals are taking measures that promote instructional practices. Even with the continued lack of clarity about instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005) and its position in the working life of school leaders, there are still common sentiments about best practices. As it relates to strategies, principals can build relationships, provide PD, strengthen capacity in others, and do their best to provide and maintain a positive learning environment. School leaders benefit from assistance, but the implementation and use of specific supports to maintain instructional leadership practice are often left up to the individual principal.

### **Common Supports**

Principals should be supported and guided in the process of teaching and learning if they are to be instructional leaders. Researchers have spent considerable time examining the professional relationships that exist between principals and their teaching staff (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Hardy, 2010; Neumerski, 2012; Terosky, 2014). As well as principals’ relationships with other academic leaders like coaches, board officials, and the community (Spillane & Kim, 2012). Principals are expected to use available supports and structures to encourage the development of instructional leadership practices. The supports examined in this section are also rooted within the four components of instructional leadership. Such supports stem from data, teachers working in collaborative teams, and community partnerships, including those with experts in various fields, the community, school boards, and superintendents.

**Use of data.** Data collection and use are common supports to instructional practice among school leaders. As a result of the accountability era focus on test scores, many school systems have adopted a strict regime, using data to support their instructional programs (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2015). Principals have been required to determine what types of data to collect, analyze, and use to drive decision making (Luo, 2015). Knowledge of and exposure to data literacy are therefore critical requirements for principals expected to use data effectively in instructional leadership practices. To accomplish this, some principals initiate data teams and guide them in developing data-driven instructional systems (DDIS). This type of framework includes collecting data and using it to design an instructional program aligned to students' needs; data reflection occurs after program alignment, followed by a developmental feedback process (Halverson et al., 2015). Research finds that an ongoing cycle of data use is an excellent support for an instructional program, especially if the data is used to identify what motivates student achievement (Hamilton, et. al., 2009). As a means of support for instructional leaders, the use of data provides clear direction for not only the principal but also all those involved in teaching and learning. Habegger (2008) alludes to the fact that data use “encourages daily collaboration and dialogue about best practices” (p. 45), allowing principals to practice a holistic approach. The collaboration created through the use of data teams serves as another support for principals' instructional leadership practices.

**Collaborative teams.** To achieve learning goals within schools, principals sometimes design collaborative teams. Within the last decade, the use of collaborative teams, such as professional learning communities (PLC), has dominated the areas of teaching and learning development. Principals' roles in the creation and operation of these teams are critical:

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The need for clarity and support in the collaborative process extends to the active participation of the school principal, who must understand, accept, and carry out her or his responsibilities for establishing the cultural, structural, and procedural conditions needed for successful team collaboration. (Taylor, Hallam, Charlton, & Wall, 2014, p. 28)

The school leader is ultimately held accountable for the orchestration and functioning of collaborative teams. As one support for instructional leadership, teams like PLCs allow school leaders to have “working time” for teachers. This time provides for examination of existing or needed group structures, as well as aligning the school’s vision and mission to the team’s mandate (Groth & Bennett-Schmidt, 2013). Collaborative teams also allow school leaders to build leadership capacity in teachers, to establish an infrastructure that encourages school improvement (Wang, 2016). Collaborative teams can also include community partnerships.

**Community partnerships.** As a means of supporting an instructional program, school principals develop relationships with the community. The benefits of community interactions concerning teaching and learning are numerous (Khalifa, 2012). While the instructional practices of principals may focus on learning, Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) point to the neglect of adult help for students in situations where the opportunity may not be provided. Principals are therefore encouraged to consider various community partnerships to build the adult presence in the lives of their students. As they relate to supporting an instructional program, leaders use the resources community partners can provide; these supports come in the form of educational programs unique to specific areas (Aceves, 2014). Community partners and agencies (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs) can handle certain aspects of learning disabilities, and issues related to social-

economic status. Shaari and Hung's (2013) study identified the necessity of strong school-community ties:

[Academy Formation] AF highlights the importance of well-defined and well-designed structures that enable relationships between schools and external agencies. AF helped strengthen and develop other linkages by bringing partners in the relationships into a cohesive unit intended to nurture the same passion. AF provided the opportunity for positive continuity, which we have already discussed as vital to learners. It linked them to passionate practitioners and relevant networks, afforded them consistent interactions and uninterrupted relationships that, in turn, assisted in developing a motivated community. AF include a focused trajectory for learners, that is, the ability to set realistic goals towards achieving specific objectives. (p. 30-31)

A focus on shared goals makes it easier for principals to use community partnerships as a support for their instructional program. The variety of supports used by principals in their instructional practices depends upon many facets, so the list explored in this chapter is necessarily limited. Principals' thoughts on barriers to their instructional practices as leaders also will vary based on things studied in this research.

### **Common Challenges**

When principals take on the role of instructional leader, there is no question they experience difficulties enacting their various responsibilities. This section reviews challenges encountered by principals as they practice instructional leadership. There is no doubt the work is inspiring. However, "in fast-paced and uncertain environments, principals are expected to meet competing expectations about priorities, decision-making processes, and school outcome"

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(Wildy & Louden, 2000, p. 173). Two of the areas commonly described in the literature as challenging for principals are time and budget.

**Time.** With only twenty-four hours in a day, principals have a limited amount of time in which to perform their instructional duties. Grissom, et. al., (2013) identified time constraints as a major challenge principals experience in doing instructional leadership work. Time continues to be a challenge for principals (Pollock et al., 2014). The problem with time is two-fold: there is not enough time in a principal's day to perform the expected instructional duties, and certain duties take an excessive amount of time, preventing principals from focusing on other tasks. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) described "time to lead" as one of three barriers that affect principals' practice as instructional leaders. Specifically, the authors discussed the lack of time for principals to perform tasks classified as instructional, such as managing the instructional program and coordinating the curriculum (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, 2005). Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2010) found that it can be difficult for principals to keep up with instructional leadership tasks during the day because of the demands of meetings and various crises. Principals are no doubt stretched for time, especially in the area of instructional leadership work (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015; Pollock et al., 2014). Hallinger and Murphy (2013) suggest the following for principals as they step away from instructional leadership and towards leadership for learning:

Thus, leadership for learning is not embodied in a dramatic presentation to the faculty on effective teaching or the announcement of a new curriculum enhancement. Rather, it is evident in the principal's daily, intentionally directed activities that improve conditions for learning and create coherence across classrooms in the school. Thus, instructional leadership is enacted in the hallways during conversations, when taking tickets at the

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lunchroom door, in meetings with staff, during staff development days, and in PTA meetings. All of these represent venues in which the instructional leader helps create a coherent picture that connects purposes to activities and decisions (p. 15).

While time is certainly a challenge, if principals fully understand their role as instructional leaders, have a clear vision and mission, and stay focused on their learning goals, time can be “created.” Hallinger and Murphy (2013) say: “aligning actions to one’s personal vision is... the first step toward creating more time” (p. 15). To create more time, some districts in the United States have adopted a school administration project that calls for a school administration manager (SAM). Walker (2009) examines and reports on districts that separate the work of principals into two categories: managerial and instructional. In the US districts in question, managerial work was given to the SAM, which allowed principals to focus on instructional leadership work. Interestingly, student supervision and discipline, as well as parent and district meetings, were classified as managerial work (Walker, 2009), and delegating those to the SAM freed up time for principals to “focus on the curriculum, instruction and assessment” (p. 217). Added time, according to Walker, has afforded principals the opportunity to become more involved with staff and students, increasing collaboration and the prospect of sharing leadership responsibilities. Many school systems have tried to alleviate the challenge presented by time by making the best use of the time available. Like time, the budget can pose a barrier to the successful practice of instructional leadership work.

**Budget.** The running of an instructional program takes many resources, and this costs money. Funding for elementary schools in Ontario is provided by the Ministry of Education’s Grants for Student Needs (GNS). “The GSN supports funding for the classroom, school leadership and operations, specific student-related priorities and local management by school

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boards. The GSN's purpose is to help the system achieve key goals, especially those of "Achieving Excellence, Ontario's renewed vision for education" (Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 2). Using a specific formula, the Ministry of Education announces any adjustments to education funding based on factors including some students and the learning needs of students with learning difficulties like special needs and English language learners. This formula, established in 1997, helps to create equity regarding obtaining resources for young learners in Ontario (People for Education, 2015). However, schools in Ontario are forced to fundraise to support students' enrichment, engagement and to develop learning experiences (People for Education, 2013). The formulated approach to funding Ontario schools is of course not sufficient. The Ministry of Education has provided guidelines for schools to source monies for specific supplies and equipment even though there are disparities in what can be purchased (People for Education, 2015). This permission speaks to the insufficient nature of the monies provided. School principals, therefore, are challenged not only regarding spending money on appropriate materials as per the Ministry's standards but also regarding sourcing additional monies for supporting their instructional programs.

The number of elementary schools in Ontario that report having to fundraise for learning resources speaks to the lack of adequate funding from the provincial government. The People for Education (2015) found that 47% of Ontario elementary schools need to source monies above and beyond the budget allocated to them by the province, and of those schools, 94% do so to raise money for technology, 25% for online resources, and 12% for textbooks. The budget challenge continues when principals have to consider whether their community and population of learners can support funding efforts. The common strategies, supports, and challenges previously

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explained are viewed as thoughts and actions that determine how principals approach instructional leadership work.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this dissertation breaks instructional leadership down into four components: vision and mission, positive learning environment, management, and staffing and resources. After reflecting on the literature, I believe that the four components listed above are useful in viewing instructional leadership in an Ontario context. My conceptual framework is employed to explore how principals approach instructional leadership work. A conceptual framework is defined as a “network of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon” (Jabareen, 2009, p. 51). Within my framework, the components of instructional leadership are influenced by the thoughts and actions of principals to explain an interpretive method to the social idea of the phenomenon.

To understand instructional leadership, I examined the work of many researchers to look for similarities upon which I could build a conceptual framework. In Ontario, principals are guided by the OLF (Ministry of Education, 2013), which includes instructional leadership as part of what principals are required to do (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Looking at the OLF, it can be inferred that principals’ work overlaps with their role and duties as school leaders (OLF, 2013), which in fact can determine the attitude and abilities of an instructional leader. There is a systematic relationship between a principal’s work, their thoughts and actions, and their instructional leadership practices. Pollock and Hauseman’s study noted that principals’ work includes many facets, and instructional leadership is a fraction of what they are required to do as part of their role. In Hallinger’s (2005) reconceptualized model of instructional leadership, there is a focus on creating a shared vision, developing a climate of high expectation, monitoring

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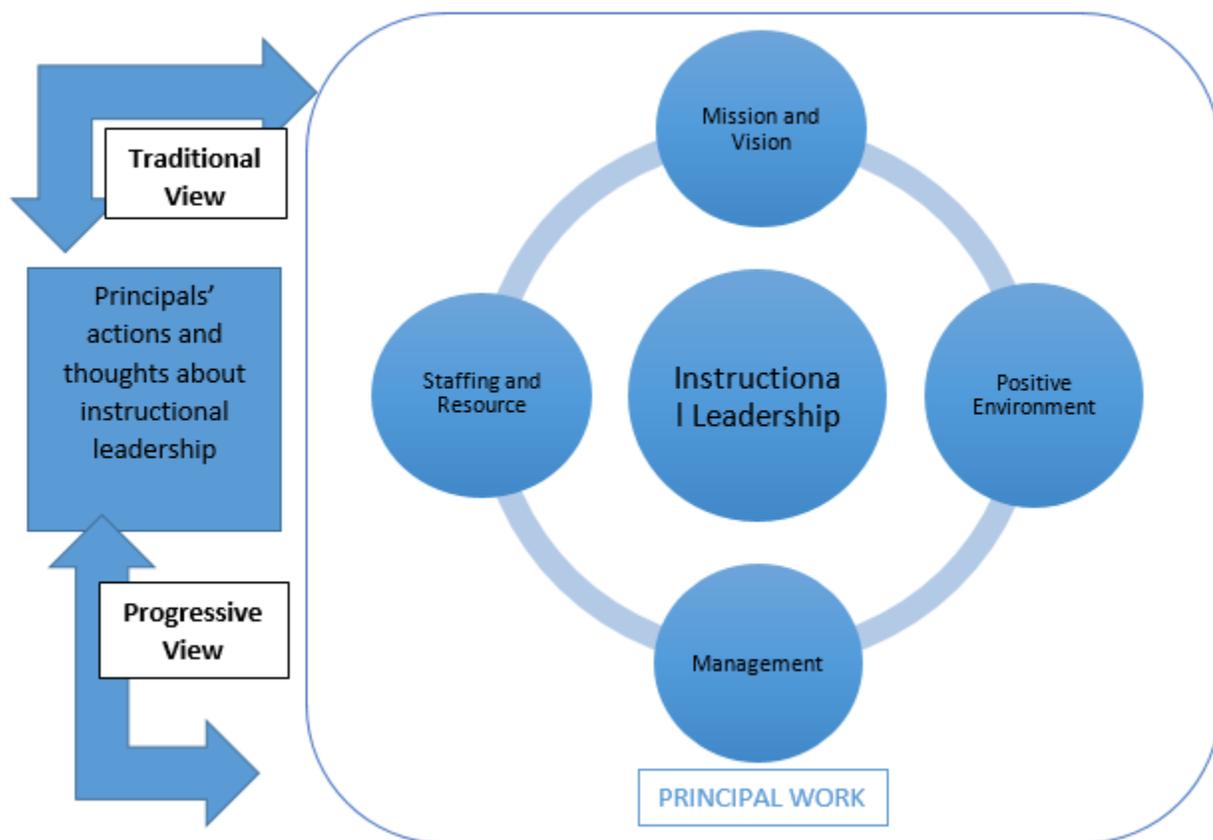
curriculum, organizing activities for instruction, and a variety of other strategies. Reitzug et al. (2008) identify four instructional leadership conceptions: relational, linear, organic, and prophetic. The work of Reitzug et al. highlights principals' behaviours similar to the work of Hallinger and Murphy, (1985; 2013) and Hallinger (2005). Additionally, Kurg (1992) identifies components of instructional leadership as including a mission and vision, management strategies, and creating a positive learning environment. The consistency in the literature on instructional leadership aspects is the basis for my naming mission and vision, positive learning environment, management, and staff and resources essential components of instructional leadership.

The components of instructional leadership are all defined for use within this study. The creation of a school mission and vision is one of the foundational expectations of school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004). Within the mold of instructional leadership, the establishment of a mission and vision is essential to the development of teaching and learning. The mission and vision shape the climate or environment that exists within a school community and work to create an environment that promotes positive learning (Du Plessis, 2013). The vision and mission are necessary since researchers have identified a shift in focus from teaching to learning (Du Plessis, 2013; Lunenburg & Lunenburg, 2013). Additionally, promoting a positive school learning environment makes for a more active step forward to instructional leadership practices (Tan, 2012). To have a positive learning environment, a principal must promote and encourage professional development (Mestry et al., 2013), as well as build relationships, both professionally and socially (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). Management encompasses establishing instructional order and discipline regarding time and effort (Du Plessis, 2013), organizing and supervising a curriculum (Hallinger, 2005), and monitoring assessment (Townsend et al., 2013) for continued improvement efforts. Staffing and resources, within the framework, captures the

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importance of recruiting and retaining effective teachers (OLF, 2013) and providing high-quality teachers with well-needed resources (Horng & Loeb, 2010). Staffing and resources also allude to practical ideas regarding what principals do to support learning within the school building with other tangible materials available to support learning within a school. It is important to note that the components of instructional leadership are fluid and so principals' thoughts and actions are not limited to one component. The following diagram depicts the components of instructional leadership with an assumption that principals' actions and thoughts affect the work they do as instructional leaders.

*Figure 1. Framework for principals' approach to instructional leadership work*



The "actions and thoughts" mentioned in Figure 1 include principals' understanding of instructional leadership, the strategies they employ, the supports they use, as well as how they

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deal with the challenges they face. With their approach, principals can have either a traditional, progressive or a combination of both views as they approach instructional leadership work. This framework will help guide my aim of obtaining perspectives on how principals approach instructional leadership work.

### **Summary**

This chapter looked at existing literature on the concept of instructional leadership. The main ideas involve the view of instructional leadership as a leadership style or as an agent for learning change. As I explored the literature, I identified the principals' role as essentially that of lead learner and manager. I suggest that instructional leadership can be classified as either a typology of leadership (i.e. the progressive view) or as an aspect of every principals' work, (i.e. the traditional). I explored the common components of instructional leadership: mission and vision, management, positive learning environment, and staffing and resources. I then related these components to principals' thoughts and actions; specifically, to their definition of instructional leadership, and the strategies, supports, and challenges they use and face. Next, I looked at common instructional leadership practices, supports, and challenges. Finally, I explained the conceptual framework used to explore the topic chosen for my dissertation: how principals approach instructional leadership work.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Questions surrounding how to examine various phenomena require careful consideration. Typically, research studies involve the identification of a problem and the subsequent selection of a suitable framework through which to examine that problem. Marshall (2008) notes the importance of having a clear understanding of a problem before “deciding questions of methodology” (p. 91).

For this study, I was motivated by my curiosity about the work principals do as instructional leaders. Specifically, I was interested in having principals share their ideas, experiences, and attitudes about their work. In particular, I am focused on finding out how elementary principals in Ontario approach instructional leadership work. Making the choice to use this type of study was an easy decision given the ability of qualitative research to enable the researcher to gain understanding from and find meaning in human perspectives and experiences (Gay et al., 2009). To fully explore ideas about principals’ instructional leadership practices, it seemed appropriate and necessary for me to speak to principals themselves.

This chapter outlines a methodological approach I took to examine how principals understand instructional leadership work; and this includes the philosophical foundations upon which this study is grounded along with a description of the selected methodology and the data collection and analysis processes it entailed. The methodology chapter will close with a discussion addressing possible issues of trustworthiness and my stance, as the researcher, through the use of reflexivity.

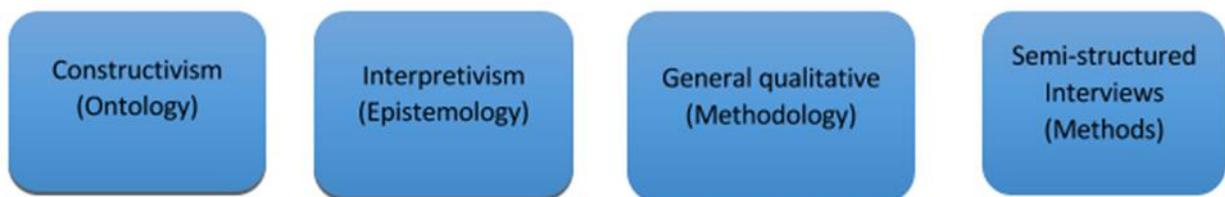
#### **Philosophical Foundations**

My rationale for choosing a methodological framework to examine how elementary principals in Ontario approach instructional leadership work stemmed from my view of the

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world among other things. As noted by Creswell (2007) choosing a methodology is one way that a researcher conceptualized the process through which to conduct a study. Qualitative studies, in particular, can begin with a worldview, an assumption, or a particular theoretical lens (Creswell, 2007). Due to the nature of the questions generated from my interest in principals' instructional leadership work coupled with my intent to be a principal at the time the research was conducted, I employed qualitative research methods in my inquiry. Qualitative research methodology is best when looking at 'how' questions as well as exploring individual experiences (Brikci & Green, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Figure 2 below broadly represents the overall methodological approach I adopted for this study.

*Figure 2: Philosophical foundation underpinning the study*



The graphic represents the directional decisions I made in constructing this research. My ontological stance is from a constructivism mindset, where I understand the world through building and creating experiences. To further examine my interest in principals' instructional leadership work, my epistemology is interpretivism, where experiences are interpreted. The use of a general qualitative methodology is an appropriate approach which incorporates semi-structured interviews as a method.

**Constructivism.** Researchers use philosophical assumptions to guide the studies they conduct (Creswell, 2007). Ontology is a branch of philosophy that asks questions about the nature of reality, and one ontological theory commonly used in qualitative research is constructivism. Constructivism asks researchers to embrace the notion of multiple realities and to

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consider the possibility that reality is constructed from each's unique set of experiences.

Constructivism is used in qualitative research design to make sense of the worlds in which study participants live and work. For my study, therefore, I used constructivism as a conceptual framework to make meaning from the experiences of individual instructional leaders.

Creswell (2007) outlines the need for the constructivist researcher to pay particular attention to relative interaction, the subjective meanings of the worldviews of others, and the complexity of those views to focus on interpretation. In his work, Brown (2009) highlights the (seemingly contradictory) need for both objectivism and constructivism within the realm of education. Since this study focuses on individual school leaders' perspective on instructional leadership work, understanding the individual and multiple realities participants brought to the table was essential.

**Interpretivism.** Whereas ontology is the branch of philosophy that focuses on the nature of reality, epistemology is the branch of philosophy that focuses on the nature of knowledge and ask questions about how we know what we know (Merriam, 2009). Interpretivism is one epistemological framework through which qualitative researchers often operate. Creswell (2007) highlights the need for the researcher to "lessen the distance between himself or herself and that being researched" (p. 17). Interpretivism enables researchers to find meaning in the world through social situations and where educational researchers can insert themselves into the continuous process of meaning making in an attempt of gaining full understanding (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

I see social interaction as the primary source of extracting meaning about the reality of the lived experiences of instructional leaders. As an educator and researcher, I have the perspective that everything has a meaning that can be used to explain interactions, experiences,

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and attitudes. There are personal elements crucial to how each instructional leader will view his or her work, and as a researcher, I have a strong desire to examine the various interpretations of work among members of the community of elementary school leaders. Within the interpretivist approach, interpretations “are located in a particular context or situation and time, they are open to re-interpretation and negotiation through conversation” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006 pg. 2). The interpretivist researcher re-describes and re-theories social reality into the explanation of the unknown. Subsequently, as instructional leadership falls within the territory of being a phenomenon, because of the lack of clarity in its existence (Hallinger 2005, Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004), there is a need for understanding how principals view their related practices.

**Qualitative practices.** Now that the ontological and epistemological frameworks of my study have been described, the reasons I chose to employ qualitative methodologies should be coming into focus. Qualitative research collects, analyzes and interprets comprehensive information about an existing phenomenon with the intent of extracting meaning (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). As noted by Smith (1996), “Qualitative approaches are concerned with exploring, understanding, and describing the personal and social experiences of participants and trying to capture the meanings particular phenomena hold for them” (p. 417). Qualitative research aims at answering the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ questions when examining phenomena; I selected a qualitative approach for this study with the aim of understanding the meaning(s) made of the work of principals as instructional leaders. Using a qualitative study that employs an interpretivist approach enabled me to explore a topic wherein meaning is still not fully understood.

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In this study, I explore instructional leadership by examining the various ways in which it is understood by elementary principals, the strategies they employ in their work as instructional leaders, the supports that are important to them in their work, and the challenges they encounter in their work. Instructional leadership is best understood and investigated from within a principal's natural setting: the school. Considered as a phenomenon instructional leadership is best looked at in its natural setting. This approach makes a qualitative study more viable as it examines the participant's experiences with more genuineness (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The methodology best-suited for this study, therefore, is a general qualitative study.

### **Methods**

This section outlines the sample population interviewed in my study, discusses my specific mode of data collection (the semi-structured interview), and explores the ethics and data analysis.

**Sample.** In this qualitative study, the intent was to conduct an in-depth examination of a certain phenomenon by connecting with people who have personal experience with the phenomenon in question. In qualitative studies, there is a "quality over quantity" mentality: rather than speaking to as many participants as possible, researchers prioritize getting a rich and profound picture of the lived experience of a small number of participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The ideal number of participants in qualitative study is usually between five and fifteen. For this study, I interviewed twelve principals.

All study participants were elementary school principals working in Ontario. Each participant had been a practicing administrator in their context for a minimum of three years before their participation in the study. Participants were from different school boards covering both rural and urban areas. Four of the principals identified as male, and eight as female.

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Participants years of experience ranged from three to eighteen years and came from diverse cultural backgrounds and geographic locations (i.e. urban or rural). This variety accounts for the potential richness of data on the topic studied. A summary of the participants is located in figure 3 below as well as in Appendix F.

*Figure 3. Summary of Participants*

<b>Participants (pseudo names)</b>	<b>School location</b>	<b>Years in the role of principal</b>
<b>Martha</b>	Urban	5
<b>Luke</b>	Rural	8
<b>Joseph</b>	Urban	9
<b>Hope</b>	Rural	3
<b>Sarah</b>	Urban	5
<b>Matthew</b>	Urban	6
<b>John</b>	Urban	4
<b>Ruth</b>	Rural	14
<b>Naomi</b>	Urban	3
<b>Mary</b>	Urban	8
<b>Faith</b>	Rural	18
<b>Esther</b>	Urban	5

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for the study (Bricki & Green, 2007; Smith, 2004). Snowballing happens when a social connection established with an existing participant is used to make connections with other potential participants (Gay et al., 2009).

Interviews were the best tool for gathering data with the principals. It provided the necessary data to look at how they approached instructional leadership work.

**Data collection: Semi-structured interviews.** As a specific method of data collection for this study, I decided on the use of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviewing is a process that involves collecting information about peoples' attitudes, opinions, and experiences; it encompasses questions about the "how" and "why" of a given phenomenon (Bischof, Comi, & Eppler, 2011). It comprises asking questions and getting responses as a means of obtaining

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feedback on the phenomenon in question, in this case, instructional leadership practices. As per Smith & Osborn (2003), "...interviewing allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants' responses, and the investigator can probe interesting and important areas which arise" (p. 57). The closeness afforded by one-on-one interviews allowed for a broad understanding of the topics discussed (Creswell, 2007). Semi-structured interview is defined by Merriam (2009) as a set of questions asked with flexibility as it seeks to collect specific data with no predetermined wording order.

Proponents of qualitative research often suggest that novice researchers conduct a pilot interview to ensure some level of comfort with subsequent participants (Gay et al., 2009). For my study, two educators acted as pilot during the development stage of the interview questions. This practice offered me the opportunity to test research questions and practice the interviewing techniques used within the qualitative research framework, i.e., probing, and using participants' responses to build trust and respect.

I conducted the semi-structured interviews in a prescribed setting using an interview guide, from which I was able to wander depending on participants' responses (Bricki & Green, 2007; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The real-time dialogue inherent in a semi-structured interview (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2003) provided an opportunity for participants to elaborate on various themes related to their instructional leadership practices. The single interview sessions were tape-recorded, and then I transcribed them verbatim. Smith and Osborn (2003) view the recording of interviews as essential within a qualitative study because of information provided through nuances. Documents' margins allowed space for me to make explanatory notes, as the transcription involves working more at the semantic level than a prosodic one (Smith, 2004). Questions included open-ended types to obtain some brief

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responses. The interviews lasted up to one hour. During the interviews, participants were prompted to elaborate on the information they were providing. For a complete list of interview questions, see Appendix B. After their interviews had been transcribed, participants were emailed and asked to take two weeks to review interpreted material, as a measure to ensure validity and reliability (Merriam, 2009). The processes of handling and interpreting the data are critical to the integrity of the research and the researcher.

**Ethics.** The data collection process is not limited to discussions of source and technique; ethical consideration is necessary each step of the way, including during sampling, relationship development, and the storage of information (Creswell, 2007; Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012). Some issues for ethical consideration unique to my study included but were not limited to confidentiality, benefits, and risks for participants, and informed consent procedures (Creswell, 2007; Ferguson, Yonge, & Myrick, 2004).

In my study, the main ethical challenges revolved around maintaining integrity and methodology competency. Qualitative studies require researchers to be acutely aware of their participants' comfort levels (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Trust and rapport are essential to ensure the comfort of participants. For this study, each principal was sent an email containing a consent form and summarizing the study. Additionally, I spoke to each participant on the phone prior to their one-on-one interview for the purpose of building rapport. Finally, at the beginning of each interview participants were given a chance to talk about their unique journeys in the field of education, which created comfort and aroused interest.

Another ethical issue in my study revolved around confidentiality (Bricki & Green, 2007). The nature of my study necessitated one-on-one interactions with schools leaders who shared information about their personal beliefs and experiences. With an awareness that a

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researcher is responsible for protecting participants from harm, I addressed potential concerns around privacy, both of the participants themselves, and their information. Upon signing the consent form, each participant was told of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants' identities were carefully protected by employing pseudonyms for both individuals' names and the names of the schools at which they were employed. Further, recorded data was kept secure in an online, password-protected document. Audio recording devices along with transcribed materials were maintained in a secure, password-protected safe and separated in local and electronic files. Participants in the study were presented with transcribed materials to clarify information provided, along with signed copies of the consent materials (Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012). Participation in my study involved no known harm to either the participants or the researcher.

**Data analysis.** The data analysis process is crucial in any research endeavor. Qualitative studies, in particular, involve rigorous data analysis. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) note: "Analyzing qualitative material... can be an inspiring activity, although complex and time-consuming" (p. 11). In qualitative studies, data analysis does not necessarily have to begin after collection is finished; any interaction with participants is considered the beginning of the analytical process, which subsequently continues throughout the entire study (Creswell, 2007; Gay et al., 2009). For my study data analysis began when I made contact with the first participant.

When a study's data has been collected and is ready for examination, researchers need to spend personal time with their data (Gay et al., 2009). Researchers need to be very familiar with their data to formulate themes that arise from that data and connect themes to other themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). As a qualitative researcher, I examined the data case by case to

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acquire in-depth knowledge of my participants' experiences. The process of data analysis requires extensive preparation and organization, "reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes and finally representing the data" (Creswell, 2007, p. 148). While there were many different ways in which to analyze the information gathered, I found some to be very confusing. Therefore the approach I choose eliminated any confusion by pointing out that "qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work that the investigator does at each of the stages" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 67). Qualitative studies allow for lots of flexibility regarding the researcher's objectives and processes. I proceeded as follows based on suggested steps from Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014):

- 1) There was much reading of interview responses and note making. This note taking included closely listening to the recordings and reading of transcripts, subsequently re-reading them to become familiar with the information.
- 2) Transforming notes into pre-existing themes. This transforming happened when I was able to identify themes in the data based on the labeled parts of the transcribed materials I was using.
- 3) Seeking relationships and clustering themes. This clustering involved looking for connections and grouping themes based on conceptual similarities, including clear labels.
- 4) The making of a summary table. This summary included some common themes as well as sub-themes ready to be used for the write-up presented in the findings chapter. The table included described themes and examples presented as excerpts from the interviews and was used to explain the findings.

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Smith (2004) encourages researchers to follow an idiographic approach to analysis. For my study, this meant focusing on one transcript at a time to create an environment suitable for discovering interesting or significant annotations. The first stage of analysis involved listening to audio recordings while reading transcripts and noting similarities, differences, and obvious themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Next, I re-read each transcript and recorded any new themes that emerged using detailed and comprehensive margined notes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Themes were then grouped based on perceived connections and conceptualized similarities (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). After looking at the connections between themes within each transcript, theme clusters were formed where necessary. Next, a summary table was created with the clustered themes using Microsoft Word (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I repeated these steps using the audio recording and interview transcript of each of the participant. A master-theme list for each was then used to compare participants' experiences. Exact quotes from the transcripts that supported participants' insights were noted. Smith et al. (1999) emphasize the need to distinguish clearly between participants' thoughts and researchers' interpretations. For additional cogency, participants were asked to check and re-check data interpretations provided in the transcript that included drafts of the interpretation of the interviews and after the analysis. Principals were invited to review the information to ensure it reflected their thoughts. The process of sending this transcript to participants was used as a member check. This check was also to ensure a rich and detailed understanding of the human experience (Merriam, 2009). Only well-represented themes were used to create the final summary table (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) presented in the findings chapter (Chapter 4).

## **Trustworthiness**

To accept a study's findings, readers need to know that the information offered is accurate. In qualitative research studies, the ideas of reliability and validity, which determine accuracy, are expressed differently than in other types of qualitative research because of its various assumptions and its focus on people and meaning (Merriam, 2009). Validity in qualitative research refers to procedures used as a means of checking accuracy, while reliability looks at consistency across researchers and projects (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (2009) states that "the validity and reliability of a study depend on upon the ethics of the investigator" (p. 228). Trustworthiness seeks to create validity and reliability within qualitative research. In an interpretivist research paradigm, there are specific criteria that comprise trustworthiness: fairness, authenticity, and meaning (Morrow, 2005). Consequently, Merriam (2009) also suggests specific strategies researchers can employ to address validity and reliability which supports fairness, authenticity, and meaning. These strategies include researcher reflexivity, member checks, and the use of an audit trail (i.e. the detailed method of conducting this study).

For my study, carried out with integrity and precise ethical stances, I practiced all three strategies, (i.e. member checks, audit trail, and reflexivity). I enacted researcher reflexivity by locating myself within my research (Miller et al., 2012). I was made aware of my biases and assumptions from the onset of the study and so made them known. As a practicing educator, I have preconceived ideas about instruction and leadership and what it looks like in my school and in my board. As a result, I had to continuously check my interpretation of participants' responses. I addressed the notion of subjectivity to achieve fairness. Regarding member checks (Marrow, 2005), participants in my study were able to read transcripts of their one-on-one interviews with me to look for omissions or areas in need of correction, and also to provide

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additional information where necessary. Finally, audit trails were evident as the information I collected was a result of relevant interview questions outlined in the study and the planned data analysis process. Interview questions were transferable, credible, dependable, and confirmable, which allowed the study to be accurate (Given & Saumure, 2008). This study can be replicated and conducted under similar conditions by other researchers.

### **Summary**

For my research, I chose a general qualitative study with a methodology supported by theories of interpretivism to explore how principals approach instructional leadership work. Semi-structured, one-on-one, in-depth interviews with principals were the best tool for collecting data. Interviews were selected as the method to gather data because they enable the researcher to collect participants' experiences, attitudes, and views on a particular topic (Merriam, 2009). Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher verbatim. The process of analyzing transcribed information can be tedious, but the value of researcher submersion is crucial to the interpretation of lived experiences.

Problematic issues surrounding qualitative studies lie mostly within the authenticity of the process, requiring researchers to be cautious in providing for validity and reliability (Creswell, 2007). To promote trustworthiness in this study, I used member checks, researcher reflexivity, and an audit trail through the implementation of comprehensive processes and constant interaction with participants. To maintain ethical responsibility, I distributed informed consent materials to participants, enacted behaviours that encouraged trust and respect, and ensured full confidentiality of shared information.

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trustworthiness in this study, I used member checks, researcher's reflexivity, and created an audit trail by using detailed processes and constant interaction with participants. To meet ethical responsibilities, I provided informed consent materials, demonstrated behaviours that encourage trust and respect, and assured participants of the confidentiality of the information and experiences they shared with me.

## Chapter Four: Findings

Chapter four presents the results of this qualitative study that had a goal of understanding how elementary principals in Ontario approach the work of instructional leadership. The interview protocol was developed based on the four sub-research questions guiding this study, and the results are similarly presented using the sub-research questions as a guide. The findings are condensed into four master themes: personal understanding, strategies, supports, and challenges. The chapter is therefore divided into five main sections, including one for each master theme, and an overall findings section. Within the general findings section, the collected information is compared to the four components of instructional leadership from the literature include: vision, and mission; management; positive environment; as well as staffing and resources. These four components represent the general view of the expected behaviours of principals when they consider themselves to be instructional leaders. Finally, each master theme is further divided into sub-themes to offer in-depth information regarding participants' thoughts and actions as it relates to their instructional leadership practices.

### Personal Understanding

The first master theme covers the underlying ideas and opinions held by principals about their roles as instructional leaders. This theme emerged from questions regarding participants' thoughts about instructional leadership, and their perceptions of practice. Participants' experiences and opinions formed the foundations for their practice and the basis for their visions and missions of learning. The sub-themes of vision and mission; characteristics and skills; defining instructional leadership; and previous experience supports this overall theme in the data.

**Vision and mission.** Having a comprehensive vision and mission understood and shared by both staff and students is necessary for school success. This sub-theme emerged in most of

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the principals' interviews. Whether created and guided by the principal alone or by a collective group within the school, participants agreed that a specific plan of action helped in moving forward with leadership practices aimed at the achievement. Principals also suggested that their school's mission and vision help to guide their practice as instructional leaders. Faith shared,

I believe you have to have a passion for teaching and for learning. It has to be modeled and it has to be shared, it has to be clear, it has to have a direction, and it has to have a vision... It is looking at the school and saying 'What is going to have the most significant impact tomorrow on teaching and learning?'

Faith emphasized the need for principals to have a passion for teaching and learning, and for that passion to be modeled and shared through a specific, clear vision and mission. While all practicing principals are expected to have a school mission and vision, some participants in this study saw the specific need to create and maintain a learning mission and vision. Faith's explanation of the shared vision in her school came specifically from teaching and learning goals. Participants suggested that teaching and learning goals are created by specific skills displayed by principals; participants identified certain skills essential to become instructional leaders. Additionally, participants believed principals' characteristics play a key part in demonstrating an understanding of instructional leadership.

**Characteristics and skills.** "Characteristics and skills" refers to certain behaviours demonstrated by principals who practice as instructional leaders. The principals in this study believed certain features and competencies assisted them when practicing instructional leadership. Principals mentioned skills related to modeling, facilitation, and strategic decision making, as well as being mindful and always open to learning. Faith shared some characteristics,

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You're the lead learner in the school. That has to be modeled and it has to be shared. It has to be clear... you have to be open to learning. I'm an insatiable learner, so that serves me well in this profession. I think that you have to be open... when we're engaged in professional learning I facilitate, I take a facilitators' stance, not a knowledge-based stance.

Principals in this study believed in being a lifelong learner, demonstrating respect, being very strategic, and being a systems thinker. Faith was clear about her stance on specific skills, such as facilitation and being a model learner, as these add to her instructional practice. She adds that listening helped her develop such skills, "I spent a lot of time listening and observing" (Faith). There was mention of being very reflective in her practice, as well as being a visionary; these sentiments were echoed by other participants in the study. Participants saw personal traits as a basis for understanding instructional leadership. Reflection on the skills and features used in their practice lead to participants' ideas about the meaning of instructional leadership.

**Defining instructional leadership.** Principals' views of instructional leadership determined their practice of such work. Study participants shared their thoughts on the philosophy as well as the characteristics of the work of teaching and learning. Most principals were clear that their understanding of instructional leadership was based on innovative practices presented to them throughout their career. Luke described instructional leadership as "focused on enhanced instructional practice through my work as an administrator with classroom practitioners and system support people." Luke, like several of his colleagues, saw instructional leadership as having a focus on instructional practices. On the other hand, Matthew's response to the same question reflected the views of seven of the twelve participants:

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“[Instructional leadership] is part of my role, I view myself as an instructional learner, not a leader.”

For Matthew, his understanding of being an instructional leader stems from being a learner. Rather than seeing the role as being in charge he identifies with learning from staff. Principal Matthew, saw instructional leadership as being only part of what is done in the school day, while some others in the study perceived every action taken daily as the work of an instructional leader. Faith responded,

...everything that a principal does is instructional leadership. That's what I've come to learn. Everything that I'm doing in the school I'm an instructional leader, it's not just related for me to program. It's everything that I do, it's a 360 view.

Faith understands instructional leadership as everything she does in her role as principal rather than the focus on curriculum planning or direct teaching and classroom work. The difference in the participants' responses about instructional leadership was garnered from the many personal and professional experiences provided.

**Previous experiences.** Experience with past professional positions and functions create a foundation for principals' individual practice. Previous work experiences mentioned by participants included being curriculum coaches, and other positions at the board level involving working with principals, other coaches as well as teachers. Participants believed that their professional experiences contributed to the ideas they shared on the topic of instructional leadership practice. All of the participants in the study spoke of their career progression regarding working as schoolteachers and subsequently working in various leadership positions within their school boards before becoming principals. The consensus was that there was an appreciation for working with educators and administrators, as this helped to shape participants'

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experiential knowledge about teaching and learning. Martha shared the following about her previous role as an instructional coach:

So, I think it was an advantage having the role of sort of a board-level position. I got to see things from a different perspective. And, to me, it really helped. I think it would be much more difficult coming directly from the classroom because there are certain things that you don't get the opportunity to see there.

Martha explained the importance of having had the chance to be in a central instructional role, as it prepared her for the role of instructional leader, specifically on understanding her work from an organizational approach rather than direct teaching and learning in classrooms. Participants seemed to feel that exposure to multiple curricula, as well as to teaching and learning practices, skills, characteristics, and board and school leadership policies all informed their subsequent views of instructional leadership. Faith's explanation sums up what many principals believed:

As I moved from school to school, I spent much time listening and observing. What are the patterns in the school? Where are the go-to people? What do we notice about who the recommenders are? Who the decision makers are? Who are the quiet voices? Who are the people that have no clue?

Participants believed that previous positions and past experiences served as a basis for how they understood and practiced instructional leadership. Participants' understanding of their role as instructional leaders varied and some were unable to define the term. With their knowledge of instructional leadership, participants approached instructional leadership with joint actions, but the notions that drove these actions varied.

### **Strategies**

This master theme relates to specific actions deemed necessary for instructional leadership by the principals in this study. This section describes strategies employed by principals in their work as instructional leaders, as well as their rationale for using these strategies. Subthemes in this section include relationship building, professional development/professional learning, staffing (placing teachers), capacity building, and the act of creating a positive school culture.

**Relationship building with staff.** The act of relationship building requires the development of trust between school leaders and teachers, parents, and students; all study participants referenced the importance of positive relationships. Participants viewed relationship building as a strategy for instructional leadership because of its foundational value in communication efforts. Sarah pointed out, “I would say that rebuilding the relationships, it’s so key because once you’ve done that and do a good job with that... whatever you ask staff to do, they’re going to try to, because [the] principal has asked.” Sarah was clear that positive relationships help with getting staff, teachers, and support workers involved in the processes of learning for teachers and students.

Study participants explained that they used many activities to build and maintain good relationships in schools. Joseph revealed, “I met with every teacher and staff. I met with the lead teachers. I spent time in their classrooms just to hear what was going on.” Participants identified that building relationships required principals to be visible around the school, have conversations about learning with both students and teachers, embark on learning walks or walkabouts and acknowledge feedback from staff, parents, and students. Joseph recalled:

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It was a lot of listening. It was meeting with everyone and being very visible. It's about having a pulse of what's going on in the school. Being there before school, in the classes, at lunch time, after school, and in the community. As an instructional leader, I made a point of being in classrooms every day, I'd walk and see what the kids were doing, talk with the teacher in an appropriate time. I had a sense of what was going on.

Joseph highlighted awareness and availability as ways in which he built relationships with staff within the school. On his walks in classrooms, he would look for the connection teachers and students make in relation to school goals, justifying his role as instructional leader. He emphasized the importance of being visible and having conversations with staff and students about learning as means of leading instructionally. Other participants also referenced the importance of human contact as the essence of relationship building, noting that contact is essential for all types of learning as well. John shared this thought about the importance of building positive relationships:

I think when it comes to relationships, it's important to build them and then sustain them. When you build a relationship with your staff, I think there's a greater chance for getting work done. I'd say there'll be greater transparency. So, when you can agree to disagree, that I believe can happen more readily when you've built a firm relationship with your staff. So, when you've built positive working relationships with staff, I think it allows your job as an instructional leader to happen a lot easier, because some of the walls have been taken down. And when people can relate to you and you can relate to them, it allows for more professional dialogue.

John's sentiments or beliefs on having relationships fostered between principal and staff is necessary for the work instructional leaders perform. The fact that professional conversations

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and personal connections can help with the effective sharing of the teaching and learning expectations or vision. John`s thoughts echoed the sentiments of many of the principals in the study.

Relationship building was described as essential for providing a medium for participants to cultivate learning. One way principals mentioned building relationships involved professional development and professional learning among staff.

**Professional development and professional learning.** Professional Development (PD) and Professional Learning (PL) involve creating opportunities for teachers to learn, share, and grow as professionals. All participants identified making learning available to staff as part their work as instructional leaders. Principals explained that the growth of an educator depends on their awareness of existing and new pedagogies and educational trends, as well as their capacity to reflect on how to serve students in a constantly changing society; PD and PL offer opportunities for both. For some participants, there was a distinction to be made between PD and PL. Mary explained,

To me there`s a difference between professional development and professional learning.

So, professional development is historically, I go to a workshop, I go to a big session in a gym, somebody talks at me, I take something away, I may or may not use it. Whereas professional learning, or instructional leadership, is more of an ongoing interactive process.

Whether or not other participants made a similar distinction, most agreed that PD and PL have comparable functions: they are essentially used to execute plans for instruction created within the school. John explained,

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In terms of implementation of the plan, a lot of that's tied to PD opportunities for staff. And the PD can come in many different forms, because some PD takes place internally. Some takes place externally as you know. So, our format for doing that is a professional learning community.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) comprise groups of teacher-learners and are typically assembled by principals to organize learning in a specific subject area. PLCs learn new pedagogies or concepts together and share much of what study participants perceived to be foundational to learning experiences within a school. The use of PLC within Ontario are as per board policies. Matthew explained, "...we focus on me supporting teachers who eventually lead the PLC sessions. Then we have follow-up meetings that are scheduled." Each principal in the study described using PLCs to direct the learning focus of their school. In Matthew's case, he led the sessions, while other principals discussed using professionals to facilitate PLC meetings, and subsequently releasing responsibilities to the teachers within the PLCs. John stated,

In terms of what I do, my actions, research shows that principals that are actually a part of PLCs actually yield the greatest results. And if everything is fine I know in terms of the operations of the school, I make myself present at these PLCs. I take part in the learning and I take the stance that I'm here to learn like everyone else, learn more about my students, learn more about my staff.

All participants in the study mentioned their involvement in PLCs as part of their work as instructional leaders. They described their roles as being those of both learners and leaders. Mary called PLCs "structures needed for learning," and went on to say "...all the structures that we put in place in a school when we're planning should really all focus on learning." Mary, like many of the other participants, believed PLCs were crucial for learning, and so she mentioned the

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importance of creating a space to hold as many PLC meetings as possible. Ruth explained, "...it was pretty much at every staff meeting we would set aside a chunk of time, we would co-plan... running the workshop or being a participant but it would always be that co-planning piece that we're together." Principals believe PD and PL, in their various forms, are important ways to harness and share learning in schools. As part of their roles as instructional leaders, principals felt they were obligated to facilitate the knowledge mobilization that is crucial for PD and PL, guiding it and ensuring its success in the school.

While all participants mentioned using PD and/or PL, the rationale for its use tended to differ. Some principals in the study used professional learning opportunities for more than curriculum-related or vision/mission-related activities; Ruth spoke of PD/PL as a "means for targeting teachers' annual learning plans and performance appraisals." This behaviour supports the idea of organizing the teaching and learning in schools which is one view of instructional leadership. Ruth, like a few other principals in the study, used opportunities as they become available to be a more effective instructional leader. "As time and monies become available through cutting cost here and there, I find ways to make it work for programming that supports of school goals" (David). Principals related the use of PD/PL also to the notion of building capacity in their teachers.

**Capacity building.** "Capacity building" is the act of empowering teachers to be and perform at their best. Principals viewed building capacity as essential to their roles as instructional leaders. Ruth explained, "You've got formal learning and informal learning, in my opinion. The formal is PD. A lot of the informal is the checking in with the teachers and the visits in the classroom." Extending the notion of capacity building to include not just faculty and staff, but parents and community members as well, Ruth continued, "The other piece of learning

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is for the parents, building capacities to the parents we have parent engagement meetings, very common like family literacy night...” It is important to note, therefore, that principals believe it is their responsibility to build capacity, not only in terms of their faculty and staff, but in terms of other stakeholders as well. Esther focused on teachers and explained specifics, “We build individual capacity in our teachers by allowing them to explore their interests that develops pedagogy”. As instructional leaders, building capacity serves as a means of releasing instructional duties as well as leadership to others within the school community. The work of capacity building is an organizing act which in turn is instructional leadership.

Study participants described different ways in which they encouraged and guided learning in regards to capacity building. Ruth mentioned,

A teacher comes and asks to go to workshop... costs this much money and this is how I can bring the learning back that's capacity building. Give them the money, book it with five teachers, go to this workshop, promise me you're going to come back and do something with our staff and with the division.

Here Ruth mentioned her responsibility, as principal, to facilitate teachers with both the opportunity and the financial means to embark on capacity building PD experiences. Ruth also pointed out that she charges her faculty members with bringing their capacity building experiences back to share with other teachers at the school. Esther shared similar ideas about capacity building, “All teachers are capable to lead as they bring so much to the teaching and learning process”.

Some of the activities participants mentioned as capacity building work included learning opportunities, professional dialogues, collaboration efforts, modeling professional behaviours,

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providing intentional growth and skills development, and other efforts that improve abilities and expertise. Ruth explained,

How [do] could you capacity build? I believe in building in common prep times, two to three teachers in the same grade could work together to plan. You've got your formal learning through staff meetings once a month. With our lead teachers, we sit with them once a month too, and if not more, to work on operational pieces too but also what our focus is for our school improvement plan because they are critical in that piece. I have some money to release teachers and the literacy team and lead teacher team to co-plan the learning then deliver it...

While some principals, like Ruth, described capacity building as a school-wide initiative, others referenced the importance of building capacity in the individual in regards to personal and professional growth. Hope clarified,

I build capacity... if people would like to have more voice in the direction of the professional learning around instruction... if I have some people on staff who are strong instructional leaders and are interested in pursuing administration. Give them the opportunity to take on leadership around professional learning like I have been trying to model.

Most of the study participants spoke about creating an environment where teachers felt supported in their efforts to be effective educators.

Participants also mentioned the use of staff meetings as learning opportunities rather than as informational sessions. Naomi shared, "I want to empower the staff to be their leader, to lead their learning. I will be there as a participant, a co-learner in those staff meetings..." While encouraging others comprised much of what principals mentioned with respect to building

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capacity in teachers and employees, capacity building can be thought of as inherent when a staff is willing and able; participants therefore described the importance of selecting staff and grooming them to have a growth mindset.

**Staffing.** Staffing involves selecting and recommending to the board specific personnel principals wish to add to their school family; it also encompasses principals' efforts in managing faculty within their schools. Many participants discussed the need to work with staff that are willing to do their best work at all times. Hope explained, "I am expecting my staff to use critical thinking strategies... and the staff to engage in critical tasks then consolidate by talking about those critical thinking strategies." Hope, like many other participants, expressed an affinity for staff who are capable of and willing to learn. When hiring teachers, short or long term, all principals in the study acted strategically by considering the fit of the individual within the school. Faith articulated,

When I'm conducting teacher interviews on the regulation 274, I write and craft mediational questions based on what I have come to know and understand of the role.

The questions I ask of the grade 3 teacher would be different from the questions I ask for a physical and health education teacher.

Faith's explanation reflects the notion that staffing is a key part of principals' work.

Principals believed in retaining staff that showed great potential regarding developing learning mindsets within the school. Faith said, "Principals, 'human capital managers,' are at every school, and then the nugget of this is principals must tie school improvement strategies to their work at recruiting, selecting, developing, and retaining effective teachers." Principals spoke to this practice as being essential for instructional leadership. Faith mentioned that principals do not always get to choose staff personnel, and therefore the necessity of acting strategically:

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“...you want to build the very best team as the instructional leader. Someone once said to me, there are three things that make a great school... staff, staff, and staff, and I believe that.” Faith clearly outlined the need to have an excellent staff in place, and one role of the instructional leader is to ensure that that happens. Like building capacity within the staff, many of the participants in this study viewed staffing as something they did to make sure that learning was constantly going on in the school building; the task of constructing the best possible team starts with hiring practices.

**Positive school culture.** A positive school culture is one that is reflective of its populations’ needs, both teachers and students. A positive school culture also highlights the fact that a school is a learning environment, which is something participants talked about working hard to create and maintain. Some principals in this study described their roles in creating positive school culture as one that identifies a school’s focus (i.e., its vision/mission), and works to integrate intensive learning in this focus. Additionally, Ruth stated the importance of creating a culture wherein teachers feel supported and protected: “When you create an environment where the teachers are working around stress and they know that you got their back, they’re more amendable to doing stuff.”

There are many dimensions involved in creating a positive school culture. Luke emphasized the importance of ensuring that each staff member of a school is in agreement about what a positive culture looks like:

So, our staff had used overly firm discipline as a way to force learning to happen. And I’m not speaking all but just some at the beginning. And what we have to do is talk about what constitutes a positive learning culture.

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One important way to build a positive school culture is to create a space wherein it is clear that everyone, from students to faculty and staff, is constantly focused on learning; such a space also allows for learners to make mistakes – after all, mistakes are often an important step in the learning process. Luke explained that transparency is vital to building trust and respect:

I think that's the key, as the instructional leader: what do you do to help everybody move ahead collectively and know other people become instructional leaders? Because they [teachers] started saying, 'Well, you could also do...' And then they started creating a class-wide something. So now, they're coming to our meetings and our professional development talking about the leadership that they're showing towards their kids and then towards others to help perpetuate a good activity or initiative for other similarly great students.

Luke, like other study participants, felt a positive change in the environment when teachers were willing to make shifts in the interest of the students.

Some participants described feeling like the creation of a positive learning environment takes time, and success comes with consistency and persistence. Naomi mentioned, "A culture of staff-induced professional conversations depends on upon the support you put out in place."

Another crucial aspect of a principal's role in creating a positive school culture involves safety. Sarah shared, "My job is to ensure that everyone is safe... if children are all safe when they are here, and they're learning... even with dealing with behaviours, that's teaching and learning."

For Sarah, safety in the school was major concern, because it affects the operation of the learning environment. Principals in this study addressed the issue of an atmosphere of fear from teachers, not only around student discipline tactics, but also in terms of the ability to make mistakes, and in terms of the physical safety of the students.

### Supports

In addition to strategies, principals in the study were asked to discuss the supports they used and found helpful as they practiced as instructional leaders. The supports that were identified by participants were divided into two categories: foundational supports and maintenance supports. At a foundational level, principals shared frameworks and plans, the development of collaborative teams, and the use of experts – specifically, sectors of the community and educational partners – as being essential to the infrastructure of an instructional program. Maintenance supports suggested by principals included relationships with supervisors, professional dialogue with peers/colleagues, and reflections on the learning process.

**Frameworks/plans.** “Frameworks” and “plans” refer to documents and structures used to outline goals and guide learning in a specific school. Frameworks and plans can vary, based on school district and board expectations. Districts, boards, and the Ministry of Education are often responsible for the creation of guiding frameworks and plans (e.g., a template that principals are required to use to set direction within their school). Specific documents often used in schools include Board Improvement Plans (BIPs), School Improvement Plans (SIPs), and Family of School Improvement Plans (FSIPs). Some boards use other frameworks – for example, Professional Learning Plans (PLPs) – that are designed to help teachers grow as educators. Additionally, many study participants mentioned using the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF), and school boards’ yearly district review documentation and feedback as foundational supports. Each of these frameworks help to document and encourage the vision and mission of both the schools and the instructional leaders. Specifics regarding which frameworks were used in which schools tended to vary according to the principals’ beliefs, and the existing culture of the schools. John explained:

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I try to ensure that the needs of students are tied back to a plan that we've devised for our school, essentially the School Improvement Plan. So, our SIP is something that has been devised by staff. It's been vetted by our Supervisory Officer. And it also has been vetted by our parent body or our school council. So, in the beginning of the year, we go through this process of developing the school improvement plan which is tied to the Board's Improvement Plan. So, we have what's called the BIP. And you may know that BIP then can become a FSIP, which is a Family of School Improvement Plan. And then from there, we have our School Improvement Plan. So, I do still see myself as instructional leader, I just see myself as somebody who is still on a journey of professional learning. And I'm here not to present myself as the know-it-all on staff, but, I am essentially the curriculum leader on staff. I am the lead learner on staff.

Like many of the other participants, John emphasized the need for the alignment of the BIP and the FSIP with the individual school's plan. He spoke of the importance of ensuring students' needs were reflected exactly in the created plans of action. Some of the participants spoke of the guidance frameworks provide in carrying out the work of the instructional leader; Ruth described frameworks and plans as the "little pieces that keep the big ship moving along." Along with some other participants, Ruth mentioned her beliefs that supports are part of a bigger picture. While John determined that his role included working as the "lead learner," for Ruth the role involved "helping [staff] and knowing that teachers know they are not alone." Each study participants spoke of the planning process being one of collaboration.

**Collaborative teams.** Teams of teachers work collaboratively with the principal to determine the goals of a school. According to the principals in the study they would not be able to negotiate such things alone and they rely on teachers. Study participants mentioned that there

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was often a need to develop several small groups within a school to support different aspects of the instructional program. The creation of these groups was, for principals, both a strategy and a support if properly constructed and maintained. Esther explained that the team included an administrator, a staff member selected through voting, another individual, (e.g., a vice principal), as well as a teacher selected by the principal. The size of the teams depended largely on school size as well as learning needs. Joseph explained, “Together we achieve more, [so] the idea of teachers working in teams as much as possible [is a must].” The development of various teams depended on principals’ vision and direction for the instructional program and the focus of the school. Participants explained that collaborative teams are used for a variety of reasons, including SIP development, division or grade teaching and learning, and often include PLCs. Joseph continued: “It is working with staffing committees, looking at different ways to organize the school like split grades, where teachers can co-plan, co-teach. It creates a rich opportunity for learning. It’s bringing professionals together.”

Participants explained that groups like those mentioned above can sometimes act as liaisons between staff and board administration. Some participants used teams to bring the message of collaborative efforts to the staff, to other schools, as well as to parents and the community. Parent councils and Family of Schools Learning Groups are examples of collaborative teams used in this way. Participants described the ways in which groups keep the vision of learning alive while simultaneously fostering the tasks of the instructional leaders.

Joseph expounded on the fact that teachers work in both formal and informal collaborative teams. He described the need for actions such as co-planning, co-teaching, and co-learning as a “constant.” Like the other principals in the study, Joseph showed that he too was involved in the learning groups, providing support as both a leader and a learner. There were a

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few principals in the study, such as Faith, who used collaborative teams as means of “moving the learning forward and having it be top-of-mind.” As Joseph cited, the use of coaches and academic coordinators working in teams with teachers was a means of introducing other experts to the staff. Esther added that, “Building [an] environment that can sustain collaboration is essential as it leads to learning”.

**Use of experts.** Participants described “experts” as personnel in areas of educational content or procedures invited to work in schools with staff or students, as determined by the needs and plans of the learning program. Principals in this study readily admitted they were not specialists in all the areas they supervised in their work, indicating the need for experts to support the instructional program. Principals saw merit in using outside professionals to create knowledge mobilization (i.e. the movement of knowledge within the institution to where it is needed most) within their schools, as well as to assist with the fostering and harvesting of knowledge among the staff. Many principals believed that utilizing resources like experts to support learning was part of their role as instructional leaders. Examples of experts mentioned by study participants included individuals within the school environment as well as those outside; for example, literacy and numeracy coordinators and coaches, that were often provided by school boards based on individual schools’ needs. Experts could also be solicited from different sources based on a principals’ desire to introduce concepts or ideas that aligned with their school’s SIP to their staff. Examples of such experts varied from book authors to departments in educational programs as well as documents published by the Ministry of Education, or the provincial government, emphasizing that experts needed not only be people. Principals reported the need to involve experts to demonstrate learning processes as well as to teach content when necessary. The intent, as many participants clarified, was to emphasize to teachers that their belief was that

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they were all learners. Participants also mentioned using experts to assist in the implementation of various Ministry initiatives. Hope explained:

I do support teachers with encouraging them to call in the instructional resource teacher if there's a need or a desire. I revert often to documents from the Ministry, particularly Growing Success and Learning for All, so that we could understand why it's important to differentiate so that we can understand our mandate and our mission. It's Ministry policy and practice, so in our board we have a number of resources through our curriculum and instruction department to support unpacking the information of Ministry documents...

Hope's use of an expert was similar to those of many of the participants. She spoke of the school board's focus, and of supports like Ministry documents, as necessary for fully understanding teaching and learning.

Other examples of experts being put to use in schools mentioned by participants included instructional coaches (individuals appointed by school boards to serve as experts in a particular area), and the use of a university education department (e.g., the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education [OISE]). The institution provides workshops and research information on specific learning strategies to act as a resource to schools in context and pedagogical development. Additionally, experts are used to advance knowledge, whether regarding subject content or teaching strategies, where instructional leaders felt that such efforts aligned with the school's learning plan. Participants used experts based on information they had gathered from various data, as data use is essential to planning for learning.

**Use of data.** Participants described "data" as any information obtained from students and their families related to learning and learning solutions (i.e., gap analysis to target specific learning needs). Principals in the study had access to many different kinds of data that they used

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to support their instructional programs, direct the SIPs, and refine their school's vision and focus. Participants also identified the use of data as a support into their role as an instructional leader. Specific examples of data collected include provincial test scores, report card grades, and data from stakeholder feedback questionnaires.

Principals in the study explained that data can provide needs assessment for student learning, and viewed the review of data as a tool vital for making decisions about teaching and learning. Martha shared how she used data to support her instructional program and to prepare for collaborative planning initiatives:

Instructional leadership would be sort of you finding the needs and the strengths within your school. There are lots of ways to find the needs whether it's use of data... I mean there are loads of indicators and things that you do, your climate survey grades 6 and 8 in our board. They do like a safe schools' climate survey kind of thing. What are the feelings within the community? What are the demographics within the community? We have the data integration platform, which is like this amazing thing that you can pretty much look up anything ...report card marks... I picked out CAT-4 results. And then 3 and 6 would be [Education Quality and Accountability Office] plus everything else. So, you have reading assessments [Ontario Comprehensive Assessment] and running records for primary [grades]. You have demographic information. You have [Early Development Institute] for kindergarten... we use them all to determine needs of our students.

Martha further spoke about how to identify goals by examining the data and “then, the instructional leadership part would be [asking] ‘How are we going to meet those goals?’” As with many of the participants, Martha saw the task of finding and using data to aid in the creation, implementation, and assessment of specific learning targets for students as vital to her

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role as an instructional leader. Esther used data for “PD support, school planning and teacher inquiry”. In addition, other principals categorized data as a communication tool as it can be used to start a conversation that can lead to collaborative community building. While finding and using data was mentioned as one area that supported instruction, participants also looked for community partners to contribute to many aspects of school improvement.

**Community partnerships.** Community partnerships comprise agencies and programs within a community that work with families, and provide various supports through a school. Connections between schools and community organizations are very important as they can lead to access to resources and links to other organizations that provide specific kinds of support. Participants explained that community supports, while not directly associated with learning, indirectly affect learning outcomes by addressing barriers faced by students related to knowledge acquisition and retention. Participants were clear in identifying some of their community partners as being integral to the development and execution of their SIPs.

The focus of the agencies with which schools were associated tended to vary depending on the type of community they served. Specific supports provided by community organizations mentioned by participants included meal provision, housing, support for mental and physical difficulties, as well as dealing with issues of abuse or neglect related to students. Participants also mentioned programs that supported academic assistance in the form of homework help and tutoring sessions. Some participants mentioned agencies that provided solid resource materials that schools used to aid in the teaching and learning process. Matthew spoke about the relationship that existed between his school and these types of agencies:

We have two [community partners]. EM Youth Services is one. They provide counseling for us. Like, they come into our school and do mental health presentations. ES Boys &

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Girls Club is another. They invite us to go to their organizations where kids learn more about equity and social justice. And they also do programs here at the school for us. So, they [also] sit on our school council executive.

Matthew went on to explain the nature of both agencies and the role each played in supporting the instructional program at his school, including providing homework assistance and after-school care of children whose parents work long hours. Principals in the study found that this kind of support assists with creating an environment conducive to learning.

Another important function of collaborations between schools and community organizations noted by the participants was the practice of having representatives from agencies join teams to provide feedback (such as parent resources (Mathew) to decision makers. Finally, participants mentioned that agencies sometimes provide counseling and mental health information to staff and students.

As an example of both foundational and maintenance support, community partnerships provide crucial support once relationships are formed. Faith articulated a belief, shared by some of the participants, that community partnership is an essential part of the infrastructure for school development. Matthew, like many of his colleagues in this study, valued these kinds of contributions and supports. In addition to community provisions, participants reported other sources, including those they received directly from peers, colleagues, and their supervisors.

**Supervisors/ peers/ colleagues.** Many principals in the study articulated a belief that it is important for an instructional leader to be capable of reaching out and asking for assistance when it is needed. Participants expressed an awareness of the irrational idea that any one person can successfully run a school program. The importance of relying on peers, colleagues, and supervisors as supports in the process of leading instruction in school was mentioned by many

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principals in the study. Specific examples given by participants included asking for feedback and suggestions, collaborative brainstorming, and requesting material or educational opportunities.

The extent to which principals relied on peers, colleagues, and supervisors depended on the needs of the instructional program and the relationships that existed between the parties. Joseph shared:

[I] create a network of support in the school and outside. I always had my “call a friend,” I had my “call a friend” for curriculum stuff. I had my “call a friend” for policy stuff, for spec ed stuff, or for safe school stuff. Having a network of colleagues that can support you, because being a principal... can be a lonely job. But then it’s about building the relationships and knowing that you’re not in there alone. Know your allies, know your enemies, and navigate it. I’ve always phone a friend. You’re not in it alone. You don’t know everything and you never will know everything. Be comfortable in that. You don’t have to know everything; I don’t.

Joseph reiterated the point that he did not know everything, and no one does, so it was important to be comfortable with asking for help when it was needed. The majority of participants said that discussing an idea with a “friend” also offered various lenses through which to look at a given situation. Esther, like Joseph, echoed the thoughts and stances of the other participants in regards to seeking support from colleagues, peers, and supervisors as a means of doing instructional leadership work. Additionally, participants saw ongoing learning as an important support to instructional leadership.

**Personal learning.** “Personal learning” was identified as taking place when principals took the initiative to educate themselves on area that would assist them in their instructional leadership. Principals in the study expressed awareness of an expectation that they would be

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knowledgeable and well-informed on a variety of interdisciplinary educational topics. As a result, they emphasized the importance of being up-to-date on teaching and learning trends, and of having the ability to readily share their knowledge with their staff. Reading articles published in reputable, peer-reviewed journals was often mentioned by participants as one way to stay well informed. Others mentioned enrolling in university courses to support self-reflective practices and enable engagement in professional conversations or even the adoption of researched materials. Faith had this to say about learning:

I will tell you every day I learn something, every day I'm making a mistake or ten, but what I try to do is I try to learn from them and then some...I think you have to be reflective, I think that's really critical.

Faith explained how the work of author Bruce Wellman had been useful for her regarding learning about the use of effective questioning within the school community. Faith, like other participants in this study, believed in being an active learner, being reflective about and critical of daily practices, and is committed to ensuring a certain degree of professional knowledge. As a life long learner, participants saw merit in having learner stance as it encourages similar mindset (i.e., Dweck's growth or fixed mindset) within staff and students hence the organizing belief of instructional leadership. Although principals spoke at length about supports, they also mentioned that they encountered many challenges in their roles as instructional leaders.

### **Challenges**

Participants in this study described the difficulties they experienced while engaged in instructional leadership work. This master theme looks at the main issues that made it difficult for principals to achieve desired learning goals. The most common challenges mentioned by principals were time, budget, and staff behaviour. Participants explained that constraints placed

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upon them because of time and budget issues were the most difficult to deal with, because of the limited ability principals typically have to control such matters. Issues surrounding staff and their conduct, principals explained, were somewhat easier to work around but did involve a slightly higher degree of uncertainty. Participants talked about ways in which they made efforts to address the challenges they faced, but also discussed how these challenges consistently reoccur in different forms affecting instructional leadership work. The majority of the participants were single-school administrators, meaning there were no vice-principals in the school, and so they found their time dominated by many regulatory activities.

**Time.** Time was identified by the principals in this study as the biggest challenge they face as instructional leaders. Specifically, participants felt as though there were not enough hours in the day or days in the year to accomplish all they needed to accomplish. Principals' work involves a great number of small tasks – particularly administrative tasks – that chip away at principals' time at work. Naomi explained, "It never seems like you have enough time to do all the things that you have to do because the minutiae of the job take up a good portion of your day." Sarah added, "It is balancing the time, [which includes] taking care of self and the school." Naomi further explained, "I wasn't able to find any time today because I have quite a number of kids at the school who have some serious and emotional needs, so I am supporting them." Many other participants shared similar dilemmas, emphasizing duties demanding of their time. Participants identified dealing with impromptu visitors, unforeseen incidents, and student behaviour as issues that dominated their work time. These issues took time away from other tasks such as engaging in professional dialogues, visiting classrooms, and modeling lessons, according to many of the principals. Participants mentioned there were often many administrative tasks left at days' end and little available time to address desired goals. Sarah

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shared, “with the number of administrative duties that we have to do on a given day... extra hours after work are needed.” Martha elaborated,

There are so many competing interests [in the school day]. Instructional leadership could fall off the map in two seconds. It’s just – you have to make it a priority and plant it in and put it in because the day goes so quickly. If I’m getting parent calls or things or if there are stuff that’s happening, it’s very easy for the day to be gone before you even can get into something... So, sometimes it feels like a lot of it is on the fly. So, it’s how do you make [teaching and learning] a priority...

Martha, like many of the participants, emphasized time as a major challenge to her work as an instructional leader. However, for some participants, even time spent on administrative tasks and dealing with students’ behavioral issues was thought of as inseparable from instructional leadership. Ruth explained,

A lot of principals say ‘I’m so busy. I’m doing this for this period.’ How do we get things done- but you can do it. You can do the instructional piece even through the discipline using the language, letting the kids think, having them articulate so it can be embedded in anything that you do.

Faith added, “Every minute I am here, I am an instructional leader, I am an instructional leader when I am setting expectations for students’ behaviour in the hallway.” While many participants faced the task of balancing competing issues, they knew they were required to get the job done.

An additional barrier is the amount of funding available to support instructional practices.

**Budget.** Needless to say, money is necessary for the success of an instructional program. Funds are required to pay for such things as teaching materials, books, resources, hiring occasional teachers to replace staff when they miss school as a result of a PD or PL opportunity

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and bringing various experts into the school to share their knowledge. Schools are allocated funding by the Ministry of Education through their boards and districts. The principals in this study mentioned being strategic in their spending but tended to agree that budgets were often not healthy enough to fully support the instructional programs. Naomi explained her thoughts on the issue:

Money is a huge issue as far as providing material resources or human resources like occasional teachers to release teachers to have those professional conversations. So, that's challenging. Money for resources is always [a problem]... the budget isn't as big as it could be to provide us with all the things that we need to support what we want to do. So, we have these professional learning plans, and they sound amazing, but, when I asked for 28 release days for seven teachers four times, and the other one was 32 release days, I received only 18 release days.

Here Naomi references the fact that she was not given enough money to obtain the requested occasional teachers for the necessary release days for her teachers. She spoke about the struggle to afford both physical material and human resources that would support her instructional practices. Faith discussed her strategy: "In terms of setting up the budget, I have a budget line for program initiatives. I put money into that budget line to pay for the very best facilitators I can find." Faith went on to explain that her reasoning for choosing what to spend money on was based on what she learned and what she observed about her staff. A few principals described similarly strategic actions with relation to budgeting. Principals discussed the challenge of not being able to provide supervision for students when teachers were learning new content and pedagogy; consequently, the issue of time and money becomes another factor when considering the continuum of staff behaviours that often make goal achievement difficult.

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**Staff behaviour.** Working with individuals who are not willing to adhere to decisions arrived at via consensus can be difficult. “Staff behaviour” is described as the actions of those teachers who behave militantly or who are unwilling to collaborate on matters affecting learning. Participants had a myriad of stories about staff who were stuck in their ways of doing things and refused to try anything new. Principals spoke of teachers who lacked professionalism, who had bad attitudes (such as undermining decisions) or a low viewpoint of education and their students. Luke shared, “The biggest challenge is with staff. I had two who were very unprofessional attitudes and a poor outlook on education.” Other stories involved teachers reluctant to try innovations, which negatively affected a division, grade level, or even school. Participants experienced issues tied to disrespect and lack of trust that distracted from their school’s learning environment. Matthew shared,

Challenges? Yeah. It’s staff, so part of the challenge was a change in the way of doing things after 15 years. You know, one of the challenges for me has always been relationships with staff – not staff in general, but staff who are not doing what they should be doing. I provide opportunities... So for staff that need support, I provide support. But some people don’t want support. They don’t want to change because it makes their job harder... So after I taught the people one, two, three times and if they’re unwilling to accept help, there’s going to be more conversations that we have, and some people don’t like to have the conversation.

Matthew had difficulty with some teachers refusing to change because they did not want their role to increase in difficulty or volume of work. Participants agreed that instructional leaders need all learners to be at least willing to accept new information. Matthew addressed supporting

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staff learning many times and discussed the strategies he implemented in cases where he felt pushback (such as constant conversations and chances or providing resources available to him).

### **Summary**

Principals in this study spoke about their specific practices (i.e. beliefs, attitude and actions) as instructional leaders. Their thoughts and actions were included in aspects of the four components examined, vision and mission, management, positive environment and staffing and resources. While the components were reflected in different parts of principals' thoughts and actions based on the particular participant's understanding, strategies, supports, and challenges, they were nevertheless represented.

This chapter has covered the four main themes I identified in the research data: the personal understandings, strategies, supports, and challenges acknowledged by the participants as integral to instructional leadership. Interestingly, of the twelve principals interviewed for this study, four principals, one-third of the sample set, described instructional leadership as including every aspect of the work they do as principals. This sentiment was perhaps best summed up by Faith, when she said to me: "it's not just related to me to a program, it's everything that I do, it's a 360 view." Some principals' responses to interview questions commonly began with phrases such as "I have been a principal for some time, and this is what I learned..." which highlighted the fact their thoughts were based on experiences and learned lessons.

On the other hand, Luke described his understanding of instructional leadership as "a focus on enhanced instructional practices through my work as an administrator with classroom practitioners and system support people," and Martha defined it as "sort of finding the needs and the strengths within your school." Joseph saw instructional leadership as "harnessing the knowledge and the backgrounds and experiences that teachers are bringing to school" while

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Hope viewed it as twofold: “helping staff to understand as well as modeling and providing expectations.” John described the role of the instructional leader as that of a “facilitator or coach,” but ended by saying “instructional leadership is a very elusive notion.” Esther shared that “It has lots of components but I support and guide teachers in the instructional process.” The majority of principals interviewed for this study seemed to view instructional leadership as a role they took on based on their job description as opposed to a holistic effort; this viewpoint was evident whenever principals mentioned not doing any instructional leadership work in a given period.

Interestingly, when prompted, some of the participants shared that many of the “other” time consuming daily events required of them as principals could also be related indirectly to instructional leadership. They were able to rationalize how their actions were connected to what they believed was instructional leadership but they did not view instructional leadership as being central to everything they did. As interviews progressed principals had time to reflect on their practices, and noted there was some change in thinking. For example, at the beginning of our interview, like many of the other participants, Ruth said, “I consider myself an instructional leader. Am I getting to do that every day? No...” She went on to describe a checklist of items she was not able to do in a typical day. Then, later in our discussion as a response to the question “Do you think that there could be a time where the administrative part is integrated with the role of the instructional leader where everything you do is geared towards leading the learning in the school?” Ruth said,

Well I think so because even in dealing with, you know, the behaviors in... in working with the students for them to make good choices, that’s teaching and learning so that they have some tools about how to go about when they get angry.

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Study participants all had some understanding of what they did on a daily basis as instructional leadership. They were able to highlight strategies, supports, and challenges based on their experiences. However, one-third of the twelve participants viewed instructional leadership work as a leadership style, while the others saw it as a tool for attaining desired school goals. The difference in these descriptions in their work as instructional leaders was between using it to address teaching and learning practices or using it as part of a role they were expected to demonstrate. This observation provides the basis for the discussion chapter that follows.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

This study used a general qualitative process to examine how elementary principals in Ontario approach instructional leadership work. My intent in instructional leadership grew from the variety of ways in which I had experienced instructional leadership work. Although school principals have many roles, that of instructional leader usually tops the list of expectations for many stakeholders. This study aim was to look at how elementary principals approach instructional leadership work in an Ontario context.

This chapter highlights and explains the main findings as they relate to the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the existing literature. The information in this chapter is arranged based on how the principals in this study viewed instructional leadership practices, traditional (i.e. agent of change) or progressive (i.e. a typology). A traditional view of instructional leadership reflects the literature's approach of the instructional leader as an agent of change. An agent of change is when principals focus on specific actions or thoughts such as supervision or management about teaching and learning as separate from their other duties or roles. Horng and Loeb (2010) spoke of a new way of thinking about instructional leadership where the traditional or old focus on the day to day "classroom observations and direct teaching of students and teachers" (p.66), was replaced by a more progressive view where the emphasis is placed on organizational management for instructional improvement. Additionally, a progressive approach supports the idea that principals use an organizational lens, and view instructional leadership as a way of leading and directing *everything* that happens within the institution.

The tension between traditional and progressive approaches is evident throughout the components of instructional leadership (vision and mission, management, environment, and

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staffing and resources), principals' understanding of instructional leadership, their strategies for doing the work, the supports they use, and the challenges they face.

### **Components of Instructional Leadership**

Principals in this study were able to provide information about instructional leadership that was classified regarding the components of the conceptual framework; these components include vision and mission, management, environment, and staffing and resources. Just as Hallinger (2005) and Krug (1992) recognize these components as important to instructional leadership, similarly, the principals in this study identified them in the work they do. While the principals in the study described and had success with each component in their own way, they articulated a need to approach each one from the perspective of an instructional leader.

**Vision and mission.** As one of the main components of instructional leadership, the need to create and share a school's vision and the mission were mentioned many times by study participants. Each principal saw the need to establish and implement a vision and mission for their school, their notions about when and how to do so varied. No study participants mentioned creating a separate vision and mission specifically for learning. Leithwood et al. (2004) emphasized the importance of vision and mission in directing leaders for successful school functioning but did not suggest creating a separate one for teaching and learning. The implication here is that the creation and sharing of a school's vision or mission are understood by principals as a prerequisite for their role as principal, as opposed to that of instructional leader. Some principals in this study saw them as separate functions. Principals in the study approached instructional leadership based on their understanding of the work, as well as on their background and personal experiences. Regardless, the notion that vision and mission provide learners with the direction (Hallinger & Lee, 2014) was common among participants. Wallin and Newton

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(2013) refer to the direction created using vision and mission as the basis for professional dialogue regarding learning opportunities. In this study, principals saw their learning in such dialogues as a means of supporting and contributing to the creation and sharing of vision and mission.

Study participants had different ideas about the meaning of instructional leadership, and possessed unique skills and characteristics needed to enact the role; this tended to affect certain aspects of establishing a vision and mission (differences among principals' understanding is discussed further in a section to follow). Consequently, principals in this study acted as prophetic instructional leaders (Reitzug et al., 2008) by demonstrating passion as they actively engaged all learners in their buildings. Principals in the study also found that modeling vision and mission was essential for the development of the instructional program (Hallinger, 2005). They demonstrated active use of vision and mission within their practice as instructional leaders. These behaviours reflect the organizational management perspective with which Horng and Loeb (2010) identifies versus the traditional ideas of instructional leadership.

**Management.** Similar to vision and mission, another component of instructional leadership is management, which covers many aspects of the teaching and learning program. Principals in this study were aware that management plays a critical role in the instructional process (Crum et al., 2009). As instructional leaders, participants' views on the topic of management seemed to mirror existing research. Management supports Horng and Loeb's (2010) progressive view of instructional leadership that principals in this study experienced. Principals in the study were willing to employ a hands-on approach to lessons and teaching (Walker, 2009). Much of what study participants identified as strategies or supports were in fact what the literature terms "management" within the instructional program. While I was able to determine

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aspects of management in participants' responses, the principals were not keen on labeling what they do "management" at all; many expressed the notion that management is separate from what they do as instructional leaders. As Cross and Rice (2000) explained, the linear and organic nature of administration and monitoring exist in various ways depending on the instructional leader. It is therefore likely safe to infer that principals in this study acted in management roles even if they did not explicitly categorize them as such. This highlights the fact that many realities exist within instructional leadership practices. Curriculum management, teacher assessment procedures (Mestry et al., 2013), collaborative practices (Blasé & Blasé, 2000), and network administration (Spillane & Kim, 2012) are some examples of the kinds of management principals in this study exercised as strategies and supports in their instructional leadership work. Crum et al. (2009) emphasize the much-needed, hands-on nature of principals' approaches to teaching and learning (i.e., the instructional leadership) that goes on in schools. Principals in this study were able to speak to these actions, demonstrating the fact that they are moving from the traditional views of instructional leadership to the more progressive view.

**Positive environment.** The development of a positive climate is another component discussed in the instructional leadership literature. Of the four elements of instructional leadership highlighted in this study, having a positive environment was one of the most central for principals when connecting to their role. Study participants identified the need for their school's atmosphere to be positive to support teacher engagement and student efficiency (Quinn, 2002). Crum et al. (2009) described that a positive learning environment as one that is built on relationships and honesty, and which creates trust between students, staff, and administrators. Principals in this study seemed to feel as though the creation of a positive environment was an important way to support instructional leadership. The focus on having a positive environment

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supports a progressive approach of instructional leadership. Hallinger (2010) speaks to capacity building, while Krug (1992) addresses personal preference and school needs as important components of creating a positive environment. The findings from this study demonstrated that principals use relationship building, professional development, and the creation of a positive school culture as strategies when working as instructional leaders.

**Staffing and resources.** The final component of instructional leadership highlighted in this study, staffing and resources greatly impact teaching and learning in schools. Leithwood et al. (2004) identified teachers as directly connected to student outcomes, signifying that staffing and resources are critical for successful instructional practice. Principals in this study described staffing and resources as a strategy, support, and even sometimes a challenge to their practice. Time and budget were identified as essential components of staffing, as were soliciting and retaining resources for schools. However, much of the staffing and resources relied on by schools are guided by legislation and provincial policies (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015), leaving principals little option regarding satisfying this part of their work as instructional leaders. The focus of staffing and providing resources is organizational management (Hornig & Loeb, 2010), and supports progressive approach toward instructional leadership.

Elements of each of the components of instructional leadership mentioned in these sections (i.e. creating a vision and mission, management, positive environment, and staffing and resources) are discussed further in this chapter as thoughts and actions (strategies, supports, and challenges) that determine principals' work as instructional leaders.

### **Principals Understand Instructional Leadership**

The participants in this study answered questions on the subject of instructional leadership in a way that mirrored the existing literature on the topic. Principals in the study

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shared a general understanding that instructional leadership has to do with governing the teaching and learning that exists within a school (Coldren & Spillane, 2007). However, the study results showed some tension between the “old” and the “new” way of approaching instructional leadership work. Some principals believed instructional leadership comprised everyday thoughts and actions carried out in schools (i.e., the progressive view), while others saw it as merely part of what they needed to do daily (i.e. the traditional view). Principals in the study had mixed ideas about their work as instructional leaders and approached their role with much flexibility. This multiple reality in approach seemed to dictate how the common components of instructional leadership were used. The variances in belief and action exemplify the diversity and complexity that exists with regards to instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; 2013; Leithwood, 2013). The principals in this study attributed little-to-none of their understanding of instructional leadership to existing literature about the phenomenon. Correspondingly, amongst the twelve participant sample, there was no consistency regarding defining instructional leadership. Each principal used different memes (idea, behaviour, style or usage) to explain how they understood instructional leadership and their role in the work. It was evident from the participants that their understanding of the role developed over many years of being in the field of education and as a result of this exposure, a perception of instructional leadership is created.

When asked to define instructional leadership, the constructs identified by the principals in the study supported either a traditional or a progressive view. While many researchers like Hallinger (2005), Hallenger and Lee (2014), and Mestry et al. (2013) identified the components above as significant for practicing instructional leadership, principals in this study described them as strategies, supports, or challenges to their role. This study demonstrates that principals understand instructional leadership either as a way to lead through a leadership approach (Krug,

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1992) (i.e., the progressive approach) or as a set of specific actions needed for practicing their main role (i.e., the traditional approach) which in either case is the business of learning (Jenkins, 2009).

The principals in this study understood instructional leadership through the thoughts and actions they perform daily. In interviews, principals mentioned specific skills such as facilitation and strategic thinking being related to what encompasses instructional leadership practice (Hallengier & Murphy, 1985; Krug, 1992). Similarly, principals in this study used professional experiences to describe their understanding of instructional leadership. This diversity highlights the breadth in the practices of principals (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Interestingly, instructional leadership as a concept comes directly from understanding leadership itself. Krug (1992) states: “leadership is the process by which the actions of people within a social organization are guided toward the realization of specific goals” (p. 430). This basic understanding of leadership, Krug continues, is identified through leaders’ behaviours based on their breadth of diversity in understanding. Therefore, questions surrounding instructional leadership become more about decisions of a particular principal rather than identifying a defined meaning for the term. The principals in this study identified and defined instructional leadership by what they did on the job rather than anything they read in the literature. Their past experiences and personal ideas were their way of relating to instructional leadership as a concept. As per Hallinger (2005), there is no generalization in the way principals approach instructional leadership. From this study, it was evident that principals, even with similar ideas, interpret instructional leadership differently.

While context was not one of the foci of this study, it was evident from the principals’ responses to interview questions that it was a critical fact. Hallinger and Heck (1996) refer to the

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fact that principal leadership is meaningless without context, and instructional leadership no different. One thing that makes the results of this study inspiring was that regardless of context, a precise definition of instructional leadership is not needed. Since context does not affect the perplexity around defining instructional leadership, principals' approach to instructional leadership is as they experience it, as either a leadership style, progressive or as an agent of change, traditional. The explanations of the principals in this study reflected their realities and their experiences. To further examine principals' approaches to instructional leadership work, I explored the strategies participants used in the principalship.

### **The Strategies Employed when Doing the Work**

The understanding and conceptualization of instructional leadership varied in this study. Principals explained the methods that worked best for them, supporting the reason for school environments to communicate many conceptualizations (Reitzug et al., 2008). These conceptualizations included the relational, (i.e., a relationship focus); the linear, (i.e. a test results focus); the organic, (i.e. an inquiry focus); and the prophetic, (i.e. a community vision focus) (Reitzug & West 2011). The principals' interpretations and understandings then dictate the direction of instructional leadership. In this study, the second guiding research question dealt with what principals consider as actions taken in their instructional leadership practices. These measures assisted in identifying the conceptualization of instructional leadership among principals in this study. The principal as an instructional leader has much to do with actions, as is evident in the models of Hallinger and Murphy (1985; 2013), and Krug (1992). Participants outlined what they do on a daily basis to ensure teaching and learning happen in their schools. Consequently, the findings corroborate many parts of the described components of instructional leadership. Participants identified relationship building, professional development, capacity

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building, staffing the program, and positive school culture as strategies they used in the role of an instructional leader. While some of these activities are not outlined components in existing instructional leadership models, several principals in this study named them as essential to their practice. These strategies exemplify the progressive view to instructional leadership.

Management, as defined in this study and a positive learning environment are key to the practices of an instructional leader. Different notions (e.g., capacity building and professional development) are embedded in these strategies (Mestry et al., 2013), showing the connection between principals' practice and researchers' theories on instructional leadership. In this study, principals focused on the specifics that they considered intrinsic to the role of instructional leader. Krug (1992) identified the functional notion versus the conceptual notion within instructional leadership practices; it was clear that principals in this study were operating from the functional, which entail the specifics of managing and promoting a positive learning environment. Therefore, it can be concluded that the practices of principals involved in this study are more experiential than theoretical. The principals described a belief that relationship building is a foundational strategy for instructional leadership practices, while the literature makes little-to-no reference to this specific strategy. In Hallinger and Murphy's (1985; 2013) and Krug's (1992) instructional models, relationship building is implied as an essential practice, but this is not directly stated. Principals in this study were convinced that without building positive relationships, their efforts to build capacity and support professional development would be ineffective. This belief echoed the idea that "Motivating and energizing a disaffected teacher and forging relationships across otherwise disconnected teachers can have a profound multiplying effect on the overall climate of the organization" (Fullan, 2002, p. 7).

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Principals in this study identified relationship building as a means of creating a positive school climate and as a strategy to advance the direction of the instructional leader. This notion is a progressive view of instructional leadership. As one role of the principal is to conduct walk-throughs and provide feedback (Grigsby et al., 2010), many principals in this study viewed this task as a chance to build relationships. In this case, some principals use a traditional strategy to move to the progressive view of instructional leadership. Having regular visits to the classroom offer principals a chance to observe and give feedback to teachers (Louis et al., 2010). The principals in this study identified instructional leadership practices as having more to do with people than the “hierarchical approach where the leader is the key person in the enterprise and simply directs the others to follow his/her vision of what the school should be” (Townsend et al., 2013, p. 78).

All principals in this study made it clear that as far as they were concerned, they were not the only instructional leaders in their schools. This mindset supports the progressive approach to instructional leadership. As a means of fostering instructional leadership qualities in others, principals attempt to build capacity and encourage professional development (Neumerski, 2012) in their staff. Studies have shown that when principals demonstrated these behaviours, teachers see themselves as more adequate regarding educating and teaching students (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci & Kilinc, 2012) since teachers are directly connected to student success (Leithwood et al., 2004). The principals’ commitment to strengthening educators’ performances through professional development (Mizell, 2010) demonstrates their dedication to instructional leadership work. Many principals in this study highlighted professional development and capacity building as significant contributions to a positive school environment. Habegger (2008) reports that successful school principals “create a positive school culture that promotes learning and

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engagement for students and adults” (p. 42). The idea is to bring teachers to a place where they are confident in learning from others with no judgment. The principals in this study stressed the importance of an environment that embraces learning for all, including teachers, students, and parents. Significantly, the relationship building that promotes a positive climate for learning stems from the social process through which knowledge grows (Fullan, 2002).

Many principals in this study used relationship building activities, professional development, a capacity-building mindset, and other strategic actions appropriate to their school communities to lead their instructional programs. To corroborate this finding, an extensive study completed by Louis et al. (2010) described principals who had success as instructional leaders as those who took action by being frequently involved with teachers as well as using interpersonal skills to empower teacher growth. Horng and Loeb (2010) ideas of a new instructional leadership were the majority focus of the strategies principals in this study used; the majority used progressive strategies to forward their practice. To create this progressive environment, principals in this study spoke of the many supports they garnered in retaining effective teaching and learning practices.

### **Supports Principals Use to Carry Out the Work**

All principals identified supports as being necessary for the learning program development and maintenance as well as ensuring the program continues effectively. The range of supports was found in the relationship building efforts on the part of the principals. After all, relationships with principals and staff are necessary for shared work within schools (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). While these relationships are expected, principals in this study found their supports for instructional leadership work needed more than the basics provided by the school system. The use of frameworks and plans, collaborative teams, community partners, and experts were

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also necessary for the foundation of a support system. Many principals found that these supports created a solid platform on which to build the instructional program. Additionally, for maintenance, many principals used supervisors and colleagues, professional dialogue with peers, and self-reflections as systems of support for instructional leadership work. Each of these strategies supports the progressive view of instructional leadership.

**Foundational supports.** For the elementary school principals in this study, the collection and use of data were a major factor in their instructional leadership practices. They had strong convictions about data's effectiveness in determining actions and next steps for student success. The types of data discussed ranged from demographics to test scores, which highlights the invaluable support student information has on decision making regarding instruction (Hamilton et al., 2009). Principals in this study used data teams to assist with the collection and interpretation of data as well as to determine the direction for decision making moving forward (Luo, 2015). After data collection and interpretation, frameworks and plans were generated. Frameworks and plans support learning and propel it forward, highlighting the strengths and the needs of learners in a given school. Such frameworks and plans are often created and sent to schools from school boards and/ or the Ontario Ministry of Education. The OLF, as one example, identifies what researchers believe is needed concerning the actions, traits, and thoughts of effective leaders (OLF, 2013). Several principals in this study reported adhering to the ideas reflected in the OLF as "guidelines" (John, participant) in their work as instructional leaders. As a result, the plans and framework principals used were highly OLF based.

The OLF document also supports the notion of collaborative teams and encourages the use of experts. Principals in this study believed their roles as instructional leaders contributed to the effectiveness of collaborative teams within their schools (Taylor et al., 2014). As a result, the

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principals recognized collaboration as a necessary support for the foundational aspects of the instructional program. Ideas surrounding community partnership are reflected in the OLF through building relationships and developing people (OLF, 2013). Some principals in this study believe in the use of community partners for establishing desired learning targets as well as planning and implementing steps toward achievement. Khalifa (2012) promoted the idea that community partnership is as essential to teaching and learning as the principals in this study were able to validate their experiences. Additionally, the principals in this study saw the dynamic and varying effects (Shaari & Hung, 2013) of using experts to support the foundations of the teaching and learning in their schools. The OLF, (2013) through its accountability dimension, highlights principals' efforts in providing instructional practice through others. Principals in this study used experts as supports to the instructional program for varied reasons; making use of experts is encouraged, regardless of reason. The organizational management (Horng & Loeb, 2010) that can efficiently describe what principals do as foundational supports adheres to the progressive view of instructional leadership.

**Maintenance supports.** The principals in this study felt the supports that develop the instructional program had to have additional assistance that helped in maintaining an effective teaching and learning program. Based on a general reflective practice, principals saw the use of professional dialogue with peers, colleagues, and supervisors as part of the supportive process within their role as instructional leaders. The OLF (2013) identifies these same actions as vital to principals' practice. Similar actions also dictate to principals the kinds of personal leadership qualities they should possess. The guiding provincial leadership document highlights building relationships and developing people as one of the five dimensions in its leadership framework (OLF, 2013). Within this dimension, principals in this study related the need to practice such

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activities as means of maintaining the instructional program at their schools. Two specific activities directly connected to the results of this study were “modeling the school’s values and practices” and “building trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents” (OLF, 2013, p. 14). Within these actions, the ideas of professional dialogue are embedded as well as the need for communication with peers and colleagues. The OLF also mentions the fact that the principals should be reflective in their practice. It would appear that elementary principals in Ontario use the OLF as a reference for their work as instructional leaders. The principals in this study seemed to believe that what they would need to create and maintain their roles as an instructional leader was embedded in the notions of frameworks, collaborative teams, use of experts and data. There were the ideas of professional dialogues, personal learning, and relationships with supervisors, peers, and colleagues. All of which are illustrative of a progressive view of instructional leadership.

### **Challenges Principals Experience when Acting as Instructional Leaders**

There were many barriers that principals in this study identified as obstructing what they considered to be their instructional leadership work. The distractors mentioned varied from challenges with teaching staff to the lack of time and resources. Each participant’s perceived idea of instructional leadership dictated what was identified as a challenge to their practice. The principals in this study mirrored the struggles mentioned in the literature: time, budget, and staff behaviours. Pollock et al. (2015) identified that principals are currently experiencing work intensification, and the practice of instructional leadership is therefore affected due to a lack of time. Ontario principals spend more time doing their work than their cooperate counterparts, a clear indication of work intensification (Pollock et al., 2015). While the policy does affect principals’ work (Pollock et al., 2015), the principals in this study were more concerned with the

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lack of time rather than which activities consumed their day. Some of the study participants reported using instructional leadership as a lens through which to evaluate which activities to prioritize in a given day or period; this is progressive. The other principals in the study were more concerned with using the time they have to be as effective a leader as possible, arguably the traditional view moving toward the progressive view of instructional leadership. The latter, identified leader as governing the people and events (Ryan, 2006), which includes the learning of staff and students within a school environment.

**Time.** In Ontario, the Education Act: R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 298, Operation of Schools, states that principals are in charge of “instruction” (p. 4) and that other duties can be placed on whoever is deemed fit. It can then be inferred that the Ministry of Education in Ontario views instruction in schools as very important. As a result, principals feel accountable to the government for enacting their duty of being in charge of instruction within schools. Therefore, the issue of time is often front-of-mind for principals. Principals in this study had split views on the challenge of time. While some principals in this study complained about the number of other activities (aside from instruction) that had to be done, others spoke of the struggles incorporating these events into their role as instructional leaders. If the first charge of principals is instruction (R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 298), then the challenge is to make the rest of the work align itself with teaching and learning efforts. In this study, time was an issue for two reasons: dealing with administrative tasks, and the abundance of learning tasks versus hours in a given period. This difference in approach to time is a challenge because of the priority principals place on daily tasks (Pollock et al., 2015). Marshall (2008) suggested that principals find their time monopolized by activities that are urgent but not important. The issue is spending too much time on the “wrong things” and not enough time on the “right” ones: “The principal’s number-one

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priority is zeroing in on the highest-priority activities for bringing all students to high levels of achievement” (Marshall, 2008, p. 17). While there may always be complaints about time, the challenge is for principals to link their actions to their school’s mission and vision, thereby always keeping the focus on the learning within their school. This mindset is connected to a progressive view of instructional leadership. Marshall (2008) highlighted the importance of knowing how to delegate by tapping into the abilities of staff and parents, freeing up time for instructional practices and self-care. There is no doubt that “principals perform a heavy workload at an unrelenting pace; principals’ activities are varied, fragmented, and brief” (Lunenburg, 2010, p. 11). However, for principals in this study, “a key to committing time to the right stuff is preventing or deflecting time-consuming crises and activities” (Marshall, 2008, p. 22). To address the challenge of time, Marshall (2008) suggested regular evaluation of the principal’s time management strategies.

**Budget.** Like time, the budget was noted by study participants as a management issue. In this study, the principals wanted more money for resources, both human and material. Principals mentioned having limited control of the monies given to their schools (People for Education, 2015), making the lack of sufficient funds a strain on their instructional practice. The power to fund schools was taken over by the Ministry of Education in Ontario, leaving boards with little control over their finances. “The government placed more regulations and accountability on the use of special purpose grants that were previously allocated without much control on actual use” (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2003, p. 46). As a result, principals in this study were aware that they were limited by board policies on fundraising, adding to their challenges with the budget. Pollock et al. (2015)’s study indicated that principals’ work is affected by other organizations, and balancing the budget is an indirect spinoff of what principals are expected to do. Principals

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in the study lamented the fact that everything costs money, and reported being challenged to find the funds needed to support the instructional program. While policies do vary between school boards, principals in this study provided no evidence that this was the primary cause of the lack of funds. Nonetheless, as principals practice as instructional leaders, their various board policies seem to do little to alleviate the challenge.

Principals were forced to resort to money management and creativity to determine how to make use of funds within their institutions to support the instructional program. As the OLF (2013) identified the principal as responsible for managing the budget and distribution of resources within their schools, the need to be creative and strategic with how given funds are utilized is evident. While principals in this study were able to get by with monies given, they had to manipulate their context each school year to make decisions that would efficiently fund the instructional program. This approach to addressing the budget challenge is also reflective of a progressive view as it relates to instructional leadership.

**Staff behaviours.** The principals in this study found that staff behaviours contributed both to the success and the demise of the instructional program. While participants made efforts including building positive relationships and encouraging a positive learning climate, they were nonetheless met with resistance and problematic behaviours from the sporadic staff member (Eller & Eller, 2013). There is no doubt that behaviours with a negative effect on the mission and vision of the institution can be detrimental to the overall success of an organization (Whitaker, 2011). In this study, the principals highlighted that staff behaviour could negatively affect the instructional program, especially when change is imminent. While there is no real way of eliminating the chance of encountering such behaviour, principals had various strategies they employed to minimize the negative impacts or convert them to positive ones. Principals in this

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study maintained the need to remain respectful as well as being consistent in supporting the mission and vision created as means of soliciting success. Whitaker (2011) suggested that principals test decisions' true purpose, as well as maintain respect and dignity for all staff members. Additionally, Eller and Eller (2013) suggested a "confront, listen, and create" plan as a means of addressing difficult staff, especially when the issue is around leadership style. Like many aspects of the role, principals have to deal with difficult situations with integrity and an open mind (OLF, 2013). The OLF (2013) highlights the principal as having a caring and personable mindset, especially for "building relationships and developing the people" (p. 14). Subsequently, this attitude supports a progressive view of instructional leadership.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a discussion of the findings of this study. This study focused on looking at how elementary principals in Ontario approach instructional leadership work. Principals approach the work with a traditional view (i.e. the agent of change), which is a combination of specific actions that support teaching and learning within schools or, the progressive, (i.e. a leadership style) organizational management aspects of instructional leadership. The information was discussed in five main sections: through the components of instructions, how principals understand instructional leadership, the strategies and supports used, as well as challenges faced. The information followed whether principals were adopting instructional leadership using either a traditional view, a progressive view or a combination of both. In each section, the majority of principals had a progressive view in their approach to instructional leadership work.

## **Chapter Six: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations for Future Research**

In this study, principals reported in no uncertain terms that they are responsible for a great deal when it comes to the efficient operation of schools. As the business of school is learning and the aim of leadership within schools is student success (Hardy, 2010). Therefore, looking at instructional practices in the Ontario system will always have an important place in research. After all, “the Ontario school system can be classified as good by most world standards, but is not great” (Fullan, 2006, p. xiii). This study examined elementary school principals’ approach to instructional leadership work.

### **Summary of the Study**

Elementary principals in Ontario are responsible for the learning that happens in Ontario’s elementary schools. These principals are accountable to provincial laws and policies that affect their practice (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015), and their thoughts and actions as they pertain to instructional leadership are not exempt from this accountability. This study looked at how elementary principals in Ontario schools approach instructional leadership work. Despite the diversity in defining instructional leadership, the components common to the notion served as a basis for examining the work principals do as instructional leaders. This study listened to principals as they outlined how they understood the concept of instructional leadership, and how they used strategies, supports, and navigated challenges in their work as instructional leaders. The study used a conceptual framework that compared the thoughts and actions of principals to four components often cited as important for instructional leaders from the literature. By utilizing a qualitative research design, information from the lived experiences of 12 elementary principals was collected, documented, and used to provide insight into instructional leadership work. During semi-structured interviews, principals in this study explained how they understood

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instructional leadership, the strategies and supports they employed, as well as the challenges they faced. The findings were enlightening.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings were sorted based on the conceptual framework as well as the four research questions that guided the study. While this study found that principals in Ontario practiced within various aspects of the conceived components, there was evidence to support the idea that instructional leadership is practiced as both a style, (i.e. the progressive view) and as an agent of change, (i.e. the traditional view). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) in the US, directs its principals to use “six standards for what principals should know and be able to do” (2001, p. 2). The standards included: 1) Student and Adult learning 2) Diversity 3) 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning 4) Continuous Improvement 5) Knowledge and Data and 6) Parent Family and Community. The NAESP directions, is similar with information presented in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF, 2013), and serves as the basis for how instructional leadership was defined and so further approached. Consequently, these standards outline what principals are expected to do, creating an association between actions and leadership style (Krug, 1992). Principals in this study described their approach to the work as either a traditional view or a progressive view.

**Components of instructional leadership.** The four common elements of instructional leadership that guided this study included vision and mission, management, positive environment, and staffing and resources. The findings demonstrated that principals in this study had at some point in their instructional leadership practice considered (consciously or unconsciously) these components regarding the decisions they made and the actions they took in

their schools. These components are also embedded in the OLF document, which principals in Ontario are required to use as a guideline for their role as school leaders.

**Understanding instructional leadership.** Elementary principals in this study who identified themselves as instructional leaders had basic knowledge of their roles as instructional leaders. Their understanding of instructional leadership dictated their practice. Half of the principals in this study saw instructional leadership as their overall leadership style, the more progressive view to the work, while the rest saw it as a combination of tasks required of the role (i.e., the agent of change), a more traditional view. The principals in this study relied on different aspects of their roles as school leaders to help them clarify their understanding of instructional leadership. While this range in understanding was constructed through detailed analysis of the data, there is truth to this reality of instructional leadership practices within Ontario schools. The OLF outlines expectations of principals' performance within its four main domains. While an attempt to precisely define instructional leadership was unsuccessful, principals in this study had their own ideas that determined their practices.

**Strategies used.** The principals in this study identified a variety of strategies they used in their roles as instructional leaders. According to the collected data, elementary principals use strategies focused on building human capacity regarding staff, as staff members directly contribute to teaching and learning in schools. The majority of the principals interviewed in this study found that relationship building was an essential strategy for contributing to an environment conducive to learning; the main aim was to construct an environment where respect was mutual, vision and mission were shared, and student learning was a priority. Capacity building, professional development, and staffing are each essential for building positive working relationships with everyone in the school building, as well as with those associated with its

success. Relationship building as a strategy for success is outlined as one of the main domains in the OLF (2013). The conclusion then is that principals' thoughts and actions are closely linked to Ministry documents.

**Supports for the program.** Principals in this study used a variety of supports, including human and materials resources. Supports were divided into two categories: foundational and maintenance. Elementary principals in this study reported relying on government-issued mandates and documents. Of the foundational supports, principals preferred frameworks and plans, as well as use of data, and building collaborative teams. These types of supports are also outlined in the OLF (2013) document. While principals in the study made few direct references to the OLF document, many of their thoughts and actions reflected its contents. Similarly, the maintenance supports mentioned by study participants (e.g., communicating with peers, supervisors, and colleagues) are also represented in the OLF domains. Study participants reported that the supports they select- similar to their choice of strategy- are based on the needs of their school community.

**Challenges.** The consensus among the principals in this study was that time, budget, and staff behaviours were common barriers to their work as instructional leaders. While a particular context ultimately determines which barriers are most prevalent and which are most manageable, each barrier was mentioned by each principal at least once. It is interesting to note that principals defined their work as instructional leaders based on their understandings of instructional leadership, and yet challenges seemed commonplace. There were also differences regarding how principals in this study addressed the identified challenges. Therefore, while time and budget may always be challenging for principals, specific context will determine the extent to which it is a barrier for each individual.

### **Assumptions**

There were two main assumptions made in this study. The first is that study participants responded to interview questions that reflected their thoughts and actions as opposed to preconceived ideas of preferred responses; I believe that principals in the study were honest and self-reflective, so they provided information that was a true reflection of their experience. Secondly, an assumption was made that instructional leadership work is a lived experience and therefore warranted the use of an interpretation of what was described; principals in the study are active instructional leaders.

### **Connection to the Problem of Practice**

Instructional leadership is the kind of phenomenon that supports individual style and understanding, and in an educational context, it is best supported and accepted. The problem of practice focused on the understanding and practices of instructional leadership and why there was such apparent diversity in practice. Principals approach instructional leadership based on how it is perceived and received in the institution. It is safe to agree with Bush (2015) on the substantial growth of instructional leadership from a 'traditional view' to an organizational focus, which can reflect a progressive view. As my experience of working in different countries has taught me, principals will vary in how they approach teaching and learning work. This variation in style supports the diversity that is needed to expand instructional leadership to being more organizational versus specific tasks that may arise.

As the ideas of instructional leadership evolve, school and system leaders are forced to be reflective in their practices to ensure that learning is still central to what we do as educators. The study participants effectively demonstrated this process through their lived, shared experiences as part of this research study. There was evidence of change in how these principals viewed the

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work of instructional leaders as the interview process unfolded. There is merit in starting and having an on-going conversation on instructional leadership practices. As it relates to the clarity in instructional leadership, it was evident that diversity does not influence lack of understanding. The principals in this study all understood instructional leadership in their own way, and the data suggested that there were many commonalities among the components of the work. The research process assisted with finding and clarifying that the task can be approached in many ways even with common core ideas. As for the ability of the principal to perform the work, there will always be issues around time and resources (Ideas into Action, 2013) but how the principal uses available supports, as well as how the principal navigates using the available strategies that aids in the outcome of learning. My recommendations for future research are based on this reflection.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study joined an ongoing conversation about principals as instructional leaders in Ontario elementary schools. To extend the conversation, further studies on the connection between instructional leadership practices and the OLF document are required. Asking questions that compel principals to think deeply about their leadership approaches could be useful for this ongoing conversation. Also helpful would be research that addresses the question: Is the OLF an instructional leadership document rather than an overall leadership guideline for Ontario principals? The information collected from this study provides evidence that elementary principals in Ontario use the OLF as a guide to leadership practices they define as instructional. What is the relationship between the OLF and instructional leadership? As an outcome of this study, it can be suggested that the OLF encourages instructional leadership as a progressive view of school leadership based on the alignment of principals' thoughts and actions to its framework. Based on that inference, principals who do not recognize themselves as leading schools as an

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instructional leader, but who would rather practice other types of leadership based on their school context, what provisions are made to support the through the Ontario Leadership Framework?

The principal's work can be compounded by many factors, so it may be useful to consider an instructional leadership framework that can help to separate leadership types from work duties. This framework could further assist principals in identifying their approach to instructional leadership. Since there is diversity with the understanding of instructional leadership either as a leadership style, (i.e. the progressive view), or the practice of specific actions within the role, (i.e. the traditional view), there is a need for a specific framework. The University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership published a 4D Framework [which] describes the essence of effective instructional direction and guides school leaders in cultivating teaching and learning for all students. Fink and Rimmer (2015) speaks to the effectiveness of this framework which also reflects the components discussed in this study. While the OLF influences the leadership practice of principals, does it consider contexts that conceptualize other aspects of leadership, such as inclusive leadership or indigenous leadership rather than simply instructional leadership? Does the OLF support both progressive and traditional views to word instructional leadership? Can the OLF be considered an instructional leadership framework similar to those already in existence? These questions can serve as discussion points for school boards and Ministry leadership programs going forward.

### **Implications for Professional Practice**

This study collected and presented information about instructional leadership work that can provide insight into the practices of elementary principals. This study could affect practice by encouraging current and future principals to be contemplative on their instructional leadership

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work. Principals could begin to reflect on their role and their understanding of instructional leadership. They could be critical of the idea that instructional leadership is approached as either a progressive view as, a leadership style, or traditional view, as the performance of tasks. This type of awareness could influence how principals essentially lead their institutions. The principals in this study had time to reflect as a result of participating in the interview process, and as such were able to think deeply about their work as leaders. While some elementary school principals in Ontario have experienced success regarding school leadership (Fullan, 2010), there is no direct evidence of safe instructional leadership practices. If principals can identify and articulate their understanding of instructional leadership work, then their processes can be replicated if and when needed. The variety of approaches to leading schools is wide-ranging and based on context. Therefore, a principal's stance on leadership is a personal position which requires careful reflection. This study shares the insights of principals who possessed a variety of experiences and demonstrated that the mindset and approach of the leader influence their practice. With knowledge and personal understanding, principals can begin to document their instructional leadership work. This is a strategy that is helpful for both the staff and the school community.

The results of this study could also provide practicing principals with ideas, strategies, and supports for their own instructional leadership work. Depending on context, practicing principals could adapt some of the strategies outlined herein as being helpful. Another outcome of this study could be the start of an intentional dialogue with staff members about their role in the instructional program which could in turn, lead to positive relationships and school environments. Principals could also use the information provided in this study to evaluate their own instructional leadership work. The data presented here may encourage principals to think

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about the time and budget of their instructional program and start to emphasize the parts that best fit their school context.

### **Implications for Educational Policy**

In Ontario, principals are guided by the OLF as a means of measuring school leadership practice. There is some evidence that much of what the principals in this study think and do as instructional leaders are closely aligned to the OLF document. If there were an instructional leadership framework document separate from a leadership framework, principals would perhaps be better able to explain and define their instructional leadership work. As it stands, some principals in this study did not identify any difference between their school leadership approach and their instructional leadership work.

Based on the results of this study, school boards could be intentional in directing their principals in instructional leadership work, so that their practice can be better understood. Board policies that support principals' understanding of instructional leadership work would provide a venue for discussions on the diversity in practices and how schools could work more effectively together. School boards could define instructional leadership practices in collaboration with their principals so that a common understanding could be transferred to the staff and the school community. School boards could further provide materials and resources needed based on what principals identified as strategies and supports for the program of instruction that they believe matches the needs of their schools. Some school boards may already have similar processes for general leadership practices. However, some delineation specific to instructional leadership and its practices would be effective.

Principals in this study shared experiences that influenced how they approached instructional leadership work. The results suggest that principals have thoughts and actions

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related to the OLF that influence how they do their work. In the study, some principals defined instructional leadership based on their experiences, while others focused on learning and doing. This study's results could influence policymakers to pay more attention to a shared understanding of instructional leadership.

### **My Learning**

The engagement in the life of this study has impacted who I am as an educator as well as a researcher. As I work in my current school community, I am more aware of the diversity that exists around instructional leadership. I hold the position as one of the Math Leads and as I approach the role, I am constantly reflecting on how I approach the tasks. Having a view of progressive or tradition is not limited to principals as instructional leaders but to all aspects of the teaching and learning process. The work of this study provided understanding that helped me as a teacher to better connect with my principal and how she approaches instructional leadership within our school. I am a better teacher because of what I learned from the participants and the literature. Many others could benefit in similar ways.

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## Appendix A

[Link to PDF file from Western's Research Portal.](#)

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide



### Interview Protocol

**Background:** Please describe for me the context in which you work and your administrative background.

*Probe:* Describe your teaching experiences, could you reflect on some of your professional leadership up to this point?

#### **Principals understand instructional leadership**

1. How would you explain instructional leadership?

*Probe:* What are your beliefs about your role as an instructional leader?

- a) Do you consider yourself an instructional leader?
- b) Explain what you believe instructional leadership entails.

2. How do you use this understanding to improve/promote the learning in your school?

*Probe:* How does your understanding of instructional leadership affect what you do as the leader?

- a) What does instructional leadership look like to you?
- b) What exactly do you do that results in academic gains for students?

#### **Strategies principals employ to carry out instructional leadership**

1. Describe what you do as a leader to accomplish instructional aims?

*Probe:* How do you go about doing it, and why you go about this work in the ways that you do?

- a) What is it, specifically, that instructional leaders do that is most effective for students in at-risk situations?
2. What is your role in the processes of instructional leadership within your school community?

*Probe:* Tell me about an average day in your life as an instructional leader?

### **Supports and facilitators that help principals carry out their work**

1. What needs to be in place for you to carry out the strategies you mentioned earlier?  
*Probe:* In what ways do you work with members of your school community to improve the teaching and learning environment?

- a) What types of instructional supports are available to you?
  - b) How is this support provided?
  - c) How do you exhibit (show) high expectations or display an instructional focus in your school?
2. What guides the instructional programs within your school?
    - d) *Probe:* Whom would we see involved in the programs?
    - e) What policies or procedures guide your instructional decisions?
    - f) Consider these, how do they help with your leadership strategies?
      - Frameworks
      - People (staff, other leaders)
      - Funding
      - Resources
      - Structures

### **What challenges do principals experience when trying to be instructional leaders?**

1. What gets in the way (barriers) of the instructional leadership part of your job?  
*Probe:* what difficulties do you face in your role as an instructional leader?
2. Explain how these barriers are addressed.

## Instructional Leadership Work

**Wrap up:** Is there anything else you would like to add to your described practices as an instructional leader?

## Appendix C

### Study Description



**April 7, 2015**

**Attention:** [REDACTED]

Good day Dr. [REDACTED], thank you for your assistance in getting us connected with potential participants for our research studies, it is truly appreciated. Please see below the information to add to the newsletter for members to view.

With the changes and the added expectations of what principals are required to do within their role, there is great interest in understanding how elementary principals approach instructional leadership. The focus of this study is on instructional leadership practices, exploring how principals understand the role and what they do to activate the teaching and learning within their schools.

Participation in this study creates an avenue where real experiences could be used to guide decision making processes. The expert knowledge that you will add to the area of instructional leadership within Ontario is irreplaceable. As practicing principals, the information you provide will add great value to understanding the role instructional leadership plays in the development of lifelong learners. Your experiences can be a catalyst for other leaders to examine their approaches and what is happening or not happening at their schools.

All I would need from you is an hour out of your very busy day. Within this hour, you will answer questions that explain your approaches to instructional leadership. If you see this study as a way of contributing to the world of school leadership, you would simple contact me through the information below. I would then forward to you the necessary paperwork to coordinate meeting. After all the data is collected and analysed, you will be informed of the results.

## Instructional Leadership Work

With only an hour of your time, you would be providing instrumental information that only seeks to make our educational efforts change for the best.

Thank you again Dr. [REDACTED], the contact information is listed: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Georgia Powell at 416- [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]@uwo.ca or my advisor at Katina Pollock at [REDACTED] ext. [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]@uwo.ca.

Georgia M. Powell

EdD candidate at Western University

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent



#### *How do elementary principals approach instructional leadership work?*

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION

##### **Introduction**

My name is Georgia M. Powell, and I am a student in the doctorate of education program at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am currently conducting research into understanding how principals in elementary schools approach instructional leadership work and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

##### **Purpose of the study**

The aims of this study are to conduct one-hour, semi-structured interviews with elementary school principals. The intent is to examine how principals understand instructional leadership while looking at the strategies incorporated in their practice. Looking into the supports and facilitators they use along with the challenges they encounter while doing the work. The interest in looking at principal instructional leadership practice stems from the expectations of policies (like the OLF) and laws in Ontario.

##### **If you agree**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute in-person or telephone interview at a time, date, and location that is convenient for you. Unless otherwise agreed, interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device.

## **Confidentiality**

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information that could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Your responses will be used in the data analysis; also, information will be coded, so there is no connection to your name. Collected data will be kept secure on an encrypted private computer where it will be protected then destroyed after a five year period.

## **Risks & Benefits**

There are no known risks to participating in this study

## **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

## **Questions**

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University at [REDACTED] or [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca). If you have any questions about this study, please contact Georgia Powell at 416- [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]@uwo.ca or my advisor at Katina Pollock at [REDACTED] ext. [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]@uwo.ca.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Georgia Powell

*How elementary principals approach instructional leadership work?*

*Georgia M. Powell*

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I give consent to be audio recorded during this study:

Please initial:            \_\_\_ Yes        \_\_\_ No

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_                      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

*How elementary principals approach instructional leadership work?*

*Georgia M. Powell*

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I give consent to be audio recorded during this study:

Please initial:            \_\_\_Yes        \_\_\_No

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_                      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

## Appendix E

### Letter to Principals



**October 2015**

Dear Principal,

Thank you for your response and interest in my study of instructional leadership work. This study will allow me to work with experienced principals like yourself, collecting information about your approaches to instructional leadership.

Your experiences are invaluable which makes documenting them so much more important. Your participation will add to existing literature about instructional leadership practices that will inevitably support the teaching and learning that happen in schools.

I would like to establish a date, time and location that would be suitable for you. We will be meeting for approximately an hour to discuss your practices. Please be advised that the session will be audio-recorded for further data analysis.

I look forward to our connecting; please let me know as soon as you are available. If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University at [REDACTED] or [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca); or my advisor is Katina Pollock at [REDACTED] ext. [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]@uwo.ca.

Thank you again and have a great day.

Georgia M. Powell

Ed.D. Candidate at University of Western Ontario

## Appendix F

<b>Participants (pseudo names)</b>	<b>School location</b>	<b>Years in the role of principal</b>
Martha	Urban	5
Luke	Rural	8
Joseph	Urban	9
Hope	Rural	3
Sarah	Urban	5
Matthew	Urban	6
John	Urban	4
Ruth	Rural	14
Naomi	Urban	3
Mary	Urban	8
Faith	Rural	18
Esther	Urban	5

## Appendix G

### Vitae

# Georgia M. Powell

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## Objective

Dedicated educator with the passion and knowledge to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to be effective well adapted citizens. With a strong belief in collaboration and capacity building, I am encouraged to work with other educators and community partners to achieve a shared goal.

## Education

**EED | DECEMBER 2017 | THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO**

Major: Educational Leadership

Related coursework: Instructional Leadership

**MED | AUGUST 2008 | VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY**

Major: Educational Leadership

Related coursework: Parental Involvement

**BED | AUGUST 2005 | MOUNT SAINT VINCENT UNIVERSITY**

Major: Primary Education

Related coursework: ESL

## CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

- Classroom Teacher- John A Leslie PS (TDSB), present
- Classroom Teacher- Cherokee PS (TDSB), 2013- 2017
- MART/SERT- Kingslake PS (TDSB), 2013
- HSP Jr. programs educator, (TDSB) 2011 - 2013

## TEACHER RELATED EXPERIENCES

- Supervisor / Program Coordinator, 2010- 2013
  - WOODGREEN COMMUNITY SERVICES, TORONTO
- Tutor, Educator 2010
  - RG EDUCATION CENTRE, SCARBOROUGH ON
- Teacher/ Math Coordinator 2006- 2009
  - VANCE COUNTY SCHOOLS, HENDERSON NORTH CAROLINA
- Resource Coordinator/ TEACHER - 2003 - 2006
  - STS. PETER AND PAUL PREP