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# The Role of the Secondary Vice-principal and its Relationship with the Enactment of the Ontario Leadership Framework

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# THE SECONDARY VICE-PRINCIPAL AND ENACTMENT OF THE ONTARIO LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

## **Abstract**

This qualitative research study provided an interrogation of the enactment of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) on the role and practices of secondary vice-principals in one school board in southern Ontario. This descriptive case study examined how the OLF influences the role, duties and practices of the secondary vice-principal and examined what leadership practices they participate in, which ones they do not, and why. The key research question was: How are the leadership practices of secondary vice-principals influenced by the OLF, and how do vice-principals use the OLF to conceptualize their role? The data collection included semi-structured interviews with ten secondary vice-principals, policy document analysis, and notes from a field journal. The relationship between the OLF and the practices of vice-principals has been largely unexplored. By providing further insight into how vice-principals translate the OLF policy into practices, it is hoped that policy makers and school and district leaders will be given insight to help inform the implementation of this policy and to use the OLF in meaningful ways with this group. This study found that by focussing all initiatives, professional learning, and resources on the principal role, assuming that both principals and vice-principals participate in the same leadership activities within the school, experienced vice-principals are left out of the leadership picture entirely by the ministry and district. Furthermore, the specific factors that may act as constraints in the ability of vice-principals to enact the OLF are neglected and job contextuality is removed, with important differences between the practices of principals and vice-principals ignored or devalued. Specifically, issues such as length of service and power and positionality are critical in understanding how vice-principals enact the OLF. Consequently, this study found that the ministry and district focus on the professional growth and learning of school principals, and the recruitment and professional learning of new school leaders, has resulted in experienced vice-principals being left behind.

## **Keywords**

School leadership, secondary vice-principals, Ontario Leadership Framework, policy enactment

# THE SECONDARY VICE-PRINCIPAL AND ENACTMENT OF THE ONTARIO LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) was first introduced in the province of Ontario in 2006 and was intended to provide principals, vice-principals, system leaders and aspiring leaders with a “clear leadership roadmap representing leading edge research and the best thinking and experience, of successful leaders across Ontario and around the world” (Institute for Education Leadership [IEL], 2012a, p. 3). While there has been significant interest in the leadership practices of principals, far less attention has been paid to the leadership practices of vice-principals (Armstrong, 2004, 2009; Kwan, 2009; Lee, Kwan & Walker, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski, Shoho & Barnett, 2011; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010; Shoho, Barnett & Tooms, 2012). Interestingly, the OLF specifically indicates that when the term “principal” is used throughout the document, the intention is that the term includes vice-principals also (IEL, 2012a). The stated inclusion of vice-principals in this document seems to suggest that the work of principals and vice-principals are indistinguishable in Ontario schools. In the absence of a separate framework or role distinction, are we to understand that the OLF accurately reflects the leadership practices of vice-principals in Ontario? This study sought to explore this question and interrogate the ways in which the role and leadership practices of secondary vice-principals are reflected by this document.

### **Problem of Practice**

Like many other jurisdictions in North America and internationally, a vice-principal’s duties in Ontario remain almost entirely at the discretion of his or her principal (Armstrong, 2004, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Shoho et al., 2012; Williamson & Scott, 2012). There is not a great deal of literature defining the role of vice-principals, and much of what does exist indicates that vice-principals are usually delegated the marginal tasks related to school leadership, such as discipline and attendance (Kwan, 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011). In fact, researchers have concluded that the description of the role of vice-principal is essentially that which is outlined in the

*Education Act* (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 1990) which is simply “duties as assigned” (s.12[2]) and to support the principal in his or her work (Armstrong, 2004, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; OME, 1990, 2010; Shoho et al., 2012; Williamson & Scott, 2012). Given that the role is decidedly vague, it becomes open to interpretation by individual principals, resulting in vice-principals having potentially very different responsibilities from school to school depending on the principal’s understanding of the vice principal’s role. That being the case, assessing the abilities and performance of vice-principals using the same standards used for principals causes some concern.

The OLF is a set of leadership performance standards, namely “statements about the features of leadership that are the most valued in the profession” (Ingvarson, Anderson, Gronn, & Jackson, 2006, p. 32). It is one component of a greater initiative called the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS). Introduced in 2008, the OLS is intended to provide a plan of action and to support student achievement and well-being by “attracting and developing skilled and passionate school and system leaders” (OME, 2008a, p. 1). Among the key components of the OLS are a variety of working groups, leadership publications, a board leadership development strategy, the Institute for Education Leadership, and the OLF. The OLF itself consists of four separate components: the District Effectiveness Framework; the System-Level Leadership Framework; the K-12 School Effectiveness Framework; and the School-Level Leadership Framework, the latter of which will be referred to as the OLF throughout this study.

The original OLF, introduced in 2006, focussed on leadership “competencies” which were represented by specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes that were viewed as related to superior job performance (Leithwood, 2012). In an effort to address identified weaknesses in the original leadership standards, such as the fragmentation of management and leadership, an emphasis on measurable behaviours, and a lack of delineation between school and system leadership, the OLF was revised in 2012. The new OLF replaced the term “competencies” with “practices” and attempted to acknowledge context, the integration of management and leadership, and the central nature of relationships and collaboration as components of leadership (Leithwood, 2012). In addition, the revised OLF included *Personal Leadership Resources* which are intended

to identify particular traits and qualities deemed most likely to “influence the effectiveness with which leadership practices are enacted” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 4). Moreover, the revised OLF was based on a more specific body of research that identified the “unique contexts, challenges and opportunities of system-level leaders” by providing two distinct frameworks: one for school-level leaders and another for district-level leaders (Leithwood, 2012, pg. 4).

As a set of performance standards, the OLF is intended to describe what “good leadership” looks like and provides the foundation for implementing the OLS by supporting career-long professional learning and guiding learning-focused conversations about “effective” leadership practices (IEL, 2012b). The OLF is comprised of five domains, each with a series of specific practices noted in brackets: Setting Directions (building a shared vision; identifying specific, shared short-term goals; creating high expectations; and communicating the vision and goals); Building Relationships and Developing People (providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members; stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff; modelling the school’s values and practices; building trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents; and establishing productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives); Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices (building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership; structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration; building productive relationships with families and the community; connecting the school to the wider environment; maintaining a safe and healthy environment; and allocating resources in support of the school’s vision and goals); Improving the Instructional Program (staffing the instructional program; providing instructional support; monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement; and buffering staff from distractions to their work); and Securing Accountability (building staff members’ sense of internal accountability and meeting the demands for external accountability). In addition to the five domains, there are three personal attributes, which are deemed significant for successful leadership: cognitive resources; social resources; and psychological resources (IEL, 2013). The personal



attributes are described briefly, but there is little explanation provided as to how these attributes could be demonstrated in practice.

Throughout the OLF, the word “effective” is used repeatedly to describe desired leadership practices and behaviors; however, no explanation is given as to what is meant by the term “effective”, how is it measured and by whom? The use of the term “effective” in the OLF is likely intended to reflect the terminology used in the *School Effectiveness Framework, K-12* (SEF), another recently revised component of the OLS, which states that the OLF

...informs the direction for system, school and classroom leaders represented in the SEF, K-12, 2013. These comprehensive resources are united by their common advocacy for the most significant evidence-informed leadership practices – those that make the most positive differences to student achievement and well-being. (OME, 2013, p. 6)

Interestingly, while the intent might be that these two documents complement and support one another, they operate as separate documents in the district involved in the study with the SEF greatly utilized for school improvement planning.

If the competencies in the OLF are deemed indicators of “effective” leadership practices, what does that suggest about practices that are not represented in the OLF? Given that the duties of vice-principals are determined solely at the discretion of individual principals, leadership opportunities could vary significantly from school to school, resulting in diverse experiences and practices. Could vice-principals who have not been permitted to participate in certain leadership opportunities be deemed ineffective? In contrast, could vice-principals who had worked with principals that delegated or shared a variety of leadership opportunities be viewed as more competent as a result? Moreover, many other contextual factors for each vice-principal influences how their responsibilities and opportunities are determined. What role does context play in determining effectiveness in regards to vice-principals and the OLF? Many researchers believe that context has substantial implications regarding the use of leadership standards (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Bush, 2010; English, 2012; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Niesche, 2013; Pont, 2013; Riveros, Verret, & Wei, 2016). In an

attempt to acknowledge the importance of context, the published resources to support the OLF describe it as flexible enough to be applied to a wide range of school leadership roles and situations (IEL, 2008). However, references to the specific role and duties of vice-principals remains absent, suggesting that the roles of principals and vice-principals are considered interchangeable and that the leadership practices outlined in the OLF are generic.

Consequently, given that the domains and practices outlined in the OLF do not distinguish between the roles of principals and vice-principals, instead referring to both simply as school leaders, the question can be raised as to what extent the document accurately reflects the role and leadership practices of vice-principals. Moreover, no distinction is made between the role of elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals. Evidently, elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals experience different environments and leadership opportunities based on the distinctive nature of their panels (Riveros et al., 2016). Thus, it is unclear how one set of standards is appropriate for both groups. In conducting this research I sought to explore these ideas further.

### **Significance**

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012), the OLF describes specific leadership characteristics “which the research indicates create the variation among leaders in how well they are able to enact leadership practices” (p. 13). Numerous researchers have explored the leadership practices of secondary vice-principals internationally (Joseph, 2014; Garrard, 2013; Kwan, 2009; Shoho et al., 2012) and in Ontario (Armstrong, 2004; Goulais, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Williamson, 2011). However, this research does not explore their leadership practices in relation to the OLF. In the very few studies that are specific to the OLF, researchers have either focused exclusively on principals or have grouped the experiences and leadership practices of principals and vice-principals together (Leithwood & Azah, 2014; Montanari, 2014; Riveros et al., 2016; Swapp, 2012; Winton & Pollock, 2015). Consequently, we know very little about how secondary vice-principals enact the OLF.

This school leadership role is largely under-represented in the research regarding the OLF and was in need of further exploration.

Since the relationship between the OLF and the practices of vice-principals has been largely unexplored, studying how the vice-principal's leadership is constructed in relation to the OLF may offer new perspectives about the connections between school leadership and educational policy. By providing some awareness as to how vice-principals translate the OLF policy into practices and how they conceptualize it, it is hoped that school and district leaders will be given insight to help inform the enactment of this policy for this specific group. According to Ball et al. (2012), "policy enactment involves the creative processes of interpretation and recontextualization – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into recontextualized practices – and this process involves interpretations of interpretations" (p. 3). As a policy, there are implications around how the OLF is enacted by vice-principals. When a single set of standards is applied to all school leaders, without consideration of the contextual factors, local leaders and their practices could be marginalized or misrepresented, resulting in a narrow characterization of leadership. Given the significance of this policy in the professional growth and career advancement of vice-principals, a deeper understanding of how this specific group interprets and enacts the OLF is both relevant and essential.

### **Purpose of the Study**

While the OLF is not intended to be a job description nor a checklist for assessing performance (Leithwood, 2012), it is a crucial guideline for leadership practice in the district in which the research was conducted. The OLF outlines the skills that practitioners must demonstrate when being considered for a leadership role. In order for a vice-principal to be considered for the role of principal he or she must demonstrate "evidence of effectiveness" in all 21 practices outlined in the OLF. In fact, the OLF is so significant to the promotion process within the district in which the study took place, that the application for consideration for advancement to the role of principal is a fillable form adapted from the OLF. This form consists of all five sections in the OLF, with each

leadership practice and corresponding bullets listed in their entirety. Vice-principals seeking promotion are required to complete the form by providing specific examples of effective leadership practices and experiences required for each section and bullet listed in the OLF. Their current principal then adds comments on each specific example. In some cases the application is completed with a great deal of communication between the two parties and in others, the vice-principal and principal each complete their portion separately. Upon completion of the form, the supervisory officer specific to that school includes his or her comments, usually after consultation with both the principal and vice-principal.

Given that the role of secondary vice-principals within the same district varies from principal to principal and from school to school, opportunities to practice or gain experience in specific competencies could vary significantly. As such, I believe that learning more about how secondary vice-principals enact the OLF and its impact on their leadership practices would offer significant insights into their work. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to interrogate the ways the OLF shapes the leadership practices of a group of secondary vice-principals in one school district in Ontario. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the emerging body of literature that exists on the role and work of vice-principals in that it will provide further insights about the ways they understand and enact their leadership practices, and the extent to which they perceive their work to be reflected in the OLF.

### **Research Questions**

This research provided an interrogation of the enactment of the OLF on the role and practices of secondary vice-principals and examined what leadership practices secondary vice-principals participate in, which ones they do not, and why. Therefore, my central research question is this:

- How are the leadership practices of secondary vice-principals influenced by the OLF and how do vice principals use the OLF to conceptualize their role?

The following sub-questions needed to be answered in order to address the central question.

1. How is the OLF used to define or construct the role of the secondary vice-principal in one public school district in Ontario?
2. In what way do secondary vice-principals perceive their work to be captured by the OLF?
3. What factors influence the enactment of the OLF for this group?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For the purpose of this study, a *vice-principal* is defined as a school administrator, assigned by the board, who serves directly under the principal and who “shall perform such duties as are assigned to the vice-principal by the principal” (OME, 1990, s. 12[2]). The legislation in Ontario that addresses the role of vice-principals is the Education Act (OME, 1990) which, in addition to the above notation, states, “In the absence of the principal of a school, a vice-principal, where a vice-principal has been appointed for the school, shall be in charge of the school and shall perform the duties of the principal” (s.12 [3]). These are the only two sections of the Education Act that address the role and duties of vice-principals. Unfortunately, neither of these sections provide any clear direction to any party as to what duties should be performed by vice-principals, leaving it entirely to the discretion of individual principals.

Throughout the literature, the role of vice-principal (Canada, Hong Kong) is often also referred to as an assistant principal (USA), deputy head (UK) and deputy principal (Australia) (Rintoul & Goulais, 2010). For the purpose of consistency, the term vice-principal will be used throughout this paper. While the terminology used for vice-principals varies throughout the world, the role, as I have determined through my review of the literature, does not. The duties of vice-principals are not well defined with no universal role definition and are most commonly described as “duties as assigned by the principal”, according to studies coming from Hong Kong (Kwan, 2008, 2009; Lee et al., 2009), the United States (Garrard, 2013; Joseph, 2014; Marshall & Hooley, 2006), and Canada (Armstrong, 2004; Goulais, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Nanavati & McCulloch,

2003; Williamson, 2011; Williamson & Scott, 2012). This will be explored in more detail in the literature review.

*Leadership practice* is “a bundle of activities exercised by a person or group of persons which reflect the particular circumstances in which they find themselves and with some shared outcome(s) in mind” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 5). The term “leadership practices” is used throughout the supporting documents to the OLF to suggest that it is the preferred term to be used to identify the desired activities of school leaders.

*Leadership standards* provide the articulation of professional principles and values and act as tools that can be used to make judgments about the performance of school leaders, professional preparation and learning, and ongoing professional development (Ingvarson et al., 2006). The stated intent of the OLF is to provide aspiring leaders important insights about what they will need to learn to be successful and to serve as a tool for self-reflection and self-assessment for those already in leadership positions (IEL, 2012a). Furthermore, it supports the work of districts in recruiting, selecting, developing and retaining new leaders (IEL, 2012b). While some might argue that frameworks are merely guidelines and not professional standards, influential reports (Ingvarson et al., 2006; Pont, 2013) position the OLF as a set of standards because they define a set of principles used for accreditation and evaluation of a practice in a profession.

In the province of Ontario, the qualifications of school teachers and leaders are determined and managed by the Ontario College of Teachers. School leaders assuming the role of vice-principal are required to be qualified in two of three divisions, have taught for a minimum of five years, and to have taken two professional development courses - Principal Qualification Program Part 1 and 2, which are based predominantly on the OLF (Ontario College of Teachers, 2009). In fact, the content of both courses in the Principals’ Qualification Program is actually organized into the five domains reflected in the OLF. Assessment and evaluation of candidates in these two courses involves their ability to understand and apply the OLF throughout the course and the required practicum component must address one specific area of the OLF (Ontario College of Teachers,

2009). In this way, the OLF used in Ontario parallels the use of the ISLLC standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008) in the United States.

### **Positionality**

Throughout my practice as a secondary vice-principal, I often struggled to reconcile the contrast between the expectations of both the Ministry of Education and my district regarding my leadership practice, and the tasks in which I spent the majority of my time. While I have always understood what was expected of me in terms of leadership and the significance of developing capacity in the competencies addressed in the OLF, I struggled to reconcile the gap between theory and practice. For example, in the domain of Setting Directions, leaders build a shared vision and identify specific, shared short-term goals. The OLF provides examples of specific practices that can be used by leaders to facilitate these objectives, all of which focus on collaboration, communication, and transparency. However, in my experience, many principals exert a great deal of control in this area with direction and goal setting processes reflecting their own beliefs about what the school needs and their philosophy on the role of the principal as decision-maker. As a vice-principal, it becomes challenging to answer questions from teachers or superintendents about the goals and strategies outlined in the school improvement plan when it was created by the principal, based on his or her own vision for the school, rather than through a shared or collaborative process. Furthermore, I am expected to support and endorse the direction set by the principal and agree with his or her vision, despite perhaps preferring to have taken a very different approach myself. This is but one example of the many ways in which I have found that the leadership practices in the OLF reflect the authority and role of the principal, rather than the vice-principal, and yet, my performance and competency are judged by my ability to demonstrate the practices outlined in this lone document. As such, discrepancies between the expectations of my superiors and the reality of my role have lead me to question whether my contributions to the schools in which I have worked were valued and acknowledged as leadership practices that influence student achievement and wellbeing, or were they perhaps, not even regarded as leadership at all.

My interest in this problem of practice and subsequent research study is a result of many years of reflecting on my own practices and efficacy in my role. I am now in my seventh year as a secondary vice-principal and throughout those years, I feel very fortunate to have worked in several different capacities with very different principals, all of whom have contributed in various and varied ways to my professional learning and leadership practices. During my years as a secondary vice-principal, I worked at three different schools with four very different principals. Two of those schools contained grades 7-12 and in one of which I was solely responsible for the intermediate grades. Interestingly, while it was my first placement as a vice-principal, my experiences with the intermediate school afforded me the greatest opportunity to engage in the school leadership practices that are addressed in the OLF.

In addition to working in schools as a vice-principal, I was very fortunate to hold a system position as Vice-principal of Special Education Services for several years. During this time I reported directly to a system principal, and like all other vice-principal roles my job description was “duties as assigned”. However, much of my work involved supporting and overseeing the practices of itinerant teachers and consultants, including the professional learning that they received and delivered to the district. Additionally, I spent a great deal of time supporting school teams with contentious issues. Holding that role afforded me the opportunity to develop and appreciate a broader perspective on a variety of critical leadership issues that certainly enriched my practice when I returned to a school-based vice-principalship.

While each of these experiences as a vice-principal provided a variety of different learning and leadership opportunities, I often found myself wondering if the duties in which I engaged as a secondary vice-principal was actually considered leadership. In fact, I often felt that I had experienced much greater opportunity to be an instructional leader in my previous role as Head of Special Education, than as a secondary vice-principal. Reflections such as these were further intensified several years ago while completing the application for consideration for promotion to the role of secondary principal. As I reflected on my experiences and the leadership practices in which I had engaged throughout my years as a secondary vice-principal, I found myself becoming very aware



of the significance of context and how critical that was in demonstrating effectiveness in each of the required competencies.

While developing the research questions and designing the study, I knew how important it would be to be sensitive to, and aware of, my own perceptions, and transparent with participants and readers. One way for me to do this would be to practice reflexivity which involves intentionally revealing underlying assumptions or biases that may cause me to formulate a set of questions or present findings in a certain way (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The entire nature of the study, including how I formulated my research questions and interview questions, how I interpreted the experiences of my participants, and the subsequent writing of my findings, were all based on the cultural, social, gender, class and personal politics that I brought to this research (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, my positionality as a colleague to my participants, in the same role, within the same district, will have certainly shaped my interpretations of the data, through the themes that I identified and the meanings that I ascribed to those themes. Furthermore, holding the dual position of researcher and colleague could influence the responses of participants, which in turn, could influence my questions (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014).

My experiences and reflections as a secondary vice-principal not only resulted in the formulation of my problem of practice, and research design, but influenced all aspects of my study. For instance, while developing the research questions and interview questions, the awareness of how my own experiences led me to question whether the OLF was an appropriate tool to capture and evaluate the leadership practices of vice-principals was important to acknowledge. Would asking participants whether the OLF captures their work suggest to them that I do not believe that it does, and if so, would that influence their response? Considerations such as these were of extreme importance to me during the study design. Furthermore, I needed to remain conscious of the fact that, during data analysis, I was constantly comparing and contrasting the experiences of my participants with my own. This will be elaborated on more fully during chapters on data analyses, findings, and discussion.

In conducting this research, I hoped to contribute to the body of literature on how secondary vice-principals enact the OLF. However, as a secondary vice-principal, I also

wanted to learn more about how I have constructed meaning in my role, ways in which my experiences have shaped my perceptions compared to my peers, and ways in which I can contribute to creating further leadership opportunities for vice-principals in the future.

### **Overview of Methodology and Methods**

This research was structured as a descriptive case study, situated in a school district that consists of fewer than 20 secondary schools, with approximately 20 secondary vice-principals, of which I am one. According to Yin (2014), the purpose of a descriptive case study is to describe a phenomenon in its real-world context. In order to capture the complexity of the problem and allow vice-principals the opportunity to explain and describe their enactment of the OLF, semi-structured interviews with ten vice-principals were conducted. Each interview consisted of ten questions and took less than one hour. Interviews were utilized as the method to collect data to allow for rich, descriptive data from which themes and categories emerged. The intent of this method of data collection was to allow secondary vice-principals the opportunity to describe and explain their daily duties in an attempt to determine which leadership practices were captured within the OLF, which were not, and why. The use of interviews also allowed for a greater exploration of individual context and experiences, which are very important to the theoretical framework of this study.

With the written consent of all participants, the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by me. One benefit of transcribing the interviews personally was that it allowed me to begin identifying themes prior to data analysis, which I recorded in my journal as I transcribed. An additional benefit was that it allowed me to become very familiar with the contents of the interviews, which proved very beneficial to me later during the data analysis stage.

Data was analyzed using inductive coding by identifying themes and categories. My coding process consisted of two levels: first level (*priori*) and second level (inductive) (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). During my first level of coding, I created a list of potential codes based on my literature review, theoretical framework, and

research questions. During my second level of coding, I grouped excerpts from the first level of coding to identify new categories and themes, while revising and condensing others. Throughout the process, new sub-categories emerged and others were discarded. While creating my categories, I made notes in my journal to capture my thinking and decision-making.

In addition to the data obtained through interviews and the field notes collected in a journal, more information was also obtained through document analysis of ministry resources and district-provided professional development supports. By exploring a variety of resources provided to vice-principals by the ministry and district, I was able to consider some of the perceptions of this group on the available supports and consequent implications of their enactment of the OLF.

### **Assumptions**

Several assumptions were made in this research study. First, the assumption was made that the information shared by participants during the interviews was actually based on their beliefs, perspectives, and experiences, as opposed to what they felt they were expected to say, by me or others. I believe that my pre-existing collegial relationship with all participants helped in this area as they felt at ease with me. Another assumption was made that secondary schools will continue to have vice-principals. If another organizational model were put in place that no longer required vice-principals to support principals, the role of vice-principals in relation to the OLF would no longer be relevant. The assumption was also made that the OLF will continue to be the document by which the performance and promotion of vice-principals is assessed. While not formally stated to be an assessment tool, the OLF document indicates that it is “a valuable tool for self-reflection and self-assessment” and “supports the work of those responsible for recruiting, selecting, developing and retaining new leaders” (IEL, 2012a, p. 5). However, should the OLF be revised to fully reflect the role and practices of vice-principals, or another framework developed that is specific to the role of vice-principal, this problem of practice and research may serve to inform such revisions or expansions. Finally, the assumption was made that system leaders, including ministry and district leaders, are

interested in knowing how secondary vice-principals utilize the OLF. Other groups that support the professional growth of vice-principals such as the Ontario Principals' Council and the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario may be equally interested in this study. It is anticipated that these groups are all interested in knowing how the OLF is enacted in schools and in what ways vice-principals interpret it and translate it into their leadership practices.

### **Limitations**

The OLF consists of four key components: school level leadership; the K-12 School Effectiveness Framework; system-level leadership; and a district effectiveness framework. While all four components serve to direct and support the work of leaders, the OLF does distinguish between leadership at the school level and at the district level, therefore, for the purposes of this study, all reference to the OLF as it relates to vice-principals was specifically in regards to the first of those components: school-level leadership practices and the associated personal resources. It did not address the K-12 School Effectiveness Framework, the district effectiveness framework, or the system-level leadership framework, although greater research in these documents, in relation to the practices of secondary vice-principals, would be worthwhile in the future.

This study focused solely on secondary vice-principals within one school district in Ontario. The school district has approximately 50 vice-principals, only a third of whom are vice-principals of secondary schools, of which I am one. The study did not include elementary vice-principals. The reason for this is primarily that the roles between elementary and secondary vice-principals varies significantly, and while equally important, would have made the scope of this study too large. Additionally, participants needed to have been in the role for at least one year prior to the interview in order to be able to articulate their experiences in more informed ways. While the experiences of new secondary vice-principals would certainly be worthy of further exploration, for the research questions pertaining to this study, I elected to limit participants to those who were already comfortable with the expectations and duties related to their role.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the search method used to locate literature related to the problem of practice. Following that, a review of the literature that pertains to different aspects of the problem of practice will include the role of vice-principals, policy context, and leadership standards. The chapter will close with a discussion on policy and the vice-principalship by reviewing existing studies most relevant to the problem of practice.

### **Search Method**

The search methodology for this review included several key steps, the first of which was to determine the area of focus for the literature review: the role of vice-principals and the OLF. The next step was to conduct a literature search using online search portals such as the Western University Library Portals and Google Scholar. Using the online portals, approximately 1000 items were located so different search terms were then utilized to attempt to reduce the number of resources for consideration. Other criteria used to create a more specific list of sources was to limit the search to documents published in English and available in full-text. Examples of search terms used were “vice-principal”, “secondary vice-principal”, “assistant principal”, “leadership”, “leadership frameworks”, “policy enactment” and “Ontario Leadership Framework”. Furthermore, additional topics were searched such as qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis, meta-analysis, research syntheses, theoretical frameworks, and policy discourse. Various combinations were tried with each providing between 50 to 200 articles and book titles, many of which were duplications from previous searches. A hand-written search log was maintained as well as an electronic search log. The third step involved an analysis of the results of the search to determine which articles, books, and theses would be included in this review. Each item that had been located through the search was given a cursory glance based on the title of the article, chapter, journal, book or thesis, and a perusal of the abstract where applicable to determine consideration for further reading. Material identified for further consideration were compiled into a folder and printed for

deeper exploration. Some considerations in choosing the final sources for inclusion in the review was the methodology used, the findings, the intended audience, the country in which the study took place, and the specificity of the topic. Also consulted was the reference list at the end of each article to help determine credibility. A great many additional sources were located by perusing the reference list at the end of articles, books, and theses, and through the recommendation of my advisor. Many resources were available online, however, some books that I deemed to be very significant were either purchased or borrowed from various libraries. It is important to note that the literature search was an ongoing process, rather than an event, and continued through all phases of the study.

### **The Role of the Vice-principal**

The role of vice-principal is seen as significant in schools around the world yet the position is much less researched than the role of principal (Armstrong, 2004, 2009; Harvey, 1994; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012). Research from Hong Kong (Kwan, 2008; 2009; 2011; Kwan & Walker, 2010; Lee et al., 2009), the United States (Garrard, 2013; Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary & Donaldson, 2002; Joseph, 2014; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012) and Canada (Armstrong, 2004, 2009; Goulais, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Montanari, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Read, 2012; Rintoul, 2012; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010; Williamson, 2011) shows that there is no universal role definition for vice-principals and is most commonly described as “duties as assigned by the principal”. Given that the role can vary dramatically depending on school context and the individual principal’s personal philosophies and understanding of the role, vice-principals are often limited in which activities they can take part (Harvey, 1994; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012). Furthermore, the role and duties of vice-principals can vary significantly between schools within the same district from year-to-year (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003). Since the literature reveals a lack of a consistent understanding of the role of vice-principals and the duties performed, much more can be learned about how vice-principals conceptualize their role.

Research coming out of the United States (Oleszewski et al., 2011; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010) and Hong Kong (Kwan, 2009) has organized the most common tasks performed by a vice-principal as falling into four categories: conferencing with students and parents; handling behavior problems; developing the master schedule, registration and attendance; and counselling students. Research conducted by Hausman et al. (2002) reported seven areas pertaining to the role of vice-principal: instructional leadership, personnel management, interaction with the educational hierarchy, professional development, resources management, public relations, and student management. However, they note that of the seven, the areas where vice-principals spent the vast majority of their time were on student and staff management. Moreover, the literature reveals that vice-principals spend the bulk of their time on managerial tasks such as student and staff attendance, student behaviour, and communicating with parents, staff, and the community (Armstrong, 2009; Kwan, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012).

As noted previously, there is very limited literature specific to the role of secondary vice-principals. Much of what does exist examines elementary and secondary vice-principals together, as one common group for the most part (Armstrong, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011, Shoho et al., 2012). This section will examine some of the research that has been conducted that is relevant to this study internationally and in Ontario.

Research coming out of Hong Kong specific to secondary vice-principals provided substantial insight pertaining to duties, job satisfaction, efficacy, and how their experiences served to prepare them for the role of principal (Kwan, 2008; Kwan, 2009; Kwan, 2011; Kwan & Walker, 2010; Lee et al., 2009). While this research provided greater understanding of the role and leadership practices of secondary vice-principals, reference was not made to any leadership standards, which is a critical component of my study.

Some of the research coming out of the United States has proven to be very beneficial to this study. Hausman et al. (2002) examined the practices of elementary and secondary vice-principals and reported that they spent minimal time engaging in

instructional leadership and professional learning opportunities. Furthermore, their research determined that the experiences of vice-principals were not serving to prepare them for principalship.

Joseph (2014) conducted research with elementary and secondary principals to determine how their prior experiences as vice-principals supported them in, and informed, their current role. Participants in this study did not feel their vice-principal role had prepared them to be principals and reported large experiential gaps in budget, instructional leadership, special education, and human resources. It would have been interesting to have the findings distinguish between elementary and secondary experiences.

In a recent study conducted in California, Garrard (2013) found that the political dynamics of their school structure resulted in the marginalization of secondary vice-principals, with limited opportunity to grow as instructional leaders due to inadequate opportunities for professional development and the ambiguity of their role. Her participants reported that they did not feel as if they were leaders in the school, but rather, their practice focussed on building and facilitating relationships. While the findings in this study were very relevant to my research, they would have been even more relevant had leadership standards been addressed in some way.

Closer to home, research conducted in British Columbia examined succession planning for school leaders and how they were socialized to their role (Grodzki, 2011). In this study, participants reported that professional development and chances for promotion for vice-principals was dependent entirely on the level of involvement and support of their principals, which was not consistent from principal to principal. Another study that examined the future of principalship in Canada, studied school leadership nationally, and while vice-principals were included as participants, their role and experiences were not acknowledged as different in any way (Canadian Association of Principals, 2014). While these studies were very informative, the findings in both combined the experiences of vice-principals and principals together, which proved to be problematic in examining experiences unique to secondary vice-principals.



Given the nature of my study, locating research that addressed the leadership practices of secondary vice-principals in relation to the OLF was critical, but proved very challenging. Much of the literature on leadership practices in Ontario fails to address either the specific role of secondary vice-principal, or the OLF, and I was unable to locate any studies that do both. For example, the work of Normore (2004) focused on recruitment and selection processes for principals; however, his data were gathered from people in a variety of roles and no reference was specific to the experiences of vice-principals. Williamson (2011) researched the experiences of elementary vice-principals and found their role was ill-defined and largely dependent on their principal. He reported that “the lack of clarity about the vice-principal role creates a situation where vice-principals understand their role principally through their experiences of it, not through research, policy, or training” (p. iii). While these studies provided great insight in many areas, they did not address the unique experiences of secondary vice-principals.

Some research does exist specific to the role of secondary vice-principals in Ontario. For example, Rintoul and Goulais (2010) examined the moral literacy and decision-making of three secondary vice-principals but their practices were not examined in relation to the OLF. Nanavati and McCulloch (2003) examined the practices of secondary vice-principals in relation to school culture. Participants reported that principals were responsible for school improvement and the vision of the school while vice-principals were responsible for management and operations. This study also found that the principal/vice-principal relationship played a critical role in opportunities for vice-principals. Goulais (2008) studied how the lack of job description impacted the self-efficacy of three secondary vice-principals in Northern Ontario but this work predated the OLF. Another recent study conducted in Ontario that failed to mention the OLF, found that new secondary vice-principals reported a stark difference between their perception of the role based on professional learning and organization training, and the actual role in which they found themselves (MacDonald, 2004).

Some studies have been conducted that examined leadership practices in specific relation to the OLF. Swapp (2012) studied the leadership practices of one elementary principal and determined that there was a very abstract relationship between the OLF and

her day-to-day work. Winton and Pollock (2015) examined how the OLF influenced the leadership practices of elementary principals in relation to their own definition of success. Also specific to the OLF was a recent study that investigated how the OLF translated into practices in elementary and secondary schools, however, it focused on both principals and vice-principals without distinguishing between the two roles (Riveros et al., 2016). These studies demonstrate an increasing interest in how the OLF translates into practices of school leaders; however, they also serve to illustrate that the experiences of secondary vice-principals in relation to the OLF is an area gravely in need of further exploration.

**The vice-principal and instructional leadership.** The original literature review for this study did not explore the concept of instructional leadership; however, due to the very strong emphasis on instructional leadership expectations and opportunities for vice-principals revealed in the interview transcripts and analysis, I decided to include a brief discussion here. In his review of the literature Hallinger (2005) determined that instructional leadership has been the most studied model of school leadership in the past three decades. According to Pollock, Hausman, and Wang (2014), “the field of educational leadership traditionally views an instructional leader as someone who is focused on the teaching and curriculum aspect of school leadership” (p. 22). However, Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) caution against “leading by adjective,” preferring instead to focus on the specific practices related to well-developed leadership models (p. 7). Moreover, in an interview, Leithwood later says of instructional leadership,

I actually think it would be a step forward to stop using the term because the role of the school leader involves so much more than that term would suggest...principals have all the demands of budgets and timetables and other operational tasks to manage in ways that contribute to growth within the organization...so I would say whatever it is leaders do that results in greater learning we can call instructional leadership if that’s the term of the day. But in fact we know that both school and system leaders are doing a lot of other things

that are indirectly – but importantly – linked to the improvement of student achievement and well-being. (OME, 2012, p. 5)

However, Leithwood (2012) identifies the following leadership practices as contributing most directly to instructional improvement in his discussion paper created to support the OLF:

actively overseeing the instructional program; coordinating what is taught across subjects and grades to avoid unnecessary overlap while providing needed reinforcement and extension of learning goals; observing in classrooms and providing constructive feedback that is useful to teachers; providing adequate preparation time for teachers; being a useful source of advice to teachers about how to solve classroom problems; engaging teachers in observing effective instructional practices among colleagues in their own school, as well as in other schools; and participating with staff in their instructional work. (p. 28)

Interestingly, research by Hallinger (2005) found that those leadership practices that were most focused on improving classroom instruction had less of an effect on improving student achievement than did leadership practices that were aimed at developing the organization and culture of the school.

When discussing what is meant by instructional leadership it is important to explore how participants involved in this study might define it. According to one resource developed by the district to support school leaders' utilization of the OLF, instructional leadership is defined as,

Those actions that an individual takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning. It is setting high expectations for learning outcomes and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction. It is managing the school effectively so that everyone can focus on teaching and learning. (To protect district anonymity, the title and author cannot be named, p. 1)

A discussion of how vice-principals in this study interpret district expectations and their own leadership practices regarding instructional leadership will take place later in the data analysis chapter.

While vice-principals consider instructional leadership as part of their role, the literature reveals that few vice-principals feel they perform the duties of an instructional leader (Garrard, 2013; Goulais, 2008; Kwan, 2009; MacDonald, 2004; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Read, 2012; Rintoul, 2012; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010; Williamson, 2011). Matthews and Crow (2003), report that the vice-principal's role "has come to reflect a non-instructional orientation that primarily emphasizes student management, defined as crowd control or policing disruptive students" (p. 108). The literature reveals that although the expectations of the role may include instructional leadership elements, the actual practice of vice-principals tends to de-emphasize this. By focusing on the less-appealing tasks of school leadership, that of discipline, attendance, scheduling and staff management, their credibility with teachers is decreased, limiting their capacity to act as an instructional resource (Armstrong, 2004, 2009; Kwan, 2009; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012).

**Socialization into the role of vice-principal.** In the absence of a clearly defined role, and duties determined at the discretion of individual principals, one might wonder how vice-principals learn how to be a vice-principal, and then later, a principal. Rintoul and Goulais (2010) reported that "vice-principals are required to complete preparation courses that focus on leadership tasks most often performed only by the principal" (p. 746), while Marshall and Hooley (2006) found that many districts create their own program to prepare assistant principals for a principal position within their district. According to Matthews and Crow (2003), there are three distinctive ways in which vice-principals are socialized in their role: assigning tasks, creating role images, and providing support (p. 274). Marshall and Hooley (2006) found that while professional development sessions, workshops, conferences, and district staff development programs may provide aspiring vice-principals with some information and training, once in the role, "it is difficult to participate in professional development opportunities since he or she is such a critical player in the daily life of the school" (p. 39). In fact, researchers have determined that vice-principals are the primary managers of the building (Kwan, 2009; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010) and as such, some

principals may be reluctant to release vice-principals to participate in professional learning opportunities.

Using survey data from vice-principals in the United States, Hausman et al. (2002) found that while technically connected hierarchically to the district office, there is really no direct relationship between vice-principals and the district office. Moreover, the literature reveals that many researchers have found that the relationship that has the greatest impact on the vice-principal is their current principal, resulting in that principal being the primary determinant of the vice-principal's duties and opportunities (Armstrong, 2009; Garrard, 2013; Goulais, 2008; Harvey, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Joseph, 2014; Kwan, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010; Shoho et al., 2012; Williamson, 2011). Through working with their principal, the vice-principal "learned what it meant to be successful, what is acceptable behavior as an administrator, [and] ways to conform to the organizational expectations" (Hausman et al., 2002, p. 272). Other researchers have also identified mentoring and modelling as an important part of preparing vice-principals for their role as principal (Goulais, 2008; Joseph, 2014; Oleszewski et al., 2011; MacDonald, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Williamson, 2011).

New principals are drawn from the ranks of vice-principals in many school systems around the world (Hausman et al., 2002; Kwan, 2008; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012). Many researchers have determined that the experiences of vice-principals do not adequately prepare them for the role of principal (Hausman et al., 2002; Kwan, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Williamson, 2011). In her study, Kwan (2008) found that respondents did not perceive their experiences in managing staff an asset, partly because they dealt largely with staff grievances and other situations in which they felt the principal did not want to be involved. She also found that vice-principals perceived their duties more "as a result of their principals' arbitrary and discretionary decisions than as a result of careful and purposeful succession developmental planning" (Kwan, 2008, p. 194). Furthermore, in their review of the literature, Marshall and Hooley (2006)

determined due to the fact that vice-principals' roles are normally assigned at the discretion of their principals, many rarely have the opportunity to make the decisions they would face after promotion to the role of principal. In other words, while working as vice-principals they are not given the opportunity to be involved in the process of decision-making that they would later need in the role of principal.

Additionally, Oleszewski et al., (2011) found that vice-principals “are rarely afforded the breadth of professional development opportunities that teachers and principals receive” (p. 267) and their research concluded the duties which they were delegated resulted in decreased principal responsibilities and insufficient preparation of vice-principals for the role of principal. In her recent research on how leadership practices of principals in California are informed by their experiences as vice-principals, Joseph (2014) found that successful relations with their principals and specialized work experience played the biggest role in their preparedness. Some identified gaps related to budget training, instructional leadership, special education, and human resources (Joseph, 2014). Other researchers concur with these identified gaps (Garrard, 2013; Goulais, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Williamson, 2011). Kwan (2008) reported very limited involvement of vice-principals in financial and resource management issues, and Shoho et al., (2012) identify resource management; leader/teacher growth and development; and teaching, learning, and curriculum as the areas that vice-principals participated in the least. Researchers report a large disconnect between what vice-principals would like to be doing, and what they actually do in their work (Armstrong, 2004, 2009; Garrard, 2013; Hausman et al, 2002; Joseph, 2014; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012).

Kwan (2008) argues that since the position of vice-principal is considered an assessment position for promotion to the role of principal, greater consistency in the role is important. In research conducted with secondary vice-principals in Hong Kong, Lee et al. (2009) reported that in key areas, such as financial and facilities management, principals are reluctant to delegate, impacting the ability and confidence of vice-principals in effectively carrying out the role of principal when appointed. In the absence of effective professional development opportunities, vice-principals must rely on the

experiences provided in their roles as determined by their principals. However, Leithwood et al. (2004) argued that preparation of school leaders must rely on “situated knowledge to develop most readily, participation with others must occur in activity which is ‘authentic’ – circumstances which involve the ordinary activities of school leadership and management” (p. 69). In this regard, Kwan (2009) agrees, arguing for policy makers to become involved in determining which specific responsibilities should be delegated to vice-principals and which opportunities provided. If the tasks assigned, the modeling that occurs, and the support provided are inconsistent and solely at the discretion of individual principals, one could argue that many variables could lead to vastly different levels of preparedness of vice-principals for the role of principal.

In the province of Ontario, vice-principals are required to have taken, or be in the process of taking, two additional qualification courses accredited through the Ontario College of Teachers and provided by the Ontario Principals’ Council through various providers (Ontario College of Teachers, 2009). After completion of these two courses, districts are required to provide their own professional development to vice-principals. The Ontario Ministry of Education has developed the OLS to support school and district leaders which consists of a variety of articles, resources, a mentoring program, a performance appraisal system, and the OLF, the policy on which the study was focused (OME, 2008a). A discussion on how the specific district in this study has chosen to operationalize the OLS in relation to secondary vice-principals specifically will be discussed in the next section of this chapter and later as part of the data analysis.

### **Policy Context**

In the field of education, policy has been traditionally viewed as an attempt by authoritative individuals to solve a problem through the production of policy texts such as legislation, or other authoritative decisions written in documents, and inserted into practice (Ball et al., 2012; Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011; Viczko & Riveros, 2015; Winton, 2013; Winton & Pollock, 2015). In this conventional view, policy-making is separated into “discrete categories of design, implementation, and evaluation that privilege the agential actor as instrumental decision-maker” (Viczko & Riveros, 2015, p.

479). Policy viewed in this way assumes that policies are delivered to schools in a completed form, ready to be implemented by various policy actors (Viczo & Riveros, 2015).

However, there is a growing body of researchers who question this linear view and argue that policy cannot be implemented, but rather enacted through creative processes of interpretation and translation based on considerations such as policy type, power and positionality, space and time constraints, and other contextual considerations (Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2011; Maguire, Braun & Ball, 2015; Riveros et al., 2016; Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita & Zoltners, 2002; Viczo & Riveros; 2015; Winton, 2013; Winton & Pollock, 2015). Since many policies do not tell you what to do or how to do it, it stands to reason that policies will not be carried out consistently when “key decisions must be made relating to the interpretation and implementation of policy directives and agendas – combining the stakeholders’ personal values, perceptions, context and resources” (Jones, 2013, p. 1). A full discussion on the theory of policy enactment and how it relates to this study will take place in theoretical framework chapter.

In the province of Ontario, there is extremely limited policy that addresses the specific role of vice-principals. Currently the position of vice-principal is addressed very minimally in both the Education Act (1990) and subsequent Policy/Program Memorandum 152 (2010). While the duties of principals are fully addressed in the Education Act (1990), regarding the role of vice-principals, it merely states, “A vice-principal shall perform such duties as are assigned to the vice-principal by the principal” (R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 298, s. 12[2]) and, “in the absence of the principal of a school, a vice-principal, where a vice-principal has been appointed for the school, shall be in charge of the school and shall perform the duties of the principal” (R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 298, s. 12[3]). Neither section of the Education Act provides any clear direction as to what particular duties should be performed by vice-principals, leaving it entirely to the discretion of individual principals.

In order to address the changing context of education in Ontario, the ministry occasionally releases Policy/Program Memorandums (PPM) to address changes or clarify



components of the Education Act. In 2012, PPM 152 was released with the subject line: *Terms and Conditions of Employment of Principals and Vice-principals*. While the title of the document indicates that it provides employment conditions of vice-principals, there is no distinction made between the roles of principal and vice-principal anywhere in the content. This document indicates the government's "support for the role of the principal with a commitment to develop a more comprehensive leadership strategy", outlines the promotion of the OLF as a tool for evaluating the performance and promotion of principals and vice-principals, as well as "succession planning and talent development to ensure the best possible leadership" (OME, 2012, p. 1). The role of vice-principal is not addressed separately, or defined as different in any way, than that of principal in PPM 152. This suggests that in the province of Ontario, the role of principal and vice-principal can be viewed interchangeably; however, numerous researchers in Ontario have found that the roles and duties are really quite different (Goulais, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Montanari, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Read, 2012; Rintoul, 2012; Williamson, 2011).

As the policy outlining the school leadership standards for principals and vice-principals in the province of Ontario, the OLF is grounded in the research and work of Leithwood (2013) who argues that, "strong districts have effective performance management systems for school leaders based on clear and explicit conceptions of effective school leadership practices, along the lines of the OLF" (p. 26). In this context, "strong" districts are those that "are successful at improving student achievement and well-being – and at closing gaps in both of these outcomes" (Leithwood, 2013, p. 10). Various resources provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education to support the implementation of the OLF, have suggested that the OLF is a policy, rather than a guideline for practice (OME, 2009). In fact, a series of resources entitled, *From Research to Policy to Effective Practice*, have been made available to school and system leaders as part of the OLS, whose title specifically indicates that the OLF is indeed a policy. Therefore, policy-makers in the province of Ontario have determined that a performance management framework that focuses on increased student achievement and well-being will determine "effective" leadership. Interestingly, while standardized assessment results

can be used to measure academic achievement, there is limited reference to the measurement of well-being in ministry resources.

The OLF consists of five domains with each encompassing two to six practices, for a total of 21 specific practices. The five domains include Setting Directions (4 specific practices), Building Relationships and Developing People (5 specific practices), Developing the Organization to Sustain Desired Practices (6 specific practices), Improving the Instructional Program (4 specific practices), and Securing Accountability (2 specific practices) (Leithwood, 2012). In addition to the five domains, the OLF outlines three personal leadership resources which leaders draw in order to enact effective leadership practices. According to Leithwood (2012), these personal characteristics are instrumental to leadership success and include Cognitive Resources (3 specific practices), Social Resources (3 specific practices), and Psychological Resources (4 specific practices).

The Institute for Education Leadership (2012b) maintains that leaders' competence in the practices identified in the OLF will evolve as they move through career stages, assignments, and environments. This appears to be an attempt to acknowledge the significance of context in relation to these standards; however, more explanation would be beneficial, particularly in regards to the vice-principal role. Specific to the mention of assignment, there is no delineation between the roles of principal and vice-principal, nor is there reference to the career stages of vice-principals, which would be vastly different than those of principals. Furthermore, it is stated that, "It is expected that school leaders will expand and strengthen their 'repertoire' of practices and personal leadership resources over time, provided they have the opportunities and are supported" (IEL, 2012a, p. 8). Nonetheless, it is critical to consider this specific to the role of secondary vice-principals. If the duties, responsibilities, and opportunities of vice-principals are determined at the sole discretion of their principal, it is not clear how it is ensured that the opportunities and supports referenced in the OLF are available and, perhaps more importantly, able to be utilized by vice-principals.

In order to support school leaders in developing the skills outlined in the OLF, all ministry sponsored professional development is delivered based on five core leadership

capacities: setting goals; assigning resources with priorities; promoting collaborative learning cultures; using data; and engaging in courageous conversations (IEL, 2012b). While the expectation exists that opportunities are provided to build these leadership capacities, doing so relies on individual districts, such as the one where this study has been conducted.

In the district involved in the research study, the OLS is currently operationalized through a series of electronic resources and professional development opportunities that are available on the staff link of the district's public website. Through a publicly accessible link entitled *Leadership and Staff Development*, there are nine subsequent links leading to a variety of resources and programs available to employees. This material includes information about the district's leadership profile (based largely on the OLF) with links to the individual domains and available resources and supports for each; generic resources that include both district and ministry information resources; six individual leadership programs for a variety of employee groups; district and ministry self-assessments; virtual career fairs and career pathways for eight different roles; a new school leaders program; mentoring programs; and an extensive calendar of all district leadership professional development opportunities available for the current academic year.

While the majority of these leadership resources are designed for and available to all employee groups, there are several specific to the role of principals and vice-principals. Of the eight virtual career fairs and pathways, one is specific to teachers becoming vice-principals and another specific to vice-principals becoming principals. A series of videos explaining the role and duties highlights the experiences of an elementary vice-principal with no mention of secondary vice-principals, which is actually a very different role in the district involved in the research. The videos provided on the role of the principal do have one secondary perspective; however, no reference is made to vice-principals or any duties generally associated with them. In addition to the electronic resources, the new school leaders program provides a series of mandatory professional development sessions for vice-principals and principals during the first two years in their new role. Through this program, new vice-principals and principals participate in a

variety of in-services in operational items such as human resources and staffing; labour relations; facilities management; and budgeting.

In addition to operational learning, new school leaders participate in a two-year mentorship program. Many of the professional development learning sessions that are available for new school leaders are also open to any experienced school leaders who feel they would benefit from attending. This operationalization of the OLS and supports for the leadership standards outlined in the OLF specific to experienced secondary vice-principals in this district will be explored more fully in the data analysis chapter.

### **Leadership Standards**

Leadership standards are a form of performance management policy put in place to specify the function of school principals, guide professional development, define criteria for assessment, and guide the selection of principals (Blackmore, 2010; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Pont, 2013). According to Pont (2013), many countries have been attempting to define what is expected from school leaders through the creation of leadership standards, and perceive such standards as a strategic tool for the improvement of educational outcomes. However, what criteria should be considered in the creation of performance standards for school leaders? According to Ingvarson et al. (2006) good standards should

be grounded in clear conceptions of leadership; be valid; that is, represent what school leaders need to know and do to play in promoting quality learning opportunities for students; identify the unique features of what school leaders' know and do; delineate the main dimensions of development the profession expects of its members – what school leaders should get better at over time, with adequate opportunities for professional development; and be assessable; that is, point to potentially observable leadership actions. (p. 38)

But if leadership standards are intended to reflect what leaders should do, how do these goals get determined? According to Gleeson and Husbands (2003), performance management frameworks are “dependent on policy prescription of the intended outcomes of teaching” (p. 506). In other words, whatever educational goals and targets are desired

by policy-makers will determine the content of performance management standards for school leaders (English, 2012; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Niesche, 2013; Pont, 2013). Pont (2013) argues that there is also an economic consideration to the creation of leadership standards by focusing on a small group of people (principals) who can impact a larger group (teachers) who will then affect the system. The intended outcome on the system is based on government targets and agendas.

However, some researchers argue that leadership standards do not capture the complexities of different roles, career phases, institutional demographics, or differentiated leadership responses (Blackmore, 2010; English, 2000; Niesche, 2013; Pont, 2013). Furthermore, some researchers argue that leadership standards actually inhibit creativity and the growth of school leaders because they mobilize mechanisms of power and control to ensure compliance of government targets that respond to political interests (Blackmore, 2010; Bolden & Gosling, 2006; English, 2006; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003; Niesche, 2013). Moreover, English (2012) argues that leadership standards will not lead to the reform intended by policy-makers because such standards are defined in terms of the assumed roles and practices of school leaders, instead of reflecting their experiences and realities. Ingvarson et al. (2006), argue that “standards are fine for professional development but should not be used for assessing performance” and they maintain the need for guidelines about how valid examples of school leaders’ practices will be captured or gathered (p. 89). Some researchers argue that leadership standards are a narrow representation of leadership and ask us to consider alternative ways for conceptualizing leadership (Bolden & Gosling, 2006; English, 2012; Ingvarson et al., 2006, Niesche, 2013). Therefore, general leadership standards that are not role-specific could be interpreted as dismissive or discounting many of the duties that vice-principals find themselves delegated, thereby leaving them marginalized.

The troubling assumption that the development of a single set of leadership standards can apply equally to all leadership positions (English, 2000; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Niesche, 2013; Pont, 2013) is specifically relevant to this study. Pont (2013) indicates that most standards are developed specifically for principals and identifies a gap

in the literature involving how common indicators are applied to leadership teams. This point was illustrated during her review of a variety of different leadership standards. For example, one comparative paper on leadership standards from OECD countries examined standards for teachers and principals, with no mention of vice-principals (Centre of Study for Policies and Practices in Education, 2013). Similarly, the ISLLC addresses leadership policy standards for school leaders, referencing the role that principals play in student achievement with no mention of vice-principals (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008) as do the Australian Professional Standards for Principals (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014). In the United Kingdom, the National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers (Department for Education, 2015) is intended for principals and aspiring principals with no mention of vice-principals. While one might argue that vice-principals are indeed aspiring principals, the standards suggest the audience is classroom teachers. Only the Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia (British Columbia Principals' and Vice Principals' Association, 2013) acknowledges the role of vice-principals in title and content stating, "Given that some management functions are locally determined, individuals and districts are encouraged to elaborate and pursue professional learning on the specific management practices that support this work in their district context" (p. 8). This could be interpreted to suggest an acknowledgement of the differences in roles and practices of principals and vice-principals; however, this is the only reference to vice-principals in this document so one could question how inclusive a document it truly is, despite the title.

As stated previously, the OLF contains the leadership standards for principals and vice-principals in Ontario, where this study took place. There is limited discussion in the literature pertaining to how the OLF policy is enacted as leadership standards; however, some researchers have recently turned their attention to this (Riveros et al., 2016; Winton, 2013; Winton & Pollock, 2015). Riveros et al. (2016) examined how the OLF translated into practices for a group of elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals. This research revealed that the OLF had become a tool for evaluation and promotion, resulting in school leaders striving for compliance with standards that were perceived to represent a finished knowledge base. This research also revealed that school leaders did

not consider the OLF as a resource to guide daily practice and that many practices that they deemed critical, such as those associated with social justice, were not directly reflected in the standards. Further, this study revealed that despite its original intent of guiding professional practice, the OLF “has been transformed into a mechanism of supervision, evaluation, and control” (Riveros et al., 2016, p. 19).

Winton and Pollock (2015) examined how a variety of policy actors within three elementary schools in Ontario defined school success as academic learning, a positive school climate, and the well-being of students, which was in contrast to the priority of high scores on standardized provincial tests, as identified by the government. Their study determined that the OLF was problematic as a set of leadership standards because it focuses on practices that promote a narrow understanding of success, which devalues other ways of enacting leadership. They argue that policy standards like the OLF “deprofessionalize leaders and threaten local decision-making and democracy because a school’s purposes are determined by experts removed from the situation and yet the school’s leaders are held responsible for their achievement” (p. 13). Interestingly, they found that principals were enacting leadership practices that were addressed in the OLF; however, it was to support their own locally determined definition of a successful school, not that of the Ontario Ministry of Education (Winton & Pollock, 2015). Based on this emerging body of literature on how the OLF policy influences the practices of school leaders, further research is much needed and would be beneficial.

This research study operates from the premise that the OLF is a set of leadership standards that is meant to capture and reflect the role of both principals and vice-principals equally. As noted previously, the OLF does not acknowledge the difference in role between principal and vice-principal, and in Leithwood’s (2012) discussion of the research foundations, it is designed to be a resource for school leaders across the province. Specifically, the first footnote in the introduction states, “Administrators include both principals and vice-principals. Throughout this text, where the term “principal” is used, this may also include vice-principals where appropriate” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 3). Given that there is no reference specifically to vice-principals in the OLF, it would be necessary to identify the cases when this association is not appropriate.

According to Hausman et al. (2002), as the educational environment changes, the vice-principal's role remains the same, concentrated on student management. Moreover, while leadership standards like the OLF are placing great emphasis on instructional leadership, the research demonstrates that vice-principals are reporting less understanding of the instructional leadership role, due to the managerial tasks in which they spend most of their time (Goulais, 2008; Kwan, 2009; MacDonald, 2004; Montanari, 2014; Read, 2012; Rintoul, 2012; Williamson, 2011). That being the case, one might wonder whether the OLF accurately reflects the role of secondary vice-principals. Williamson and Scott (2012) maintain that in order to improve or change in the image of the vice-principal role, alignment with the OLF must occur and they argue for the drafting of a complementary framework specific to the role. They believe that such a framework would provide a new direction for research, professional development, job satisfaction, performance appraisal, and recruitment. According to Williamson and Scott (2012), "In the absence of role-specific frameworks, we apply inappropriate lenses, which demean the role" and they argue for a new conceptual lens, one specific to the role of vice-principals, to capture their contributions to school leadership (p. 10). However, in the absence of such a complementary framework, the OLF is the only resource that is used in the province to reflect and capture the role of vice-principals.

### **The OLF Policy and the Vice-principalship**

Most relevant to my research were those studies that did specifically address both the OLF and the exclusive practices of secondary school leaders. Research conducted by Leithwood and Azah (2014) on the workload of secondary principals and vice-principals in Ontario, made some reference to the OLF. Unfortunately, all survey and interview data collected from both groups were analyzed together with no delineation between participants' responses or experiences. It would have been interesting to have the data presented separately to see in what ways the perceptions and experiences of these two groups were similar and different.

In another recent study conducted by Montanari (2014), the experiences of secondary principals and vice-principals were explored in relation to the OLF; however,



like in other studies, most of the data were presented together. Nevertheless, the discussion portion of the study argued that the study had demonstrated that the roles of secondary principals and vice-principals were vastly different and that greater research exploring the unique experiences of secondary vice-principals specific to the OLF is greatly needed. For example, vice-principals specifically reported that student discipline was the main component of their job, thereby rendering the OLF irrelevant to their daily work (Montanari, 2014). Interestingly, principals did not include student discipline as a component of their role or one of their duties, with some specifically stating it was the job of the vice-principal. Instead, secondary principals reported school improvement and school climate as the main components of their job, both of which are areas in which the OLF is highly focussed (Montanari, 2014). Given the findings and recommendations for further research in this study, it would be very worthwhile to explore the specific experiences of secondary vice-principals in relation to the OLF.

In summary, this literature review demonstrates that the role of vice-principal is unique in that the position lacks a precise job description, varies from school to school, is highly dependent on the leadership practices and beliefs of individual principals, and yet entails numerous tasks crucial to the success of the school (Oleszewski et al., 2011; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010). Furthermore, vice-principals tend to perform what have traditionally been considered management tasks; however, according to the Institute for Education Leadership (2012a), the OLF recognizes that “management is an important part of leadership and while focused on processes and procedures that keep the organization running smoothly, effective leaders approach technical management in an adaptive way in order to maximize instruction and collaboration in support of the vision and goals” (p. 5). Despite the managerial emphasis of their role, the performance and effectiveness of secondary vice-principals are measured by the OLF policy, which focuses largely on instructional leadership. Like other leadership standards, this policy focuses on those practices most often performed by, and associated with, the school principal and the managerial duties that are so often delegated to vice-principals, those of attendance and discipline appear to be represented by very few indicators. Significantly, the OLF acknowledges that secondary principals will enact some leadership practices

themselves while distributing some to other leaders within the school. Are secondary vice-principals considered the “other leaders in the school” (IEL, 2012a, p. 6), and if so, how can their performance be judged by the same tool used for principals?

As demonstrated, few studies have been conducted specific to the OLF and very little data exists on the specific role of secondary vice-principals in the province of Ontario. The results of the studies included in this literature review support the need for further exploration on the leadership practices of secondary vice-principals and how they conceptualize their role in relation to the OLF. Therefore, research specific to the experiences of secondary vice-principals in relation to their enactment of the OLF would provide unique insight as to how this performance management policy is understood and enacted by this specific group of school leaders.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

In this chapter, I will begin by explaining the worldview in which this study is situated. Next, I will explain policy enactment theory, which was used to inform my analysis of the data and the findings of the study. This chapter will also explain how other critical approaches to leadership and an interrogation of leadership standards served to further guide the interpretation of data in this study.

#### **Social Constructivism**

This research study was guided by a social constructivist paradigm. Constructivists assume that there is no single observable reality, but rather, that reality is constructed with everyone experiencing the world in a different way (Merriam, 2009). More specifically, social constructivists believe that meaning is negotiated socially, and that it is through interactions with others, and through historical and culture norms, that people construct their reality (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivists study these constructions, with a complexity of views, and the implications on people's lives and how they interact with others (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). In my research, I sought to understand the multiple realities of my participants in their particular contexts and to construct meanings from those experiences. According to Creswell (2013), the epistemological assumption that subjective evidence from the participants, and the relationship between the researcher and that which is being researched, is of significant consideration in social constructivism. The constructivist philosophy is built on the idea of ontological relativity where all statements depend on an individual worldview and a subjectivist epistemology where the inquirer is also engaged in the social construction as opposed to objectively depicting one reality (Patton, 2015).

Using this social constructivist lens in my study allowed me to capture the individual perspectives of all the participants and construct meaning from my findings that was unique to my own interpretation and experiences (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). In qualitative research, social constructivism brings three significant relationships into focus: the relationship of the researcher with the subjects, the audience, and with society

in general (Gergen & Gergen, 2008). Patton (2015) suggests that social constructivists ask questions such as, “How have the people in this setting constructed their reality? What is perceived as real? What are the consequences of what is perceived as real?” (p. 98). Paramount to my study was my unique positionality which enabled me to strongly relate to participants’ perceptions of situations and individual contexts in order to understand those perceptions. According to Creswell (2013), “Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they “position themselves” in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (p. 25). My positionality (see Ch. 1) will be reflected by the data analysis, findings, and summary chapters.

### **Policy Enactment Theory**

There is much discussion in the literature about different views of policy processes that have existed in education; however, a linear or conventional view and an interpretive view seem to be most prevalent (Ball et al., 2012; Blackmore, 2010; Braun et al., 2011; Jones, 2013; Maguire et al., 2015; Spillane et al., 2002; Viczko & Riveros, 2015; Winton, 2013). According to Viczko and Riveros (2015), linear views “have a tendency to separate processes of policy-making into discrete categories of design, implementation, and evaluation that privilege the agential actor as instrumental decision-maker” (p. 479). Furthermore, linear views tend to focus on policy goals aimed at pre-defined problems with pre-defined outcomes (Ball et al., 2012; Riveros et al., 2016; Viczko & Riveros, 2015) and the literature reveals that policies rarely dictate practice, but rather, induce particular or limited responses (Ball et al., 2012; Maguire et al., 2015).

As such, conventional notions of policy implementation treat policy as a finished product, “crafted at the higher levels of the bureaucratic structures” (Viczko & Riveros, 2015, p. 480). When policy is crafted as a generic tool with little consideration for the different contexts and people involved, one may question how effective it could hope to be. According to Viczko and Riveros (2015), studies on conventional notions of policy implementation “portray schools as decontextualized and homogeneous organizations where policies are merely transferred and applied” (p. 480). Furthermore, according to

Braun et al. (2011), “policy-making and policy-makers tend to assume ‘best possible’ environments for ‘implementation’: ideal buildings, students and teachers and even resources” (p. 595). If this is indeed the case, one might question whether policy-makers have any real concern as to whether the policy translates to practice in schools and achieves the intended outcomes, or if the act of merely creating the policy is deemed sufficient. Furthermore, if a policy is only seen as a way of solving a problem, then “all the other moments in the processes of policy and policy enactments that go on in schools, and other organizations, become marginalized or go unrecognized” (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 485).

The notion of policy enactment served as a theoretical framework for this research study. Unlike a conventional or linear approach to policy, the concept of policy enactment emphasizes the multi-faceted and complex process of putting policies into action, in which various actors, with various interests take part (Ball et al., 2012). In their theory of policy enactment, Ball et al. (2012) argue that policies cannot simply be implemented. Instead they must be translated from text to action, put into practice, and the abstractions of policy ideas put into specific and unique practices. In contrast, when following conventional approaches to policy as implementation, Ball et al. (2012) note that “there is little attention given to the material context of the policy process, neither the buildings within which policy is done, nor the resources available, nor are the students with whom policy is enacted often accounted for” (p. 5). Understanding policy work as enactment, rather than implementation, allows us to recognize the ways in which different leaders attempt to realize policy and how the interpretation and the social construction of policy practices vary (Ball et al., 2012; Blackmore, 2010; Maguire et al., 2015; Viczko & Riveros, 2015; Winton, 2013).

Given that, “in much policy making and research the fact that policies are intimately shaped and influenced by school-specific factors which act as constraints, pressures and enablers of policy enactments tends to be neglected” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 19). This approach to understating policy is significant in relation to secondary vice-principals given that their role is determined almost exclusively by school-specific factors which would almost certainly impact how policy is enacted.

Some researchers believe that many studies that explore how policies are put into practice overlook a host of contextual factors, instead focusing on implementation which is generally seen as either top-down or bottom-up (Ball et al., 2012; Blackmore, 2010; Maguire et al., 2015; Riveros et al., 2016; Spillane et al., 2002; Viczko & Riveros, 2015). According to Ball et al. (2012), “policies enter different resource environments; schools have particular histories, buildings and infrastructures, staffing profiles, leadership experiences, budgetary situations and teaching and learning challenges and the demands of context interact” (p. 19). In contrast, the interpretive view of policy analysis challenges linear views, focusing on policy “enactment” whereby the role of “agency, interpretation, sense-making, translation, embodiment, and meaning throughout the policy process” are significant (Viczko & Riveros, 2015, p. 479).

The interpretive view draws on various different approaches to policy such as assemblage; enactment; networks; materiality; and performativity, all of which examine policy as a process that emerges between interactions (Viczko & Riveros, 2015). Maguire et al. (2015) argue that, “enactments is a theoretically richer concept which better captures the multifaceted ways in which policies are read alongside/against contextual factors, by different sets of policy interpreters, translators and critics” (p. 487). Moreover, “enacting policies is a process and not a one-off event and in this process some policy actors are more dominant than others...time and space and positionality and commitments all play a part in the different workings (or not) of policy interpretations in action” (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 487). Given the subjective and arbitrary nature of their role, one which is determined by different policy actors within the school, can secondary vice-principals be considered the predominant policy actors who determine how policy is enacted in their schools?

Examining policy as a process, rather than a product, is important when considering school leadership practices of secondary vice-principals, given the significance of context for policy actors. According to Viczko and Riveros (2015), “engagements with policy are productive; they perform new realities that might never have existed without the moments of resistance, problem definition, and change” (p. 479). Braun et al. (2011) concur, arguing that “policies are intimately shaped and

influenced by school-specific factors, even though in much central policy making, these sorts of constraints, pressures and enablers of policy enactments tend to be neglected” (p. 585). The literature reveals that many contextual dimensions are significant when considering policy enactment: situated (locale, settings); professional (values, experiences); material (staffing, infrastructure); and external (degree of local authority support, pressures/expectations from broader policy context) (Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2011; Maguire et al., 2015; Viczko & Riveros, 2015). According to Braun et al. (2011), “context is an ‘active’ force, it is not just a backdrop against which schools have to operate, it initiates dynamic policy processes and choices and is continuously constructed and developed both from within and externally in relation to policy imperatives and expectations” (p. 590). In what ways have the context for vice-principals been considered in the creation and use of the OLF policy in determining and measuring the leadership practices of this group?

Policy enactment theory notes that the ways in which policies are enacted in schools are influenced by issues such as power and positionality, time of year, length of service, and particular spaces (Maguire et al., 2015). The issue of power and policy enactment is of great significance to this research study. Given that the literature has demonstrated that the duties performed by vice-principals are very different than those of principals (Hausman, et al., 2002; Kwan, 2008, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012), it cannot be assumed that policies will be performed by vice-principals in the same manner as principals.

Additionally, although vice-principals play a vital role in schools, their experiences have been largely ignored in the research or simply incorporated with those of principals as stated by the Canadian Association of Principals (2014), Leithwood and Azah (2014), and Pollock et al. (2014). In fact, in their study on the workload of principals, Pollock et al. (2014) recommend research be conducted specific to the experiences of vice-principals stating:

Recently they have been included in transitional studies that are narrowly defined using a small sample size, or their responses have been included with those of

principals. We believe that the work of vice-principals is different from that of a principal, and therefore vice-principals should have their voices heard. (p. 36)

According to Maguire et al. (2015), “The literature reveals that policy enactment depends largely on perspectives and values of different policy actors and that enactments are “contingent, fragile social constructions” (p. 487). Given that the way in which policies are performed are impacted by the issues of power and positionality, then using policy enactment theory to examine how secondary vice-principals enact the OLF is appropriate.

### **Critical Approaches to Leadership**

In addition to policy enactment theory, there are several different perspectives on school leadership that will help inform the analysis of the practices of vice-principals in this study. Why do we study school leadership in education? According to Day et al. (2009), a leader’s “diagnosis of individuals, the needs of schools at different phases of performance development and national policy imperatives are influential in promoting improved student outcomes” (p. 2). However, Harris (2005) argues that the current body of research does not say how leadership practices positively impact school or student outcomes and have not established direct causal links between leadership and improved student learning.

Nonetheless, if we accept that leadership is linked to school success, however that might be measured, further discussion is required to determine how school leadership is constructed and by whom. Lingard, Hayes, Mills, and Christie (2003), argue that the many theories of leadership can be placed into three categories: trait leadership based on personal attributes of leaders; contingency and situational leadership which are context specific; and transformational leadership. They further argue that successful educational leaders are able to manage the complex interplay between all three theories of leadership. Bolman and Deal (2013) make six inter-related claims about leadership: it is an activity, not a person; it is different than management; it is multilateral not unilateral; it is distributed not concentrated on the top; and it is contextual and situational in exchanges between the leader and others.



In determining what “leadership” means, one must consider the distinction that has been made between leadership and management in the OLF. Leithwood (2012) acknowledges that concepts of leadership and management often represent different activities; however, he maintains that the OLF “adopts an integrated perspective on these concepts because the tasks typically associated with both concepts make potentially important contributions to the achievement of organizational goals” (p. 6). Furthermore, Leithwood (2012) claims, “An integrated approach to leadership and management also has significant consequences for the work of non-academic leaders – and their perspective on the purposes for that work. These leaders influence functions that are quite crucial to the accomplishment of the school’s and district’s goals” (p. 7). However, the very fact that the distinction is made between activities that are leadership and activities that are managerial suggests that they are not integrated at all, but rather two separate components. For schools with a single leader, one might assume that the lone leader performs both components, resulting in an integrated concept of leadership. However, in schools with a principal and vice-principal, where the principal determines which administrative duties will be performed by the vice-principal, the result can be two distinct administrators with only one engaging entirely in managerial tasks. In which case the integrated approach, as suggested in the OLF, is eradicated.

In contrast, however, some argue that leadership and management should not be viewed as distinct approaches to administration at all, but rather, are just different ways of thinking about organizational work and view such distinctions as problematic (Eacott, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Gunter, 2001, 2013; Newton & Riveros, 2015). Furthermore, such critics believe that this artificial distinction has no real value in understanding practice. Instead, Newton and Riveros (2015) argue that the study of educational administration “centred on an examination of the ontology of practices and conducted in collaboration between scholars and practitioners has the potential to provide a situated or context-sensitive understanding of the organizational realities in education” (p. 339). The artificial distinction between leadership and management that exists is especially relevant to this research study because, in examining how the leadership practices of secondary vice-principals are influenced by the OLF and how it is used by them to conceptualize

their role, one must consider how they, and the district in which they work, have come to understand leadership.

The OLF relies very heavily on the term “effective” leadership. But how is “effective” leadership defined, and by whom? The Wallace Foundation (2013) suggests that effective leadership entails five key responsibilities: shaping a vision of academic success for all students; creating a climate hospitable to education; cultivating leadership in others; improving instruction; and managing people, data and processes. It is not surprising that the categories in the OLF are similar to that in the report by The Wallace Foundation (2013) given that both were authored by Leithwood. However, a meta-analysis conducted by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) concluded that an application of identified leadership dimensions requires an understanding of the particular qualities that are responsible for their impact, founded in empirical or theoretical research on the particular task, rather than on general assumptions about leadership. Moreover, they argue that, “because the practice of leadership is task-embedded, leadership theory and research will not deliver increased payoff for student outcomes unless they become more tightly integrated with research on the particular leadership tasks defined by our meta-analyses” (p. 669).

A study by Day et al. (2009) found that “there is no single model of practice on effective leadership; however, it is possible to identify a common repertoire of broad educational values, personal and interpersonal qualities, dispositions, competencies, decision-making process and a range of internal and external strategic actions” (p. 2). While researchers agree that a common understanding of the practices associated with leadership is essential, it does not necessarily address the complexity of school leadership and the significance of context (Day et al., 2009; Eacott, 2013a, 2013b; Gronn, 1997; Hallinger, 2003; Hendriks & Scheerens, 2013; Mulford & Silins, 2003). Some researchers seem to support an emphasis on instructional leadership in order to positively affect student outcomes (Leithwood, 2012; Robinson, 2007). Robinson (2007) has made the claim that there is only a small, indirect link between the effects of transformational leadership on student outcomes and while there may be moderate effects on the attitude of teachers and the perceptions of school culture, the effects do not translate to students.

However, Hallinger (2005) argues that one principal cannot be the sole instructional leader for the whole school and calls for others to share that role. Some researchers argue for a different model of school leadership where several principals lead together, with equal authority and responsibility (Thomson & Blackmore, 2006). One might suggest that this exists currently with the vice-principal role; however, the power and responsibility are not equally distributed with one clearly having more authority and decision-making powers. Hallinger (2011) argues that 40 years of empirical research suggests that, “even where shared leadership is being supported by policy measures, the principal’s own leadership is essential to fostering the leadership of others” (p. 138).

Silins and Mulford (2007) argue that some critics of school effectiveness say it is a decontextualized body of literature that emphasises top-down or bottom-up approaches. They argue for a bottom-up approach in which schools are identified as learning organizations with four dimensions: trusting and collaborative; shared and monitored mission; taking initiatives and risks; and relevant professional development. They maintain that all four dimensions serve to empower teachers and students by involving them in goal setting, decision-making, review and evaluation, and shared learning.

Moreover, some researchers argue for a broader understanding of student outcomes that extend beyond academic achievement (Hendriks & Scheerens, 2013; Mulford & Silins, 2003). For example, Mulford and Silins (2003) would like measurements of student success to include self-concept, student and teacher voice, social/moral considerations, and out of school contributions. They argue that there are strong connections between context and social capital to improve student outcomes that should not be overlooked in determining effective leadership. Similarly, during their review of fourteen leadership studies, Hendriks and Scheerens (2013) found that characteristics of the school organization and the school climate had a strong impact on leadership effects. Leithwood (2007) agrees that leadership effects on school culture are important, stating:

A compelling body of evidence suggests that principal leadership has a large influence (through conditions they help to create in their school organizations) on how teachers feel about their work and the subsequent consequences of those

feelings on teaching and learning. Indeed, this may be the most powerful natural path through which principals contribute to student learning (p. 628)

For a number of decades, many researchers have argued that existing models of school leadership tend to overlook the significance of context (Blackmore, 2013; Eacott, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Gronn, 1997; Gunter, 2001, 2013; Hallinger, 2003; O'Reilly & Read, 2010; Silins & Mulford, 2003). For example, Eacott (2013b) believes that leadership remains, “a concept connected to attributes, factors, behaviors, interventions, all of which lack a solid grounding in a specific context. However, it is the context that gives the behaviors or interventions meaning and significance” (p. 178). Similarly, Hallinger (2003), maintains that leadership can be linked to factors in the external environment and the local context of a school and that,

Leadership must be conceptualized as a mutual influence process, rather than as a one-way process in which leaders influence others. Effective leaders respond to the changing needs of their context. Indeed, in a very real sense the leader's behaviors are shaped by the school context. (p. 346)

Likewise, Mulford and Silins (2003) hold the view that context matters and found that, “variables such as socio-economic status, home educational environment and school size have a clear interactive effect on leadership” (p. 187). Hallinger (2003) argues that it is almost meaningless to study the leadership practices of principals without reference to school context stating, “leadership must be conceptualized as a mutual influence process, rather than as a one-way process in which leaders influence others” (p. 346). Moreover he believes that the behaviour of leaders is shaped by the school context. Similarly, Mulford and Silins argue that successful leadership is developmental where one must first focus on the personal/interpersonal before moving onto the educational/instructional, before finally moving onto the development/learning/change phase.

In addition to questioning how leadership effectiveness is measured, critics of more traditional approaches to leadership research ask us to consider how our knowledge is constructed, how problems are identified, by whom and for what purpose (Blackmore, 2013; Eacott, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Gunter, 2001, 2005, 2008, 2013). Eacott (2013c) argues that “leadership is one of the greatest unquestioned assumptions of our time” (p.

119) and maintains that we need to think differently about the concept of leadership in education and ask how the way we think about it impacts scholarship and practice. Bush (2010) believes there are four fields of educational leadership: policy, research, practice, and theory and that all four must be judged on how they interplay with the others, rather than standing alone. Furthermore, the existing scholarship relies on the assumption that leadership is “an idealization waiting to be discovered, can be captured, deconstructed, and then ultimately replicated elsewhere...In doing so, there is a failure to acknowledge the specific social space – both temporal and physical – in which practice takes place” (Eacott, 2013a, p. 178).

Some researchers argue that leadership is theoretically underdone in research and in policy (Blackmore, 2010; Eacott, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Heck & Hallinger, 2005). Critics argue that the impact of leadership is measured by a variety of performance measures linked in policy with the purpose of solving a perceived empirical problem that is not grounded in context (Eacott, 2013a, 2013b; Newton & Riveros, 2015). Furthermore, Heck and Hallinger (2005) maintain that researchers are unaware of the problems that concern practitioners and that alternate ways of situating leadership are needed to address the “blind spots” in our knowledge and practice. Such researchers would like us to question and debate how problems and knowledge are constructed, arguing that research needs should be identified through practice, rather than artificially constructed through popular trends (Gunter, 2008; Moos, Krejsler & Kasper Korod, 2008; Oplatka, 2008).

### **Interrogating Leadership Standards**

According to Ingvarson et al. (2006), the main reason for establishing school leadership standards is to increase the effectiveness of professional preparation and development for school leaders; however, it is primarily by engaging school leaders in “more effective professional learning that standards can make a major contribution to improving student learning” (p. 7). Some researchers interrogate the notion that the development of leadership standards by which school leaders’ effectiveness can be measured, leads to educational reform (Blackmore, 2013; Bolden & Gosling, 2006; Bush,

2010; English, 2000, 2006, 2012; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Niesche, 2013; Pont, 2013). English (2012) argues that those agencies forcing leadership standards fail to recognize their own interests when they define and implement them, contending that,

Stating that there is a single set of standards that applies to all leadership positions is simply a “tenet”, that is, an article of faith. In this move, job contextuality is removed and a “one size fits all” description is developed. In this construction, important differences between roles are erased or marginalized. (p. 167)

Bush (2010) also questions the process from which leadership practices and policies derive, stating that, “policy formulation is often informed by political beliefs or ideologies. This leads to the critical question of how these beliefs and ideologies emerge and are forged into policy and, often, into law” (p. 266). Similarly, Niesche (2013) maintains that leadership frameworks offer a narrow representation of leadership and asks us to recognize their political nature claiming that “capabilities for leaders are more likely to reflect what suits the political interests of policy-makers than practice-derived evidence about how to lead learning” (p. 229).

Researchers have questioned whether creating common leadership standards can accurately reflect the work of all school leaders (English, 2012; Pont, 2013). English (2012) maintains that simply developing standards does not ensure they will translate to practice as the behaviors of school leaders are “embedded in reified current roles and practices” (p. 155). Furthermore, according to Pont (2013), compared with those for teachers, the standards for principals are not specific and distinctions are not made regarding the different phases in a principal’s career, the complex organizational structures, or the differentiation of practices in situations based on specific circumstances.

Given that the literature suggests that context is critical when considering the creation and application of leadership standards then it would be worth asking how these standards capture all school leadership roles equally. Can generic leadership standards accurately reflect the roles of both principals and vice-principals or would some aspects be left behind?

## Chapter 4: Methodology

This research study explored how the secondary vice-principal's leadership is constructed in relation to the OLF in order to offer new perspectives about the connections between school leadership and educational policy. The theoretical framework for this study considered policy enactment theory, critical approaches to leadership and of leadership standards. Therefore, a qualitative case study approach is very appropriate for this study, given the research problem and theoretical frameworks.

### Methods

**Case study.** The literature reveals differing opinions on what defines a case study. For example, according to Gay et al. (2012), case study research is a qualitative research approach in which researchers focus on a unit of study known as a bounded system. Merriam (2001) states that the qualitative case study can be defined in terms of “the process of conducting the inquiry (that is, as case study research), the bounded system or unit of analysis selected for the study (that is, the case), or the product, the end report” (p. 43). Patton (2015) argues that a common thread to case study definitions is “the necessity of placing a boundary system around some phenomenon of interest – and where the boundary is placed is both inevitably arbitrary and fundamentally critical because that boundary-setting process determines what the case is and therefore the focus of the inquiry” (p. 259). Given the particular design of my study, I have chosen to adopt the definition of Creswell (2013), who defines case study as “a methodology: a type of design in qualitative research that may be an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry” (p. 97).

As required by any well-designed study, Yin (2003) advises that there are five components of case study research design that are especially important to consider: a study's question; its propositions; its unit(s) of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings. As in all qualitative research, case study resonates with the readers' experiences as they compare and contrast the case to their own experiences or understandings. However, there are particular types of

research questions for which case study is particularly well suited. For example, case study design should be considered when the focus of the study is to answer why or how and when you want to uncover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2003, 2014). Furthermore, descriptive case studies seek to reveal patterns and connections within the real-life context in which it occurred (Tobin, 2010; Yin, 2003, 2014). Additionally, according to Merriam (2001), a descriptive case study can illustrate the complexities of a situation – the fact that not one but many factors contributed to it; have the advantage of hindsight yet be relevant in the present; and show the influence of subjectivities on the issue. Considering the complex contextual factors which serve to construct the perceptions, behaviours and practices of secondary vice-principals, while allowing for individual voices and experiences, was crucial to my research, making case study the most appropriate research method.

My research case study took place during the 2015-16 school year (bound by time) in one publicly funded school district in Ontario (bound by place). A group of secondary vice-principals (the unit of analysis) were interviewed individually, answering questions specific to their role as it relates to the OLF (bound by definition and context) (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By not including elementary vice-principals from this district or secondary vice-principals from other districts, and by including only the perceptions of vice-principals, this case study remained focused.

The approach to case study used in my research is based on a constructivist paradigm in that “truth is relative and is dependent on one’s perspective” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). Creswell (2013) argues that constructivist researchers focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work and how their own background shapes their interpretation of events. Furthermore, the interpretations of constructivist researchers are shaped by their own experiences and background, necessitating the need for them to position themselves in the research (Creswell, 2013). Crotty (1998) identified several assumptions regarding constructivism: humans construct meanings as they engage in the world they are interpreting so researchers tend to use open-ended questions to allow participants to share their views; humans engage with and make sense of their world based on their historical and social perspectives so researchers seek to understand the



participants context; and researchers' own interpretations are shaped by their experiences and the process of qualitative research is inductive. Given that my participants were secondary vice-principals in the same district in which I am a secondary vice-principal, it is important that I position myself in the research. My perceptions and sensitivities of my own experiences in the role most certainly shaped my interpretations of the perceptions of my participants and presented one challenge on which I constantly reflected and explain more thoroughly in the following section.

**Challenges.** There were a few challenges associated with this case study, the primary one being my positionality within the research. While the fact that I am in the same role as the interviewees was of tremendous benefit in terms of developing a rapport and having a strong understanding of their role and experiences, this also presented some significant considerations for me while conducting the interviews and during data analysis. It was very important for me to be nonjudgmental of participants' views or beliefs, and to not question their candor, particularly when the answers varied, or information was omitted all together from anecdotal information shared informally with me in the past by participants. One way in which I addressed this challenge and to create internal validity was through reflexivity. Given my position as a colleague with all participants, and my own biases, beliefs, and assumptions about the role and its relation to the OLF, it was extremely important for me to reflect on myself critically as the research instrument. By explaining and clarifying my positionality, the reader can better understand how I might have arrived at my interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009). During the following chapter on data analysis, I will address how my biases and experiences informed my analysis and how I used reflexivity to overcome these challenges and used them as an asset.

Another challenge presented in this study pertained to participation, as I was unsure of whether I would have any willing participants. The individual philosophies of vice-principals around the purpose of school-based leaders conducting research to support their doctoral studies could have created unanticipated tensions or a reduced willingness to participate for some of my colleagues. Over the years, during professional

development in-services, or at organized vice-principal meetings, discussions have often turned to a perceived disconnect between research and practice in our work. At times, opinions have been shared that discounted the significance of some research, which was deemed impractical or irrelevant to our practice. As a result, I was unsure as to what level of support I would receive for conducting research while in my role. However, I hoped that the positive and collaborative relationships that I had built with my colleagues, some of whom I had worked with for seven years, would result in a willingness to support me and my research. Fortunately, this proved to be the case and I had no difficulty recruiting participants. No reasons were asked of, or given, for those who chose not to accept the invitation to participate in the research study so there is no way of determining what factors may have influenced those who chose not to respond.

Another challenge that existed was the perception of district support regarding this research study. Had principals or supervisory officers appeared unsupportive of the research being conducted or discouraged participation in any way, interviewees may have been reluctant to agree to participate. However, I have no reason to believe or suspect this was the case. Most interviews were scheduled outside of the school day with little impact on the school. I do not know what conversations with principals or vice-principals may have occurred behind the scenes to either discourage or encourage participation. However, I have no reason to believe there was any attempt to influence participation in either way, for which I feel fortunate.

Finally, the challenge of time may have existed. Potential participants may have simply felt they could not afford the time to participate in a non-mandatory activity, as participation would mean taking time away from work or family. Given that I am in the same role as potential participants, in the same district, I am very aware of the many initiatives and conflicting deadlines that this group must navigate and negotiate at all times, most particularly at the beginning of a school year. I am certain that most of the people who agreed to participate did so to support for me and my research, for which I am very grateful and I wonder if I would have received the same level of participation had I attempted to conduct this research in a district in which I had no relationships.

**Context and participants.** This case study was situated in a public school district in Southern Ontario that encompasses almost 7,000 square km. The district consists of approximately 75 elementary schools, and 15 secondary schools with approximately 10,000 secondary students registered. Currently there are approximately 20 secondary vice-principals, including myself, with schools of over 1000 students having more than one vice-principal. All figures are approximated to avoid identification and preserve the anonymity of my sources. Of these secondary vice-principals, five were in their first year, and therefore excluded from the study. Vice-principals in their first year in the role were excluded from the study because they would have only a few months in the position when the interviews were conducted; therefore, they would still be learning expectations and would have extremely limited experiences on which to draw. After ethics approval was received from both Western and the district, permission was given from the district to send an invitation by board email to all potential participants, upon which 10 responded and consented to participate. The participants were equally represented by gender and all had held the role of secondary vice-principal at more than one school, working with more than one principal. See Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Years as Secondary Vice-principal	Number of Schools in which they have worked as a Secondary VP	Number of Principals with whom they have worked as a Secondary VP
Liz	F	2-4	1	2
Paul	M	2-4	2	2
Maria	F	2-4	3	4
Steven	M	5-7	3	4
Bill	M	5-7	4	4
David	M	8+	4	5
Frank	M	8+	4	6
Cheryl	F	8+	4	6
Heather	F	8+	4	7
Susan	F	8+	8	10

**Data collection.** This study sought to capture the experiences of secondary vice-principals in one school district. Therefore, a single unit of analysis was used, the unit

being one group of secondary vice-principals in one school district. According to Yin (2003), researchers will want to compare their findings with previous research. While research on the role of vice-principals is fairly limited, studies do exist that examine the roles of secondary vice-principals in specific districts. This study is similar enough to other studies to allow for a degree of comparison (Armstrong, 2009; Garrard, 2013; Goulais, 2008; Hausman et al., 2002; Joseph, 2014; Kwan, 2008, 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Leithwood & Azah, 2014; MacDonald, 2004; Montanari, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010; Shoho et al., 2012; Swapp, 2012; Williamson, 2011).

I believe that my seven years of experience in the same role and district as the participants was of benefit in reaching data saturation, as I feel I have a good understanding of the themes and interrelationships (Saumure & Given, 2008). According to Creswell (2014) data saturation occurs when “the researcher stops collecting data because fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (p. 248). Interestingly, data saturation occurred fairly early. However, I wanted to honour the voices and experiences of all who agreed to participate so I conducted all 10 interviews as arranged. While some very interesting data emerged as a result of unique perceptions or experiences, only themes that reached saturation were explored and as the sample was fairly cohesive with members of a specific demographic, the data will not be transferable to the general population where greater variability would exist (Saumure & Given, 2008). It is important to note that saturation was not achieved with a frequency count, but rather, through an examination of the variations with the data and how these variations might be explained in the context of the theoretical framework (Saumure & Given, 2008).

**Semi-structured interviews.** In order to capture the complexity of the issue and allow vice-principals the opportunity to explain and describe their daily practices, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the ten secondary vice-principals. The interviews consisted of ten questions and each interview took less than 60 minutes. The open-ended questions were intended to allow participants to describe their daily practices

for the purpose of determining which practices were reflected in the OLF and which were not.

This strategy combined the benefits of using specific questions to guide the interview, while allowing for the interview to change flow and direction based on responses and potential follow-up questions (Gay et al., 2012). Such questions allowed for a detailed response and elaboration on questions in ways that could not be anticipated. This allowed me to gather rich and descriptive data about the daily experiences and duties of vice-principals, how they perceive their role in connection to the success of the school, and how they perceive their practices in relation to the OLF. No pilot interviews were conducted with the exception of one practice session with peers within this program. The decision was made not to conduct pilot interviews as the questions were very specific to a particular role, and I did not want to reduce the number of potential participants. Also, given that the questions were open-ended, I was able to improve the follow-up questions during each interview. I did end up combining two questions as I found that participants answered both questions within one answer resulting in the second question being unnecessary.

In order to collect data during the interviews an audio-recorder was used, with appropriate signed consent received from all participants. The purpose of recording the interviews was to allow me to participate fully in the conversation and to provide a verbatim account of the session. No participants refused to be recorded, a fact which may be attributed to the very high level of trust that exists between the participants and myself. I believe that the assurance that all recordings and information shared would remain confidential was sufficient to ease minds. While the transcription of the interviews was time-consuming, it was of great importance to me that the interviewee had my full attention throughout the process. Additionally, knowing that I would very likely forget my impressions and thoughts, I captured them using field notes for use during data analysis.

All transcription of interview data was conducted by me through *parroting*. Using a program called, *Dragon Naturally Speaking* (Dragon), I repeated aloud what was said on the recording while the program produced a text copy. This speech-to-text

program is generally used as assistive technology for people who struggle to write, and therefore, only recognizes specific voices. I was able to utilize this program by listening to the interviews and repeating what was said. As I spoke, Dragon typed every word that I was saying. After each transcription was complete, I went back and listened to each interview again, editing to ensure that the conversation was transcribed verbatim. While this process was much more time-consuming than having the recorded interviews transcribed by a service, I believe the process was extremely valuable in that I became very familiar with the content of each interview and was able to begin identifying themes throughout. As I transcribed, I recorded initial impressions and themes in my journal for reference during data analysis.

**Data analysis.** According to Guba (1981) there are four criteria required for establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative study: credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability. One way that researchers can establish credibility is through triangulation (Guba, 1981), which was the main strategy for data analysis in this research study. In triangulation, the object of the study can be best understood when approached by a variety of research methods (Rothbauer, 2008). In this case study, triangulation occurred through comparing and contrasting the perceptions of ten different participants, representing different data sources, with the literature (Yin, 2014). While this descriptive case study focussed largely on the information and perceptions received through semi-structured interviews, there were several other sources of data that were analyzed in order to test the validity of my research findings and reduce bias or deficiencies. According to Patton (2015), there are four triangulation processes for enhancing credibility: triangulation of qualitative sources; mixed qualitative-quantitative methods triangulation; analyst triangulation; and theory/perspective triangulation. Triangulation in qualitative inquiry can be used as a strategy to identify, explore, and understand different dimensions of the units of study, which can strengthen findings and enrich interpretations (Rothbauer, 2008). Creswell (2014) argues that qualitative researchers should ensure the validity of their study design and findings. Qualitative validity occurs when the researcher checks for the accuracy of the study's findings by

utilizing certain procedures or strategies (Creswell, 2014). See Table 2 for the strategies that I used to ensure validity in my study.

Table 2: Strategies Used for Promoting Validity and Reliability

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Evidence from Study</b>
Triangulation	Using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Data received from 10 different participants</li> <li>▪ Interview data compared and contrasted to identify themes</li> <li>▪ Document review</li> </ul>
Member checks	Taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they were plausible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interview transcripts reviewed by participants for input and feedback</li> <li>▪ Informal conversations with participants</li> </ul>
Adequate engagement in data collection	Adequate time spent collecting data such that the data became “saturated”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Researcher had existing relationships and trust with all participants</li> <li>▪ Strong rapport already present</li> <li>▪ Data saturation reached early but all participants interviewed to honour all voices who had consented</li> </ul>
Researcher’s position or reflexivity	Critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Researcher disclosed position as colleague to participants to the reader</li> <li>▪ Reflexivity used to address bias and assumptions that shaped interpretations and analysis</li> <li>▪ Chapter on analysis and findings address how my interpretation of findings was shaped by my own experiences</li> </ul>
Peer review and/or examination	Discussion with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All aspects of study design reviewed by Advisor</li> <li>▪ Advisor reviewed themes and findings</li> <li>▪ Exchanged writing samples</li> </ul>

		<p>with one colleague in Ed.D. program for feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Informal conversations with peers in Ed.D. program</li> <li>▪ Thesis also reviewed by external mentor unfamiliar with study for feedback</li> </ul>
Audit trail	A detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reflective journal and field notes taken during and immediately following interviews and throughout analysis</li> </ul>
Rich, thick descriptions	Providing enough description to contextualize the study such that the readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context, and, hence, whether findings can be transferred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extensive quotes used to ensure participant voices and experiences present</li> <li>▪ Descriptions in the study provide sufficient information to allow readers to make comparisons in similarity</li> </ul>
Maximum variation	Purposefully seeking variation or diversity in sample selection to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provided examples of participant reports that contradict the general perspective themes</li> </ul>

(Adapted from Creswell, 2014, p. 2012; and Merriam, 2009, p. 229)

Respondent validation or member checking is one way that triangulation occurred in this study, which could be considered a form of analyst triangulation. Participants were asked to comment on the transcripts. An initial transcript was sent to each participant to ask whether I accurately rendered their experiences that were the target of the study, fully captured the meaning their experiences had for them, and asked if they wished to have anything changed or deleted. Several participants made minor clarifications and a few added some information that they had omitted during the interviews. All participants reported that the transcripts accurately captured their experiences.

After initial member checking, the transcripts were analyzed to identify emerging themes and patterns. In analyzing the interview data, I used a general inductive approach



in which there are three underlying purposes: to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format; to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data to ensure that these links are both transparent and defensible; and to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the text data (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). In order to determine patterns and themes, I used coding. According to Miles et al. (2014), coding is a “data condensation task that enables you to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units” (p. 73). Miles et al. (2014) suggest using two levels of coding after which, “the interrelationships of the categories with each other are constructed to develop higher level analytic meanings for assertion, proposition, hypothesis, and/or theory development” (p. 73).

During level 1 (piori) coding, I created a list of potential codes based on my theoretical framework, literature review, and research questions. I then read through each of the transcripts, making reflections related to text and highlighting relevant portions and matching them to the specific codes. During level 2 (inductive) coding I gathered all the same-coloured excerpts together, into new separate documents, and using the excerpts and reflections from the first level, identified new codes (themes). By grouping excerpts from the first level coding together, new categories, themes, or constructs emerged and were identified. After identifying connections and patterns between the level 1 codes and the new codes or themes that emerged during level 2, I found that sub-categories emerged, some codes were discarded, and categories changed.

**Document analysis.** Another form of triangulation in this study took the form of document analysis. In addition to conducting interviews, I investigated the leadership development initiatives in the district, as well as the professional development that is mandated for new school leaders by the Ministry of Education in order to corroborate or augment the information provided from the interviews (IEL, 2012a; Leithwood, 2012, 2013; OME 1990, 2010, 2012). According to Yin (2014), reviewing documentary evidence can corroborate or contradict interview data, in which case, further exploration

into the topic is required. While the data gathered through the interviews I conducted was based entirely on participants' perceptions of professional development and supports available, a document review provided context for those perceptions and served to inform my findings for this study. To support triangulation, conducting a document analysis allowed me to look for data that supported alternative explanations for the participants' perceptions (Patton, 2015).

Among the documents that I reviewed were agendas from vice-principal meetings, minutes from board office meetings pertaining to vice-principals and/or the OLF, the district's process for the New Supervisory Internship Program (NSIP) and related professional development agendas, and the district's professional development opportunities and programs for school leaders. Specifically, I conducted a document analysis to investigate how this district has operationalized the OLS and how secondary vice-principals are involved. Given that the OLF is a major component of the OLS, it was important to see how this district has interpreted it. By consulting these other data sources, I can explore different dimensions of the problem of practice and leadership practices within this group of secondary vice-principals.

**Field notes journal.** Field notes contain the description of what has happened and any impressions, feelings, thoughts and questions that arise during an interview (Patton, 2015). The use of a field notes journal allowed me to note any and all thoughts related to the research topic, the interviews, and initial impressions and thoughts immediately following each interview, rather than waiting until the analysis stage. In my field notes journal I also wrote analytical memos containing some preliminary thoughts and interpretations. According to Saldaña, (2013), "Future directions, unanswered questions, frustrations with the analysis, insightful connections, and anything about the research and researcher are acceptable content for memos" (p. 42). Being able to refer to my field notes journal during data analysis enabled me to revisit specific details or thoughts that had long-since been forgotten. Given the significance of context in my research and theoretical framework, it was extremely important for me to be able to capture my impressions and thoughts during and following each interview for use with data analysis.

### **Ethics**

This research study requested and obtained approval from Western's Non-Medical Delegated Board as it involved human participants. The research was considered "minimal risk" as the probability and magnitude of possible harm by participation in the research was no greater than those encountered by participants in their everyday lives. All participants were over the age of 18 and were capable of offering consent. Potential benefits to participation exist if district leaders take the information shared to help inform future leadership development opportunities for this group or if they revise current procedures for promotion. The only inconvenience to daily activities that I was able to foresee was if interviews took place during the school day; however, most elected to meet after school hours.

Recruitment of participants was made initially via email by me with an invitation to contact me for more information and to receive a letter of information. All interested participants signed a letter of information and consent form that outlined the purpose of the research and granted permission to audio record the interviews. There was no reimbursement offered or provided for participation; however, all participants were brought coffee or tea and muffins from their local coffee shop.

All information was stored on an encrypted storage device purchased and used solely for the purpose of this research. Code numbers were used to identify participants' names and school names for confidentiality and were stored in a separate file in a locked drawer in my home. The audio-tapes of interviews were transcribed using the same code numbers. The codes were later changed to pseudonyms for ease of reading and writing. After five years, all audio interviews and paper copies of the data will be destroyed as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC, 2014) procedures and protocols.

## Chapter 5: Analytical Themes

While the experiences of participants varied based on individual context, through an analysis of the data, three strong themes emerged, each containing a number of subthemes. The first theme that emerged involved the *identification of secondary vice-principals as school leaders*. Participants perceived their duties to be considered “managerial” which consisted primarily of managing student attendance and staff absences; maintaining the school climate through student supervision and discipline, and reactive problem solving. Participants reported less involvement in what they considered as “leadership practices”, which in their view involved school improvement planning and instructional support. The details of this distinction will be further elaborated in this chapter. The second theme that emerged was *the influence of the principal role in determining the practices and opportunities of vice-principals*. Subthemes included the established distinctions between the principal and vice-principal role; school leadership opportunities for vice-principals; and preparing for the principalship. The final theme that emerged was *the influence of leadership standards on the practices and professional growth of secondary vice-principals*. Subthemes included organized professional learning opportunities outside of the school and ways the standards are being applied in practice by vice-principals.

As mentioned in chapter 1, according to the OLF, a “leadership practice” is “a bundle of activities exercised by a person or group of persons which reflect the particular circumstances in which they find themselves and with some shared outcome(s) in mind” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 5). According to Leithwood (2012), the use of the term leadership practice in the OLF as opposed to leadership skills, is to acknowledge

the situated and social context in which leadership is exercised; the central nature of relationships in leadership work; the importance of leaders responding flexibly to the situations, events and challenges which present themselves in order to accomplish important goals; and the shared nature of leadership work in virtually all organizations. (p. 5)

The term “leadership practices” is used throughout the supporting documents to the OLF to suggest that it is the preferred term to be used to identify the desired activities of school leaders. Throughout the interviews, participants referred to their practices as either managerial or leadership. Indeed, the term *leadership practices* was used by them to distinguish the practices that they viewed as leadership and the practices they perceived as managerial. Participants viewed leadership practices as activities that they believe support student learning such as providing instructional support, school improvement planning, and goal setting. They viewed managerial activities as tasks pertaining to adhering to procedures and routines related to the management of the school. The OLF distinguishes management and leadership in the following way:

management is about the status quo while leadership is about change;  
management focuses on the short term while leadership is about change;  
management is about keeping “the ship” running smoothly while leadership is  
about disrupting the status quo; and management is about doing things right while  
leadership is about doing the right things. (Leithwood, 2012, p. 6)

Given this description, it is not surprising that vice-principals view themselves as managers and view their principal as leaders, since most of their duties align with the description of manager in this definition.

### **Theme 1: The Identification of Secondary Vice-principals as School Leaders**

When discussing their leadership practices, participants fell into two distinct categories: those that perceive everything that they do as leadership and those that view very little of what they do as leadership, despite performing the same duties. However, all participants considered their duties, which consisted primarily of managing student attendance and staff absences, supervision and discipline of students, and reactive problem-solving, as “managerial” in nature. The emphasis that participants placed on the managerial nature of their role, and the duties to which they had been assigned by their principals, provided insight into how notions of leadership are constructed by this group and the district in which they work. These distinctions made by the participants will be examined in detail below.

**Managing student attendance and staff absences.** Participants reported managing the attendance of students and absences of staff as an area in which they spend a significant amount of time. Participants consistently described the daily activity of reviewing attendance reports and following up on unexcused absences with individual students and their families. According to Bill: “*A lot of the morning would be chewed up around chasing attendance for kids.*” Liz also reported that following up on student attendance took a significant amount of time,

*My secretary gives me a piece of paper with every single student that missed a class yesterday and was not accounted for, so no parent phone call or whatever...I talk to students about the class and then at that time I start pulling kids down to say where were you, what happened. Most of them actually say, “I skipped.” and I say, “Ok, you’ve got your detentions” and they go, “Ok”...and it takes most of the morning because you’re interrupted a hundred times.*

Given the emphasis placed on the management of student attendance for this group, it is important to consider this activity in relation to the leadership standards. While the OLF does not refer specifically to student attendance, connections can certainly be made to student well-being and achievement. Since the OLF is a policy intended to improve student outcomes, student attendance could be seen as being significantly related to credit attainment and graduation rates. Furthermore, as districts receive funding based on average daily enrolment (OME, 2015), student attendance has financial implications for districts in Ontario. Despite the fact that participants came from different schools, with different principals, their practices in managing student attendance were virtually indistinguishable, suggesting a prescribed practice. However, if vice-principals are spending such a significant amount of time on managing attendance, some may find it challenging to focus on other priorities such as providing instructional support to teachers, collecting and analyzing school data, or facilitating school-based professional learning with teachers. Thus, by delegating the management of student attendance to vice-principals, rather than delegating activities related to school improvement, vice-principals have fewer opportunities to exercise the domains of leadership practice

outlined in the leadership standards, and as a consequence, are not positioned as school leaders in terms of this Ontario policy.

Mulford (2008) argues that the behaviour of leaders should be shaped by the school context; however, the management of student attendance is currently being directed by district and provincial student achievement and funding goals. For example, students who are absent from a class for 15 consecutive days without a medical note are to be removed from that class. When only one class remains on a student's timetable, they are referred to a centralized attendance officer who then follows procedures to determine at which point the student will be removed from roll. Students 18 and over are removed from roll immediately by the vice-principal. This practice is mandated by the ministry and individual student or school context is not taken into account (OME, 2015). Furthermore, funding is clawed back by the ministry for students who were removed from roll after the required 15 days. In my experience a great deal of time can be spent by vice-principals completing the paperwork required by the ministry to track the absences and subsequent removal from classes and roll. Ironically, in many cases, the very students who had been removed from roll, and for whom funding had been clawed back, continue to be in the building each day, requiring and receiving intensive supports from the vice-principal and others, sometimes coming back on roll but without the reimbursement of funding.

In my view, this reactive emphasis on student attendance suggests a very linear way of thinking that assumes that student attendance is one problem with one solution: improve student attendance and you will improve achievement and funding. No participants questioned the practice or value of managing student attendance, but rather, accepted it as an expectation of their role. But how was monitoring student attendance identified as a problem to be addressed specifically by the vice-principal and for what purpose? Given that the ministry has provided specific funding and direction for teaching and counselling, with the direct intention of improving student attendance, how has the monitoring of daily attendance and the issuing and supervising of subsequent detentions, for example, become leadership functions as opposed to functions of students' success teachers or attendance counsellors? No participants shared any reservations

regarding this large component of their role, despite the fact that they considered it to be “managerial.”

In addition to spending significant amounts of time addressing student attendance, participants reported *managing staff absences* as an area in which they spent considerable time. Most participants indicated that they alone had been delegated the responsibility of managing staff attendance while a few reported that some components of this duty were handled by a secretary. The tasks related to managing staff absences were consistent among participants, with emphasis on the large amount of time spent on this duty outside of the school day. At this point it is important to clarify what tasks are involved in managing staff absences. In the district involved in this study, all school staff, with the exception of custodians, are required to enter absences, planned and unplanned, into a program called *SmartFind* by phone or computer. The vice-principal monitors the recorded absences throughout the day, in the evening, and in the morning, determining and arranging supply staff as appropriate. Budget has been allocated for certain types of absences through collective agreements, such as illness, personal days, union business, and ministry mandated professional development. However, limited funds are available to cover staff absences for reasons such as the supervision of extra-curricular activities and non-mandatory professional development. In such cases, vice-principals are expected to use on-calls to cover absent teachers. On-calls involve contract teachers covering for absent colleagues, the number of which are negotiated through collective bargaining. In order to minimize the number of on-calls used, vice-principals attempt to maximize the number of different teaching assignments that a supply teacher can cover by re-assigning or combining classes. When organized effectively, one supply teacher can often cover multiple staff absences, reducing the number of on-calls required, with the goal of having enough to last the year. While some planning can take place in advance, many absences are entered to the system through the night or in the morning, inevitably resulting in changes to all planning previously in place.

Once coverage has been determined, paperwork is completed that outlines and directs the coverage of each class, attendance sheets printed, keys organized, and lessons or work left by teachers gathered and printed or photocopied and placed in mailboxes or



given to supply teachers upon their arrival. Some years ago, the district had purchased a license to use a particular software program that assisted in the completion of the paperwork component of managing teacher absences; however, the program is no longer available and only those vice-principals who still have access to it on their laptop are able to utilize it. Other vice-principals have created their own method, using either spreadsheets or templates that they have created themselves. Some participants reported that a secretary assisted with some specific tasks involved in the process noted above and this varied from school to school, ranging from no secretarial involvement to being handled almost entirely by a secretary.

Heather reported that: *“A typical day starts probably at about 6:00 AM or 6:30 AM with the computer going on and just double-checking...that there aren’t any outstanding teacher jobs. Teachers are asked to text me by 6:30 if they are ill.”* Similarly, Frank reported an early start to his day in order to manage on-calls: *“Usually starts at 4:30 or 5:00 am. I get up, get ready for work, then 25 minutes to work. It usually starts with an hour, an hour and a half managing on-calls, teachers’ absences.”* Steven also reports working early from home, before travelling to work: *“My day starts at 6:00 in the morning and it’s doing teacher on-calls. You start in the morning, check and make sure that nobody else has phoned in.”* Similarly, Maria states: *“I arrive really early in the morning so I can have some quiet time while I try and figure out on-calls for the day.”* Most participants reported spending time at the end of the day preparing for the following days staff absences, some at school, and others at home.

The OLF does not refer to managing staff absences; however, a connection could be made to the specific competency of “demonstrate respect, care, and personal regard for students, staff and parents” (IEL, 2013, p. 12) and to the overall school climate. Participants noted that when the staff are happy with the way on-call assignments are managed and communicated, it has a positive impact on the tone of the school. This may create the social capital that Mulford and Silins (2003) argue should be an indicator of effective leadership. However, was the delegation of staff absence management to vice-principals an effort to positively impact the school climate and create social capital with staff, or was there a more pragmatic reason? For example, vice-principals spent a

significant amount of time outside of the school day managing staff absences. So it is worth noting that this task could not be delegated to other people: collective agreements regarding work day and overtime precludes any other employee group from undertaking this task. More importantly, however, is the fact that managing staff absences effectively requires a keen understanding of the strengths and capacities of individual teachers and of the students in the classes which need to be covered, in my view. There are many nuances involved in ensuring that on-calls are assigned in such a manner that have a positive outcome for staff and students and vice-principals have a much better idea of how students and staff interact with one another than do secretaries. Furthermore, when vice-principals manage the assignments of on-calls effectively, with positive outcomes for both staff and students, the general tone of the school is much more positive than when managed ineffectively. In my opinion, secretaries would not have access to the personal information about staff and students that vice-principals rely on to help inform decisions about which on-calls to assign to whom.

For some participants, the duty of managing staff absences also includes teaching the class themselves when necessary. As Heather reported: *“Teachers may have to leave, you might have to cover them. I’ve been in classes a fair amount this year because I’m at a small school so there’s not extra supply, very few on calls.”* David reported a similar experience: *“I had to do some on calls...you need to solve the problem so you cover.”* I believe that there are several considerations in having vice-principals cover classes themselves. First, if they are in a classroom teaching, they are not able to engage in any other activities of any kind, including dealing with students who had been sent to the office. As reported by participants, not all principals will deal with students who had been sent to the office. Secretaries will often send students back to class if the vice-principal is not available to supervise them, creating a variety of problems, such as teachers who feel undermined, classmates who perceive that disruptive behaviour has no consequence, reduced safety of all if an angry student has not had an opportunity to de-escalate or debrief, or when a student under the influence of alcohol or drugs has not been sent home. As a result, a puzzled superintendent may receive a phone call from an angry parent because they perceive the vice-principal is not doing their job. Second, is turning a

blind eye on the lack of supply teachers and letting the vice-principal cover for the missing teacher a cost-cutting measure? Third, there is the question of instructional competency: do vice-principals have the curriculum and pedagogical knowledge to teach all classes? While this can also be asked of supply teachers, it is a point worth considering. Assuming that vice-principals have the instructional capacity to cover virtually all secondary school classes, one might suggest this provides an opportunity for instructional leadership whereby debriefing lesson plans and activities can take place. However, it is very unlikely that vice-principals have the expertise to provide this type of guidance for all disciplines and all subjects.

Nevertheless, while managing staff absences and student attendance is a very necessary activity for the normal functioning of the school, it is unclear how these practices are captured by the leadership standards. Furthermore, if the OLF is the criterion to define leadership practices in Ontario, and the tasks referenced by the participants do not fit this understanding of leadership, then it follows that vice-principals are not truly viewed as leaders, at least in light of the leadership standards. Moreover, if large components of the vice-principal role, such as the ones outlined so far, are not captured by the OLF, then it could be argued that their practices are not recognized as leadership practices. What is the role of these practices in the evaluation of the vice-principal's performance? The absence of these considerations in the leadership standards and documents created to support enactment of this policy suggests that important differences in the principal and vice-principal role have been ignored by policy-makers, thereby marginalizing vice-principals and privileging the principalship (English, 2012; Maguire et al., 2015).

**Maintaining the school climate through student supervision and discipline.**

All participants reported student discipline as being a major component of their role and an area in which they spend a significant amount of time. According to Frank: "*In this building, office referrals from classrooms usually begin 9:15, 9:30, and that's beginning to manage those students who have been kicked out of class. And that's pretty much what happens most of the day.*" Similarly, Paul reports

*By the time 8:00 hits, there's usually a student or teacher that has an issue that we need to deal with...or there's a kid issue from the day before. Anything that I couldn't get solved the day before, I do then. And then in the morning it's usually dealing with kids sent to the office.*

Participants reported spending so much time dealing with student behaviour that they often felt their role as vice-principal was more related to discipline issues than to issues of education. This is consistent with the findings of other researchers who also found that vice-principals view themselves largely as disciplinarians (Armstrong, 2009; Kwan, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012). As Bill explains: *“In this job, sometimes you're more police officer than educator, right?”* Most participants reported that student discipline fell entirely on their shoulders as vice-principals, with their principals having little to do with discipline. This is illustrated by Liz who reported that, *“I'm the disciplinarian...I know that I will deal with virtually every single kid that comes through that door, the way this is set up with my principal. He rarely deals with any kids.”*

In my view, connections could be made between the leadership standards and the management of student discipline, such as to “create and enforce consistent, school-wide discipline policies” and “minimize daily disruptions to classroom instructional time” both of which are directly reflected by the experiences shared by participants. However, even with this apparent association between the standards and their practice, vice-principals in this study do not report participation in creating school-wide policies, only enforcing them. This speaks to a greater issue regarding the power structure within the school and the vice-principal's role as subordinate to the principal in decision-making and setting directions. The vice-principal as enforcer of rules, rather than co-creator, is a clear illustration of how power influences the ways in which the policy positions the vice-principals, having little control over those components of policy that seem to have major influence over their work (Viczo & Riveros, 2015; Maguire et al., 2015).

All participants reported the supervision of students as another key component of their role. All participants noted the significance of being visible in the halls, interacting

with both staff and students, as people arrived at school in the morning, throughout lunch, and between classes. As Heather shared: *“Just going through the halls, making sure kids are where they need to be and greeting people and touching base with staff.”* All participants reported that morning supervision provided an opportunity to get a feel for the day. David shared: *“In our job we have to be aware of the tone of the school and that was a good way in the morning, to kind of gauge what was going on with certain individuals or generally in the tone of the school.”* Liz spent her time before school in the mornings in the smoking section for the same reason *“Just seeing how the kids are doing and seeing how things are going with the kids.”* Some participants relayed that being visible in the morning also provided the opportunity to monitor the building. After he completed his on-calls in the morning, Frank stated: *“Then it’s starting to interact with students as they come in, and teachers. Walking the facilities to make sure there hasn’t been any vandalism and address any issues that need to be covered.”*

Lunch time supervision was noted as a very important part of the day by all participants. As Cheryl reported, lunch was spent, *“making sure teachers came to their supervisions. Usually I try and get outside and do a perimeter walk around the school just to make sure there’s nobody hanging in the parking lot. Get kids back into classes after lunch.”* Heather reported a similar experience: *“I spend a lot of breaks and lunch hours in the [smoking] section and wandering the halls.”* Steven found that, *“when lunch time came around, always supervising, always walking the halls, even though we have staff supervision.”* I believe that student supervision could be reflected in the OLF by the practice of *Maintaining a safe and healthy environment*, where school leaders are expected to “communicate standards of non-violent behaviour and uphold those standards in an equitable manner” and “empower staff in the school to play a leadership role in promoting a positive school climate and modelling appropriate behaviour” (IEL, 2013, p. 12-13). These expectations are directly related to the activity of student supervision and are reflected in the work of vice-principals, particularly in the modelling of expected behaviours. Vice-principals did not report feeling that supervision was just a task assigned to them, but rather, was a crucial component to their work. All reported feeling that being visible in the halls and interacting with students, as much as possible during

the day, strongly contributed to the moral tone of the school and contributed to the well-being of students and staff. Despite specific activities such as this not being strongly represented in the leadership standards, it is clear that the participants feel they have an effect on the school culture.

**The fluid nature of the role and reactive problem solving.** All participants described having to be very reactive in their role with much of their day spent in problem-solving and conflict resolution. Heather recounts: *“There often isn’t a typical day. Typically in a day you’re dealing with lots of teacher issues....and just dealing basically with issues as they arise.”* While vice-principals reported having routines that they attempt to stick to, being flexible was an integral part of the role. As Frank reports: *“Most of my job involves problem solving and putting out fires.”* and Liz states: *“All the other little traumas and drama that happens, I settle....a fight happens, or dress code...all kinds of things happen.”*

Participants reported being reactive as a pattern that continues all day. According to Frank: *“Then as the end of the day goes or comes, again you’re problem-solving on the fly and that could be anything from aberrant student behaviour to a medical crisis.”* Maria’s reports a similar experience, explaining: *“My day just kind of rolls as things happen.”* As Cheryl explains,

*There is always something that comes up. You get called to a classroom because somebody sucked back an earring, and other stupid things, you know, you call an ambulance. You’re the “I feel sick” person. There’s an angry parent at the door, there’s a parent on the phone...A problem with the custodian, someone’s written something on the wall, come on down and have a look. You’re always just pulled from what you need to be doing. That’s a typical day.*

Despite preparing for staff absences the day prior, participants reported the need to make last minute changes to staffing plans, often having to rely on the relational trust created with teachers (Mulford & Silins, 2003). As David described: *“You need to account for any of the possible changes that present that morning, which there usually are. You have*

*to be prepared to make changes and pulling some favours and asking people if they're willing to change."*

All participants reported problem-solving and being flexible as integral to their role as secondary vice-principals which is most reflected in the leadership standards through the *Personal Leadership Resources* at the bottom of the document. In my view, the reactive and unpredictable nature of the vice-principal role is captured somewhat in the Cognitive Resources (problem-solving expertise); Social Resources (perceiving and managing emotions and acting in emotionally appropriate ways); and Psychological Resources (Optimism; Self-efficacy; Resilience; and Proactivity). In supporting documents to the OLF it is indicated that, "a problem exists when there is a gap between some current state of affairs and a preferred future state of affairs, and the means required to reduce the gap requires thought" (Leithwood, 2012, p. 44). The same document states that expertise in problem solving is exercised through six component processes: problem interpretation; goals; principles and values; constraints; solution processes; and mood and provides suggestions in practice for each (Leithwood, 2012). Nevertheless, there is little indication of how these personal leadership resources in the standards are to be used in the evaluation of performance or how individual vice-principals could use these resources to interpret and construct meaning of the OLF (Winton, 2013).

While participants referred to problem-solving as a big part of their job, they did not give many examples to connect problem-solving to the OLF. According to Klinker, Hoover, Valle, and Hardin (2014), problem solving "is the most important action in which leaders can engage because they deliberately select an action from a series of options" (p. 190). Lakomski and Evers (2010) believe that a high emotional intelligence is necessary in reasoning and decision-making, arguing: "When emotion is absent, rationality has been shown to break down" (p. 439). Additionally, Klinker et al. (2014) present the case that inexperienced school leaders follow policy or rules when solving problems while experienced leaders use their professional judgement and are responsive rather than procedural. However, neither reference how experienced leaders make decisions when they also have to defer to someone with greater authority, such as with experienced vice-principals who may be required to defer to their principal when

addressing a problem, or follow procedures or rules set by him or her, rather than using their own professional judgement. While problem solving was not the focus of this study, it is my view that the responses suggest that vice-principals are not always able to use their professional judgement but instead often must rely on procedures set by their principals, or in some cases, are required to defer to the principal's judgement entirely.

As leadership standards, the OLF defines leadership as “the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals” (IEL, 2013, p.12-13). Given that participants describe their role as dealing primarily with attendance, discipline, and reactive problem-solving, areas that have little to do with identifying the vision and goals of the organization, vice-principals seem to be exercising influence through the relational trust they develop with students and staff through these procedural activities in my view. Nevertheless, since the OLF does not reflect the work of vice-principals, its purpose is unclear.

### **Theme Two: The Principal's Influence on Determining the Practices and Opportunities of Vice-principals**

The second theme that emerged emphasized the significance that the philosophies and practices of individual principals had on the experiences and practices of vice-principals. They reported that the opportunity to engage in leadership practices varied from principal to principal and was largely dependent on individual principal beliefs. Participants also reported that individual principals had a great deal of control over the professional growth of vice-principals and varied in their efforts or inclination to prepare them for the principalship.

**Distinctions between the principal and vice-principal roles.** All participants reported that their role and duties were determined solely by their principal and most compared and contrasted their experiences with past principals at other schools. All participants noted that the primary difference in the role between principal and vice-principal is that vice-principals deal with the running of the school, while principals



focus on instructional leadership. As Liz shared: *“The better job the vice-principal does in keeping the tone and morale of the school, the more the staff and the principal can do with the development, strategies, and research, the student achievement.”* In Heather’s experience,

*Dealing with the one-on-one in terms of staff issues and student issues - that falls on the vice-principal. The principal leads the school improvement work...I deal more with the social agencies, your retention counsellors, community police officers, school board counsellors...I’ve always done the health and safety...They’ve taken the information from the ministry and the superintendents and different initiatives and lead those...the vice-principal deals with the day-to-day, the kids, the discipline, the staff, the parents.*

Steven’s experiences are consistent with others, stating: *“The principal’s role is directing the teachers and the vision for the school. The vice-principal’s role is managing the day-to-day, person-to-person conflicts between teachers and students, between students and students.”* As Susan shared: *“A lot of what the VP does is management vs. instructional leadership. For me, if the building is running smooth, and that’s the management side, then it gives them more time to develop those instructional leadership practices.”*

While participants referred to small differences between the different principals they had worked with, their perceptions of the differences between the two roles was extremely consistent. It is my view that this suggests that while the role of vice-principal is understood to be “duties as assigned,” principals are consistently assigning the same duties to vice-principals, allowing principals the opportunity to engage in some specific leadership practices, inadvertently at the expense of vice-principals’ time and career development. Since the leadership development in the province focuses on the practices highlighted in the OLF, and many of the duties that principals are assigning to vice-principals are not explicitly considered by the leadership standards, this suggests that principals are valued as the true school leaders by some principals within this district, with vice-principals being delegated the procedural pieces. Moreover, even within the procedural pieces assigned to them, vice-principals are usually expected to follow the direction of the principal, even if they do not agree. This can further marginalize vice-

principals if they are assigned a duty, but then are expected to check with, or follow the direction of the principal, removing decision-making power from them.

For vice-principals who have been in the role for many years, and who have worked with different principals, this may serve to diminish their leadership skills, rather than enhance them. Power and positionality are key considerations in understanding how the OLF is enacted by vice-principals; however, such contextual understanding is entirely absent in the framework and supporting documentation (Maguire et al., 2015; Viczko & Riveros, 2015). Furthermore, by applying one set of leadership standards to the work of both principals and vice-principals, two very different roles according to participants and the literature, “important differences between the roles are erased or marginalized” (English, 2012, p. 167).

**School leadership opportunities for vice-principals.** All participants reported that the philosophies and practices of individual principals had a significant impact on determining leadership opportunities available to vice-principals within the school. As David shared: *“It very much depends on your relationship with your principal and what type of principal you have. If you have a principal that’s very comfortable in delegating, that doesn’t want to control too much, then you seem to have more opportunities.”* Liz reports that she has had limited leadership opportunities with teachers based on the preferences of her principal, stating: *“He rarely deals with any kids so I will deal with that. So he is given the opportunity to do the leadership. I don’t think my job allows for it. That’s not my practice – my practice is the students, right?”* Cheryl has experienced a range of principal styles, saying,

*I think that your principal can either be somebody who sort of ignites your passion and provides opportunities for you to have direct leadership with the school, leading the professional development at staff meetings or in small group meetings or PLCs or whatever. Or I’ve had other principals where they’re the principal and they do the professional development and you sit at the staff meeting with the rest of the staff and you take in what they say and you have your*

*little duties that you do, like get the coffee or something, but you're really not part of the big picture of the leadership, of the direction.*

David's experience also highlights the significance of principals' determining leadership opportunities for vice-principals, reporting that in one school, *"I felt like a glorified department head... You have to have a great principal that recognizes the strengths and abilities of the person to be able to do things and make that person grow in their role."*

Despite being at a variety of different schools with different principals, Frank reports *"In my years as a VP I rarely had opportunities, because of the nature of the job, to engage in anything like instructional leadership."* Bill's accounts are similar stating,

*That's one of the frustrating parts of the job because you're busy dealing with attendance issues or behaviour issues or sometimes issues that involve police. It chews up a big part of your day and then, unfortunately, it's not really related to, or it takes away from, the time that you have to be that instructional leader.*

All participants were very consistent in their perception of instructional leadership as being much more valued by the district and ministry than other practices and they have identified a strong disconnect between expectations and the opportunities that exist based on the realities of their role as vice-principals. All participants identified leading a Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) cycle as an example of a leadership practice with some reporting experiences in this area, and others expressing frustration at not ever having had the opportunity. A TLCP is a model of a school-based professional learning community whereby the staff follows a specific formula to improve student learning and outcomes:

The basic idea of the pathway is that classroom practice can be organized in a practical, precise and highly personalized manner for each student, with the intended outcome being increased achievement for all students. The model, which sequences the work of each PLC is an organizer for deep learning and inquiry.

However, it should be noted that a teaching-learning pathway is not simply a technical exercise. It also involves new ways of working together. (OME, 2008b)

As David shared: *"I was delegated the whole literacy TLCP process so I was so happy to be able to lead two or three cycles and that was fantastic... I know others have not had*

*that opportunity.*” Steven views classroom walkthroughs as an opportunity for instructional leadership reporting,

*I love walking into classes and seeing what's going on. And it's never evaluative. It's always just, I want to see what you're doing so we can have a conversation or so I can, if there's a certain kid, I know what's going on. But inevitably something will come out of that, and I'll say hey, I saw so-and-so doing this, you should talk to them about that, a certain thing they'd one on a smart board or whatever. That type of thing. So that's another part of the leadership that I do.*

While Bill’s principal has been very supportive in encouraging him to engage in instructional leadership, he found that the busyness of the day resulted in instructional leadership occurring after school hours: *“If there are any meetings after school, that’s kind of the time we get that instructional leadership done, meet with teachers around whatever projects are going on.”* Maria also experienced difficulty with instructional leadership, despite having her principal’s support, noting: *“The staff mindset is more around me as a manager and managing time and schedules and money and students, rather than coming to me with things around instructional leadership.”* Despite her strong coaching background in effective instructional practices, teachers were reluctant to view her as an instructional leader, preferring that she focus on managing the building and school culture. While one might wonder if gender has impacted the unwillingness of teachers to view this particular vice-principal as an instructional leader, there is no evidence of this in the data. Instead, it is more likely due to entrenched perceptions of the vice-principal as disciplinarian and manager, which is consistent with the experiences of other participants.

In my view, the strong emphasis placed by participants on instructional leadership as the favoured indication of leadership competency provides insight as to how leadership is conceptualized by vice-principals in this district. As the policy by which their performance is judged, the OLF places great significance on improving the instructional program and school improvement planning as do ministry resources developed to support school leaders. While the OLF does state that it follows an integrated model of instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Leithwood, 2012), the district

involved in this study places great emphasis on instructional leadership, with much professional learning focussed on this perspective. The leadership standards also emphasizes leadership practices that improve the instructional program so vice-principals and the district have taken to describing that as *instructional leadership* rather than *instructional support* or *instructional supervision*. There are other roles within the district that offer instructional support, such as instructional consultants or program consultants, so instructional leadership is the term generally used within the district when describing the work of school leaders pertaining to improving the instructional program. Participants in this study view instructional leadership as work with individuals or groups of teachers involving curriculum planning, delivery, and assessment and evaluation. This would include TLCs and professional development sessions involving improving the instructional program. The district involved in this study has developed a leadership profile that incorporates the competencies in the OLF with some district leadership requirements, of which *instructional leadership* is highlighted as a key competency.

**Preparing for the principalship.** Participants reported feeling that leadership opportunities within the school are critical in preparing them for the role of principal; however, they believed these opportunities to be inconsistent throughout their work in schools and with principals. As David reports: “*The principal is already in the role and they should be very conscious of the vice-principal who is not in the role and is aspiring to be in the role. That comes with the job as well.*” Susan acknowledges that not everyone has the same opportunities: “*I think it’s tough sometimes when a VP wants to go forward to have demonstrated those leadership pieces that the principal is expected to run, because the VP is supposed to help take care of other things.*” Participants reported that the level of support they received in going forward varied from principal to principal. As Heather explained,

*Some have talked to me about going forward in the principal role and I think that’s how they feel they need to support you, because ultimately you do want to be a principal. So they did support by saying things like, “when you’re a principal*

*you should do this, remember when you're principal to do that." So a lot of it was around the legality stuff. But it really varies from principal to principal.*

However, even with the support and encouragement of their principals to go forward, participants noted that the aforementioned differences of the principal and vice-principal roles made daily mentoring difficult. As Frank noted,

*I think there's well-intentioned efforts on the part of the principals I've worked with to include me in their understanding of how the building runs. But many times that breaks down because of the daily routines and requirements of both jobs, VP and principal. So the nature of the job precludes extensive mentoring, day-to-day, regarding leadership and what they do compared to what I do.*

Participants reported that mentoring happens largely through incidental modelling. As Bill noted: *"I observe how she handles situations, how she handles staff, how she handles instructional leadership and I try to incorporate the things that I think would work for me and the things that don't, that are obviously her style."* Paul also feels that he is preparing for principalship by watching his principal,

*I think part of being a vice principal is looking at things from the role of a principal and you get to spend 2,3,4,5,6+ years training to be a principal and I look at things as if I was the principal. What would I do? So that if the time comes where I am a principal, then it's not this big shift, like oh my God, now I finally get to make a decision.*

Participants also report that the practices and beliefs of individual principals largely determine whether vice-principals are able to participate in professional learning opportunities outside of the school. Cheryl reports,

*Where I am now, if I want to do something, if I want professional development, it's, sure, go ahead, ya, we'll work it out, don't worry. Where I was the year before, it was, well no, I can't have you out of the school that day because... So I think the things you want to take yourself that are your own professional development really depends on your principal allowing you to be out of the school because that makes more work for the principal.*

All participants reported that individual principal philosophies and practices had a significant impact on how vice-principals are being prepared for future principalship in this district.

It is my belief that in examining how the OLF contributes to preparing vice-principals for principalship, it is necessary to consider how principals interpret and enact the policy and the impact that has on vice-principals (Blackmore, 2010; Maguire et al., 2015). As leadership standards, the OLF indicates that school leaders should be building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership. However, based on the experiences of participants, it appears that some principals may be focussing on developing teacher-leadership capacity rather than vice-principal leadership capacity. The OLF refers to the importance of mentoring in the *Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices* domain, specifically to “provide staff with leadership opportunities and support them as they take on these opportunities” (IEL, 2013, p. 12-13). Furthermore, principals can provide evidence of competency in all areas of the OLF, simply by indicating they have delegated responsibility to someone else, either their vice-principal or a teacher-leader. On the other hand, vice-principals who are seeking principalship are expected to have engaged in most, if not all, of the practices identified in the OLF and it reflects poorly on them if they have not. However, due to the hierarchical nature of the two roles, and the vice-principal’s limited voice within the district, it would be unwise for a vice-principal to say he or she had not had the opportunity to engage in particular practices, regardless of the context in which they work. Moreover, it is my opinion that vice-principals preparing for principalship must ascribe to the narrow representation of leadership reflected in the policy by achieving competence in areas that “reflect what suits the political interests of policy-makers” (Niesche, 2013, p. 229), rather than areas in which they believe contribute to the school.

### **Theme Three: The Influence of Leadership Standards on the Practices and Professional Growth of Secondary Vice-principals**

The final theme that emerged provided insight into how the OLF influences the daily practice and professional growth of secondary vice-principals. The data revealed

two subthemes in which participants interacted with the OLF: through organized professional learning opportunities outside of the school; and ways in which they intentionally utilized the leadership standards in their practice.

**Organized professional learning opportunities outside of the school.** All but one participant reported that they received little to no training from the district for their role as secondary vice-principal, and the lone participant who did receive training was the most recent to the role. Participants reported that they learned how to be secondary vice-principals primarily by simply doing it, with limited opportunities for organized professional learning outside of the school. Cheryl's first year was very isolating as she explains,

*As a vice-principal you're limited by when the principal wants you out of the school or doesn't want you out of the school. It made a big difference when they made the VP meetings mandatory because then they had to let us go. But before that, if you didn't get to the VP meeting, you were in the dark. It was that way my whole first year as a VP.*

In contrast to the others, Maria reports: *"Because I'm a newer vice-principal, there were lots of opportunities for me to do some learning and professional development, so I'm completing that, but after that, there is no clear path for professional development."*

Other participants conveyed relief that new vice-principals currently seem to receive much more training than they received themselves when new in the role. As David explains:

*It's much more now than we had as a new VP. It's weaved in and ongoing and it's personalized. So I think for a new person, like in their first five years or so, there's a lot of opportunity outside of the school time to develop some of their leadership skills.*

The fact that all but one participant spoke to the lack of training received by them when they became vice-principals can be explained through their lengthy time in the role. While the OLF was first introduced ten years ago as part of the OLS, districts were not required to have a plan to institute a Board Leadership Development Strategy until 2011



(OME, 2009). By the time the district involved in this study had developed and implemented their leadership development strategy, all but one of the participants were already in the role of secondary vice-principal. Thus, only one participant in this study had been involved in the professional learning and extensive mentoring that is now required as part of the OLS. Despite not having participated in the professional learning and two years of mentoring that is now provided to new vice-principals, participants were enthusiastic of the supports that are now in place for their new colleagues. However, most participants in this study were required to participate in a program provided by the district called the New Supervisor's Induction Program (NSIP), which consisted of 10 mandatory evening learning sessions. These 10 sessions focussed on operational and procedural activities such as health and safety; staff attendance and absence management; labour relations; facilities; and budgeting. The emphasis on procedural and operational training for new vice-principals at that time, may help to understand how participants conceptualize the role of vice-principal today.

When asked about the professional learning provided by their district, all participants referred to vice-principal meetings. While meetings are not traditionally viewed as professional learning, the district in this study has moved to a model where the intent of scheduled meetings is for professional development as opposed to an informational focus, which can be provided by email or handouts. While a portion of all meetings does tend to include updates on current or upcoming issues, much of each meeting is spent on professional learning and many participants referred to this as the only professional learning in which they participate. All participants conveyed the significance of regular vice-principal meetings to support them in their role. Heather reports: *"I think it's limited in terms of how we're supported in our VP meeting dates because we have three or four a year and one or two of them is always cancelled...but there's a lot of information that you need to have to do our jobs."* Susan values seeing colleagues at vice-principal meetings, stating: *"The networking is critical and really, really important."* Frank reports: *"VP meetings have dramatically declined over the years. We've gone from once a month down to probably two or three times a year. I think the intentions are there to support us but they really don't materialize."* The fact that the

number of vice-principal meetings have declined is noteworthy. When I first moved into the role, vice-principal meetings usually occurred every few months but were not mandatory. Attendance at these meetings was poor largely due to the fact that principals did not want vice-principals to be out of the building for the day. Within a few years, attendance at vice-principal meetings became mandatory and superintendents had to approve any requests made by principals to keep the vice-principal at the school instead of attending. The attendance of vice-principals increased dramatically and the meeting agendas were co-constructed by vice-principals and superintendents. Unfortunately, over the past several years, the number of meetings has decreased to the point where now they occur only three or four times per year with one or more being cancelled due to weather or other unforeseeable circumstances. No reason has been given by the district for the decrease in meetings other than to say that they are trying to keep school leaders in the schools and reduce the number of days they are out of the building. While this may be a consideration for principals, who sit on a number of committees and are out of the building quite frequently, many vice-principals are only out of the building for vice-principal meetings, suggesting that perhaps principals may once again be exerting some influence to ensure vice-principals are available to manage the school.

While Steven appreciates getting together with colleagues, he does not necessarily find the meetings to be relevant, reporting: *“But when we go to our meetings, it’s always whatever is provincially dictated, or the flavour of the month that they want us to get on board with.”* Paul concurs, stating: *“I think a lot of the problem with professional learning in the education community is that it is not individualized. It’s just here, we’re doing this...join in whether you like it or not.”* The professional learning that occurs at vice-principal meetings follows the agenda of principal meetings, to some extent, which addresses ministry and board initiatives and goals. The perception of participants that the learning is not relevant to their work could speak to the fact that they do not participate in these activities at the school. Alternatively, if vice-principals were involved in the initiatives that are the focus of the meetings, rather than running the building so that principals and teachers could engage in the activities, they may find the learning to be more valuable and applicable to their work.

In addition to being provided organized professional development, participants conveyed that money is available for school leaders to pursue their own professional learning. Maria reports: *“There’s been information that has come out about funds being available for you to pay for your own professional development, to attend a conference or take a course, so I’m going to investigate that.”* Heather, who appreciates the opportunities for self-directed learning opportunities, explains,

*One way they support professional learning is through a PD fund, which I have accessed, mostly to get resources that I’ve been interested in. I also went to a conference last year so the money’s there. I think it’s not very well accessed but I think it’s up to us as individuals to know that it’s there and take it on...they’re supporting us by providing the money and the odd email reminder.*

While not all participants had accessed funds for self-directed professional learning, all were aware of its availability.

All participants reported that the practices and philosophies of individual superintendents also had a significant impact on their professional learning opportunities and experiences as secondary vice-principals. Participants’ accounts reveal that not all superintendents provide the same opportunities to vice-principals. Cheryl reports:

*I think it depends on your superintendent hugely. The superintendent I had last year, I felt that there really was opportunity for professional development. There were specific meetings for vice-principals on how we could improve our leadership skills around the school improvement plan. But I have had other superintendents where there was no room for professional development for vice-principals. You just went in and did your job and they did work with the principals.*

Heather reports: *“Our superintendent does provide books that are always of value in terms of supporting teachers and help plan our PD days and those resources have been valuable.”*

Participants noted that the district in which they work follows a conventional model of professional development, with some questioning the usefulness of such a model. Paul reports:

*We do a very traditional approach to professional learning. Most of our professional learning is to sit in a room and somebody at the front talks with a PowerPoint, and we all sit there and listen, and then we go do the same thing with our teachers, and our teachers do the same thing with the students, and we say, why are you doing that?*

Liz concurs, stating: *“We PD completely wrong. You can’t go to a meeting all day and then come back and implement it. I love the information but to come back and put it into practice is so difficult.”* These reports of participants as mere recipients of information at their meetings, rather than engaging in job-embedded professional learning opportunities, are inconsistent with the research on strong districts that stated: *“These meetings aimed not only to provide PD aligned with system and school priorities but also to further the improvement plans of schools and the system. Authentic engagement by participants in solving the district’s improvement problems was the mechanism for accomplishing both of these purposes”* (Leithwood, 2013, p. 23). While the professional learning provided at their meetings met the criteria suggested by Leithwood (2013), the close monitoring of progress toward improvement goals or the “at-the-elbow” coaching by superintendents necessary for the translation of learning to practice were not provided (p. 23).

It is my view that by focussing initiatives, professional development and resources on the principal role, assuming that both principals and vice-principals participate in the same leadership activities at the school, vice-principals are left out of the leadership picture entirely by the ministry. Moreover, over the past several years the district involved in this study has placed emphasis on the professional growth of lead teachers, formerly called department heads, with principals and teachers attending specialized professional learning sessions together. Vice-principals are left behind to manage the school during these professional learning sessions and during subsequent school-based sessions. The frustration of vice-principals being left out of the professional learning that teachers and principals are receiving is exacerbated in some cases where vice-principals are being handed notes from professional learning sessions attended by principals and teachers and being told to facilitate the subsequent school-based meetings if the principal is unavailable to do so. The methods by which the district and ministry

have chosen to enact the OLF, with a focus on the professional growth of the principal and the recruitment and professional development of new leaders, experienced vice-principals have been left behind entirely.

**Application of leadership standards to the practices of vice-principals.**

Participants perceived the OLF more as a compliance checklist than a tool for professional growth. As Liz reports: “*Our Annual Growth Plan is based on the OLF and I do it to say I’ve done it, and check it off, but it’s not real. I just say, okay, yeah, I did that so they should be happy now.*” Paul explains,

*It scares me that it’s becoming a checklist. Do you do these? Check, check, check, check. Okay, perfect, you’re good. And the check thing is terrible because that is compliance and adequacy in its most natural state. But I don’t think it captures the essence of being a true leader because there’s so much ‘uncheckable’ stuff that makes up what being a good leader is. Great leaders invoke passion and emotion and there’s lots of different ways they do that. I think that’s the part that’s very difficult to measure and I worry that the leadership framework is about measuring and you can’t measure emotion and you can’t measure some of those skills. It’s hard to measure what makes a good leader. You just feel it.*

Some participants report that they rarely consider the leadership standards in their practice. Participants did not mention the fact that the OLF had been revised in 2012 suggesting they were recalling when the policy was originally introduced. Liz shares: “*To just look at it and be able to cite it, I couldn’t cite one thing. I know it’s a big long page, I know there are columns, and I know some of the look-fors but that’s it.*” Steven admits,

*I don’t even remember it being introduced to us. I certainly don’t refer to it, even on a monthly basis. If I were to sit down with it, I could certainly pick out things that I’m doing but it’s more innate than by design.*

Similarly, Cheryl states: “*I didn’t even hear about the leadership framework for the first few years that I was a VP. It really just comes out at certain times. It’s not big in my day-to-day workings as a vice-principal.*”

Other participants relayed using the leadership standards in their practice occasionally as a reflective tool. Frank reports: *“I think it’s a reference for VPs. I think it’s to say, listen, if this is what leadership is, I’ve got work to do or there’s areas that I can expand on.”* Maria also uses the OLF for reflection,

*I don’t have it out on my desk everyday but if I’m thinking about school improvement planning, then how am I leading the program? How am I part of the accountability? Looking at those different areas of the leadership framework and using it kind of reframes my thinking. You can get very task-oriented and very much into what reports need to be completed. You can lose track of what it is you’re there for.*

All participants viewed the OLF as most commonly used when “going forward” for consideration for promotion to the role of principal. Cheryl reports: *“When I was thinking I wanted to go forward, I pulled it out and looked at it and found areas where I felt that I was weakest and worked on those areas and talked it over with my principal and superintendent.”* Heather agrees,

*When I went forward and had the opportunity to really look at it closely, it allowed me to see where I maybe had some gaps and where I wasn’t focussing. Because I tended to focus on building relationships, particularly at the beginning when you are just starting out as a VP and I think it helps gives perspective to how much is involved in really running a school.*

All participants who had considered going forward shared the similar experience that it was only after using it for that purpose that they had finally become truly familiar with the OLF and reflecting on ways in which their practices were reflected in it.

Participants believed there would be value in job-embedded opportunities for vice-principals to use the leadership standards as a tool to more effectively develop and support their leadership practices. Frank reports: *“As a tool metaphor, it means it is the right thing to use, at the right time, in this way, and are you trained sufficiently well enough to use the tool to accomplish the task that you are trying to do?”* David suggests: *“Finding ways that a VP could reflect in a meaningful way. What have I done so far? Where do I need to go?”* Heather agrees: *“Maybe have it be a working document and*

*populate it more fully. If we were made to do it, or encouraged to do it, then I think we could maybe have more balance in the school.” Cheryl explains,*

*If there was intentional time put aside to use it. And I have to say that is what my last superintendent did for us. She gave us that intentional time to look at our growth and work on our school improvement plans. And we did use it, looked at the framework and areas in terms of our professional growth. Having been removed from the school for that afternoon once a month, or every two months even, was a good way to intentionally look at the framework and have it kind of as the backbone to what we are doing.*

Liz shares a similar idea: *“Maybe that’s an activity that VPs have to do at one of our meetings. Just go through it and give examples of what you do and where you see blanks and don’t see examples so we can live and breathe it.”* David shares some ideas on using the OLF with vice-principals: *“I’d like to see a tool to support movement through it as a continuum. Like the coaching model where you went from a coach to a mentor and there’s a continuum in between with different types of interaction.”* Paul would like to see professional learning with the OLF go deeper: *“The next piece is, what kind of vision are you developing and why? The leadership framework lays out what you have to do; but to me the next step is how you go about taking those ideas and executing them as a great leaders should.”*

In summary, three themes emerged during the analysis of the data. The first theme involved the identification of secondary vice-principals as school leaders. Participants articulated that they identify more as “managers” than “leaders” and feel they spend the majority of their time engaging in activities that are procedural and not understood as leadership, such as managing student attendance and staff absences; supervising and disciplining students, and reactively problem-solving. The second theme that emerged emphasized the principal’s influence in determining the practices and opportunities for vice-principals. Participants reported very distinct differences between the roles and responsibilities of principals and vice-principals that were determined by their principals. Participants felt that opportunities to engage in leadership practices within the school existed at the sole discretion of their principal and that opportunities varied significantly

between principals and schools, placing some vice-principals at a disadvantage.

Participants described these leadership opportunities and principal modelling as ways in which they were preparing for principalship. The final theme that emerged involved how leadership standards influence the practices and professional growth of secondary vice-principals. Vice-principals reported professional learning that emphasized instructional leadership, despite their having limited ability to apply learning to their practice.

Participants felt that the OLF was good in theory, but addressed the practices of principals and neglected to capture most of their work as vice-principals as they are not decision-makers in the school and must follow the direction and philosophies of the principal. Vice-principals reported using the leadership standards almost exclusively as a tool to support them when going forward for promotion to principalship, and did not use it to guide their daily practice.

If the leadership standards are seen only as a way to solve a problem, in this case improving school leadership to benefit student achievement, then all the other practices of vice-principals “become marginalized or go unnoticed” (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 485). The OLF is based on the idea that there are leadership practices that are common across roles and contexts (Leithwood et al., 2004). However, by understanding how the OLF is enacted by different leaders, including district leaders and principals, helps to understand how this policy is conceptualized by vice-principals and how significant context is (Ball et al., 2012; Bush, 2010; Viczko & Riveros, 2015). Since the OLF is one common set of performance standards that is meant to capture the work of two very different leaders, school and role-specific factors that act as constraints are neglected (Ball et al., 2012), and job contextuality is removed with important differences between practices ignored or devalued (English, 2012). Specifically, issues of length of service, power and positionality are critical in understanding how vice-principals enact the OLF (Viczko & Riveros, 2015; Maguire et al., 2015).



## **Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion**

This chapter will provide a discussion of the research findings in relation to the literature and will be organized by the three themes that emerged during the analysis. The first theme that emerged was the identification of secondary vice-principals as school leaders. The second theme examines the influence of the principal role in determining the practices and opportunities for secondary vice-principals. The final theme explores how the leadership standards influence the practices and professional growth of secondary vice-principals.

### **The Identification of Secondary Vice-principals as School Leaders**

As noted in the literature review, there is very limited policy that addresses the vice-principal role in the province of Ontario. In fact, other than the OLF, only the Education Act (OME, 1990) and the subsequent Policy/Program Memorandum 152 (OME, 2010) refer to the position of vice-principal in terms of duties or expectations of the role. The Education Act (OME, 1990) vaguely directs that vice-principals are to perform any and all duties assigned by the principal, and in the absence of the principal, shall perform the principal's duties. PPM 152 addresses the role of principal and vice-principal together and specifically identifies the OLF as the tool for evaluating the performance, promotion, and succession planning for all school leaders (OME, 2010). In the absence of any other policy to which vice-principals can refer to support them in conceptualizing their work, the OLF prescribes the practices in which they are expected to engage in order to meet the standards for "effective" leadership.

In the province of Ontario, "effective" leadership has been determined to be the practices that focus on increased student achievement and well-being (OME, 2009). However, while the province uses standardized tests to measure academic achievement, there are no systems in place to measure student and staff well-being or the contextual school factors that contribute to academic achievement; furthermore, the OLF is the only tool used to manage and evaluate school leadership performance. Leithwood (2013) maintains that effective performance management systems for school leaders should be

“based on clear and explicit conceptions of effective school leadership practices” (p. 26), which have been attempted through the leadership standards.

The province of Ontario is not alone in its implementation of a performance management policy in the form of leadership standards. Internationally, many countries have been attempting to specify the expectations placed on school leaders and perceive such standards as a mechanism to improve student outcomes (Pont, 2013). Moreover, leadership standards are intended to specify the selection and function of principals, guide their professional development, and define criteria for their assessment (Blackmore, 2010; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2006).

The faulty assumption that a single set of standards can be applied equally to all school leadership positions (English, 2000; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Niesche, 2013; Pont, 2013) can be illustrated by the fact that other school leadership standards do not even mention vice-principals (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014; Centre of Study for Policies and Practices in Education, 2013; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Department for Education, 2015). In contrast, like the OLF, the Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice Principals in British Columbia attempts to acknowledge the vice-principal role; however, there is no mention of the differences in role and the vice-principal is absent in all but the title (British Columbia Principals’ and Vice Principals’ Association, 2013). The omission of the vice-principal role in other leadership standards could suggest three possibilities: a) that the roles are identical, which is clearly not true, b) that vice-principals are not viewed as school leaders, or c) that their role is so distinct from that of principals that one set of standards cannot capture both.

Nevertheless, the intent of the OLF as leadership standards is to include both principals and vice-principals equally, even going so far as to state: “Where the term principal is used, this may also include vice-principals where appropriate” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 3). This suggests that the assumption is made by policy-makers that the principal and vice-principal roles are interchangeable, with both having equal opportunity and authority to engage in particular practices. The intent of this statement is somewhat puzzling, however, given that there are no instances at any point in the OLF where the

inclusion of vice-principals has been identified as inappropriate, suggesting that all components are applicable to the vice-principal role.

However, rather than the leadership practices outlined in the OLF, participants in this study reported that the activities in which they spent the majority of their time were attendance and absence management, supervision, discipline and reactive problem-solving. The strong emphasis on procedural activities with their duties being entirely at the discretion of their principal, confirmed the findings of existing research on the vice-principal role that concurred with the universal description of “duties as assigned” (Armstrong, 2009; Garrard, 2013; Goulais, 2008; Hausman et al., 2002; Joseph, 2014; Kwan, 2008, 2009; Kwan & Walker, 2010; Lee et al., 2009; MacDonald, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Montanari, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Read, 2012; Rintoul, 2012; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010; Shoho et al., 2012; Williamson, 2011).

The findings in this study are consistent with the work of other researchers who conclude that the management of student attendance, staff absences, and the supervision and discipline of students are the primary function of secondary vice-principals (Kwan, 2008, 2009, 2011; Kwan & Walker, 2010; Lee et al., 2009; MacDonald, 2004; Montanari, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010). Specifically, in a study conducted by Montanari (2014) in relation to the OLF, secondary principals indicated that attendance and discipline were components of the vice-principal role, not their own role as the principal of the school. This is consistent with the experiences of participants in this study who reported that principals generally did not address attendance or discipline issues with students. Furthermore, participants in this study emphasized that the time spent on student discipline and supervision resulted in feelings of being “rule enforcers” rather than school leaders. As the managers of the building, and having virtually sole responsibility for student behaviour and discipline, vice-principals are excluded from many of the leadership practices that are identified as preferred in the OLF (Hausman et al., 2002).

The focus of participants on procedural duties meant that they had less time to focus on other school priorities. This speaks to how vice-principals in this district are

being positioned as school leaders, and since the leadership standards provide a narrow representation of leadership, which discounts or devalues many of the duties that vice-principals have been assigned, the result is a marginalization of these particular practices (Bolden & Gosling, 2006; English, 2012; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Niesche, 2013). This finding confirms that of Winton and Pollock (2015) who determined that the OLF was problematic as leadership standards because it focussed on particular practices that promote a narrow understanding of leadership which devalue other ways of enacting leadership. Therefore, given that the OLF is not role-specific, further explanation is required to determine how examples of the specific practices of vice-principals can be described or identified.

While describing what they perceived to be managerial tasks, being visible in the halls and interacting with students and staff as much as possible was critically important to participants. These practices were used to develop trust and rapport with staff and to model professional behaviours for their colleagues, which contributed to the moral tone of the school and to the well-being of students and staff. While participants did not consistently equate these particular practices to leadership, Hallinger (2005) maintains that they have a greater impact on the school than the practices focussed merely on improving classroom instruction.

Significantly, the OLF acknowledges the importance of effective management of schools stating, “management is an important part of leadership and while focused on processes and procedures that keep the organization running smoothly, effective leaders approach technical management in an adaptive way in order to maximize instruction and collaboration in support of the vision and goals” (IEL, 2012a, p. 5). However, if principals delegate only the management components of leadership to vice-principals, how are vice-principals demonstrating that their managerial duties are “maximizing instruction and collaboration in support of the vision and goals”, which are essentially the vision and goals of the principal? Vice-principals in this study are clearly in a role that is subordinate to the principal, with limited involvement in setting directions or goals for the school. Since such large components of the vice-principal role are not sufficiently

recognized in the leadership standards, and thus not recognized as leadership practices, then it remains unclear how performance in these areas is understood.

Additionally, participants in this study described being very reactive in their role, making decisions and solving problems all day long. Some mentioned having to refer everything to their principal and others referred only particular types of problems. However, all reported that the decisions they made were reactive in order to solve an immediate problem that pertained to managerial issues rather than to decisions having to do with school improvement or goal setting. This is consistent with the findings of Marshall and Hooley (2006) who reported that vice-principals rarely have the opportunity be involved in the types of decisions or decision-making process that they would later need as principals.

This study demonstrated the previously unexplored issue of how context in the applicability of the leadership standards to the vice-principal role has been overlooked by policy-makers. As a guideline intended to improve or set expectations for school leaders in Ontario, it appears that policy-makers have assumed that the OLF is a finished product that can be inserted into practice by vice-principals, without consideration for their power or positionality and their prescribed activities (Ball et al., 2012; Maguire et al., 2015), considerations over which they have little control or influence. The findings of this study confirms that of others who argue for a distinct framework for vice-principals that captures their contributions to school leadership, without which, their work is currently demeaned (Williamson & Scott, 2012).

In this study participants reported that the activities in which they spent the majority of their time were attendance and absence management and the supervision and discipline of students, which confirms the findings of other research that has been conducted internationally on the role of secondary vice-principals (Kwan, 2008, 2009, 2011; Kwan & Walker, 2010; Lee et al., 2009; MacDonald, 2004; Montanari, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010). Most studies that addressed how leadership is conceptualized by vice-principals in Ontario did not address the role in relation to how leadership standards are enacted (Goulais, 2008; Macdonald, 2004; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010; Williamson, 2011). The few

studies that have been conducted in relation to the OLF have either focussed exclusively on principals (Swapp, 2012; Winton & Pollock, 2015) or on principals and vice-principals together, without delineating between the two roles (Leithwood & Azah, 2014; Montanari, 2014; Riveros et al., 2016). However, the findings in this study make a new contribution to the literature in that it provides unique insight as to how secondary vice-principals conceptualize school leadership and identify themselves as leaders, in relation to leadership standards that are intended to capture two very different school leadership roles equally. These findings show that if vice-principals continue to be delegated procedural duties in schools, at the exclusion of other priorities, we need a more comprehensive understanding of leadership in Ontario, and a more robust leadership framework that captures their specific practices and contributions to schools.

### **The Influence of the Principal Role in Determining Practices and Opportunities for Secondary Vice-principals**

The findings in this study confirm the findings in most of the existing research, which demonstrates that the factor with the greatest impact on the practices of vice-principals is the practices and actions of their current principal (Armstrong, 2009; Garrard, 2013; Goulais, 2008; Harvey, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Joseph, 2014; Kwan, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010; Shoho et al., 2012; Williamson, 2011). Specifically, findings in this study indicate that the influence of individual principals is critical in determining the practices of vice-principals, the opportunities they are provided, and the practices or activities in which they can participate. Participants specifically referenced how their experiences had varied significantly from school to school based on the practices of individual principals and all compared and contrasted multiple experiences with multiple principals. This confirms what other researchers have found that school context and the principal's understanding of the vice-principal role largely determined the activities in which vice-principals take part (Harvey, 1994; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012). However, regardless of the differences between schools

and principals, participants had a consistent understanding of the differences between the roles of principal and vice-principal with all reporting that principals were responsible for the school vision, school improvement planning, and instructional leadership while vice-principals manage the students and the building which is consistent with the findings of other researchers in Ontario (Goulais, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Montanari, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Read, 2012; Rintoul, 2012; Williamson, 2011).

This common understanding of participants regarding the difference between the two roles, which are considered interchangeable in the leadership standards, suggests a prescribed conceptualization of school leadership in this district. Given that the OLF implies that both principals and vice-principals engage in the same practices, without distinguishing between the two roles, one could expect that vice-principals would understand their role as school leader to be somewhat synonymous with that of principal, and their roles interchangeable to some extent. However, based on the experiences of participants, it is apparent that this district has ascribed the specific practices in the OLF that support the instructional program to the principal, at the exclusion of vice-principals. However, this is consistent with the ministry's view, which continues to focus on the principal as the preeminent school leader, serving to perpetuate this role ambiguity and the marginalization of vice-principals. Furthermore, while it is understood that leaders' competence in the areas addressed in the leadership standards will change throughout career stages and school assignments (IEL, 2012a), there is no acknowledgement that the career stages of vice-principals may actually have little bearing on the types of practices in which they engage, which instead are determined by their principal and the subordinate and procedural nature of their role, rather than by their experience or competence.

The lack of opportunity for vice-principals to engage in instructional leadership is consistent with existing research which shows that vice-principals report less understanding of instructional leadership due to the managerial tasks in which they spend the majority of their time (Garrard, 2013; Goulais, 2008; Joseph, 2014; Kwan, 2009; MacDonald, 2004; Montanari, 2014; Read, 2012; Rintoul, 2012; Williamson, 2011). Furthermore, one study in particular found that principals articulated that school

improvement planning was specifically their role while managing the building was specifically the role of the vice-principal (Montanari, 2014).

The literature reveals that some believe that leadership practices that focus on classroom improvement have less of an impact on improving student achievement than practices that focussed on the culture of the school (Hallinger, 2005). Furthermore, Leithwood (2012) argues that the role of school leader involves much more than instructional support, specifically referencing demands placed on principals such as timetables and operational tasks as contributing to growth within the school, tasks delegated to vice-principals in this study. However, while the OLF claims to focus on a combination of instructional and transformational leadership practices (Leithwood, 2012), there remains a strong emphasis on practices in which the vice-principal does not participate. Other researchers have found that by assigning vice-principals attendance, discipline, and staff management, which are perceived as the less appealing and less valued tasks of leadership, their credibility as instructional leaders is decreased among teachers (Armstrong, 2009; Kwan, 2009; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Shoho et al., 2012). This is confirmed by the experiences of some participants in this study who came to the vice-principal role with a particularly strong instructional background; however, found themselves no longer viewed as an instructional leader based on the prescribed nature of their vice-principal role and responsibilities.

The emphasis of participants in this study on instructional leadership practices is consistent with the OLF, which also values the practices that impact student achievement and school improvement. Given that the performance and effectiveness of secondary vice-principals is judged by leadership standards that emphasize the practices performed by and associated with the principal, it becomes apparent that vice-principals are at a disadvantage. Furthermore, participants in this study reported that principals and groups of teachers often worked together on school improvement planning and improving the instructional program, leaving vice-principals to manage the students and run the building, thereby excluding them from school-based leadership opportunities.

As leadership standards, it appears the OLF supposes that principals and vice-principals have equal opportunity to engage in those leadership practices that have been



identified as effective, and assumes that both policy actors are able to enact the policy in the same way across and between schools (Braun et al., 2011). Moreover, the OLF states that, “it is expected that school leaders will expand and strengthen their ‘repertoire’ of practices and personal leadership resources over time, provided they have the opportunities and are supported” (IEL, 2012a, p. 8). However, there appear to be no mechanisms in place by the ministry or district to ensure that vice-principals, who are in a subordinate role and do not determine their duties or opportunities, are afforded these opportunities and supports referred to in the leadership standards. Furthermore, policy making has been separated into discrete steps of design, implementation, and evaluation that assumes that, once written, the OLF will be put into practice in the same way by all school leaders (Maguire et al., 2015; Viczko & Riveros, 2015). The mere inclusion of vice-principals in the policy does not ensure they are provided the opportunities necessary to develop their capacity, and the practices of individual principals is essential to foster leadership opportunities (Hallinger, 2011).

In relation to policy enactment, the way that principals enact the OLF is critical to vice-principals, particularly in how they choose to provide leadership opportunities and supports for “staff” in the school and who that staff is. Most participants in this study believed that principals tried to enact this component of the leadership standards, which focuses on developing leadership in others. However, in many cases they believed those others were teachers, rather than themselves. Whether principals view vice-principals or teachers as the people to whom they provide leadership opportunities has a direct impact on how vice-principals are being prepared for principalship and the role that policy plays in this preparation (Blackmore, 2010; Maguire et al., 2015). Specifically, the exclusion of some vice-principals from collaborative school-based instructional improvement sessions, to manage the students and the building, while principals and teachers work together on instructional improvement, indicates how policy-makers have not considered how the OLF translates to daily practice for leaders in different roles, particularly when one policy actor has the power to determine the practices of the other.

This study confirmed the findings of others who found that the principal’s actions were critical in preparing vice-principals for the principalship (Garrard, 2013; Grodzki,

2011; Hausman et al., 2002; Joseph, 2014; Kwan, 2008, 2009, 2011; Kwan & Walker, 2010; Lee et al., 2009; Montanari, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Williamson, 2011). Not only did the individual philosophies and practices of principals contribute to the leadership opportunities that existed within the school for vice-principals, they also impacted how vice-principals were prepared for future promotion. Grodzki (2011) found that opportunities for professional development and chances for promotion for vice-principals were dependent entirely on the level of involvement and support they received from their principals. Vice-principals seeking promotion have their readiness determined based on the practices in the OLF, regardless of whether they have been provided opportunity or encouragement, resulting in their “effectiveness” being determined by performance standards that are not grounded in the context of their current role, but of a future or imagined role (Eacott, 2013a; Newton & Riveros, 2015).

All participants emphasized the importance of on-the-job mentoring by principals; however, many found this logistically difficult due the differences between the roles, responsibilities, and daily priorities of both principals and vice-principals. Also, the participants reported principal modelling as the primary mechanism for preparing for the principalship and indicated that having multiple principals was beneficial in helping them understand acceptable and expected behaviours and to develop their own understanding of leadership. This is consistent with the studies that have identified modelling and mentoring as crucial for preparing vice-principals for the principalship (Goulais, 2008; Hausman et al., 2002; Joseph, 2014; Oleszewski et al., 2011; MacDonald, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Williamson, 2011).

This study found that participants did not feel that their daily activities served to prepare them for the principalship, which is consistent with that of other researchers (Hausman et al., 2002; Kwan, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Williamson, 2011). Like the findings of Kwan (2008), this study reveals that vice-principals perceived that their duties were assigned based on historical role definitions and at the discretion of the principal as opposed to any form of intentional succession planning on the part of the district. The experiences of participants in this study, and in the literature, conflict with suggestions by

Leithwood (2012) who argues that school leaders must experience situated, authentic, job-embedded experiences in their role in preparation for school leadership. Furthermore, Kwan (2009) argues that policy-makers need to prescribe specific opportunities for vice-principals to ensure equal opportunity between contexts.

As a performance management policy, leadership standards are intended to specify the function of principals, guide professional learning, and define criteria for assessment and recruitment (Blackmore, 2010; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Pont, 2013). However, the findings in this study reveal that the OLF does not capture the complexity of the vice-principal role, their different career phases, district practices, or the different leadership opportunities available to them, particularly how these contextual factors are influenced by principals' discretion, which renders this policy inadequate to guide the practices or promotion of vice-principals (English, 2000; Niesche, 2013). Despite the assertion by policy-makers that a single set of standards can capture two very different leadership roles, the OLF has clearly been developed to address the practices of principals and in doing so, serves to marginalize the practices of their subordinates, vice-principals. This finding provides a unique contribution to the existing literature and greater research into how principals conceptualize the vice-principal role, and how they enact policy in relation to vice-principals, would be beneficial in developing a greater understanding in this area.

### **The Influence of Leadership Standards on the Practices and Professional Growth of Secondary Vice-Principals**

This study found that vice-principals engaged in a number of practices that were not necessarily reflected in the OLF; however, the purpose of this research was not to study what practices vice-principals engage in despite the OLF, but rather, to show how the OLF is incorporated or used to shape the role of the vice-principal in this particular district. The findings of this study revealed that participants who were in the role prior to the implementation of the OLS did not receive any formal training or mentoring to learn the vice-principal role and learned to be vice-principals simply by being in the role. Participants referred to the principal preparation courses they took to become school

leaders as focussing largely on instructional leadership, and the role of the principal, rendering them inapplicable to the role of vice-principal. This confirms the findings by MacDonald (2004) who reported that secondary vice-principals experienced a stark difference between their perception of the vice-principal role based on professional learning and organization training, and the role in which they found themselves upon placement in a school. Similarly, Williamson (2011) found that lack of clarity in the vice-principal role creates a situation where they understand their work through their experience of it rather than through policy or training.

Participants in this study referred to attending vice-principal meetings as their organized professional learning but found such meetings to be infrequent and based on leadership practices of principals, therefore inapplicable to much of their own role. Participants valued the vice-principal meetings provided by their district more for the opportunity to be out of the building and engage in dialogue with their peers, than for the learning itself, due to its lack of applicability to their role. Furthermore, participants had little opportunity to engage in authentic, job-embedded professional learning or superintendent coaching that supports the translation of learning to practice (Leithwood, 2013). This is consistent with other findings that vice-principals do not generally receive the quality professional development opportunities that teachers and principals do (Kwan, 2009; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010).

While the assumption has been made that school-based opportunities will be provided to all leaders in order to build these capacities, doing so has not been mandated by the ministry or district so vice-principals are not necessarily being afforded the opportunity to generalize any professional learning that they do receive. Given that the leadership standards are intended to include the practices of principals and vice-principals equally, it is not surprising that professional learning would also be generic and not specific to the individual roles. However, this demonstrates how policy-makers again have neglected to address the context in which vice-principals learn and work (Blackmore, 2010; Spillane et al., 2002), and in applying leadership theory involving tasks in which vice-principals have limited opportunity to engage, they are neglecting to

consider how context shapes the behaviours and practices of vice-principals (Eacott, 2013c; Hallinger, 2003).

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that experienced secondary vice-principals do not receive professional learning opportunities that are applicable to their current role and that their specific and unique learning needs have been neglected by the OLF and its specific role as a tool to support the greater OLS. Without clear direction and policy specific to the professional learning of experienced vice-principals by the ministry and district, this group will continue to spend minimal time on professional learning opportunities as has been demonstrated by other researchers (Garrard, 2013; Grodzki, 2011; Hausman et al., 2002; MacDonald, 2004; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003).

Another finding that provides a unique contribution to the literature is that while secondary vice-principals view the OLF as the leadership practices expected of them, they did not believe it adequately captured their activities or contributions to the school, and that it was more reflective of the work of principals. Moreover, participants believed that the only area of the leadership standards in which their work was well reflected were areas that addressed various types of relationships with others and all felt that their ability to develop trusting relationships and rapport with students, staff, and parents were critical components of their role. This study also found that vice-principals viewed being highly visible in their schools and modelling attitudes and behaviours for staff and students as ways they were able to demonstrate leadership within the managerial tasks to which they had been assigned.

This study found that participants viewed the OLF as a guideline for what is expected of all school leaders, but contends that how their role has been constructed by their principals and district limits how applicable these leadership standards are to the work of vice-principals. As Jones (2013) argues, decisions related to the interpretation and implementation of policy, based on the personal values, beliefs, perceptions and context of various stakeholders, will impact how it will be carried out. Specific to this study, it is critical to consider not only how vice-principals interpret the leadership standards outlined in the OLF, but how principals, the district, and policy-makers

understand the OLF in relation to the specific work of vice-principals. This study has demonstrated that contextual considerations such as power, positionality, and role construction have not been adequately considered by policy makers or the other policy actors who have far greater influence on determining the experiences of vice-principals than do the vice-principals themselves. While this finding makes a unique contribution to the literature in that it is specific to the role of secondary vice-principals, it is consistent with other findings on the critical nature of context in determining how policy is enacted by various policy actors (Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2011; Maguire et al., 2015; Riveros et al., 2016; Spillane et al., 2002; Viczko & Riveros, 2015; Winton, 2009; Winton & Pollock, 2015).

As a form of performance management, policy standards reflect what school leaders should be doing based on educational goals determined by policy-makers (English, 2012; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Niesche, 2013; Pont, 2013). However, in the case of the OLF, the education goals by policy-makers have been determined based on the desired practices of principals with the practices of vice-principals being overlooked almost entirely. This could be interpreted to mean that policy-makers expect to see vice-principals engaged in the same activities as principals; however, if that is the case, they have neglected to address it through this, or any other policy. Alternatively, the inclusion of vice-principals in the OLF could be meant to outline those practices that vice-principals will eventually encounter when in the principalship. Again, however, if that is the case, then policy-makers need to develop and facilitate an alternative policy and process for evaluating the performance and promotion of vice-principals, one which aligns with the context of their role.

While there is some research on how principals enact leadership standards like the OLF, there is extremely limited research involving how generic standards are applied to vice-principals, revealing a large gap in the literature (Pont, 2013). While some researchers have examined how the OLF is enacted by principals, or by principals and vice-principals together (Riveros et al., 2016; Winton, 2013; Winton & Pollock, 2015), no studies have been conducted to examine the OLF in relation specifically to the role of secondary vice-principals, providing limited opportunity to compare the results from this

study with that of others. Moreover, given the inapplicability of the OLF to the practices of vice-principals demonstrated by this study, an alternative way of evaluating their work and contributions is essential. This finding is supported by Williamson and Scott (2012) who argue that developing a complementary framework specific to the vice-principal role will provide a new direction for research, professional learning, performance appraisal and recruitment for this critically important group of school leaders.

This study also revealed that participants did not use the leadership standards to guide their current practice as vice-principals, but rather, considered it a performance checklist that did not adequately capture their role. Additionally, participants reported that they referred to the OLF rarely and viewed it as a tool for reflection on leadership practices that they would face later in the principalship. Moreover, this study determined that vice-principals almost exclusively used the OLF only when they are actively seeking promotion. Those that had reflected on it for that purpose, found the process to be extremely valuable and expressed the desire that all vice-principals have the opportunity to use it in that way, as part of their ongoing professional learning, rather than just when going forward for principalship. Participants believed that district supported, job-embedded, authentic opportunities to use the OLF to guide their daily work would be very beneficial and make it a much more useful and applicable policy.

The findings of this study are consistent with other research on how the OLF is used in practice (Riveros et al., 2016; Winton, 2013; Winton & Pollock, 2015). Riveros et al. (2016) found that the OLF was a tool for evaluation and promotion resulting in school leaders aspiring for compliance to standards that were based on a prescribed and alleged finished knowledge base. Furthermore, their research determined that the OLF did not guide professional practice, but rather, was used for supervision, evaluation, and control (Riveros et al., 2016). Similarly, Winton and Pollock (2015) determined that the OLF was not used to guide the practice of school leaders, but rather, to direct focus to a set of practices that promoted a very narrow vision of leadership. Likewise, Montanari (2014) determined that the OLF was not used by vice-principals to guide their daily work, although it was used more so by principals.

Given that the intent of leadership standards is to increase the effectiveness of the professional learning and development of school leaders (Harris, 2005), the findings of this study demonstrate that the OLF does not serve to influence the leadership practices of vice-principals given the prescribed nature and lack of authority in their role. Furthermore, this study has demonstrated that using leadership standards that have been developed for principals, to evaluate the performance and promotion of vice-principals, cannot possibly address the goals established by policy-makers (Bush, 2010; English, 2000, 2006; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003; Gosling, 2006). Moreover, given that the OLF was intended to aid in “succession planning and talent development to ensure the best possible leadership” (OME, 2012, p. 1), the results of this study demonstrate that the OLF plays little role in succession planning other than to act as a tool in completing applications for promotion to principalship.

To summarize this chapter, the findings of this study consisted of three themes. The first theme involved the identification of secondary vice-principals as school leaders where this study found that participants viewed themselves more as managers than leaders, based on the way leadership had been constructed by policy-makers and their district. The second theme emphasized the significance that the practices and perceptions of individual principals and the findings in this study determined that the vice-principal role, and all related opportunities and practices, was a direct result of how the role was conceptualized by individual principals and other senior leaders, rather than a result of the skills or abilities of the vice-principal. The final theme in this study examined how the OLF influenced the daily practices and professional growth of secondary vice-principals and found that vice-principals viewed the policy as applicable to the principal role and used it almost exclusively as an instrument to assist them when seeking promotion to principalship.

This study has contributed to our understanding of how secondary vice-principals conceptualized their role in relation to the OLF. Furthermore, it has demonstrated that the OLF is not an appropriate policy for use with vice-principals as it neglects most aspects of their role, resulting in their marginalization. Since the OLF is one generic performance policy, intended to equally capture two very different types of leaders, role-specific



factors that act as constraints, such as power and positionality are overlooked entirely. Furthermore, with one school leader having exclusive authority to determine the practices and opportunities of the other, notions of “effectiveness” in the performance of vice-principals, and their suitability for promotion, may be based only on those practices in which they have been permitted to engage, rather than their capacities and preparedness.

## **Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusions**

This final chapter summarizes the findings in this study in relation to the original research questions and provides recommendations for future research and for practice. First, I will briefly summarize the research project by revisiting the study's purpose and significance, and an overview of the methodology and methods. Next, for each of the three research questions I will provide a summary of the essential findings. Finally, I will conclude by making recommendations for future research and for practice.

### **Summary of Study**

The literature reveals that the role of secondary vice-principal is poorly defined with a job description consisting simply of “duties as assigned” and to support the principal in their work (OME, 1990; 2010; Armstrong, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Shoho et al., 2012; Williamson & Scott, 2012). Given that the role is so decidedly vague, it becomes open to interpretation by individual principals and districts, resulting in potentially inconsistent opportunities and responsibilities for vice-principals between schools. However, despite this, the performance and capabilities of vice-principals are, in theory, outlined by the same standards of practice used for principals.

Numerous researchers have explored the leadership practices of secondary vice-principals internationally (Garrard, 2013; Joseph, 2014; Kwan, 2009; Shoho et al., 2012) and in Ontario (Goulais, 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Williamson, 2011). However, the research on leadership practices in relation to the OLF is limited, and what does exist, focuses exclusively on principals or has grouped the experiences of principals and vice-principals together (Leithwood & Azah, 2014; Montanari, 2014; Riveros et al., 2016; Swapp, 2012; Winton & Pollock, 2015). The literature review did not reveal research specific to vice-principals and the OLF, which means that this group was under-represented and in need of further exploration.

Since the relationship between the OLF and the practices of secondary vice-principals had been largely unexplored, studying how this group constructs their leadership practices in relation to the OLF offers new perspectives about the connections

between school leadership and educational policy. Furthermore, by exploring how vice-principals translate the OLF policy into practices, this study will provide further insights into the ways they understand and enact their leadership practices, and the extent to which they perceive their work to be reflected in the OLF. Therefore, this research study provided an interrogation of the enactment of the OLF on the role and practices of secondary vice-principals and examined what leadership practices secondary vice-principals participate in, which ones they do not, and why. The key research question was: How are the leadership practices of secondary vice-principals influenced by the OLF and how do vice-principals use the OLF to conceptualize their role?

Structured as a descriptive case study, this research was situated in a school district in Ontario, Canada, with fewer than 20 secondary schools. In order to allow vice-principals the opportunity to explain and describe how they enacted the OLF, semi-structured interviews with ten secondary vice-principals were conducted. Each interview took less than one hour and consisted of ten questions, allowing for rich, descriptive data from which themes emerged. The use of interviews for data collection allowed for the exploration of the individual context and experiences of participants which was critical to the theoretical framework of this study. With the written consent of all participants, interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed. Data was then analyzed using inducted coding by identifying themes and categories. In chapters five and six of this thesis, discussions were organized according to the themes that emerged from the data. In this final chapter, the summary of the findings and discussion are now organized according to the research sub-questions.

**Research Question 1: How is the OLF used to define or construct the role of the secondary vice-principal in one public school district in Ontario?**

This study demonstrates a contradiction in the way the role of secondary vice-principal is constructed, evaluated, and practiced and the way it is reflected by the OLF. The intent of the OLF is that it covers the role of both principals and vice-principals equally, with no distinction between the two. As such, it appears the assumption has been made by policy makers that the principal and vice-principal roles are interchangeable,

with both having equal opportunity and authority to engage in particular practices. However, this study demonstrates that vice-principals spend the vast majority of their time dealing with procedural activities such as attendance, discipline, and supervision, activities which are scarcely mentioned in the OLF. This discovery is consistent with other researchers who also found that vice-principals spent most of their time on procedural activities such as managing attendance and discipline for the school (Armstrong, 2009; Garrard, 2013; Goulais, 2008; Hausman et al., 2002; Joseph, 2014; Kwan, 2008, 2009; Kwan & Walker, 2010; Lee et al., 2009; MacDonald, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Montanari, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2001; Read, 2012; Rintoul, 2012; Rintoul & Goulais, 2010; Shoho et al., 2012; Williamson, 2011).

Furthermore, this study found that participants perceived leadership practices as those activities that specifically support student achievement such as providing instructional support, school improvement planning, and goal setting, but tasks that pertain to adhering to procedures and routines as managerial or procedural, rather than leadership. The strong emphasis placed by participants on instructional leadership as the favoured indication of leadership competency, provides insight as to how leadership is conceptualized in this district. This is consistent with the OLF which also values those practices which impact student achievement and school improvement. As the policy by which the performance of vice-principals is measured, the OLF places great significance on improving the instructional program and school improvement planning, as do the ministry resources developed to support all school leaders. Moreover, while the leadership standards profess to follow an integrated model of both instructional and transformational leadership, participants in this study consistently viewed instructional leadership as valued leadership, which suggests a greater emphasis placed on these practices by the district, with most professional learning focussing in this area.

Participants in this study shared a consistent understanding of the differences between the principal and vice-principal role with all reporting that principals were responsible for the school vision, school improvement planning, and instructional leadership while vice-principals manage the students and the building. This common

understanding between the distinct differences between these two roles and the duties associated with them, despite the OLF's implication that the roles are interchangeable, could suggest a prescribed conceptualization of school leadership and role distinction in this district. However, this seems somewhat consistent with the ministry's view, which continues to focus on the principal as school leader, perpetuating the marginalization of vice-principals. Given that the performance and effectiveness of secondary vice-principals is evaluated by leadership standards that emphasize the practices performed by and associated with the principal, it is apparent that vice-principals are clearly at a disadvantage.

These findings are relevant for several reasons. If the OLF is the lone criterion used to define leadership practices for all school leaders in Ontario, and the tasks referenced by the participants do not fit this understanding of leadership, then it follows that secondary vice-principals are not truly viewed as leaders, in light of the leadership standards. This speaks to how leadership is portrayed through this document and the absence of such considerations in the OLF and supporting documents suggests that important differences in the principal and vice-principal roles have been neglected by policy makers, thereby marginalizing vice-principals and privileging principals. Furthermore, if the OLF is not used to define or construct the role of secondary vice-principals, then what is its purpose? One might suggest that the inclusion of vice-principals in this policy is to align them with larger policy and management discourses in education, or to expose them to the skills they will later need as principals, but if this is the case, how is the OLF providing this group the tools to enhance their practice? Moreover, since the leadership development in the province focuses on the practices emphasized in the leadership standards and many of the duties assigned by principals to vice-principals are not explicitly considered by the OLF, this suggests that principals are valued as true school leaders while vice-principals are delegated the crucial, but undervalued, procedural pieces. The OLF has clearly been developed to address the desired practices of principals, but as a result, serves to marginalize the practices of vice-principals, their subordinates. Therefore, policy-makers need to develop and facilitate an

alternative policy and process for evaluating the performance and promotion of vice-principals, which aligns with their role.

**Research Question 2: In what ways do secondary vice-principals perceive their work to be captured by the OLF?**

This study found that while secondary vice-principals viewed the OLF as prescribing the leadership practices that are expected of them, they did not believe it adequately captured their activities or contributions to the school. Moreover, they believed that while the OLF was good in theory, it was more reflective of the work of principals and neglected to capture their work as vice-principals as they were not decision-makers in the school. It is significant to note that other research conducted on the OLF found that it did not even adequately capture the work of principals (Riveros et al., 2016; Swapp, 2012; Winton, 2013; Winton & Pollock, 2015). Therefore, it stands to reason that if researchers have found the work of principals is not adequately captured by the OLF, that the practices of vice-principals would be even more marginalized, an assumption which has been demonstrated by the findings of this study.

Furthermore, the study found that participants did not refer to the OLF to guide their current practice as vice-principals, or as a tool for professional growth, but rather, considered it a performance checklist that did not adequately capture their role. Most participants rarely considered the leadership standards in their practice and all reported it as most commonly used by vice-principals when going forward for promotion to the role of principal. However, those who had used it for this purpose found it to be extremely valuable and believed that it was only after utilizing it for promotion had they truly become familiar with the OLF by making connections to how their practices are reflected in it.

Interestingly, given that participants described their role as dealing primarily with attendance, discipline and reactive problem-solving, areas that have little to do with leadership as defined by the OLF, vice-principals perceived that they exercise their influence as leaders through the relational trust that they develop with students and staff during the procedural activities in which they spend so much of their time. Furthermore,

participants felt that being highly visible and interacting with students contributed positively to the morale and tone of the school, and while not strongly represented in the OLF, felt this had a beneficial effect on the school culture. However significant the contributions of vice-principals are to the school culture, since such large components of their role are not sufficiently captured by the OLF and therefore not recognized as leadership practices by this policy, it remains unclear how performance in these areas is understood and judged.

Nevertheless, this study has demonstrated that the OLF does not guide the professional practice of vice-principals, but rather, is used as a mechanism for evaluation and promotion. Moreover, using leadership standards that capture the work of principals, to determine the performance and promotion of vice-principals, cannot possibly address the intentions of this policy. Vice-principals seeking promotion to the role of principal are expected to demonstrate effectiveness in all areas of OLF, most of which are performed by the principal, forcing them to ascribe to a very narrow representation of leadership, rather than emphasizing the areas in which they contribute most to the school.

**Research Question 3: What factors influence the enactment of the OLF for this group?**

The findings in this study indicate that the influence of individual principals is critical in determining how vice-principals enact the OLF, through the opportunities they are provided, and the activities in which they are able to participate. All participants had worked with a variety of different principals and reported that opportunities to engage in leadership practices within each school existed at the sole discretion of their principal, and while all emphasized the importance of on-the-job mentoring by their principals, these experiences were inconsistent due to the differences between the daily activities of principals and vice-principals and the philosophies of individual principals. Furthermore, this study found that opportunities for vice-principals varied significantly between principals and superintendents, within this district, potentially placing some vice-principals at a distinct disadvantage. While participants understood the OLF as a guideline for what was expected of them as school leaders, the way in which their role

was conceptualized by individual principals, individual superintendents, and by the district, limits how applicable these leadership standards are to their work as vice-principals.

This study also found that participants did not perceive that that they made many decisions regarding the direction, goals, or vision of the school. Furthermore, it found that vice-principals felt that they enforce policies and rules rather than create them, providing a clear illustration of how power influences the way in which the OLF positions the vice-principal, having little control over the components of the policy that influences their work (Viczkó & Riveros, 2015; Maguire et al., 2015). Moreover, even in those procedural areas in which they had been delegated, most reported having to follow the direction of the principal, even when they disagreed, removing even more decision-making power from them. As demonstrated by the findings in this study, in order for leadership to be truly distributed, the need exists for a re-distribution of power and resources, as opposed to a delegation of work and responsibility (Blackmore, 2013).

For experienced vice-principals who had been in their role for many years and have worked with many principals, this reported lack of decision-making and authority may diminish their leadership skills, rather than enhance them. Power and positionality are key considerations in understanding how the OLF is enacted by secondary vice-principals, but is entirely absent in the framework and supporting documentation. Furthermore, in examining how the OLF contributes to preparing vice-principals for the principalship, it is necessary to consider how principals interpret and enact the policy and how their interpretation and enactment impacts vice-principals. It is not appropriate to assume that if vice-principals do not engage in particular leadership practices, that they do not possess the skills or ability to do so; however, “When the implementation does not match the intentions of the policy designer, the resultant practices are casted as errors or resistance” (Riveros & Viczkó, 2015, p. 545).

This study demonstrates that experienced secondary vice-principals do not receive the professional learning opportunities that are applicable to their current role and that their specific and unique learning needs have been neglected by the OLF. Moreover, there appears to be no mechanism in place at either the ministry or district levels, to



ensure that vice-principals are afforded the opportunities and supports referred to in the OLF. Participants had little opportunity to engage in authentic, job-embedded professional learning or superintendent coaching that supports the translation of learning to practice that is referred to in the OLF (Leithwood, 2013). Furthermore, while the assumption has been made that school-based opportunities would be provided to all leaders in order to build the capacities referred to in the OLF, doing so has not been mandated by the ministry or district so vice-principals are not necessarily being afforded the opportunity to generalize any professional learning that they do receive. Given that the OLF is intended to reflect the practices of both principals and vice-principals equally, it is not surprising that professional learning provided by the ministry and district would also be generic and not specific to individual leadership roles.

As mandated by the ministry, a part of the OLS requires that all new vice-principals in this district receive individualized professional learning and participate in a two year mentoring program. However, all but one participant in this study are experienced vice-principals and have been in their role prior to the implementation of these professional development opportunities for new school leaders. Additionally, as part of their leadership succession plan, this district has placed emphasis on the professional growth and learning of lead teachers, formerly called department heads, with principals and groups of teachers attending specialized professional learning sessions together while vice-principals stay behind to manage the school. As a result, this study found that the professional learning provided to experienced vice-principals was limited to that which was provided at their quarterly vice-principal meetings.

This study found that by focussing all initiatives, professional learning, and resources on the principal role, assuming that both principals and vice-principals participate in the same leadership activities within the school, experienced vice-principals are left out of the leadership picture almost entirely by the ministry and district. Furthermore, the specific factors that may act as constraints in the ability of vice-principals to enact the OLF, are neglected and job contextuality is removed, with important differences between the practices of principals and vice-principals ignored or devalued. Specifically, issues such as length of service and power and positionality are

critical in understanding how vice-principals enact the leadership standards. As a result, this study found that the ministry and district focus on the professional growth and learning of school principals, and the recruitment and professional learning of new school leaders, results in experienced vice-principals being left behind entirely by both groups.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

**How principals, the district, and the ministry conceptualize the vice-principal role.** Further exploration into how others understand and conceptualize the secondary vice-principal role would be beneficial. Given that policies seem to portray the work of principals and vice-principals as indistinguishable and interchangeable, with generic standards and professional resources, research into how these two roles are constructed and conceptualized by others within the school system, including superintendents, directors of education, and ministry officials, would enrich the discourse on school leadership and interrogate how vice-principals are specifically located within the discussion.

**How the OLF is enacted by different leaders, specific to individual roles.** The OLF is based on the idea that some leadership practices are common across roles and contexts (Leithwood et al., 2004). However, by applying one set of standards to two very different school leadership roles, important differences are erased or marginalized (English, 2012). Exploring how the OLF is enacted differently by different leaders, including district leaders and principals, will help to understand how policy is conceptualized and enacted by vice-principals, and the significance of context in their ability to do so. Therefore, it is critical to consider not only how vice-principals interpret the leadership standards outlined in the OLF, but how principals, districts, and policy-makers understand the OLF in relation to the specific work of vice-principals.

**Development of a new leadership framework, specific to the vice-principal role.** Given the inapplicability of the OLF to the practices of vice-principals demonstrated by this study, an alternative way of evaluating their work and contributions

is essential and would provide a new direction for research, professional learning, and performance appraisal for this important group of school leaders.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

- **Authentic opportunities for application to practice.** Given that participants who had used the OLF to support them in going forward for promotion for principalship reported the experience as extremely beneficial, districts are encouraged to provide and facilitate similar opportunities for all vice-principals.
- **Professional learning specific to experienced vice-principals.** Professional learning should focus on the current practices and duties of vice-principals, not those of principals. By providing vice-principals with professional learning that is specific to the principal role, without ensuring that vice-principals can apply this learning to practice, the contributions of vice-principals are marginalized and de-valued.
- **District and ministry facilitation of school-based leadership opportunities for experienced vice-principals.** Given the inconsistent and arbitrary nature of school leadership opportunities for this group, the ministry and district must be more involved in ensuring that all experienced vice-principals are afforded ample opportunities to engage in those leadership practices emphasized in the leadership standards. Specifically, the ministry and district should ensure a common understanding, demonstrated through practice, of the vice-principal role in relation to the practices identified in the OLF.

The findings in this study make a new contribution to the literature that provides unique insight as to how secondary vice-principals conceptualize school leadership and identify themselves as leaders in relation to leadership standards that are intended to capture two very different school leadership roles. These findings demonstrate that vice-principals continue to be delegated procedural duties, at the exclusion of the leadership practices

identified in the OLF. It stands to reason that a more comprehensive and complex understanding of school leadership is required in Ontario, as well as a different framework that captures the vice-principal's specific role, practices, and contributions.

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### **Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions**

Number of interviews: 10

Timeline of interviews: August 2015 – October 2015.

#### **Introduction:**

At the beginning of the interview I thanked the participant for agreeing to speak with me and explained the purpose of my study, which was to learn more about the daily professional practices of secondary vice-principals to determine to what extent the OLF reflects those practices. Next, I explained that the entire interview would be recorded so that I could transcribe and analyze the responses later. Finally, I explained that their answers would be kept confidential with no identifying information included in the report.

#### **Interview Questions:**

1. Describe your typical day as a secondary vice-principal.
2. Which portions of your role do you interpret as leadership and why?
3. Describe ways in which your district supports your professional learning.
4. In what ways do these learning opportunities translate into your daily practices?
5. How do current or past principals contribute to your understanding of and practices in school leadership?
6. Describe the major difference between being a vice-principal and a principal.
7. In what ways and for what purpose do you use the Ontario Leadership Framework in your practice?
8. Describe how the OLF captures your work as a secondary vice-principal.
9. Describe how the OLF does not capture your work as a secondary vice-principal.
10. In what ways could the OLF be best utilized as a tool to support you in your professional learning and growth or career planning?

#### **Conclusion:**

I thanked participants for their time and advised them that I would be in touch after transcription of the audio to present it for their review and to make changes or delete information. I closed by asking if they had any questions or required any clarification on anything.

## **Appendix B: Letter of Information and Consent**

**Project Title:** An Analysis of the Role of the Vice-principal and its Relationship with the Implementation of the Ontario Leadership Framework

**Principal Investigator:**

Dr. Augusto Riveros Barrera, Faculty of Education, Western University

**Student Researcher:**

Tracy McCarthy, Doctoral Student, Western University

### **Letter of Information**

**1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this research study about the ways in which the Ontario Leadership Framework shapes or influences the practices of secondary vice-principals. You have been selected because you are currently in this role or were in the role during the last year.

**2. Purpose of the Letter**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

**3. Purpose of this Study**

This study will provide an interrogation of the effects of the implementation of the Ontario Leadership Framework on the role and practices of secondary vice-principals. It examines the leadership practices of secondary vice-principals and investigates whether the OLF captures the leadership practices of these practitioners. It is hoped that the study will provide guidelines for districts in Ontario to use the Ontario Leadership Framework in meaningful ways with this group.

**4. Inclusion Criteria**

1. Participants must be currently employed as secondary vice-principals in the specific school district identified for this study.
2. Newly appointed principals who held the role of vice-principals in the previous school year, are eligible to participate in this study.
3. Participants must have been vice-principals in the school board for at least a year.

**5. Exclusion Criteria**

1. Vice-principals who only hold elementary school responsibilities will be excluded from participation in the study as will those employed by other school districts.
2. Individuals who are not vice-principals in the selected school board for this study will not be included.
3. Individuals who do not consent to be audio recorded will not be included in the study

## **6. Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. It is anticipated that the entire interview will take approximately 1 hour. The interview will be conducted in private, on the school premises and will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. The interview will be transcribed and all names or personal identifiers will be removed to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, you should not participate.

## **7. Possible Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. The interview can be stopped at any time should you experience any discomfort or fatigue during the interview.

## **8. Possible Benefits**

Participants will benefit in that they will have the opportunity to reflect on how the Ontario Leadership Framework has impacted their professional practices. The possible benefits to society may be the development of more detailed explanations of the way policies on educational leadership are translated into practices. These explanations will benefit future policy analysis and future policy making at the provincial and district levels.

## **9. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

## **10. 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 future employment.

## **11. Confidentiality**

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study, Tracy McCarthy and Dr. Augusto Riveros Barrera. Data will be stored on an encrypted memory stick and a password-protected laptop. After a five year period, the memory stick will be destroyed and the laptop memory wiped clean to ensure all data is destroyed. If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will

be removed and destroyed from our database. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

**12. Contacts for Further Information**


If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact

Tracy McCarthy  
Ed.D. candidate, Western University



Dr. Augusto Riveros Barrera  
Principal Investigator, Western University



If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics 



**13. Publication**

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact Tracy McCarthy at the email or phone number listed above.

**14. Consent**

A Consent Form is included with this letter that participants will sign.

*You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form.  
This letter is yours to keep for future reference.*

**Consent Form**

**Project Title:** An Analysis of the Role of the Vice-principal and its Relationship  
with the Implementation of the Ontario Leadership Framework

**Principal Investigator:**

Dr. Augusto Riveros Barrera, Faculty of Education, Western University

**Student Researcher:**

Tracy McCarthy, Doctoral Student, Western University

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.

Participant's Name (please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Consent for Audio recording: YES\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_



### **Appendix C: Email Script for Recruitment**

**Subject Line:** Invitation to participate in research

You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Tracy McCarthy and Dr. Augusto Riveros Barrera of the Faculty of Education, Western University, are conducting. Briefly, the study involves an examination of the ways the Ontario Leadership Framework relates to the practices of secondary vice-principals. It is hoped that the study will provide guidelines for districts in Ontario to use the Ontario Leadership Framework in meaningful ways with this group.

Participants will be asked to meet with the interviewer, Tracy McCarthy, for approximately 1 hour on a mutually agreeable date. The interview will consist of approximately 10 questions that will focus on your experiences and duties in your role as a secondary vice-principal.

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive a letter of information about this study please contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

Thank you,

Tracy McCarthy  
Ed.D. candidate, Western University

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dr. Augusto Riveros Barrera  
Principal Investigator, Western  
University

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**Appendix D: Western Ethics Certificate**



**Western  
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board  
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Augusto Rivera Barrera  
**Department & Institution:** Education, Western University

**NMREB File Number:** 106597  
**Study Title:** An Analysis of the Role of Vice-principal and its Relationship with the Implementation of the Ontario Leadership Framework  
**Sponsor:**

**NMREB Initial Approval Date:** May 14, 2015  
**NMREB Expiry Date:** May 14, 2016

**Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:**

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol	Western Protocol Clean (received April 27/15)	
Recruitment Items	Recruitment Email Clean	2015/04/26
Letter of Information & Consent	LOI Clean	2015/04/26
Instruments	Interview Protocol (received March 31/15)	

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRD 0000941.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of [redacted] NMREB Chair or delegated board member

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
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*This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.*

### Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Tracy McCarthy

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** Trent University  
Peterborough, Ontario, Canada  
1997-2001 B.A.

York University  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
2001-2002 B.Ed.

Charles Sturt University  
Victoria, Australia  
2008-2012 M.Ed. (Educational Leadership)

The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2013-present (Ed.D. candidate)

**Related Work Experience:** [REDACTED]  
Intermediate Multiple Exceptionalities Class  
2002-2006

[REDACTED]  
Secondary Head of Special Education (2006-2008)  
Secondary Vice-principal, Multiple Schools (2008- Present)  
Vice-principal of Special Education Services (2009-2012)

**Additional Qualification Experience:** Additional Qualification Instructor  
[REDACTED]  
Special Education, Part 1  
History, Intermediate ABQ  
2012-Present

Additional Qualification Curriculum Writer  
[REDACTED] (History, Intermediate ABQ) 2011  
[REDACTED] (Special Education, 2 and 3) 2012

Additional Qualification Instructor  
[REDACTED]  
Special Education, Part 1 and Specialist (2010-2012)