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How Elementary School Principals Manage Accountability Expectations

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how elementary school principals in the Canadian province of Ontario manage multiple accountability expectations in their work. My conceptual framework is based on seven different accountability systems that can influence principals' work: bureaucratic, moral, political, professional, market, legal, and performance-based. This interpretive, qualitative study consisted of 12 semistructured interviews, approximately 60 minutes in length, with principals from two urban Ontario school boards.

The amount of demands placed on elementary principals by various forms of accountability—including mandated government policies, school board initiatives, and what principals believe to be important based on the needs of their respective schools—is intensifying and changing the expectations of principals' work. In schools today, the nonnegotiable forms of accountability being imposed by school boards and the Ministry of Education are increasing both in number and the amount of time that accompanies adhering to each mandate. This additional work influences how some elementary school principals function during the work day, and potentially lengthens their time at work. It also creates tensions for principals as they navigate between the nonnegotiable forms of mandated accountability and what they perceive to be important aspects of their work. Pollock and Winton (2015) describe the work of 21st century principals as a juggling act that requires finding a balance to manage the conflicting and competing accountability demands that often occur at the same time.

This study revealed that elementary principals use strategies and supports to fulfill increasing bureaucratic accountability expectations, while also honouring aspects of moral accountability that are specific to the needs of their respective school contexts.

Keywords: elementary principals; principals' work; work intensification; accountability; multiple accountability systems

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The role of the elementary school principal has changed significantly throughout the last several decades. According to Spiro (2013), principals' work in the 1960s primarily focused on "…the B's—buses, boilers, and books" (p. 28). The principal was responsible for overseeing the school site, providing supervision for the staff, handling parental concerns, and managing student behaviour (Spiro, 2013). During this time, it was generally assumed that the principal was performing their duties well if the school's physical site appeared to be well-maintained and clean, teaching and learning was happening, and the board office was not receiving complaints from disgruntled parents (Spiro, 2013).

In schools today, ensuring the physical plant is kept in good condition and maintaining a satisfied parent community remain important; however, the issue of accountability has become more complex. Within the last few decades, there has been a notable increase in the number of policies and initiatives from the Ministry of Education and school boards that Ontario principals are expected to oversee and implement. Another significant change has been the introduction of large-scale student assessments through the Education Quality Accountability Office (EQAO), which occur annually. In addition, as the position of authority within their schools, there is also an expectation that principals will provide instructional leadership and conduct performance appraisals of the teaching staff.

Principals are expected to be both leaders and managers within their respective school sites (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Kowalski, 2010; The Institute for Educational Leadership, 2013). This requires striking a balance between managing the operational aspects of their work, and leading their staff members away from the status quo and guiding them toward making positive changes in their practice (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins,

2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Leithwood, 2012). Principals' work has become more complex due to the escalation of accountability expectations. In fact, Ranson (2003) contends that the processes surrounding accountability have become "no longer merely an important instrument or component within the system, but constitutes the system itself" (p. 459). Elmore (2005) emphasizes that accountability has always been a critical part of how schools function. He posits that there are three ways accountability originates for principals: (a) principals' personal beliefs surrounding what is necessary and beneficial to the school community, (b) the norms of the workplace, and (c) formal expectations. Increasingly, policy is playing an integral role in school accountability, yet principals continue to have some flexibility in decision-making.

The provincial government creates policies to ensure that schools reflect changes occurring within society (Fullan, 2001). For the purpose of my research, I consider the policies imposed by the Ontario Ministry of Education to be the formal aspects of principals' work. Several of these fundamental policies are: Bill 212 – Progressive Discipline and School Safety (2007), Equity and Inclusivity Education in Ontario Schools (2009), and Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools (2010a). These policies are considered mandatory and compliance is expected. Principals are accountable to implement and fulfill the intended outcomes of each policy with little flexibility, despite the needs of their specific school context (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014). The absolute nature of this aspect of principals' work indicates that school leadership is heavily mired as middle management and that principals function as a school-based agent for implementing government policy in schools, despite their personal beliefs surrounding what is in the best interest of the school community.

Principals must strike a balance between honouring policy expectations and integrating what they personally value into their schools, which presents a unique challenge. Thus, principals must become experts at reading situations and identifying where the greatest need exists and then managing each situation to the best of their ability. Doing so successfully frequently requires simultaneously juggling multiple forms of accountability (Pollock & Winton, 2015). Achieving this balance prevents principals from prioritizing policy-based work over interaction with students, participation in the learning environment, and serving the needs of the school community. This has the potential to create tensions for principals as they may need to prioritize bureaucratic and professional accountability over what they personally value and deem important.

Problem of Practice

Accountability is fundamental in democratic societies. Principals are responsible for many forms of accountability that exist simultaneously in their work (Emstad, 2011). Numerous policies and an increasing number of initiatives legislated by the provincial government and the Ministry of Education constitute a significant amount of the workload facing principals. However, this only represents the formal aspects of accountability that they must attend to daily. Principals are accountable to diverse parent communities (Ryan, 2006) and for ensuring that the education provided in their schools adheres to the Ontario curriculum and meets the varying needs of all learners. They are also accountable for ensuring the school environment adheres to health and safety regulations, while also promoting opportunities for relevant professional development to the teaching staff to enhance the quality of instruction students receive (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Underlying all of these formal, law-mandated accountabilities, however, are the less formal aspects of moral accountability that each principal deems important

based on the specific needs of their respective schools. These aspects of moral accountability

could potentially be pushed aside to manage the other increasing formal aspects of

accountability. This represents a significant source of stress for many principals as they may

have to extend their work day to manage these varying expectations, which leads to what is

considered *work intensification* (Pollock et al., 2014). Thus, the competing forms of

accountability create tension between what principals must contend with from their employers

[the board and Ministry of Education] and what they believe to be in the best interest of their

school's students, community, and staff.

The public education system is changing and the role of principal is becoming deeply

entrenched in various forms of accountability (Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Pollock & Winton,

2015). The purpose of this study is to examine how elementary school principals in Ontario

understand and manage seven (*bureaucratic*, *professional*, *performance-based*, *legal*, *moral*,

political, and *market*) different, and at times conflicting, accountability expectations that

comprise their work. The Principalship is dictated by policy and systems of accountability to

ensure that specific criteria are met (Firestone & Shipps, 2005). While accountability for student

learning and achievement is a primary responsibility for principals, there are numerous other

forms of accountability that consume a significant amount of principals' time (Firestone &

Shipps, 2005; Pollock & Winton, 2015). Managing the different forms of accountability requires

the continuous attention of elementary school principals and presents ongoing challenges:

attending to one form of accountability may take time away from another that would also benefit

from principals' attention. Several of these accountability systems represent the formal aspects of

principals' work, and as a result may take precedence over the less formal types of accountability

that are not required by law. This creates tensions as the forms of accountability frequently

compete for principals' time and attention. Increasingly, bureaucratic accountability requirements are consuming more of principals' time, which leaves less time to prioritize nonmandated forms of accountability.

This study reveals the interpretations principals have of the different accountability systems, as well as the challenges they face contending with increasing expectations; this study also investigates the formal and informal supports and strategies principals use to manage these expectations. By uncovering the challenges principals face in managing the different forms of accountability, this study helps provide a clearer understanding of how principals' work is intensifying.

Research Question and Research Subquestions

The aim of this study was to explore how elementary principals simultaneously manage the expectations from the seven forms of accountability that frequently compete for priority in their work. The overall research question being investigated was: "How are multiple accountability expectations influencing principals' work?"

My research subquestions were:

1. How do elementary school principals understand accountability in their work?

2. What strategies do elementary principals use to meet accountability expectations?

3. What challenges do elementary principals face to meet accountability expectations?

4. What supports need to be in place in order for principals to meet work-place accountability expectations?

The aim of this research was to explore and understand how principals are contending with the intensification of their work as a result of multiple accountability systems. The questions uncovered how accountability expectations for elementary principals have been

steadily increasing throughout the last few decades, the challenges principals face attempting to manage the different types of accountability, and the formal and informal supports available to assist principals when required.

Significance of the Study

My study sought to understand how multiple accountability systems influence elementary principals' work. The role of principals has become more complex and their work has intensified as a result of the increased expectations of the role, including: meeting the specific academic, social, and emotional needs of diverse student populations; maintaining necessary contact and providing support for struggling families; ensuring a safe school environment by adhering to health and safety regulations; overseeing the fulfillment of numerous policies and initiatives; navigating the parameters of various collective agreements for each of the unions represented within schools; promoting ongoing professional learning; acting as instructional leaders; and supporting staff members through EQAO testing and formal reporting periods (Leithwood, Azah, Harris, Slater, & Jantzi, 2014; Pollock et al., 2014; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). While not a comprehensive list, these requirements represent many of the formal aspects of principals' work; however, it does not include the less formal aspects that principals value and students, staff, and the school community deem important. In order to navigate this work intensification, principals must be creative when determining how to adhere to the formal requirements and occasionally decide what they are willing to concede. For some principals, the options include extending their work day to be present in the school and participate in the less formal aspects of the school day, or remain in their offices and preserve their personal time after the school day has ended. Other principals attempt to creatively combine accountabilities, while seeking

organizational support from teacher leaders or outside agencies to fulfill areas of need within the school.

Accountability

There are numerous definitions of accountability and while many are similar, there are also notable differences. Normore (2004) posits that when a person or an organization is accountable for something, there is an expectation they will be held responsible for their actions and decisions. Elementary principals are accountable to their stakeholders and as such, they may be called upon to justify their decisions.

Accountability in Schools

Since the 1990s, there has been a steady increase in the type of accountability systems that exist in Ontario schools (Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Pollock & Winton, 2015). Thus, it is not surprising that the responsibilities of elementary school principals are deeply rooted in numerous, often conflicting, systems of accountability (Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Pollock & Winton, 2015). It is the responsibility of principals to ensure that schools are equitable institutions where all students have opportunities to thrive and succeed. Principals are also held accountable for encouraging parental engagement, resulting from Ontario's 2006 Parent Involvement Policy. This policy was intended to create a more welcoming environment in schools, which would ideally lead to increased collaboration between home and school and provide opportunities for parents to support their children's learning (Kugler & Flessa, 2007).

Principals' work is grounded in accountability: Some aspects are mandated through legislation and other decisions are determined by a moral purpose based on what the principal believes to be in the best interest of the school and community. It is commonly understood that principals will effectively implement reform efforts initiated at the board and Ministry levels and

"also… push back when the mandates seem unreasonable" (Kugler & Flessa, 2007, p. 1).

Everything that occurs on school property is ultimately the responsibility of the principal, and the

last few decades have proven to be a challenging time of change in education. Kugler and Flessa

(2007) acknowledge that society has high expectations for school principals: They posit that it is

generally assumed principals "have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work well not only

within schools, but also within districts and within communities" (Kugler & Flessa, 2007, p. 1)

given that elementary school principals are accountable to all stakeholders.

Crum, Sherman, and Myran (2009), acknowledge that although the "goals of the

accountability movement were largely intended to improve equity and student learning, we have

experienced a number of unintended consequences of a complex system of assessment and

accountability" (p. 51). Ensuring that students and staff are meeting the accountability-based

criteria expected of them is ultimately the responsibility of school principals. One significant

challenge remains a lack of adequate training and resources in numerous areas where principals

are held responsible. Thus, understanding how elementary school principals understand and

manage these accountability-based expectations warrants further investigation, and is the focus

of this study.

Ontario's Elementary Principals and Accountability

Ontario's Education Act provides principals with legal requirements and outlines the

legislated responsibilities to which principals must adhere. In Section 265 of the Education Act,

entitled "Duties of principal" (Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.E.2), the areas of responsibility for

principals are listed and essentially fall into three main categories. These include: (a) ensuring

that the health and safety standards of the school are maintained to safeguard all students and

staff from any preventable harm. This requires that the principal remain vigilant and report any

potential areas of concern regarding unsanitary conditions or communicable diseases to the

Medical Officer of Health; (b) ensuring that proper documentation through examinations,

maintaining student records, and reporting of student progress to both the board and the parents

(when dealing with minor children) occurs; and (c) that principals act as an instructional leader

within their school. Section 265 (1) of the Education Act states, "It is the duty of a principal of a

school, in addition to the principal's duties as a teacher…" which speaks to the understanding

that principals are expected to lead by example within their schools. This also encompasses the

responsibility that principals have to provide management for the school itself, through

maintaining a visitor sign-in book, creating a timetable that is accessible to all stakeholders,

overseeing that only board-approved textbooks are being used in classrooms, and determining

and following through on decisions that prevent certain people from having access to the school

based on the need to prevent physical and/or mental harm to students.

     In addition to the Education Act, elementary school principals in Ontario are also

accountable to various school board initiatives and strategies, amendments to policies, and new

legislation. An educational policy or regulation may be defined as an expectation written by

people in positions of authority for the purpose of guiding the actions of those who work within

the realm of education (Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, & Livingstone, 2005). For

instance, Rowan's Law (Bill 149) represents the first concussion-based legislation in Canada that

focuses on educating coaches, parents, and the athletes themselves. As a result of this law,

Ontario schools will be providing concussion awareness, including how the symptoms may

manifest, accurate information on head injuries, the long-term risks, and also when a student-

athlete is ready to return to play. Introducing Rowan's Law will require principals to determine

how it is delivered and followed-up at their school site, following the mandatory compliance training.

Accountability for student learning and achievement is a primary responsibility for principals (Elmore, 2005). Large-scale student assessment is one method for ensuring that students are receiving the education they require and that school systems are meeting the students' academic needs (Popham, 1999; Ben Jaafar & Earl, 2008). However, in schools today, student performance is not the only performance accountability for which principals are ultimately responsible. Instead, there are several other forms of accountability that consume significant amounts of time during the principals' workday (Pollock et al., 2014). Principals are responsible for the performance of teachers on a daily basis in addition to the formal process of the Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA), as well as supporting all staff who work in the building.

Positionality

Managing accountability is a formidable challenge for all educators and this is particularly true for principals. My experiences, observations, and ultimately my reflections as a Caucasian, Christian, English-speaking Canadian woman and an educator in Ontario's public school system has led me toward this research. My interest in accountability systems in Ontario public schools has developed through my varied experiences and observations regarding how expectations surrounding accountability have changed during my 18 years of service. The early years of my teaching career were fraught with political unrest resulting from the governance changes that occurred when Mike Harris' Conservative government repealed Bill 100 in 1997, marking the beginning of a tumultuous time in Ontario's public education system (Levin, 2009). In fact, during my final teaching practicum in December 1997, I joined the 160, 000 Ontario

teachers who left their classrooms to join picket lines in opposition to Bill 160. This change in legislation recategorized school principals as management, which meant they were no longer affiliated with the teacher unions. Another significant change resulting from Bill 160 was the creation of a new curriculum for each subject and grade, and the initiation of a formal accountability process for student success through provincial testing of Ontario students and formal teacher evaluation (Levin, 2009).

My work in one of the largest school boards in Canada as a classroom teacher and my many years of collaboration as part of the leadership team in a Position of Responsibility (POR) has made the changes in accountability expectations even more apparent. Based on the belief systems of the principal, teachers holding a POR may be included or excluded from many of the decisions that determine priorities for the school. During my tenure in this role, I have worked with six different principals and each has welcomed my contributions to the decision-making process and the support I provided by leading various programs from outside agencies and initiatives within the school community. These programs brought leadership opportunities for the student body through athletics, social justice education, antibullying initiatives, instrumental music, art through design and technology, and computer science; the principals embraced these programs because the programs enhanced the school community. Many principals look to teacher leadership to coordinate these activities as opportunities for fostering future leaders within the system and sometimes simply because they do not have time. I believe strongly in collaboration and recognizing that all educators within schools are accountable to the students and families they service, and as such I work closely with my colleagues across grade divisions and endeavour to create opportunities for professional learning that will positively impact student

learning. My experience indicates that in recent years, these efforts are being more strongly

encouraged and valued.

Similarly, the majority of my years of teaching experience are at the Grades 3 and 6

levels, and I have experienced the increasing amount of pressure to ensure that students are

prepared to write and be successful on the annual EQAO assessments. Each year, there are

optional but encouraged sessions offered on how to prepare students for EQAO testing provided

through the Family of Schools, and many principals suggest using previous test questions as a

method to prepare students for the nuances of the assessments. However, there are some

principals who expect that teachers prepare students and inquire how the "preparation" is going.

Often this emphasis on EQAO is driven by members of parent community who are keen to know

what is being done to assist their children and, of course, how they can support the process at

home.

Accountability is something that all educators constantly strive to manage. Bourke (2014)

refers to the idea of researchers being both insiders and outsiders and in many respects, I feel this

represents my position in this research. While I am not formally considered to be school

administration, I do have additional responsibilities designated by the principal, thus positioning

me both within and outside my the research. England (1994) suggests research is a shared space

that is created by the participants and the researcher. In striving to remain reflexive throughout

the research process, I have spent considerable time determining my positionality with regard to

the increase in accountability expectations that impact principals' work. My reflections have

brought me to understand my position as being a witness to what principals are experiencing

with regard to increased accountability expectations because teacher leaders are able to provide

support for principals who are stretched for time. Yet, as a classroom teacher with only some

designated leadership opportunities in the school, I also consider myself to be an outsider in this research.

As Foote and Bartell (2011) posit, "the positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretations of outcomes" (p. 46). Bourke (2014) also describes positionality as a challenge for researchers because they must remain objective about their findings despite their personal experiences creating the potential for subjectivity. Thus, throughout my research process I prioritized recognizing the importance of ongoing reflection and reflexivity about the information this study generates, and the impact my findings may have on this growing body of research.

Organization of Chapters

This thesis is organized into six chapters. The first chapter describes my statement of the problem, my problem of practice, the research question and subquestions, the significance of the study, accountability and the Ontario context, and my positionality.

Chapter 2 reviews the available literature on accountability and how it influences principals' work, and is organized into four sections: (a) definitions of terminology, (b) accountability in education, (c) educational policy as accountability, (d) how policy influences principals' work, and (e) strategies for managing multiple accountability systems. This chapter concludes with a discussion of my conceptual framework, which highlights the multiple forms of accountability that comprise principals' work.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for my qualitative, interpretive study. I conducted a total of 12 semistructured interviews with elementary school principals from two different urban

public school boards. In this chapter, I describe my approach to data analysis and interpretation and conclude with a discussion about the trustworthiness of this study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings to my research question. Three themes emerged from the data: (a) competing forms of accountability create challenges for elementary principals, (b) accountability-based work contributes to work intensification for principals, and (c) principals use strategies to manage work intensification.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion surrounding my research findings and my interpretation of the collected data. In this section, I argue that elementary principals are experiencing work intensification as a result of increased accountability-based expectations, which is changing the nature of principals' work. My findings indicate that the increased amount of work facing principals is creating tensions as a result of: (a) not having enough time during the work day to complete all that is expected of them, (b) smart phone technology prevents principals from being able to disconnect from their work responsibilities and interferes with their personal life, and (c) pressure from themselves, as well as staff, parents, and students to be more involved in school life.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions I derived from my analysis of the interview data. In this chapter, I discuss the assumptions within my study, as well as implications and potential future changes to educational policy. This chapter ends with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Some of the most challenging demands currently facing elementary school principals stem from managing the various forms of accountability at the core of their work. This literature review will investigate how education scholars understand accountability and how Ontario principals understand and manage numerous and often conflicting accountability-based expectations in their work (Pollock & Winton, 2015). It will also define and examine accountability in public education and the different types of accountability that influence principals' work. Following my review of the existing literature, I outline my conceptual framework, which highlights the seven different forms of accountability that informed my study.

Definitions of Terminology

For the purpose of clarification, I use the definition of *accountable* as being responsible for a particular outcome and preparedness to deliver a response to another person regarding their performance; *accountability* is holding someone responsible for their decisions or the end result of a decision that has been made; *accountability systems/approaches* are constructs that exist in isolation based on a set of expectations or beliefs that are to be upheld by a responsible body of people or an individual; and *expectations* are aspects of accountability that combine to create the obligations of the person(s) responsible for performing the appointed tasks.

Accountability in Education

There are numerous definitions for the term *school accountability*. For instance, Stecher and Kirby (2004) describe school accountability as being "the practice of holding educational systems responsible for the quality of their products—students' knowledge, skills, and behaviours" (p. 24). Another definition by Linn (2003) regards accountability as being a shared responsibility that leads to improved education that extends beyond teachers and students to also

include school administration, the parent community, educational researchers, and policymakers (Ng, 2010).

The work of elementary school principals is rooted in different systems of accountability (Firestone & Shipps, 2005). In general, these accountabilities arise from the specific needs of their respective school communities and through mandated government policies (Pak, 2010; Pollock & Winton, 2015). Thus, it is imperative for principals to manage numerous forms of accountability simultaneously (Pollock & Winton, 2015; Pinto 2015), requiring a skillful approach and creative ways to find solutions for existing issues.

According to Dwivedi, Jabbra, and Stone (1989), there are seven forms of accountability that coexist in public schools. These systems of accountability fall into the categories of: market, political, legal, professional, moral, administrative/bureaucratic, and performance-based.

Market accountability. Market accountability is based on the premise that schools will improve through competition (Pollock & Winton, 2015; Firestone & Shipps, 2005). This includes competition for teaching positions as well as between schools, which provides parents with options for their child (Firestone and Shipps, 2005). The prevalence of market accountability is greater in the United States, where it is believed that competition yields improved quality and access to different options and preferences, as it often does in business (Darling-Hammond, 2004). The American education system provides parents with more options through charter schools, vouchers, and incentives, resulting in a more competitive market for schooling. However, in Ontario, market accountability exists somewhat differently. Within the four different publicly funded school boards that comprise Ontario's public education system (English Public, English Catholic, French Public, and French Catholic) competition for student enrollment, which translates into funding dollars in an era of declining birth rates, (Alphonso &

Bradshaw, 2014) creates competition. In addition, parents may choose to remove their children from the public school system entirely and send them to private schools for religious reasons or for specific services that are offered through a particular school (e.g., special education needs).

Another aspect of market accountability in Ontario's public schools results from the influence publishing the EQAO school results has on property values and neighbourhood desirability. The Fraser Institute, the EQAO website, widely circulated newspapers, and other forms of media all publicize which schools have achieved or exceeded the provincial standard and which have been less successful. In recent years, real estate agents have been including EQAO information regarding school catchment areas as part of their headlines to capture the attention of potential buyers. While these publications do not directly influence principals' work on a daily basis, there appears to be an emerging social pressure for principals to ensure that their schools' scores are increasing. Experiencing similar changes toward the end of the last century, the Ministries of Education for both Icelandic and Ontario schools began turning their focus toward quality assurance for the education being provided and streamlining resources (Lárusdóttir, 2014).

Many critics of market-oriented reforms have expressed concern that competition and choice in education leads to a decrease in the level of equity that exists in school systems, particularly for students with low socioeconomic status (Moorman, Nusche, & Pont, 2008). However, findings from an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2007 report indicate that all students, particularly students with low SES, benefit when schools enact policies that allow for "school influence on staffing decisions, school autonomy in determining course content, private operation, government funding, and more equalized government between private and public schools" (Moorman, Nusche, & Pont, 2008, p. 34). This

finding supports the belief that schools should determine the members of their staff based on the needs within the school, that the curriculum being delivered must be relevant to students, and that government monetary funds should distributed equitably.

Political accountability. Political accountability reflects the responsibility of people who have been elected to public office and are in decision-making positions, enabling them to create and change policies based on the needs and wants of society (Firestone & Shipps, 2005). The people holding these elected positions must also face their constituents should they decide to stand for reelection (Darling-Hammond, 2004). School board trustees and members of government are examples of people who hold political accountability in education (Pollock & Winton, 2015) because they are accountable to the general public for their actions and positions on specific issues (Normore, 2010). According to Pollock and Winton (2015), the impact of elected officials in the United States is far greater than it is in Ontario. Political accountability for some principals working in the United States may make them "liable directly to legislators, governors, and judges for a number of education related issues such as establishing schools and determining taxes" (Pollock & Winton, 2015, p. 6-7). As such, it is believed by some in American schools that educators are accountable to the general public because their employment is held by elected officials (Gonzalez & Firestone, 2012).

Legal accountability. Legal accountability aligns with the legislated policies and laws in place to ensure that schools and the people who work in them adhere to the specific laws and guidelines imposed by the government (Darling-Hammond, 1989). The Education Act is the main statue that governs how schools function in the province of Ontario (Ontario Public School Boards Association, 2014). Within schools, principals have policy-based mandates that must be fulfilled as part of their legal accountability. For instance, they must ensure that staff compliance

training mandates are met, that educational provisions are in place to meet the learning needs of students, and that there is a standard for general health and safety both in the school and on school property (Normore, 2010). Legal accountability may also involve establishing rights for people or groups, as well as defending the rights of people that are being overlooked (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

In Finland, legal accountability in schools is managed at the municipal level, where the guidelines for how schools will function in each area are created based on their respective needs (Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016). This is not the case in Ontario, where principals are legally accountable to uphold the Education Act, which is based on legislation intended for all schools within the province.

Professional accountability. Accountability is considered to be an important dimension of professionalism (Moller, 2009), as professional accountability is valued and expected within the realm of education. For teachers, "The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession" are delineated through the Ontario College of Teachers and are intended to "provide a framework of principles that describes the knowledge, skills, and values inherent in Ontario's teaching profession" (Ontario College of Teachers, 2012). These standards outline what is expected of teachers in their daily work, which includes ensuring that they have acquired the appropriate knowledge and skills to make them effective in their practice (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

The work of Ontario's principals is guided by the Ontario Leadership Framework, which represents a significant piece of the Ontario Leadership Strategy (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). It is generally considered to be a document that supports school leadership, district-level leadership, and future school leaders by identifying practices and optimum personal characteristics, as well as providing guidelines surrounding effective leadership practices and

how effective administrations function (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). The

Ontario Leadership Framework is comprised of five Core Leadership Capacities that are

considered essential to achieving the educational goals established by the Ontario government.

The five leadership capacities are: (a) setting goals, (b) aligning resources with priorities, (c)

promoting collaborative learning cultures, (d) using data, and (e) engaging in courageous

conversations (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). The Ontario Principals' Council

(OPC), also highlights aspects of school leadership that are necessary to ensure optimum

learning environments for students. Principals are encouraged to incorporate practices that

prioritize student-centered teaching and learning conditions through: (a) setting direction, (b)

building relationships and developing people, (c) developing the organization to support desired

practices, (d) improving the instructional program, and (e) securing accountability (Ontario

Principals' Council, 2013).

     For principals, professional accountability has two-dimensions. As the figure of

management within schools, principals hold the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that teaching

and learning are happening in classrooms, "through monitoring of identified instructional issues"

(Pollock & Winton, 2015, p. 7). Another dimension comes from principals' willingness to "share

leadership responsibilities by encouraging teachers' self-direction and collaboration" (Firestone

& Shipps, 2005, p. 88): Principals take responsibility for building the capacity within their

schools to encourage future leaders.

     As in Ontario, principals in Finnish schools worked as teachers prior to taking on

Principalship, which often leads to working approximately 60 hours per week and experiencing

workplace stress (Saarivirta, 2009). As part of their professional accountability, the Finnish

National Board of Education organizes principal training and qualifying exams that each

prospective principal must pass in order to receive the mandatory diploma (Saarivirta &

Kumpulainen, 2016). Despite these opportunities for learning, however, many Finnish principals

find these measures do not adequately help them meet the demands of principals' work, which

often leads them to seek further leadership training (Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016).

  Moral accountability. Moral accountability reflects the ethical and moral foundation

upon which a person, a group of people, or an organization views the world and acts upon their

beliefs (Pollock & Winton, 2015). It is also considered to be "powerful and binding" (Moller,

2009, p. 40) as it necessitates accepting responsibility for impacting people's lives. Moral

accountability may also be seen as providing guidelines for behaviour based in "personal

integrity, adherence to personal and communal values, and empathy for others" (Firestone &

Shipps, 2005, p. 88). This view aligns with Normore (2004) who also believes moral

accountability is based on a principal's commitment to what is valued within their school: Moral

accountability influences their professional practices because they act based on what they believe

to be in the best interest of the student body and school community. Moral accountability in

schools may take the form of social justice, where opportunities are provided for students that

otherwise would not have been possible (Firestone & Shipps, 2005).

  Within the Finnish education system, there is recognition that within the country

"different regions have different needs," (Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016, p. 1274), a view that

acknowledges a need for equity. The structure of the decision-making process allows for more

consideration to be given to the local needs of each community, even with matters of curriculum.

For instance, students who live closer to the Russian border of Finland are able to take Russian

as opposed to Swedish, which would be more appropriate for students who live closer to Sweden

(Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016). Such consideration prioritizes what is needed in each school:

"the school-based curriculum" (Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016, p. 1275) is developed by a municipal-level curriculum unit that requires the approval of the school principals. Accordingly, this gives principals some additional ability to address the specific needs of their school community.

Administrative/bureaucratic accountability. This form of accountability aligns closely with a top-down structure where workers take orders from, and are accountable to, their superiors. This system of accountability is hierarchical as it is bound by rules and regulations that must be followed in order to ensure compliance (Elmore, 2005). Dwivedi et al. (1989) posit that decisions "determined at the superior level are followed, and supervisory control is exercised intensively with a clear understanding for the need to follow orders" (p. 6). The conformity expected as a result of supervisory control becomes the responsibility of educators, which they must enact in their practice (Elmore, 2005). There are many examples of bureaucratic accountability in public education today. For instance, teachers are accountable to their school principals, principals are accountable to their superintendents, who are accountable to their Director of Education, who is accountable to the school board trustees (Firestone & Shipps, 2005). All parties, however, are ultimately accountable to the provincial government. Similarly, another aspect of bureaucratic accountability is the government-based policies and procedures that elementary principals are responsible to bring to fruition within their respective school sites. Pinto (2015) acknowledges the complexity of the policies that accumulate and continue to present schools "with mandatory, prescriptive policy layers …that directs practice in schools" (p. 143). While this is not an exhaustive list, many of these policies include how students are assessed in classrooms, requirements for daily physical activity, policies surrounding mental

health, special education accommodations and modifications, expectations surrounding equity in schools, and the delivery of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program (Pinto, 2015).

Bureaucratic accountability exists differently in various countries. In Finland, principals have control over how the funds from their respective schools' budgets are allocated; they have some allowances with what curriculum is taught in schools, but do not have absolute control over the staff hiring process—the final decisions are made by the municipal school authority (Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016). In Iceland, the foci of principals' work has shifted away from teaching and learning and toward accountability for school finances and operations within the site (Hansen, Johannsson, & Lárusdóttir, 2004).

Performance-based accountability. Ben Jaafar and Anderson (2007) describe the Canadian approach to performance-based accountability as focusing on accountability for school improvement, rather than for the purpose of evaluating schools. For instance, when specific academic areas are identified as weak, principals will prioritize these areas for more intensive instruction. It is the responsibility of principals and all practitioners who work in education to ensure that students are achieving the provincial standard on EQAO assessments. Ontario elementary schools have a four-level, tiered system that corresponds to letter grade ranges. Thus, the B- to B+ ranges would align with Level 3 achievement (EQAO, 2012). While EQAO represents the only provincially run large-scale assessment in Ontario, there are other smaller-scale prescriptive assessments that individual schools, school boards, and Families of Schools look to for student performance information.

When a school is deemed underachieving by EQAO results, the principal must seek necessary supports and devise a plan that will improve student performance (Emstad, 2011). In 2011, 96% of Ontario principals surveyed said that they looked to EQAO assessment results to

inform their school improvement planning and to identify areas of strength and need, respectively, in reading, writing, and mathematics (EQAO, 2012). This improvement may come in the form of school-based interventions: for example, professional development opportunities for teachers with centrally assigned instructional leaders, other in-house curriculum experts (Emstad, 2011), or more formal channels assigned through EQAO (EQAO, 2012). The formal EQAO interventions for underachieving schools, such as Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP) and Schools in the Middle (EQAO, 2012), provide the identified schools with strategies and tools that will assist them to "develop and implement targeted improvement plans" (EQAO, 2012, p. 13).

Creating a school environment that prioritizes high academic achievement is essential to the Principalship today. This is particularly important as evidence suggests there is growing support for EQAO testing among many Ontario parent communities (EQAO, 2010). As Rosenkvist (2010) states, "88% of parents consider the provincial testing program important, and 69% place high importance on having this indication of their child's achievement in relation to the provincial standard" (p. 19). Thus, it seems probable that if parents value the standardized assessments, they expect that schools are preparing their children for the assessment. Ultimately, the onus of expectation falls onto the school principal.

In Singapore's educational system, the performance-based accountability of schools manifests in three ways: the school ranking, the School Excellence Model, and the School Awards system (Ng, 2010). Within the realm of school ranking, all secondary schools and preuniversities are annually ranked according to three areas and the results are published in the media (Ng, 2010). The areas being ranked include: (a) students' overall results from national exams, (b) students' improvement compared to their examination performance when they first

entered the school, which is referred to as "value-added-ness," and (c) students' performance on the National Physical Fitness Test and the percentage of overweight students (Ng, 2010). Schools in Singapore report directly to the Ministry of Education and not a local school board, which means that all teachers and principals are direct employees of the Ministry of Education (Ng, 2010).

   Smaller scale examples of performance-based accountability. In Ontario public schools, apart from EQAO testing, there are several less formal academic accountability measures that may be utilized to provide information regarding the academic performance of students. For instance, students attending schools that qualify for the Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) program in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) receive the Canadian Achievement Test 4, a Canadian-designed, multiple-choice assessment that may be conducted at the beginning of a new school year and closely aligns with the Ontario curriculum. The results are quickly returned, providing schools with valuable data that identifies "1. The strengths and needs of individual students, classrooms, and grades, 2. Trends over time with cohorts of students, 3. Student progress against him/herself over time" [Taken from TDSB, MSIC News 2011-2012, Term 1 Update]. This test also serves to triangulate achievement data from varying sources that include EQAO results, in-class assessments, report card data, and achievement gap data (TDSB, 2011-2012). Thus, this assessment provides data that is both timely and relevant to improving instructional practice, which may contribute to improved student achievement.

   Origins of performance-based accountability. Ontario's education system is performance based (Pollock & Winton, 2015). The Education Quality Accountability Office Act of 1996 was created as a result of the findings and recommendations from the 1995 Royal Commission on Learning. The agency was created to assure the public that Ontario students

were being assessed based on identified skills at specific points as they progressed through their educational journey. In the province of Ontario, educational accountability is maintained through the EQAO large-scale testing that provides yearly information on how elementary students in Grades 3 and 6 perform (Ben Jaafar & Earl, 2008). The content of these large-scale assessments is based on Ontario curriculum requirements mandated by the Ministry of Education, and focus on student proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics. In September 2000, the EQAO introduced Grade 9 assessment of mathematics and in September 2002, introduced the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) to all Grade 10 students, with the understanding that receiving a passing grade was a requirement for graduation (EQAO, 2012). As a result, secondary school graduation rates, suspension rates, and student voice surveys are considered fundamental when assessing the effectiveness of an education system, because they represent the outcomes of four years of focused attention following the elementary grades. These results inform the decision-making that allows for improvements and planning within the school system.

   Consequences of performance-based accountability. The consequences facing Ontario principals for underachieving on performance-based accountability assessments are far less severe than those faced by principals in the United States, where the punitive consequences for poor outcomes may result in financial penalties and even loss of employment (Ben Jafaar & Anderson, 2007). It is for this reason that scholars and educational practitioners consider the education system in the United States to be high stakes. In Ontario, employment remains secure and there are no financial implications assigned to underperforming EQAO testing results; however, there are some consequences as the Fraser Institutes ranks and publishes the results (Pollock & Winton, 2015). A lower ranking negatively impacts schools and community development because real estate agents use this data to sell houses: the rankings frequently

impacts parents' choice of neighbourhood. This data is also used by the media when covering

education in the news, and by municipalities when writing the bids that determine funding for

social programs (Pollock & Winton, 2015). School boards also use EQAO data to determine

which school sites require additional funding and support; this leads to pressure from the

Ministry of Education to make improvements in identified areas of need. Another difference

between performance-based accountability in the United States and Ontario is that, for educators

working south of the border, the tests "are high-stakes for teachers but low-stakes for students"

(William, 2010, p. 109). In Ontario, educators generally perceive the large-scale assessment to be

how "we can find out whether instruction has had its intended effect, because even the best-

designed instruction cannot be guaranteed to be effective" (William, 2010, p. 107). Thus, the

EQAO assessments are intended to provide information about how students are performing at

specific stages of their school years and about the effectiveness of schools with regard to

improving student performance (EQAO, n.d.).

There are some conflicting viewpoints surrounding large-scale testing and whether it is

truly intended to be a springboard for improving student learning outcomes. For instance, Hess

(2002) argues that broadly publishing test results enforce "informal social pressures" (p. 112)

and that the true purpose is to shame schools into amending their practices. This increased focus

on meeting and exceeding the provincial standard contributes to the increased workload of

Ontario school principals.

Performance-based accountability for teachers. Teachers constitute another area of

performance accountability for which principals are responsible. In 2002, the Ministry of

Education introduced the TPA process into Ontario schools, and drafted the Annual Learning

Plan (ALP) document that was in place by 2004. These developments occurred following the

Harris Government's *Common Sense Revolution*, which sought to bring formalized

accountability into the realm of education by discrediting the public sector in the eyes of Ontario

residents. Harper's government presented the Quality in the Classroom Act (Ontario

Government, 2001) as a way to ensure that Ontario students were receiving their education from

teachers who were adequately performing their assigned duties. The provincial government

touted the policy as promoting the professional growth and ongoing development of teachers and

as an instrument of accountability, whereby teachers were consistently and fairly evaluated.

According to the Education Act, TPAs are to be conducted by the school vice-principal,

principal, or a supervisory officer acting on behalf of the principal, and are based on the

competencies explicitly laid out in the Ontario College of Teachers Standards of the Teaching

Profession document. The competencies contained within include: pupils and pupil learning,

professional knowledge, teaching practice, leadership and community, and ongoing professional

learning (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004).

Public funding as accountability. Answerability is a prominent theme in all

government-based arenas where significant amounts of money are allocated. Ben Jaafar and

Anderson (2007) acknowledge that accountability has become "an integral part of policy

development and implementation" (p. 207) in the Ontario public education system. In recent

years, there has been increased public interest in the results of EQAO testing, since "public trust

is secured by specifying performance and regulating compliance" (Ranson, 2003, p. 460). Thus,

the results of the large-scale testing are one way the government provides citizens with assurance

that schools are functioning adequately and students are learning the contents of the Ontario

curriculum. As a measure of accountability, large-scale assessments have and continue to

monitor student achievement. Jacobsen, Saultz, and Snyder (2013) substantiate this viewpoint by

acknowledging that, "because education is a public good, the public holds its schools

accountable for their performance in order to make a judgment about how well this public

institution is performing" (p. 361). Due to the enormity of education as a funding expenditure,

questions surrounding the fiscal responsibilities of how public dollars are spent, and whether or

not schools are delivering adequate education, are frequently considered in the public sphere.

Consequently, student learning outcomes and the effectiveness of the education system garner

great attention from the public and are often central to political campaigns in Ontario.

  Systems of accountability within schools. Jabbra and Dwivedi (1988) define public

service accountability as "the methods by which a public agency or a public official fulfills its

duties and obligations, and the process by which that agency or the public official is required to

account for such actions" (p. 5). In the 1980s, a new focus on this form of accountability in the

business realm originated early research into multiple accountability systems and the influence

these systems had on managers and leaders. Jabbra and Dwivedi's description emphasizes the

expectation that public sector workers serve the general public by being accountable and taking

responsibility for their actions. Similarly, Stone, Dwivedi, and Jabbra (1989) argue that

professionals working in the public sector have a responsibility to ensure their decisions and

actions "[protect] the public interest" (p. 7) as part of their professional accountability. Given

that public money funds Ontario's education system, the adaptation of public service

accountability from the business to the education sector is unsurprising.

  In the 1980s and 1990s there were "substantial initiatives undertaken world-wide to

increase educational accountability" (Normore, 2004, p. 56), but the focus of the research was on

student, teacher, and school accountability and not the accountability of school administrators

and/or principals. While some research did begin during that time, there has been far more

interest and subsequent research conducted on school principals and their role within

accountability since the turn of the century. For instance, Normore (2004), Darling-Hammond

(2004), Firestone and Shipps (2005), Elmore (2005), Ben Jafaar and Earl (2008), Flessa and

Gregoire (2011), Fullan (2011), and Pollock and Winton (2015) have conducted research on

principals within the realm of accountability. It is important to note the vast majority of this

research was conducted with a focus on the United States. It is for this reason my study has built

upon the research of Pollock and Winton (2015). The work of Pollock and Winton (2015)

originated with a case study approach that looked at how three principals from different school

settings in Ontario managed multiple accountability expectations in their work. I have attempted

to expand on their findings by conducting semistructured interviews on a larger sample of

elementary school principals. As in the research of Pollock and Winton (2015), my intention was

to further uncover the realities facing Ontario principals as they navigate multiple accountability

systems, given that there continues to be insufficient research conducted in this area.

   The understanding that principals must navigate between multiple accountability systems

is not new within the field of educational leadership—a few researchers have been delving into

this area for several decades. For principals to be successful, their work must encompass the

needs of diverse student populations (Ryan, 2006), the parent community, and their staff

members and their union affiliations; disruptions resulting from labour issues; time-consuming

legislated policies; and accountability for student success (Pollock et al., 2014). Finding and

maintaining a balance among each of these areas is not a new challenge for elementary school

principals. Firestone and Shipps (2005) assert that, "educational leaders have long juggled

conflicting accountabilities" (p. 81). These different types of accountability are often sources of

conflict for principals, as some are required through provincial legislation, whereas others are

deemed important by the school community, staff, the student body, or by the principals

themselves. While all forms of accountability are important, some accountabilities are

prioritized, given that failing to fulfill policy-based responsibilities may result in reprimand.

The existing research highlights the enduring dilemma facing principals: how to prioritize

different standards of accountability, while fulfilling their legal responsibilities and creating

sustainable and innovative learning environments for students. This balancing act represents a

significant challenge, as "principals' work often involves navigating seemingly irreconcilable

government policies and community expectations while trying to live up to the idealized vision

of instructional leadership" (Alberta Teachers' Association [ATA], 2014, p. 9). This reality

frequently creates conditions where principals must determine how to prioritize the competing

tensions that arise in their work.

Policy and accountability. Delving into how accountability is managed in schools is

prudent because it is a fundamental element of schooling. Principals are responsible for creating

a school culture conducive to productive teaching and learning based on the needs of their

schools, while ensuring that imposed policies are implemented (Flessa, 2012). Accountability

may be presented as a method for promoting school improvement and ensuring uniformity across

the 3,974 (in 2014-2015) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012) elementary schools in Ontario,

however, the unintended consequences it is having on principals' work may be undermining the

initial good intentions.

On a daily basis, principals must meet the expectations of mandated government policies.

The 2015 OPC report, "The Changing Nature of Principals' Work," identified five of the most

prevalent provincial policies that influence how principals engage in their work, which consisted

of Regulation 274/12 (Hiring Practice), Growing Success, Safe Schools Act – Bill 212, Bill 13

(Anti-bullying), and Bill 115 (Putting Students First Act) (Pollock et al., 2014). These mandated

policies provide consistent guidelines for principals across Ontario. They are also incredibly

time-consuming and constitute some of the nonnegotiable forms of accountability that principals

must navigate. There is also the Ministry of Education's Code of Conduct (PPM 128), which

outlines the importance of creating safe and accepting learning environments for teachers and

students, where academic excellence is prioritized (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012).

Developing a system that promotes optimum learning opportunities for students requires meeting

the needs of all students.

Change Resulting from Provincial Politics

The prevalence of policy in Ontario's education system is extensive. The infusion of

policies has steadily increased since the 1995 provincial election when Mike Harris of the

Progressive Conservative Party was elected Premier of Ontario. At the time, the changes brought

forward by the Harris government were generally considered neoliberal in nature because they

intended to cut many of the financial burdens that accompanied employee benefits and enact

stronger regulations under the guise of fostering increased professionalism (Burke, Mooers, &

Shields, 2000; Wrigley, 2008). This neoliberal influence led to "a number of education policy

initiatives under the auspices of improving increased accountability based on a manufactured

crisis spread via the Common Sense Revolution (CSR) that commenced in the late 1990s"

(Pinto, 2015, p. 143). This crisis was marked by John Snobelen's statement about the need to

create a crisis in education: "I think of it as creating a useful crisis. Creating a useful crisis is

what part of this is about" (Krueger, 1995). While the CSR was touted as an attempt to lower

taxes and alleviate economic issues by decreasing the deficit facing the province at the time

(Rose, 2002), it also changed education into a business. It marked a time when the government

placed focus on increased accountability of public services; this led to the creation of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), which was considered to be "part and parcel of a plan to further centralize and regulate our schools—more provincial controls over curriculum, over funding, over standardized testing of our students, over methods of reporting to parents" (Robertson & Smaller, 1996, p. 128). The Education Quality Improvement Act, also known as Bill 160, changed the structure of Ontario's education system by removing principals and vice-principals from teacher unions, thus creating an additional tier of management.

Work Intensification as a Result of Accountability Expectations

The literature suggests that the demands placed on elementary school principals have increased in recent years and, as a result, the role has become more stressful (ATA, 2014). Pollock et al. (2014) determined that, on average, Ontario principals spend approximately 59 hours each week on their work. They also discovered that elementary principals allocate approximately 7.5 hours per week to manage the school, while 55% of the sample stated they would rather use that time differently (Pollock et al., 2014). The findings from the study indicated that principals would prefer to spend more time with staff providing instructional leadership and being more present among the student body. The study also highlighted the fact that principals were only able to be present during the less structured times of the day, which included recess, transition times between classes, and the lunchroom, on average for six hours per week (Pollock et al., 2014). Similarly, as a result of the high demand for principals' time on management-related tasks, Pollock et al. (2014) discovered that, on average, principals only had five hours per week available for attending to instructional leadership within schools. The study also revealed that an overwhelming, "82% would like to see this [amount of time] increase" (Pollock et al., 2014, p. 16) to work with their staff on curricular and instructional issues.

The national research study, *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* (2014), indicated similar results from elementary principals across Canada. The findings from both studies show that principals want to be more involved with students and engage in instructional leadership and professional learning with their staff members.

However, one interesting finding was that 79% of principals viewed accountability policies to be important or very important (ATA, 2014), despite the fact that attending to these tasks also consumed a significant amount of their workday. This suggests principals recognize the value that accountability-based policies bring to education. Thus, there appears to be competing tensions between how principals would prefer to spend time based on what they recognize will be good for students and staff members and completing the management components that are also integral to the function and safety of the school site.

Stress as a Result of Mounting Accountability Expectations

There is longstanding awareness about the stressful nature of educators' work. However, the majority of the existing research has focused on the circumstances of teachers, who are considered to be the frontline workers in education. It is only within the last 20 years that researchers have uncovered the stress that accompanies the work of school principals who have "historically been… middle manager[s] who translates educational policy from the central office to the classroom" (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 1). Since then, there has been heightened emphasis placed on how Ontario youth are being educated and the quality of the teaching and learning that is happening in schools. This focus continues to heighten the work of principals who have "always carried multiple and often contradictory responsibilities, wearing many hats, and moving swiftly between multiple roles in the course of one day" (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 2). One study, conducted by Borg and Riding (1993), sought to uncover the stress-causing aspects of

school administrators' work in Malta. The study identified that elementary principals

experienced a higher degree of excessive stress from their work at 39.9 %, while secondary

principals were slightly less at 36.5% (Borg & Riding, 1993). The study identified three primary

sources of work-based stress: "frequent interruptions of work," "too much paperwork," and "lack

of, or inadequate, school equipment and resources" (Borg & Riding, 1993, p. 2). The fact that

there are numerous demands placed on principals is relevant, considering how fast-paced school

environments can be on any given day. In many cases, being accountable necessitates

paperwork—when managing numerous accountabilities, it is probable that as it accumulates the

stress levels of the principals might as well.

Strategies for Managing Accountability Expectations

Within schools, there are different needs based on the school population and it is the

responsibility of principals to meet these accountability demands.

Negotiate expectations. According to Pollock and Winton (2015), principals' success

necessitates effectively negotiating and finding a balance between the "local, political, economic,

and religious contexts that generate different accountability demands" (p. 33) and not ignoring

these needs. Principals must discover ways that will enable them to balance the competing

accountability expectations that exist in their schools. This may be achieved by learning about

the local school community (Pollock & Winton, 2015), which is of particular importance in

Ontario where ethnic and religious diversity are both acknowledged and celebrated. The reality

of public education also necessitates that circumstances surrounding socioeconomic status be

addressed and prioritized.

Prioritize expectations. Each of the three principals in the Pollock and Winton (2015)

study were able to successfully prioritize the accountability expectations that mattered to their

respective school communities by listening, being flexible in their approach, and acting

according to identified needs. While each principal recognized that performance-based

accountability was a main focus of the Ontario government, and it was their responsibility to

ensure efforts were being made to improve achievement on EQAO testing, they also were able to

meet the other needs that existed within their schools. The issue of prioritizing expectations can

be illustrated through the example of Wanda from the Pollock and Winton (2015) study, who,

when arriving at a new school, was faced with a student discipline problem, frustrated teachers,

and the expectation of fulfilling bureaucratic and legal accountability expectations. To address

this situation, she introduced two complimentary programs that fulfilled the requirements of the

School Improvement Plan (SIP), which focuses on expectations surrounding student behavior,

allowing teachers to focus on student learning, and the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways (T-

LCP) process, which supports teacher collaboration with a focus on identifying and addressing

areas of student need (Pollock & Winton, 2015). By prioritizing the needs of the students and

staff within her school and the bureaucratic processes assigned to principals, Wanda managed the

competing accountability demands in her school.

   Networking and brokering with outside agencies. The needs within schools frequently

vary based on the community they are situated in, and as such there is not only one way to

manage competing accountability expectations. Pollock and Winton's 2015 study highlighted the

efforts of Allan, who was accountable both to the communities his school served and to the

provincial government's focus on performance-based accountability by networking and

brokering with other outside agencies to reduce stress on families brought on by unemployment,

poverty, and student hunger. Recognizing that conditions in homes have a direct impact on

student learning, Allan sought out community resources to support the needs of families in his

school community because he believed that "supporting parents and the larger community helped

to improve students' success at school" (Pollock & Winton, p. 27). In this instance, Allan

prioritized moral accountability in order to focus on performance-based accountability; he did so

by improving student circumstances that were impeding their academic success.

    Connecting expectations. Pollock and Winton's study (2015) also shared the efforts of

Dan, a principal from Ontario's publicly-funded Catholic education system, who balanced his

school accountability expectations by first connecting expectations and then ensuring that

classroom activities served more than one purpose. He believed that he was accountable to

uphold the expectations of performance-based accountability in his school and also to the

teachings of the Catholic church. In order to manage these accountabilities, he connected the

development of faith formation with student achievement; he suggested that it was an

expectation of students in the Catholic faith to be the best they could be, and this also meant

being as academically successful as possible. Dan's school successfully managed the competing

tensions of the different accountabilities by combining priorities, which included using the Bible

as a text to be used during literacy instruction. (Pollock & Winton, 2015). Thus, by combining or

complementing priorities, or in some cases balancing coexisting accountability expectations in

an effort to improve schooling for students, principals are able to manage multiple accountability

expectations.

    In order to meet the needs of their schools and manage accountability expectations,

principals may also look to the "human" resources within their schools and seek support from

knowledgeable teaching and support staff. To bring this shared effort to fruition, providing

adequate professional development through instructional leadership for their staff (Fullan, 2007)

is vital.

Concept of Work

The basis of my study is focused on accountability through principals' work. Work is fundamental to the lives of people in industrialized countries (England & Musimi, 1986; Mannhein, 1993) and certain scholars have discovered that it is considered second only to family in terms of importance (Harpaz, 1999; Harpaz & Fu, 2002). Pollock and Hauseman (2015) define principals' work to be "the practices and actions in which principals engage to fulfill responsibilities as school principals" (p. 2). As the school leader, principals must navigate between all stakeholders in education and find a balance between policy expectations and their own sense of accountability within their work context. The stakeholders to whom principals feel most accountable, include: students, staff, the parent community, their supervisory officers and school board, and the Ministry of Education. Principals' work is multifaceted and complex given that much of their accountability-based work competes and overlaps. (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). The work of Ontario's elementary school principals is changing, and my study attempted to gain a more thorough understand of how principals manage the competing accountability expectations in their work.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks are integral to qualitative research studies as they outline "the research process in terms of identification of relevant concepts/constructs, definition of key variables, specific questions to be investigated," (Schultz, 1988, p. 34) and focuses the study from the beginning to the end. Within a conceptual framework, each concept represented is significant, and when combined, "lays out the key factors, constructs, or variables, and presumes relationships among them" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 440). Thus, a conceptual framework is created to interpret a phenomenon.

The conceptual framework for my study explores the seven forms of accountability that comprise and influence principals' work, as well as the notion of work itself. It also is designed to show how the participants from my study viewed each accountability system. For instance, all participants recognized that it was imperative to uphold the mandated government policies (bureaucratic accountability), as well as the emphasis placed onto performance-based accountability. While each participant valued these accountabilities differently and individually may not have agreed with all aspects of each form, there was consensus that, as principals, they are part of the system and ultimately their responsibility is to oversee and enact. Similarly, there was also agreement that these forms of accountability comprised the majority of their time during their work day. In Figure 1 on page 42, the centre section contains five bubbles, with four of them connected. The top bubble represents moral accountability, which reflects the needs of the community. It includes a focus on social justice and is consistently a priority for principals. Within the Ontario context, there is room for other accountability systems to become a focus and combine with the mandated performance-based and bureaucratic accountability requirements. This is important, for as Firestone and Shipps (2005) assert, some principals feel pressure to neglect what they personally value and believe is in the best interest of the school community, as a result of how some accountability systems are designed.

My conceptual framework also depicts the experience of elementary school principals as they simultaneously manage multiple forms of accountability to fulfill the requirements of their work. Principals' work in Ontario continues to be an underresearched area; this should be rectified, given the expectations of the job are increasing and the needs within society require the prioritization of multiple accountability systems. In schools today, principals are pressured to ensure their schools are inclusive and providing opportunities for all students, performing at or

above the provincial standard on large-scale assessments, adhering to the many policy

expectations that come from the Ministry of Education and initiatives from the board, ensuring

professional accountability is upheld within the school, and that all legal and professional

accountabilities are maintained. Principals' work is accountability-based and attempting to

manage the expectations from each of the seven forms necessitates that principals engage in

strategic planning, utilize available supports, and consider other available strategies to create

school environments that focus on the diverse needs of 21st century schools.

Figure 1 depicts the seven forms of accountability that elementary school principals

manage in their work. It has been generally understood that principals have "juggled conflicting

accountabilities" (Firestone & Shipps, 2005, p. 81) in their work for quite some time. Until

recently, however, there was minimal research on this topic, which Firestone and Shipps deemed

to be "critical" (p. 81). Pollock and Winton (2015) explored this aspect of educational leadership

by conducting case study research to uncover how principals "manage the tensions of

accountability in their attempt to mediate the multiple competing accountability approaches

present in their work" (p. 3). My research attempts to build on the work of Pollock and Winton

(2015) and further uncover the challenges elementary principals face, as well as the strategies

principals employ to manage the competing accountabilities.

Principals are ultimately responsibility for everything that happens within their schools,

and it is for this reason that principals' work comprises the outside ring of my conceptual

framework. Given that Ontario's system of education is performance-based (Pollock &Winton,

2015), it comprises the next ring, which envelopes the other forms of accountability represented

in the framework. The profound influence of bureaucratic accountability is similarly significant,

as Ontario principals are required to implement and supervise mandated government policies and

initiatives received through their respective school boards. Thus, the outside rings represent the legislative control held by Ontario's Ministry of Education, and collectively represent the nonnegotiable forms of accountability.

The middle ring represents the other forms of accountability for which principals are also responsible. Principals must ensure that all staff members from various union affiliations uphold the government mandates and levels of professional and legal accountability. The onus is on principals to ensure that the teachers in their schools work within that the standards of practice outlined by the OCT.

Although Ontario principals are influenced by the decisions made by trustees, they experience less political influence than their American counterparts. As a result, I have positioned political accountability at the bottom of the four accountability bubbles. Market accountability exists in Ontario, but it does not impact the day-to-day working experiences of Ontario's elementary school principals. Instead, market accountability appears to influence public perception of schools through the eyes of prospective parents who may want their child to attend a certain school, and real estate agents who use EQAO data to make certain properties more appealing to buyers. Thus, the market accountability bubble is disconnected from the other forms of accountability, but remains within the realm of principals' accountability.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for How Elementary School Principals Understand and Manage Accountability Expectations
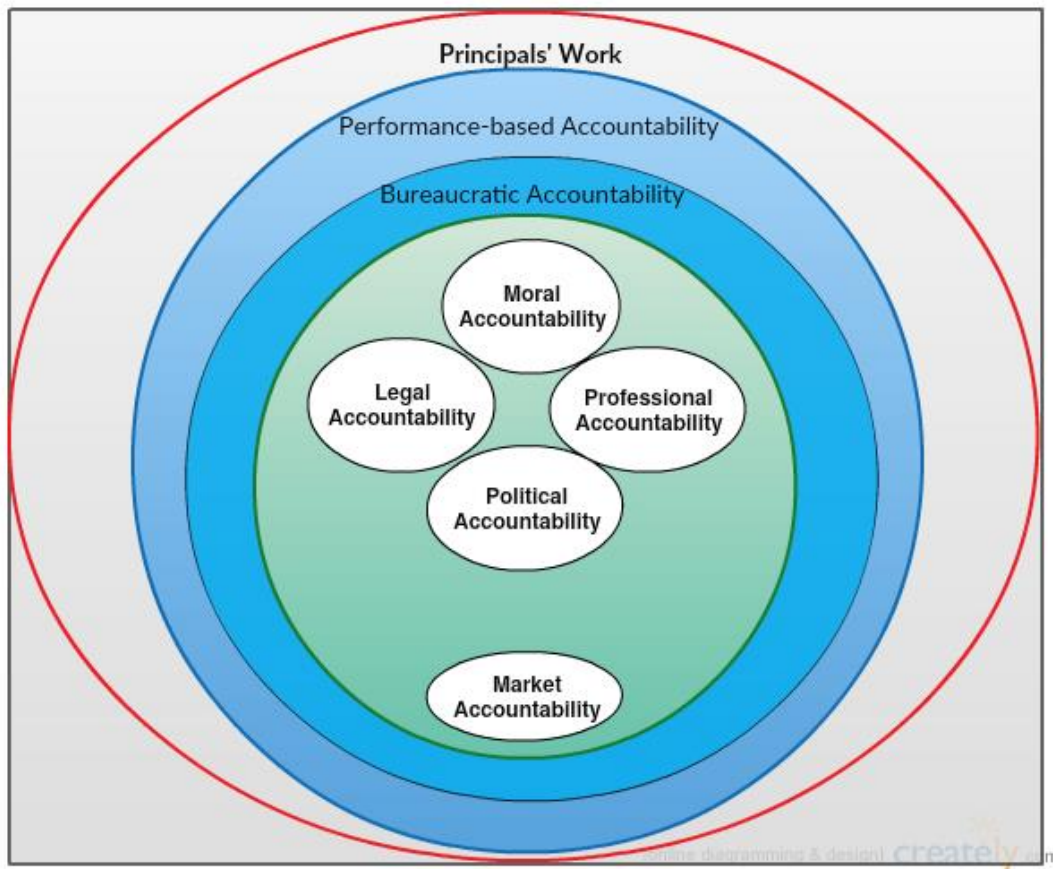
Chapter Summary

This chapter highlighted the different forms accountability that exist in Ontario's system

of education. Recognizing that Ontario has an education system that emphasizes performance-

based accountability (Pollock & Winton, 2015) but does not enforce punitive consequences for

substandard performance, principals are also able to prioritize other significant forms of

accountability that address identified needs within their school communities. Principals can

successfully manage competing accountabilities by negotiating and prioritizing the expectations

that exist within their schools, networking with outside agencies to manage the accountabilities,

and/or by combining and balancing coexisting accountability expectations to improve schooling for students.

   In the following section, I examine and explain the details surrounding the methodology of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

I employed an interpretive, qualitative study approach to answer my research question and research subquestions. I recruited participants for this study from two large urban Ontario public school boards through purposeful snowball sampling. In total, 12 elementary principals provided consent to participate in the approximately 60-minute semistructured interviews. In this chapter, I outline my research methodology, how I analyzed and interpreted the data, and how I maintained trustworthiness throughout the study.

Interpretive Approach

The design and focus of my study aligned with a qualitative, interpretive approach to research. An interpretivist approach seeks to discover findings that emerge through naturalistic methods (Merriam, 2009). To obtain data for my study, I conducted semistructured interviews that captured the participants' perspectives. Given that "different people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9) there is no single correct way to view a situation. Thus, I conducted this research through a constructivist lens, as each participant may have potentially viewed similar circumstances differently based on their own perception (Crotty, 1998). By focusing on the perspectives of my participants, I intended to gain a deeper understanding of how elementary principals manage multiple accountability expectations in their work.

Qualitative Research

It is the goal of qualitative researchers to determine how people understand their own experiences and the meaning they attach to these experiences. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for the data collection, data analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). According to Merriam (2009), "Qualitative researchers are interested in

understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). Using a qualitative approach, researchers are able to make needed changes to their research based on their findings (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2014). This was the case with my study, as I needed to revisit my initial plan based on participant responses. For this reason, conducting individual semistructured interviews with each participant was most appropriate for my research goal, as it allowed me to identify common themes as they emerged. As such, I did not consider using focus groups for this research, as they would not have provided individual perspectives (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Similarly, case study research was not applicable for my study because it tends to focus on one specific unit—for instance, the perspective of one teacher, a single classroom, or a separate school site (Patton, 2015). It was critical to my research that I acquired rich and detailed data from my participants, as it would lead to a more thorough understanding of how Ontario principals currently manage multiple accountability systems in their work (Patton, 2015; Merriam, 2009). I conducted several more interviews after reaching data saturation (Merriam, 2009) to confirm my findings and ensure that new themes did not emerge.

Semistructured Interviews

The semistructured interviews were not meant to be evaluative or to test a hypothesis; rather, I used them to gain a better understanding of the principals' experiences and the meanings they construct therein. Merriam (2009) describes this process as being "inductive, that is, researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories" (p. 15). Semistructured interviews provide opportunities for participants to respond to researchers' questions by describing their experiences. My interview protocol consisted of prepared open questions and previously conceived probes to gain further information, supplemented by questions that

naturally arose during the interview process (Gay et al., 2012). Semistructured interviews provide researchers with greater flexibility: Researchers may ask follow-up questions of the participants for the purpose of clarification and thereby create opportunities to further probe participant experiences (Seidman, 2013). I conducted interviews that were approximately 45-60 minutes in length at mutually agreeable locations, for it was important that the participants felt comfortable and not inconvenienced. It is critical for researchers to thoroughly understand their topics, because they need to effectively plan and structure questions that will ideally bring forward beliefs and experiences of participants that may not immediately surface during the initial interview questions.

Researchers must be flexible and adjust their questioning based on "the emerging worldview of the respondent" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). Consequently, I considered face-to-face interviews to be the most appropriate data collection method for this study, because these interviews aim to help researchers "understand the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 3). My interviews included both highly and loosely structured questions that provided the participants with opportunities to share their responses based on personal experiences. The structured section of the interview consisted of a set of questions geared toward obtaining specific information about how participants understand and manage accountability expectations. For instance, each principal was asked: "How do you understand accountability in your work?" Each participant was given time to consider their response to each question, and during those moments I took notes about my observations, as well as recording the questions that had arisen from previous responses (Patton, 2015).

I investigated other areas of my research question by drawing from a list of topics that aligned with the direction of the interview, and presented them to the participant in no specific

order. During the process, I avoided multiple and/or leading questions, as well as questions that

required a yes or no response; the latter would not have elicited rich and detailed responses that

could have informed my research (Seidman, 2013).

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of Ontario elementary public school principals

with a minimum of five years of experience working as a principal. At the time of the interviews,

each principal had worked at their current location for a minimum of one school year. This

criterion is important because it ensured the principals were familiar with their schools and could

speak to the nature of any potential challenges and effective supports regarding accountability. I

purposefully excluded principals with less than five years of experience from the study. One

limitation of my study is that all of the principals worked in large, urban school boards where

there were notably larger, more diverse school populations than may be found in suburban or

rural areas. I also did not include secondary principals in my study because the contexts and

experiences of principals from different panels are notably different (Firestone, Herriot, &

Wilson, 1984).

In any study, participant willingness to answer researchers' questions truthfully presents a

potential limitation. Inaccurate senses of awareness regarding what is actually happening in their

schools, limited ability to recall specific details, and the subjective nature of participant

perceptions can also potentially present limitations. Similarly, participants might decide to alter

their true feelings in order to appear differently to the researcher. Flessa (2012) shared a similar

concern while conducting research, as he believed there was a "risk that principals' responses

might echo the prevailing 'party line'" (p. 331) of their school board. As board representatives of

their respective schools, principals could potentially feel obligated to respond more positively to interview questions than they actually feel.

I have included a brief description of each participant below to provide background information about their years of experience in education. I have given each participant a pseudonym to ensure their identities remain anonymous.

Principal Rose. Rose has been working in education for a total of 18 years. She entered administration after 10 years of teaching and spent two years as a vice-principal before becoming a principal. Rose has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last six years.

Principal Read. Read has been working in education for a total of 22 years. He taught for seven years before taking a central position at a school board as the Head of Physical and Health Education for four years. Read then spent two years as a vice-principal and has been a principal for the last nine years in an Ontario urban school board.

Principal Dylan. Dylan has been working in education for a total of 19 years. He entered administration after eight years of teaching and was a vice-principal for three years before becoming a principal. He has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last eight years.

Principal Stuart. Stuart has been working in education for a total of 17 years. He entered administration after seven years of teaching and was a vice-principal for two years before becoming a principal. He has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for eight years.

Principal Tracey. Tracey has been working in education in various capacities for over 23 years. She was a vice-principal for two years before becoming a principal. She has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last 14 years.

Principal Deserae. Deserae has been working in education for a total of 23 years. She entered administration after six years of teaching and was a vice-principal for four years before becoming a principal. She has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last 13 years.

Principal Suzanne. Suzanne has been working in education for a total of 25 years. She entered administration after 12 years of teaching and was a vice-principal for five years before becoming a principal. She has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last eight years.

Principal Clare. Clare has been working in education for a total of 27 years. She entered administration after teaching for 12 years. Clare has had two secondments to the Ministry of Education and returned to working in schools after each contract ended. She was a vice-principal for three years before becoming a principal. She has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last eight years.

Principal Henry. Henry has been working in education for a total of 22 years. He entered administration after nine years of teaching and was a vice-principal for three years before becoming a principal. He has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last 10 years.

Principal Max. Max has been working in education for a total of 17 years. He entered administration after six years of teaching and was a vice-principal for three years before becoming a principal. He has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last eight years.

Principal Chris. Chris has been working in education for a total of 22 years. He entered administration after six years of teaching, then spent one year working as a consultant with a

school board. He was then promoted to become a vice-principal and spent three years in that role before becoming a principal. He has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last 12 years.

Principal Jennifer. Jennifer has been working in education for a total of 25 years. She entered administration after eight years of teaching and was a vice-principal for two years before becoming a principal. She has been a principal in an urban Ontario school board for the last 15 years.

Sample Size

Sample size is determined based on the nature of a research study and by approximating what is necessary to answer the research question (Merriam, 2009). For this study, I intended to conduct up to 25 semistructured interviews, or until I reached saturation. Saturation is the point where no new information is emerging from the interviews (Merriam, 2009; Padgett, 1998). I reached saturation during the seventh interview of my study, but continued with the rest of the scheduled interviews to ensure that different themes did not emerge. Once I completed my data analysis, my thesis advisor recommended conducting two more interviews to confirm my findings and ensure that no new themes emerged.

Recruitment

After receiving approval from the Research Ethics Board from Western University at the beginning of summer 2015, I began the process of acquiring participants. In the early stages of recruitment, I hoped that Dr. Joanne Robinson, Director of Professional Learning for the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) would be part of my recruitment strategy. Through consultation with my thesis advisor, Dr. Robinson kindly agreed to include an advertisement announcing that I was seeking participants for my study in the weekly e-bulletin sent to all Ontario principals.

Unfortunately, this process did not garner any participants for my study, likely due to the

ongoing teachers' job action that interrupted the first few months of school starting in September

2015.

      As a result, I obtained all of the participants for this study through snowball sampling

(Merriam, 2009) from my first interview. The first participant was a principal whom I had

known for many years from serving on various committees. This principle recognized that

members of my doctoral cohort were struggling to obtain participants, and kindly connected with

other principal colleagues who lived and worked in the Toronto area and were willing to

participate.

      Once these principals made initial contact through email, I sent a return email outlining

the nature of my study. During the email correspondence and telephone conversations that

followed, I answered any questions and reiterated the details surrounding my study. I also

explained that a condition for participation was their willingness to have the interviews recorded

and turned into verbatim transcripts. Each participant agreed once I explained that turning the

interviews into transcripts would allow me to thoroughly analyze the data while also remaining

focused on their responses during the interview. I also emphasized my commitment to ensuring

anonymity and explained that their data would be stored in a secure file in a locked filing cabinet

under a numerical code. After ensuring that the inclusion criteria had been met, the participants

provided times of availability and we determined a mutually agreeable interview time and place.

When the potential participants arrived at the interview, I asked them to read the letter of

information and if they required any further clarification. Once I had answered all of their

questions and the participants felt comfortable with how the process would unfold, I then asked

them to sign the informed consent documentation. I interviewed 12 participants between August

2015 and February 2016.

Data Analysis

According to Yin (2011), it is imperative for researchers to possess five attributes prior to commencing the data gathering process: (a) the ability to question, (b) strong listening skills, (c) adaptability, (d) a solid understanding of the issues, and (e) a lack of bias. To ensure I met these criteria, my thesis advisor and I engaged in a mock interview; based on her feedback for future improvement, I participated in another pilot interview with a colleague from my doctoral cohort prior to commencing the formal interviews.

Stake (2006) emphasizes the importance of determining a detailed strategy for data analysis process prior to collection. This is significant because, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest, data analysis actually starts during the data collection process. Throughout the interviewing process, I engaged in ongoing comparative analysis by double-checking for themes and returning to previously recorded transcripts to identify connections between participant responses (Merriam, 2009). As part of this approach, I worked to make sense of the data (Gay et al., 2012) and continuously refined categories as they emerged (Heck, 2004).

Within hours of completing each interview, I transcribed the data into Microsoft Word documents and I listened to the recordings again along with the transcribed versions to guarantee accuracy. To further ensure reliability, I also reviewed my research notes promptly following the interviews to capture the nuances of each participants' body language and other physical reactions and responses they had to my line of questioning. In fact, these notes have ensured that certain aspects of the interview have not been lost in the transcription process; they have also helped create rich descriptions of the findings for further analysis.

Each of the approximately 60-minute interviews took over four hours to transcribe and

typically resulted in over 17 pages of text. With the exception of one interview that occurred

over Google Hangouts, I conducted all interviews in person and at each principals' respective

school office.

Once I completed the transcribing process for all of the interviews, I read each interview

transcript several more times to identify any additional themes and made notes in the margins of

the transcript pages for future reference (Gay, et al., 2012). I then emailed the transcripts back to

each respective participant for the purpose of *member checking* (Merriam, 2009), to ensure

accuracy and allow for any changes to be made through either additions or deletions (Patton,

2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seidman, 2013). Member checking assures the credibility of the

findings with the participants and requires that the researcher return a copy of the transcript from

the interview to the participant to confirm the accuracy of the transcribed interview (Seidman,

2012). This process seeks to prevent misinterpretations by the researcher and ensure that the true

experiences and beliefs of the participants are conveyed in the findings (Seidman, 2013). During

this process, only one participant requested a minor change: that a potentially identifying street

name be removed or changed to a pseudonym.

For organizational purposes, I turned the identified themes into separate codes with

distinct names. I then highlighted emergent themes, both in relation to commonalities and also

what was unique (Gay et al., 2012). I paid particular attention to thoroughly understanding the

common experiences, as well as the unique ways that principals experienced changes in their

work that resulted from multiple accountability systems.

Since data can be interpreted in a multitude of ways (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003),

when I completed all of the interviews, I analyzed them again. At this point, I removed the initial

codes and moved the data into categories and subcategories (Lichtman, 2010) based on how the

principals managed multiple accountability systems and the challenges and supports they

identified. As principals began to identify the strategies they employ in their work, I took

additional notes regarding subthemes. I read every transcript numerous times with an openness

toward any theme that might have emerged.

Throughout this process, I used different coloured highlighters to identify sections of data

that supported each emerging theme. Once I had a solid set of themes established from all 12

interviews, I then compared these themes to my conceptual framework. Throughout this process,

I remained in close contact with my critical friends, professors, and thesis advisor. Their input

was invaluable as I worked through the data analysis process and focused on remaining reflexive

in my approach. As part of my commitment to the research process, I maintained a research

journal (Merriam, 2009), where I made note of any particular bias I might have recognized, my

reflections on the comfort level of the participants, personal observations regarding my

developing interview skills, and different probing questions I might consider using in subsequent

interviews.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was the most appropriate method of data analysis for my study

because it provided an effective strategy for interpreting and building a narrative from the

subjective experiences of the participants (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015). According to Crow,

Inder, and Porter (2015), thematic analysis may be defined as "a process of interpretation of

qualitative data in order to find patterns of meaning across the data" (p. 617). Researchers often

use thematic analysis because it assists with "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns

(themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Accordingly, the researcher is required to

build narratives by identifying these themes. Thus, it is advantageous in qualitative research

because it is flexible for researchers and garners detailed and complex data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Researchers play an active role when identifying themes. While the findings exist within the transcripts of our interviews, it is our thinking about the data that creates the connections (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When conducting thematic analysis, the researcher must become familiar with the data by reading the interview transcripts multiple times. Once researchers are knowledgeable about the information in the transcripts, they create some initial codes. It is imperative that the research question remains at the core of this process and that each code provides insight into the participants' experiences. After I created my codes, I identified themes by merging together the codes that were similar in nature. Once identified, I carefully refined the themes to ensure that they addressed the information I took from the codes; I then defined and clearly described each theme. I connected each theme to various sections from within the transcripts and attached specific quotations that highlighted the core of the themes. Once I constructed the themes, I started to write narratives based on each participant and their experiences.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research that uses an interpretivist model requires four elements that combine to ensure trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The trustworthiness of research is highly dependent on the integrity of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Thus, it is the responsibility of each researcher to be reflective of what biases they bring into the research setting and to make a concerted effort to remain reflexive.

Credibility. It is imperative to assure credibility in the research in order to guarantee the accuracy of the findings from the study. Member checking the transcripts of interviews provides a safeguard to ensure the data has not been misinterpreted and thus ensures that the research remains credible (Morrow, 2005). Researcher reflexivity is also important to ensure personal beliefs are not incorporated into the analysis of the data. Accordingly, I maintained a self-reflective journal throughout the process and recorded any assumptions and biases I discovered (Morrow, 2005). I engaged in ongoing dialogue and sought guidance from critical friends to ensure objectivity (Morrow, 2005).

Transferability. Interpretation plays an important role in interpretivist research. A more thorough understanding of how principals understand and manage accountability in their work can be constructed from analysis of the compiled data. It is also important for the reader to have adequate information about the research process in order to have a better understanding of whether the findings are transferable to other circumstances (Morrow, 2005).

Dependability. The methods for conducting a research study must be well documented to ensure that another researcher can replicate the study by following the initial researchers' process. Thus, it is essential that researchers maintain detailed notes about how they have undertaken their methodological process. From the beginning, I have maintained copious, detailed notes regarding the nuances of the process.

Confirmability. It is crucial that researchers remain unbiased and ensure that the study outcomes reflect the actual circumstances from the research and not the researchers' own personal beliefs. By engaging in member checking and working closely with my critical friends, I have focused intently on maintaining objectivity and accurately reporting the findings from my study.

Ethical Considerations

The Research Ethics Board of the University of Western Ontario granted approval prior to the commencement of my research study. Due to the nature of this research, I did not use the tactic of deception and there were no expected physical or mental risks of harm to the participants (Patton, 2015). Each of my participants signed the letters of informed consent and agreed to being recorded during the interviews. Prior to the beginning of each official interview, I clarified the nature of the study with the participant and provided assurance regarding the confidentiality measures being taken throughout the process. It is the responsibility of the researcher to thoroughly explain the measures in place to ensure confidentiality, for instance: the proper storage of all recorded data, interview transcripts, researcher notes, as well as the master list of participants with assigned codes. These sensitive documents will remain locked securely away in separate filing cabinets for the mandatory five-year period, as per the Western University's Guidelines for Non-Medical Research.

I reminded participants that they had the option to not answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable and were free to withdraw from the study at any time. I assigned pseudonyms to each participant to ensure anonymity and altered any potentially identifiable information.

I also gave the participants the opportunity to read through the transcripts and make any changes they deemed necessary to ensure accuracy within the data and to ensure that their identities would remain securely anonymous.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined my methodological approach for conducting this research. My thesis advisor and I determined, based on my area of research, that an interpretive qualitative

study using semistructured interviews would be the most appropriate method for data collection. I also described my data collection and data analysis processes, the ethical considerations to which I have adhered, as well as the methodological limitations of this study. In the next chapter, I will present my findings.

Chapter 4: Findings—Multiple Accountability Expectations and the Influence on Principals' Work

This chapter presents the findings from my research subquestions that collectively answer my main research question: How are multiple accountability expectations influencing principals' work? The findings from the data present the perspectives of the interviewed elementary principals. The subquestions addressed in this chapter are: (a) How do elementary school principals understand accountability in their work? (b) What strategies do elementary principals use to meet accountability expectations? (c) What challenges do elementary principals face attempting to meet accountability expectations? (d) What supports need to be in place for principals to meet work-place accountability expectations?

The first section of this chapter discusses the seven types of accountability the participants in my study referenced as being the most relevant to their work as Ontario elementary school principals: bureaucratic, performance-based, professional, professional, legal, moral, and market accountability. The second section presents the strategies principals use to meet accountability expectations. The third section outlines the challenges they face, and the fourth section reveals the supports that principals find most useful when managing the accountability expectations that comprise their work. Within each section, I present the subthemes that emerged, which highlight the perspectives of the principals from my study.

Elementary Principals' Understanding of Accountability

According to the principals in my study, accountability is a fundamental element of their work. In fact, there was consensus among participants that principals are accountable for everything that happens in their schools. Jennifer shared how she perceives accountability as an elementary school principal:

As principal, I am always aware that in every moment of everyday someone is—for lack of a better term—evaluating me, because I am the person who makes the final decisions. And after every interaction I have with people, they leave with an impression from that interaction, be it a child, a staff member or a parent, or my supervisory officer, or my other principal colleagues. So, in whatever role I am in, I am constantly aware that I am accountable for my actions, decisions, and various interactions on a daily basis; to do it well, there are times when I need to switch gears quickly. In one moment, I'm dealing with budgets and bussing issues, and the next, bullying or an issue with a parent. While these actions are mine, I am also aware that I'm representing my school and the values and standards of the school, my school board, and the Ministry of Education in my words and actions.

Jennifer's role as principal makes her accountable for managing myriad situations that arise with the students, staff members, and the parent community at her school. She also feels accountable to her principal colleagues within the system and her supervisory officer, and knows that that her responses to various situations need to be reflective of the beliefs and the directions set by her employers, the school board, and Ministry of Education. Jennifer acknowledged that there are times when the multiple accountability systems compete for her attention and it is her responsibility to address each one to the best of her ability. Further, Jennifer conveyed that she is not always able to attend to each situation in ways and within timeframes that satisfy everyone: "Pleasing everyone every day isn't possible. There is a lot of pressure on principals that most people aren't even aware of from every direction." She emphasized the challenges principals face managing multiple forms of accountability, which creates ongoing difficulties—opinions regarding her effectiveness in her role are formed based on how she handles situations.

Jennifer feels a large amount of pressure in her job as elementary school principal. In her interview, she was cognizant that her decisions have repercussions for how people perceive her, as well as her employer, the school board, and Ministry of Education. Jennifer recognized the enormity of managing the different forms of accountability and referred to feeling pressure from constantly being judged based on the decisions she makes. For instance, when managing one

situation, someone else may be questioning why she is not prioritizing another situation. Jennifer

feels bound by accountability because she is the person "who makes the final decisions" at the

school level as the representative of the board. Jennifer recognized that she also needs to be able

to tap into the realm of moral accountability and be available as a support for students and their

families. Jennifer referenced being accountable to the values and standards of the school board

and Ministry of Education. A significant part of this accountability is bureaucratic.

      Bureaucratic accountability. Within the education system, bureaucratic accountability

reflects procedures and policies that are established and enforced to ensure schools function

according to specific guidelines (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Pollock & Winton, 2015). At the

school level, it is most often the responsibility of the principal to ensure these mandates are

followed and that schools remain in compliance (Normore, 2010; Pollock & Winton, 2015). The

principals in my study reported feeling accountable to complete substantial amounts of policy-

based work that must be managed within their school sites on a daily basis. Fulfilling these

aspects of their work comprises a significant amount time, which often takes them away from

other things they value. According to Pollock et al. (2014), Ontario principals spend

approximately 59 hours per week working, with 47.5% of their workday spent in their offices.

Stuart explained that principals' work is driven by legislated policies:

> Very few professions now have their job description written in law. Educators do. In our
> case [principals], it is the Education Act. For instance, as a principal you are responsible
> under the Education Act, but as a supervisor you are also responsible under the
> Occupational Health and Safety Act, Privacy Act, Freedom of Information Act—you
> have so many things to consider because you're an education leader, a teacher, a
> supervisor on site; you are "in loco parentis," so the Family and Children's Services Act
> is relevant. There are very few professions where there is so much legislation that make
> you obligated to act in certain ways and there is no way in heck you are going to be able
> to do everything right and not screw up in some way…by not dotting that "I" or crossing
> that "T" in some way, shape, or form.

Stuart named some of the policies that make principals accountable through legally mandated

forms of bureaucratic accountability. According to the Pollock et al. (2014) OPC study,

principals' work has become so grounded in policies and procedures "that there is little room for

principals to demonstrate professional judgment or autonomy in their daily work (p. 3). The OCT

asserts that, in addition to the Education Act, principals must also have an understanding of at

least 17 different pieces of legislation (OCT, 2009; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Further to this,

Ontario principals are accountable to uphold Ministry of Education strategies and initiatives,

which include: Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools; the

Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy; Parents in Partnership: Parent Engagement Policy; the

Aboriginal Education Strategy/First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Policy Framework; Reporting in

Ontario Schools; the Ontario Curriculum; and the Ontario Leadership Strategy (Pollock et al.,

2014).

Stuart emphasized that it is almost impossible to avoid making mistakes by omission as a

result of the many different layers of accountability principals face—for example, the increasing

volume of paperwork that accompanies policy-based work through documentation. In addition,

many of these policies involve specific training for both principals and all teaching staff

members in order to meet requirements set out by the boards, which are referred to as

compliance-based training expectations.

Compliance training. Henry shared that many policy expectations require compliance-

based training and principals are mandated by the board to ensure their staff members receive

and successfully complete the necessary training sessions:

> There has been more directed professional development in recent years. The board drilled
> down on what was needed—more focus on policy and procedure. There is a lot of
> accountability there in terms of who has done their Asbestos training and WHMIS
> [Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System] training, the Duty to Report

training that connects to the Children's Aid Society, and Sabrina's Law. In fact, there are two more laws coming down the pipes focusing on concussions and asthma. It [the board] has become a lot more compliance-oriented and ensuring that we [principals] are following procedures.

Henry described many of the accountability policies as compliance-based. These requirements ensure staff receive training for various sets of procedures that protect schools and the board from legal implications should someone become injured. Henry implied that it is essential for principals to ensure the fulfillment of mandatory compliance training and that he is expected to follow the rules imposed by the board. The drive for compliance stems from a focus on ensuring uniform knowledge among all employees regarding the standards and expectations (OECD, 2000) prioritized by the board. As such, the TDSB initiated a series of online compliance training for all staff to complete, which focuses on new and existing policies. These include: Dealing with Abuse and Neglect of Students (PR 560); WHMIS, Mental Health & Well-Being; Anaphylaxis in Schools; Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act; Workplace Violence General Awareness; and Asbestos Awareness Level 1. The implementation of these compliance training sessions is a component of the TDSB's Years of Action Plan: 2013-2017, which includes a significant focus on occupational health and safety.

   Occupational health and safety. According to the participants, one of the most highly focused-upon areas of bureaucratic accountability is health and safety. Dylan indicated that the board sends more correspondence to principals about issues of health and safety than improving student performance:

   Some days it [time spent managing accountability systems] is huge and other days it is less so…but what I do know is that it is increasing. So, as much as I want to get out of here [the school office] and get into the classrooms and do other things, I know I have to do this [bureaucratic accountability-based work] because if I don't, and that requirement is not met, I could be in trouble that way. Making sure that my health and safety board is up, I have my staff trained, and I account for what training and when they were trained is

> critical because if I have a labour inspector come in, I need to be able to prove that it has
> been done on the spot. If not, I could be held under the Health and Safety Act.

Dylan is held more accountable for meeting health and safety requirements in the school than he

is for improving student academic performance. He explained that the board's emphasis on

bureaucratic accountability makes him feel more like a manager of the school site than an

educator working with the team to improve student learning outcomes. However, Dylan

acknowledged that not prioritizing health and safety requirements within his school could render

him in violation of the Health and Safety Act, which could potentially result in formal discipline.

To comply with the Health and Safety Act, there are numerous layers of regulations that

must be upheld in order to ensure schools are hazard-free. Max highlighted the significance of

maintaining the school and remaining in accordance with health and safety regulations, as well

as the amount of time it takes to ensure compliance:

> The health and safety inspections come four times per year and I have to log on and sign
> off on the recommendations that have been rectified. I need to ensure that the building is
> safe. There are too many days where the majority of my time goes to dealing with health
> and safety. I have to sign off that I have spoken to someone about the extension cord
> being on the floor, or I have told the caretaker that he or she must change a ballast or
> whatever it is. So, a screw loose on the playground becomes my issue and I become
> accountable for it and have to sign off on it. At the end of the day, if the issue is
> significant enough, the Health and Safety Department can shut our doors and the school
> won't open until the issue is fixed.

Max described the importance of adhering to all health and safety procedures and rectifying any

issues in a timely manner. Principals are accountable for ensuring their school sites are prepared

for health and safety inspections because the severity of the infraction could potentially result in

a temporary school closure. This includes making sure all equipment and structures both within

the school and outside on school property are maintained and functioning as intended. Max

stated that overseeing this aspect of his work is quite time-consuming between identifying the

issues, following-up to confirm the matter has been corrected, and completing the paperwork that

documents the necessary processes that have been followed.

Paperwork. A common theme throughout the interviews was the amount of time-

consuming, accountability-based paper work principals must complete for processes that extend

beyond teaching, learning, and student achievement. Tracey explained that board policies

outlining how principals must handle petty cash for office supplies far exceeds the accountability

expectations that are placed on improving student outcomes:

> There are more safe-guards, there is more paperwork, and checks and balances on the
> $6.50 that I spend on stamps than there are on how my students are doing in their Grade
> 2/3 class. There are definitely more checks on my submissions of budget forms or petty
> cash forms, or if I don't submit space evaluations or optional attendance forms. There is
> more follow-up in regard to that than in regard to if my students aren't moving from level
> 2 to 3, or I have more kids getting Ns on their learning skills or performing with
> difficulty.

Tracey's experience with heightened accountability procedures for all monetary purchases, even

office petty cash, has become a time-consuming process. According to Tracey, the paperwork

that follows purchasing office supply items is subject to more scrutiny than a decline in student

academic performance. Suzanne agreed that there are more accountability measures in place

surrounding school finances and student enrollment than there are for student performance,

specific interventions to support student learning, and instructional leadership. Sharing a similar

experience, Jennifer conveyed that the amount of paperwork required for nonacademic

components of the school day has become far more extensive:

> Every cent that is spent must be accounted for. Sometimes it is too much hassle to bother
> with the paperwork and I just use my own money to buy the things we need in the office,
> or if a student forgot their lunch and we can't get in touch with a parent. It isn't a big
> deal, but it is frustrating that there are so many hoops to jump through.

The bureaucratic framework that exists in schools provides strict guidelines and procedures for

how purchasing and the spending of any school funds occurs. Navigating this system of

accountability is time-consuming and as Tracey, Suzanne, and Jennifer indicated, it creates a conflict between what principals believe should be the main focus in schools and where they are mandated to focus their attention. Just as principals are accountable to follow the procedures for handling monetary funds and purchasing, they are also accountable for the performance of both teachers and students through performance-based accountability.

Performance-based accountability. Within the education system, performance-based accountability is used to enact and monitor change (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Pollock & Winton, 2015). All of the principals who participated in my study acknowledged the focus that the Ontario government has placed on performance-based accountability as a method for providing data on student achievement and accountability for teachers' performance. During each interview, the principals identified the performance accountability measures for full-time contract teachers (through the Teacher Performance Appraisal [TPA] and New Teacher Induction Program [NTIP] processes) and for students (through the annual EQAO large-scale assessment) as significant aspects of their work.

Teacher performance appraisal. The TPA process is intended to provide experienced teachers with feedback that will promote additional professional learning and support, as necessary (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). This system is one of the more well-known accountability-based responsibilities that principals conduct within schools. The TPA process is also revered by certain sectors of the public, as it is generally believed to assure quality teaching and learning is occurring in the public school system (EQAO, 2013). Principals adhere to legislative requirements and Ministry of Education guidelines, as well as other board-specific requirements, when conducting TPAs on their teaching staff members (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Experienced Teachers. Once every five years, teachers who have full-time contracts and more than two years of experience are evaluated on the 16 competencies that align with the five domains of the OCT's Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession. However, should a principal deem the performance of a teacher to be questionable, they may choose to conduct additional appraisals. Similarly, should an unsatisfactory rating be given to a teacher during their TPA, it is the responsibility of the principal to provide the needed support and a second TPA would be conducted at a time designated by the principal (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

New Teachers. Teachers who have full-time contracts with their school board but less than two full years of successful teaching experience are evaluated through NTIP. This process occurs twice yearly during their first two years of teaching and successful completion of these appraisals is a mandatory requirement for becoming a permanent full-time teacher.

Chris referred to the TPA and NTIP processes as: "an extremely time-consuming accountability requirement that only gives a snap-shot of true performance and is not always representative of what happens in classrooms day-to-day." Suzanne added:

> The processes involve several meetings with the teacher being assessed before the classroom observation where the specific competencies being addressed are selected, and then a follow-up meeting is organized to debrief before the final report is sent to the board.

Suzanne shared a similar view to Chris in that she perceives the process to be "basically a formality, but not really indicative of teachers' regular performance because they know they are being evaluated and many throw out all of the stops to make the lesson being observed the best it can be." The other form of performance accountability that elementary principals are responsible for overseeing is the annual EQAO assessment for students in Grades 3 and 6.

Accountability for students through EQAO. The annual EQAO testing is the only large-scale, province-led assessment in Ontario. The participants in this study recognized the

importance the government and their respective school boards place on the results of the

assessment, and each principal takes their role in facilitating the testing seriously. However, their

respective viewpoints and experiences with EQAO were varied. For instance, Dylan argued that

EQAO is "not a true indicator of actual student performance and achievement; instead, it gives a

glimpse into each student on the day of the test." Similarly, Clare recognized there are many

aspects to student performance accountability and views accountability in Ontario schools as

being far more than just the annual EQAO assessment. She considers accountability for student

learning as something that occurs daily in classrooms, more formally through report cards during

the school year, and exists as the shared responsibility of the adults in the building:

> What we have in Ontario is the large-scale performance-based accountability through
> EQAO, and then we also have our day-to-day performance-based accountability
> assessments that we gather; report cards are also a form of performance-based
> accountability. So, it really is looking at what the student is learning and how are they
> demonstrating that learning, and the adults are also accountable for that, too.

Clare described formal large-scale accountability and day-to-day accountability as part of what

educators require to determine what students are learning. She indicated that providing these

opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning on an ongoing basis is the responsibility

of the education workers in the school and an element of good pedagogy. According to Clare,

provincial report cards are also a form of performance accountability: It is a formal record

distributed three times per year that indicates how students are performing on specific tasks and

ultimately progressing through the curriculum.

     How principals experience EQAO. The annual EQAO large-scale assessment is an

important consideration for all Ontario principals. How principals experience the impact of

EQAO appears to be largely determined by the emphasis placed on results by their supervisory

officers. There was consensus among participants that some, but not all, supervisory officers

were willing to listen and remain open to justification from the school principal should a decline

in results occur. Read, for example, can explain to his supervisory officer why his school's

EQAO results rise or fall:

> We are not in an American System, so if the scores don't go up, I can explain when they haven't. The goal was to have it [the scores] increase but then my English as a Second Language (ESL) population went up dramatically and you know, six of the kids were also in Home School Program (HSP). So, the larger conversation becomes understanding why the data is different this year and not a true representation of the class performance. If it was every year, it might be different and if the scores just kept dropping off, people would start to look more closely.

Read has the opportunity to engage in conversations following the release of EQAO results, and

if necessary, to provide explanations for declining scores; he can promote better understanding

by explaining the specifics from within the cohorts of students generating disappointing results.

Max also shared how he explained a decline in scores to his supervisory officer:

> He [supervisory officer] wasn't happy. There is no question about it, but I pointed out that four out of 26 Grade 3s were in our Home School Program for 50% of their school day in a setting that has a reduced student to teacher ratio, because aspects of their learning that cannot be met in a regular class setting. So, what can be expected from the results, really? Should I have to explain this? I don't think so.

According to Max, when students have been formally identified as needing additional academic

support—a small class placement and a modified academic program because they are not

working at grade level—it should be expected that there will be a decrease in scores. Clare also

described the need for justification as a source of frustration:

> It actually doesn't make any sense. So, we recognize challenges students are having meeting the expectations of their age appropriate grade level and we modify their program, and provide extra support through a smaller class placement for 50% of their school day. Then, Grade 6 testing comes along and we expect a student who is working at Grade 2 or 3 level to write alongside his or her age appropriate peers and then I have to justify why my school scores dropped? It's ridiculous. Each cohort of students going through is different with less or more intense needs. Some years will go up and others down.

Clare described being asked to justify a decrease in scores when there are identified needs within a particular cohort of students as unreasonable. For students to be placed into a HSP program, they have documented needs that cannot be met in a typical classroom. Consequently, the expectation that students will be able to perform at Grade level on provincial tests is ambitious.

Not every principal felt as though they could easily justify a decline in EQAO results. For instance, Deserae explained:

> EQAO testing results has become the be-all and the end-all for some superintendents and we [principals] need to make sure the scores go up and have a good explanation when they [students] don't make level three. It can be intimidating when you are asked to provide an explanation for every number.

Deserae feels intimidated when asked to account for each score and provide a rationale for each student who did not meet provincial standard. Jennifer shared a similar experience of having to justify EQAO results to a supervisory officer who did not understand what she described as "the clear limitations" of the data. Further, Jennifer emphasized that it is critical for supervisory officers, principals, teachers, the parent community, and society in general understand these limitations. Jennifer described an actual conversation with her supervisory officer where she attempted to show him that the data does not always provide an accurate picture:

> With my old SO, he used to come—we had a small cohort—and he would say, "Jennifer, the scores are not going up!" and I seriously had the best teachers and I would say to him, "Bill, we had 50 kids in Grade 3 and 12 of them were new last year, that is over one-fifth, and out of that 12, nine of them are in the HSP and are identified or are going to be identified and of that group in Grade 2, we had eight more that were new and several requiring ESL support, so you have to understand all of those factors to see that those kids haven't been with us since Kindergarten. But when we pull out the ones who have been, even if they are getting special education support, they are improving. It was ongoing pressure for me because I didn't really feel he really understood.

Jennifer noted some of the many factors that can impact EQAO results, particularly when there is a small cohort of students. For instance: students moving into the neighbourhood and students who are receiving ESL or special education support. She expressed feeling pressure when her

supervisory officer did not understand that the data only provides a snap shot of the cohort without any explanations.

Professional accountability. Professional accountability in education requires the attainment of knowledge and specialized skills that allow for entry into the profession. Upon entry, the professional is then required to maintain the professional standards of practice (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Pollock & Winton, 2015). Dwivedi et al. (1989) recognized the importance of professionalism within the public sector and emphasized that professionals must "balance the code of their professions with the larger context of protecting the public interest" and that public interest "should determine a professional's responsibility and accountability" (p. 7). As public servants, educators are held accountable both by themselves and by others for their actions and decisions (Bivins, 2006).

For Jennifer, professional accountability is a reflection of herself and how she models and encourages leadership in her school. She recognized the responsibility elementary principals have for setting the tone for the school site and the importance of being viewed as an active member of the team by supporting the teachers on her staff in their work:

> In general, I think the principal's role necessitates that you have to set an example of expectations, while being part of the team. You need to be at the table and you have to learn with the staff and be there as a partner. You set the direction based on what you learn from and with the staff, students, parents, and community.

Jennifer feels obligated to be accountable to all people within the school environment. She expressed a deep commitment to performing in a way that supports the needs of all adults and learners in the school.

During interviews, there were many instances where principals shared feeling conflicted by what they believed they should be doing versus what they were required to do as a result of bureaucratic accountability expectations, which is a part of their professional accountability. For

instance, Henry described being forced to prioritize some aspects of his work, which he believes

infringes on what he is accountable to perform:

> It is busy and the paperwork is time-consuming and there are times when they take
> precedence over the other happenings in the school that I should focus on, like
> instructional leadership for my staff and being more present in the school.

Henry's statement addressed the competing forms of accountability that principals must navigate

in their work. While Henry feels he should be providing instructional leadership to his staff to

improve classroom instruction, he is bound by another form of accountability that takes

precedence. Creating environments that lead to improved learning outcomes is an important

consideration for all educators. Dylan also shared an example of how competing accountability

systems have caused him to approach his work in a different way than his own professional

accountability would suggest:

> What does this [paperwork] have to do with me being in classrooms making sure that
> students move from level 2 to 3? Well, indirectly it does, but on a general level, no it
> doesn't. But I need to make that more important than the other. I get more emails about
> the safety of my building and things I have to watch for from the board than I do about
> how the board can help me move kids from level 2 to 3. Ten to one! I am a building
> manager far more than an instructional leader.

Dylan's desire to focus on creating accessible learning environments and improving the

academic achievement of the students in his school exemplifies his commitment to being

accountable to the profession. He also recognized that other accountabilities have to be

prioritized and that he is bound to fulfilling these expectations. Classroom walk-throughs are one

method principals use to become part of the learning environment and engage with students.

   Classroom walk-throughs. As part of professional accountability, the principals in this

study noted the importance of conducting regular walk-throughs to observe the teaching and

learning processes occurring in classrooms. The principals indicated that regular classroom visits

provide them with opportunities to offer support and identify any potential issues. For example,

Deserae emphasized her belief in this aspect of her work:

> I have an obligation and an interest to get out there and as much as possible to be outside and be in the hallways and classrooms. I wouldn't let a week go by without having gone into every classroom. That would feel wrong to me. This is not to say that I spend a lot of time, but I look for a lot when I go in and I can tell quickly because I know what to look for in terms of performance. And if something doesn't seem right then I need to act on it.

Deserae has a strong sense of commitment to student learning. She referred to constantly

assessing what is happening in classrooms when she conducts walk-throughs and feeling

confident in her ability to recognize quality teaching practices. As part of her commitment to

professional accountability, she acknowledged that any issues she observes will be immediately

addressed with the staff member in order to improve the situation and provide needed assistance.

Read shared a similar sense of commitment to teachers and students; he demonstrates this

commitment by ensuring teachers have what they need to do their jobs to the best of their ability:

> Resources that are relevant and reflect current thinking are essential. For example, books that focus on social justice issues and awareness are essential in today's classroom. I don't want teachers spending all of their time acquiring materials—there are other places for them to focus their attention, like on differentiating instruction and creating learning environments that meet the needs of all students. We work as a team and I try to be involved in classrooms as much as possible.

Read demonstrates professional accountability to his staff and school community by providing

materials that address 21st century thinking and are reflective of the differences in ethnicity,

socioeconomic status, and religion that exist within public education.

Jennifer's professional accountability specifically focuses on the academic achievement

of the student body. She acknowledged the faith she has in her teaching staff, but indicated that

she is always thinking about what else can be done to make learning more relevant to students

today:

> We are all educators and it is a shared responsibility among everyone at our school to provide engaging opportunities for learning and to share them. It is difficult for us [schools] to keep abreast of what our students are motivated by but it is our responsibility to figure it out.

Jennifer emphasized that professional accountability is shared among all educators with the common goal of enhancing student learning. She is confident that her teachers will uphold their own professional accountability: She supports the personal growth of her staff by allowing them opportunities for trial and error as they embark on new and innovative teaching strategies.

Legal accountability. Legal accountability in education refers to the requirement that schools adhere to legislation and laws. In general, legal accountability focuses on actions in the public domain that organizations are accountable to uphold (Dwivedi et al., 1989; Pollock & Winton, 2015). One of a principal's main responsibilities is ensuring that their school functions according to established laws and regulations (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Pollock & Winton, 2015).

Class distribution. The process of arriving at an approved staffing model for the school year is laden with legislated, policy-based guidelines. As the process begins, principals are given a framework that outlines the number of primary, junior, and intermediate classes that must be in place for September, based on student enrollment projections. For the model to be approved, principals, along with the school staffing committee, must place students into classes based on the allotted number of staff members. Occasionally, the board provides the option of an *exemption* class, which allows for a Grade 3-4 split to help ease the frequently larger junior class sizes. Suzanne described her frustration with the staffing processes that typically result in high numbers in the Junior classes to maintain the primary cap of 20 students:

> When we are given the framework and the school staffing committee meets, we often look at each other and realize there isn't much we can really do to make it work. Declining enrollment due to the revitalization project isn't helping either, but it is

> frustrating when you know that 38 students with diverse needs will be in such large classes. I feel like my hands are tied and I can't do what is in the best interest of our kids.

Determining the staffing model involves a nonnegotiable bureaucratic form of accountability: Principals must align precisely with the guidelines assigned by the board in order to have the model approved. Given that many aspects of bureaucratic accountability are based in law, there is a strong connection between these two forms of accountability. Throughout the class distribution process, principals must adhere to the guidelines presented for each school, regardless of whether the allocation of resources best suits the specific needs of the context. This is often a conflicting time for principals because they are bound by guidelines that state how many classes may be created in each division. While principals often return to their supervisory officers to request an additional staff member or the possibility of an exemption class, they may be denied because of resource constraints that result from insufficient funding. This presents a challenge because, even though principals know it is not in the best interest of the students, they are bound to follow directives of the board. In this way, legal accountability aligns closely with several aspects of moral accountability.

Moral accountability. All principals who participated in this study articulated a common theme: the struggle to find balance between participating in school life and ensuring their work—comprised of the mandated legal policies and procedures through bureaucratic, legal, and professional accountability—is complete. The principals expressed a strong desire to be present in the school hallways, attend learning engagements within the school, and be visible among the student body. Clare explained what she has to do for this to happen:

> Every day is such a myriad of things and there is never enough time to be everywhere and yet, some days my work can wait and I put it aside and being a member of the school community has to take the lead.

Rose, like Clare, described intentionally prioritizing moral accountability and setting aside other work:

> Every year I say to myself that I will be out of my office more, or I will do things differently to make sure I can attend more soccer games, or spend more time watching the students conduct science experiments. And there are times when it happens, but most times I see video or pictures and it isn't what I had in mind when I took this job.

Rose expressed that she was unaware the job of school principal would be so disconnected from students and the learning process, both in the building and through extracurricular activities. She expressed that each year she intends to be more present and involved, but despite her efforts it is not always possible.

Henry addressed another aspect of moral accountability: he discussed the importance of having learning opportunities for students that extend beyond the curriculum both within and outside the school day. His school is located in a community with low socioeconomic status, where there are few opportunities for students to be involved in positive activities after the school day ends. In order to increase opportunities for students, he addressed these concerns with his staff and together they brainstormed agencies and local organizations that could offer different opportunities:

> We had heard about the Hockey Education Reaching Out program and did some research and secured 10 spots for interested kids. They provide properly fitting equipment, free ice time, and instruction. The kids love it! We discovered that the Regent Park School of Music offers subsidized music lessons for students and even provides some grants for group lessons for kids who need it—and ours do. There are free swim times at a local indoor pool and through Parks and Recreation there are free swimming lessons to be had. We knew we needed to do more, and this was a start—and we are continuing to find more.

Henry articulated that focusing on the academics of his school population was not sufficient. He and his staff sought support from local agencies willing to support students from families with low socioeconomic status and brought opportunities to the school community.

Similarly, Deserae highlighted the importance of mental health education: she brings a

variety of age-appropriate programs into her school several times throughout the year. She also

organizes evening sessions geared toward parents on a variety of issues, such as postpartum

depression, anxiety, and clinical depression through the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health:

> Issues surrounding mental health are still taboo in many different cultures and we owe it
> to our students and their families to provide information and offer a window of hope.
> After this many years in education you have seen many things and to not recognize that
> families in your school are struggling with mental health issues, right now, you're
> kidding yourself.

Deserae indicated that the school-based sessions instigated many important conversations with

students, which was her original hope. She believes strongly in educating her school community

about important issues such as mental health and eliminating the stigma attached to it. Deserae

shared that she has passed on this information to many of her principal colleagues and they have

brought the programs to their schools as well. Sharing resources and ideas among colleagues is

one strategy that principals use to meet accountability expectations.

Intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is a positive force that contributes to increased

work engagement and a desire to help others (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009). Several of the

elementary principals in my study stated that intrinsic motivation is important because Ontario

schools have no policies in place that demand student improvement. As a result, Henry believes:

> …it is the intrinsic accountability that appeals to the professional and it says, "Oh my
> gosh, many of my kids are underperforming at level 2—what am I going to do about
> that?" As a principal, there is nothing formal that I can do. It would be that relationship
> piece, where it would be the principal saying to the teacher, "what can *we* do to improve
> the learning in your class and what are the extenuating circumstances, and mitigating
> factors that are preventing these kids from showing improvement?" As the principal, it is
> my job to motivate my staff to determine what is needed with their students and then I
> need to support teachers' learning to make this happen. Building the relationship is
> pivotal in order to make this happen.

According to Henry, intrinsic motivation is important for Ontario education workers because there are no formal punitive repercussions for results that fall below the provincial standard. Henry also believes, however, that by building positive relationships with teachers, principals can have a collaborative working rapport that will support positive changes in the classroom and ultimately improve student learning. He also spoke to being a professional, which highlights the connection between moral and professional accountability. Further, Tracey acknowledged that self-directed professionalism is a vital component of how education workers function at all levels. Tracey strongly believes that her motivation to be the best principal she can comes from within herself:

> The pressure to improve comes more from me. As long as I do what I am supposed to be doing to the best of my abilities and try to improve and learn and do better. There are so many other factors, but I am not worried about being fired from my job in any way. However, I want to do better because I don't want to let the kids down. And I think that it is a professional piece there too because I want to be as good as I can be in my job. So, I have never really felt that pressure, in all reality, from outside; I put it on myself.

Like Henry, Tracey believes intrinsic motivation to be an underlying trait of being a professional person—one who cares about their performance to enhance their own feelings of self-worth. She believes it motivates people to work hard and incite positive change. Tracey's motivation to be an effective principal is not based on fear or demands from her supervisory officer or her employer, the board. This was a unanimous theme among the principals, who indicated they do not fear losing their jobs based on performance; instead, something deep within themselves drives them to ensure their respective school sites are functioning optimally.

Just as teachers benefit from the support of their principals when looking to make changes to their educational practice, principals also require support and insight from other administrators to manage day-to-day pressures and balance the numerous expectations that often must be handled simultaneously. By establishing trusting relationships, principals have

opportunities to talk through the issues and challenges they are facing. Working collaboratively

with their staff members and principal colleagues is crucial when working toward meeting

various accountability expectations.

Market accountability. While only one participant shared an experience with market

accountability, it is still necessary to discuss this experience because it highlights the influence

that publishing EQAO results has on the residents of some Toronto neighbourhoods. Henry

shared a story about an incident that had occurred the previous school year:

> Last year, I received a call from a parent who was freaking out because in this area of
> town there are two Anderson Avenues…one with an "o-n" and the other with an "e-n".
> So, she bought a house on Anderson Avenue, which was not in my catchment, and she
> called the school and said she had just called the office and they had told her they were
> not within district and I said that's right…the other Andersen Avenue is within the
> district. She went on to say, "Well, my real estate agent said that I was in district! I can't
> have my kid go to that other school because their EQAO scores are abysmal! He needs to
> come to your school." So, I said to her, "I am really sorry, but we are a closed school
> because we don't have the space." She replied, "His future is gone!" Meanwhile, he was
> in Grade 2 at the time. She went on to say, "I am suing my real estate agent; I am calling
> a lawyer."

Henry's example highlights the gravity some parents place onto the results of EQAO testing:

buying a home in a school district that performs better on the large-scale assessment and

threatening legal action when an error had been made. Unsurprisingly, real estate agents use this

information as a selling feature to highlight certain properties. When I asked Henry if he felt

pressured by this type of reaction, he replied: "No, not at all. Some years the EQAO scores will

be higher than others and that is how it goes. Some people get caught up in the media and don't

realize what that test actually represents." He did not express feeling any pressure as a result of

the emphasis the local community placed on the assessment results.

Strategies Elementary Principals Use to Meet Accountability Expectations

An underlying theme of accountability is at the very core of principals' work. The principals who participated in this study consistently recognized that their work is changing because of increasing accountability expectations. According to Max, accountability and answerability in principals' work appears to be growing. Max described changes and additional responsibilities that have become nonnegotiable during the eight years he has been a principal. Max explained some of these expectations:

> Being a principal today is different than it was. I spend way more time tied to my desk dealing with more layers of work and I wear more hats. For example, working with facilities and architects and things I have no training with. Social workers, family law, psychologists, and then dealing with mental health concerns and working to get supports in place to reach a diagnosis and other health issues of students, teachers, and parents in the school community or when people have died and/or gone missing. I was trained as a teacher but I need to be conversant in many different areas today.

Max identified an increasing need for principals' to have knowledge that extends beyond expertise in teaching and learning. He believes that for principals to be successful in their work today, they must acquire a diverse range of skills that will enable them to function knowledgably in varying situations. Max's experience highlighted the changing nature of the job, which is becoming more focused on responsibilities that take time away from classrooms and students. As the school-based representative of the board, principals must oversee and be involved with all aspects of what is happening in their school. Max also expressed the importance of knowing how to manage when tradespeople, social workers, and psychologists enter the school site to provide services, which may contribute to additional paperwork and responsibility for ensuring various laws and policies are upheld.

Principals use different strategies to meet various accountability expectations. As professionals, many teachers kept abreast of research that provides updated approaches intended

to positively impact teaching practice. In many cases, these teacher leaders have a greater

awareness of what will constitute effective instructional leadership in both theory and practice.

Teacher leaders. Teachers who are willing to take on leadership responsibilities—based

on recognized skills that set them apart from their colleagues, which in many cases includes

school administration—are valuable assets. Many principals from the study acknowledged that

their skills may be somewhat outdated as a result of being out of the classroom for a number of

years, and as such, they seek the expertise of their teacher leaders. Suzanne described the ways

teacher leaders support school leadership in her school:

> Teacher leaders can be a lifesaver. They are critical and it works for us because our
> school values sharing and collaboration and let's face it, many of us [principals] have
> been out of the classroom for a while. For example, within the last few years, our two
> POR's have facilitated the professional learning teams at our school and have done a
> thorough job of it. For the most part, teacher leaders have earned the respect of their
> colleagues and they [the teachers] value their expertise. This also gives teacher leaders
> chances to mentor newer teachers and more experienced ones as well, which in many
> cases is more relevant than coming from me.

Suzanne emphasized the importance of teacher leaders in her school: They facilitated

professional learning teams for their colleagues and provided the instructional leadership that she

did not have time to incorporate into her work day. She views their skills and support as a viable

option to help provide instructional leadership in her school. In addition, she recognized the

contribution teacher leaders make to professional accountability by providing mentorship to new

staff members.

Prioritizing and delegating. Elementary principals manage numerous tasks based in

bureaucratic accountability on a daily basis. Clare addressed the limited amount of time

principals have to complete their daily tasks, and identified the need for prioritization in her work

day. Clare realizes that she is unable to accomplish every task that crosses her desk, and her

sense of professional accountability motivates her to delegate some aspects of her work to other

staff members:

> It's not that I am unable to do my job. I get what I need to done. There are just some things that I don't see the value in doing. Some of the paperwork that holds me accountable for little things, like a music inventory. They are going to send it to me every year and I am never going to find time to walk around the school counting instruments. I will pass it on to one of my teacher leaders and if the teacher chooses to do it, it will get done and if they don't, it doesn't. Simple as that. It's my time, and that is not the best use of it.

Clare illustrated that it is essential for principals to prioritize between accountabilities. She

provided an example of a yearly accountability-based task assigned to principals who have

instrumental music programs in their schools. While completing a music inventory is important,

she expressed that it is not the best use of her time. Clare also indicated that, due to time

constraints, some tasks may not be completed at all. Principals today are faced with so many

different accountabilities that they must make decisions about where to focus their attention.

Consequently, some principals consider tasks that are not policy-based to be discretionary, given

that there are no significant repercussions for noncompletion. In her statement, Clare

acknowledged that principals have a choice to complete certain aspects of their work. She also

affirmed that seeking support from members of her teaching staff has the potential to help her

meet accountability expectations: When Clare manages the situation and delegates the task to

another teacher, her own professional and moral accountability remain intact.

Challenges Elementary Principals Face to Meet Accountability Expectations

As previously mentioned, the work of elementary school principals has changed

profoundly over the last few decades. The pervasiveness of accountability in education has

continually increased: Principals' work today is almost entirely based in accountability (Pollock

et al., 2014). The seven different forms of accountability outlined in my conceptual framework

impact the work principals perform each day. According to the principals in my study,

negotiating these different forms of accountability presents daily challenges.

Time limitations. Clare emphasized that there are days when the work of principals is

fast-paced; sometimes there is simply not enough time in the school day to address every issue

that requires her attention. Clare described days when, despite her best efforts, she is not able to

meet all of the accountability demands facing her:

> I am accountable for everything that goes on in my school, from teachers' performance to students' performance to other staffs' performance and of course to my own performance. Sometimes I am a coach, other times I am a mentor, and other times I am the boss, depending on what the person needs and the circumstances at that particular point with the staff. However, with myself, I am likely my toughest critic, although maybe not some days because some people can be harder. And for kids, I try to be what the child and their family needs at the time. So, certainly an advocate, someone the kids can count on, rely on, and trust and try to help them wherever possible. Time is the issue. There just isn't enough of it or me, it seems, to go around.

Like Clare, Rose expressed that the constraints of the school day and constant demands for her

time are an ongoing source of daily stress. Rose often feels as though she is letting people down

because it is impossible to do all that is required while being physically present for all aspects of

the school day:

> My staff comes to me, and it is important that I am present for them, and there are always situations with students that require my immediate attention. When parents come to see me, or call, I feel they deserve my attention also. Each thing that comes up can't be solved quickly. Sometimes it takes time and I owe it to each person to serve their needs to the best of my ability. When I can't I can sense their frustration and it doesn't leave me. There are a lot of evenings spent thinking about how I have not done enough.

In both cases, Clare and Rose felt compelled to provide support but were frustrated that not every

circumstance could be rectified immediately after it was brought to their attention. Given that

some situations arising during a school day are more time-sensitive than others, Clare and Rose

generally manage issues in a priority sequence.

Technology increasing principals' work hours. Rose indicated the necessity of finding

a balance between the expectations that principals must meet. Supporting staff as they strive to

create optimum learning environments is a priority for Rose, which often means she completes

much of her own work after the school day is finished. She explained that her time after school

hours is often spent reading hundreds of emails to fulfill her work responsibilities. According to

Rose, this is one of the few options she has in order to be present in her school for both staff and

students:

> My work day does not end when students and staff leave the building. My car is always
> the last in the parking lot and it is what it is. My day isn't complete without contact
> with kids because that is why I do this job. It isn't to sit at my desk. On a typical day, I
> receive hundreds of emails that need to be read and many of them have to be answered. It
> is not uncommon that I am also responding to the beeps from my Blackberry at 10 p.m.—
> it isn't ideal, but it is the nature of the work.

For Rose, accountability takes the form of electronic correspondence. While some of the emails

she receives are not pressing, they are all important to some aspect of her work. Read shared a

similar experience, and indicated that emails and telephone calls comprise a significant amount

of principals' time, even after they have left the building and are in their respective homes. Read

recalled one evening when he was out at a family birthday dinner and his young son asked him,

"'Dad, are you going to put your phone away?' I had to explain...Daddy was waiting for a couple

of emails for work that were important. And my wife wasn't happy, either." As the principal in a

challenging urban school where there can be numerous Children's Aid cases and other time-

sensitive issues involving the police, Read views these interruptions to family time as an

occasional requirement of his job:

> My work is not an 8:00 a.m.–5:50 p.m. job where I can just turn my phone off and walk
> away. Not at all. My day begins shortly after 5:00 a.m. with checking my emails and
> responding to anything that is pressing. Often I wake up in the night and I am thinking
> about work, too. It can be all encompassing. I aim to be at work by 7:30 a.m. and it is not

uncommon for there to be someone waiting—a teacher, my head caretaker, a parent—
with concerns. It is part of it. The same goes for the end of the day. My plan may be to
leave the building by 6:00 p.m., but it is not unusual for something to come up and I am
the sole administrator in my building. It can be a lot. Sometimes I struggle with it. It even
makes me wish I was doing this job before the Blackberry. Jim Balsillie [former CEO of
Research in Motion] has made life easier and yet, more 24-7.

According to Read, technology contributes to principals' inability to disconnect from their work

and creates challenges in his personal life. He implied that the amount of work expected of

elementary school principals has changed and technology can make principals' work nonstop.

Read realized it was crucial for him to find balance between his work and his family time:

At that moment, I knew it [Blackberry] was having a negative impact on my family when
my son looked me straight in the eye and let me know that I was there in body but that
was where it ended. And he was right… my mind was trying to figure out how I was
going to manage what was going to be a delicate reentry to school for a student in the
morning.

Read's work as a principal frequently detracts from his personal time, and board-issued

technology makes the separation of work and personal time more challenging.

Work downloaded to principals. Board restructuring has altered what is expected of

principals. According to Dylan, more work has been downloaded to the schools to manage as a

result. This change has made principals responsible for tasks that were previously handled

centrally at the board level:

The role has changed in that more is downloaded onto the principal. In years past, if a
teacher was having difficulty in a particular subject area I could call a consultant. They
would work and coteach with the teacher, and there were all sorts of wonderful
supportive things happening. And now there are not nearly the supports available to
influence teaching practice. So, if a teacher is having problems, the coaching for that
teacher must come from me. In the same way, when a student arrives who needs support,
I'd call and the board would send us someone over, even temporarily, until something
permanent was put into place. Now, if I have a child with special needs and we don't
have the staff available to support this particular child and he gets aggressive every day,
he comes to me and I need to be with that child. So, when this is the case, I am not able to
be in classrooms nor am I available to work on developing math teaching strategies with
staff to support student learning. There is only a limited amount of time during the day.

Dylan described the impact these additional responsibilities have on his work day and how they

diminish the amount he is able to accomplish. While principals may intend to provide teaching

and learning support, they are often caught between conflicting responsibilities for student safety

and increasing levels of accountability.

Principals' work is unpredictable. Certain aspects of principals' work are predictable—

for example, compliance work—but much of their work is not. Principals' work tends to vary

based on the events of the day and what presents as being most urgent. According to Henry,

remaining flexible and being prepared for anything is essential for principals:

> At any moment, my plan for the day could change. Anything can happen: a parent issue
> that requires my consulting with others, a critical issue with a student that may take hours
> to investigate, an accident, a building issue, the police, Children's Aid, student and
> teacher issues…it could be anything and you have to go with it. My days are spent
> putting out fires, then I look at my watch and realize I have done nothing that I planned to
> do today—and that's how it goes. But, then I'm behind and what I had planned to be
> involved in tomorrow may have to be changed based on how time-sensitive what I
> missed today was. Everyday I feel behind and I'm always running to catch up. And I'm
> not the only one…my colleagues are in the same boat.

Henry frequently feels behind because the unpredictable nature of his work takes him away from

what he originally plans for his day. As a result, Henry often has to cancel other planned events

to complete time-sensitive missed work.

Supports Elementary Principals Use to Manage Accountability Expectations

The term *supports* in this context will refer to anything or anyone that helps principals

meet the challenges of managing multiple accountability systems in their work. The elementary

principals in this study believed that finding supports to help them meet their accountability

expectations is essential. The principals felt strongly that there are too many different

responsibilities to manage in isolation and that supports enable them to fulfill the different

aspects of accountability with greater success.

Relationships with colleagues. The principals who participated in this study all highly value their relationships with fellow principals, who offer firsthand experience on how to manage difficult circumstances, provide emotional support, and share resources to save each other time. They each find value in networking opportunities and remain in close contact with several colleagues. Often, these colleagues turn into friends.

Having strong collegial relationships with fellow principals is important for Dylan: he can consult on specific situations, ask advice, and seek sympathy. He also stressed that knowing who to call based on the nature of the situation is highly important:

> A part of it is knowing who to call and that there are lots of people out there with the experiences who can assist. Experience has taught me this. While some people have one phone-a-friend or two phone-a-friends, depending on the issue I could nail out exactly who to phone to get the answer, so the stress is going away quickly. This means I am not freaking out trying to get an answer or end up getting 20 different answers. It is knowing who that right person is for the right issue, or who to call to make sure I get to the right person, because it is a big board and there are lots of layers to it. And you may think that something falls into one category and it doesn't because it is something totally different. It is also important to not be afraid to ask the questions and on the flip side, it is also being confident enough when something isn't really a big deal. The people around you might perceive things to be huge but when you actually put it into perspective you can manage and deal with it and it is not an immediate thing—lots of stuff can be put on the shelf for saner times.

According to Dylan, it is necessary for principals to be aware of the complexity of situations when determining who to call. Regardless of uncertainty, he emphasized the importance of reaching out, asking questions, and also being able to look at a situation and determine whether or not it must be dealt with immediately. Dylan emphasized that experience makes the job easier, but it is still essential to have a broad range of contacts that can be trusted to give accurate direction and information.

Similarly, Suzanne emphasized the value of having a group of trusted colleagues as a resource when dealing with the challenges that often accompany accountability-based decision-

making. She also recognized the importance of sharing strategies and seeking the opinions and

insights of others when required. Suzanne relies on the teacher leaders in her school because they

often maintain closer connections with the other staff members and have social capital within the

building:

> My colleagues for sure. There are so many quick decisions that need to be made
> throughout every single day. For this, looking to our teacher leaders is critical, too. Our
> environment is fairly collegial. If there has been a strategy that has worked, we are
> encouraged to share what you have learned to gain the "most good" from the learning and
> to build capacity. We have terrific support through our senior admin. And we have
> talented consultants, albeit fewer, and success breeds success.

Suzanne provides opportunities for her staff by seeking expertise from other school board

employees who have particular areas of specialization. She believes creating successful

situations is highly important, and these may include supporting teachers by having a consultant

visit the school, or seeking guidance from the senior administration in her board, as required.

Henry placed similar importance on having a group of trusted colleagues who act as

critical friends. He believes these relationships allow principals to support each other by sharing

ideas and strategies to manage accountability expectations:

> I think one of the best supports is a sense of team, whether it be with the staff from your
> school or other colleagues. I've always had friends that I have worked with. In fact, I
> actually have a good friend who works in the Catholic board, which is great because
> sometimes this provides me with a different perspective.

According to Henry, having a trusted group of colleagues creates a beneficial support network

when making difficult decisions. These colleagues can be from their own school, from other

schools, and even from different school boards. Henry noted that it can be especially

advantageous when these critical friends are from different school boards because they can

provide different perspectives. He also emphasized the importance of developing connections

with the people who work in his school and having confidence in their professionalism.

Experience and reputation. Deserae's years of experience are a tremendous asset as she

navigates different accountability expectations. She believes she has gained credibility from her

reputation as a professional who attempts to work through issues in her own school before

seeking assistance from the board:

> Sometimes they are a source of support, yes. It really is about knowing people. And knowing what they know and what they don't know. If I really needed an SNA [Special Needs Assistant], I could phone someone in a position of power with whom I share a mutual respect. They would know I have already tried A-Z and I am not someone who is just picking up the phone saying Johnny has just kicked someone for the first time—we have done a lot to work with the situation and so, yeah, I have been around long enough that I have a good network from around the board and many of whom are in higher up positions, which helps.

Deserae acknowledged the advantage she gains from her well-established and respected

reputation in the board with her supervisory officers and principal colleagues. As a result of her

many years of experience, Deserae feels confident that, should a question or issue arise, she has

an established network of people in decision-making positions who will be able to provide the

assistance she needs. She also enjoys being a resource for principals with less experience:

> The other thing that is good is that I am able to be a resource to other people. So having them pick up the phone and call to ask me questions, this is good too because it forces me to reflect on my answer. This is where I go back to the policy and procedure piece where my own making of decisions is one thing, but when I am making suggestions to my colleagues it is based on policy.

Deserae's years of experience and success as a principal allow her to provide support to newer

principals, and means she requires less support than she did at the beginning of her career.

Despite her experience and trust in what she has learned through her years as principal, however,

she continues to seek clarification from the policy and procedure link on her school board's

website for principals and encourages other less experienced principals to do so as well. For

Deserae, acting as a resource to newer principals to contributes to "making a difficult job less

nebulous and more concrete." Deserae finds working with newer principals positively impacts

her own practice because it creates opportunities for reflection on her own problem-solving

approaches.

Accessing support from outside agencies. While principals have certain mandatory

requirements they must meet, they also have agency and choice as well. Every principal who

participated in this study addressed accountabilities relevant to their specific school context,

based on the community where their school is situated. Finding a balance between these different

accountabilities and developing ways to manage them present an ongoing challenge. Read, for

example, believes bringing in programs is necessary, and he finds programs that will cover more

than one accountability-based issue at a time within his school. He believes in shared leadership

and empowers staff members to oversee partnership programs with independent schools and

other community agencies that have the potential to contribute to the academic support and

advancement of students, provide positive mentorship, and create opportunities for physical

activity. The Running and Reading program at Read's school, scheduled twice per week at

lunchtime, has been strongly supported by the parent community and several parents have

become involved with the 10-week program:

> The school community has high expectations of us—and they should. There are many
> academic gaps and lots of behaviour issues on the school yard, and before and after
> school, too. "What are you going to do about this?" is something I hear from parents of
> kids who have been on the receiving end of a recess issue. They have a point. What are
> we to do? Staff are on duty and yet, it doesn't stop the issues. So, we connected with a
> local independent school and started a Running and Reading program at lunch. It wasn't
> a big hit right off the bat, but it has caught on. Now, some kids who couldn't manage
> before can't wait to see their older buddy who spends 20 minutes reading with them and
> then they all go out for a 20-minute run. With some kids, I can say there has been a
> notable change in their behaviour.

Using support from community agencies has positively impacted the students in Read's school.

According to Read, one benefit of this program is the positive relationships that develop between

the students and their older mentors. He also observed that there have been fewer negative

interactions on the playground since certain students began participating in the program.

In another example, Rose brought the Youth to Youth program from the Right to Play

agency into her school to provide leadership for older students and structured play opportunities

for younger students. The focus of this program is to empower youth to collaborate and facilitate

games for younger students that inclusively promote fair play and a love of physical activity.

These leadership opportunities also allow students to identify problems in the school and develop

action plans to educate their peers. Rose believes that the entire school body benefits from such

programs:

> Outside agencies like Right to Play come into schools and provide excellent motivational
> training for students. They build self-confidence in our kids and make them feel part of
> the solution through leading positive play with younger students who either don't have
> anything to do at recess and end up creating issues, or the ones who haven't made friends
> in their classes. It also creates opportunities for making new friends that otherwise might
> not have happened. From the office perspective, it is positive because we need to keep
> our suspension numbers down, and by working at creating community here and making
> school a place where kids feel safe and included…they want to be here. We are hopeful.

Read and Rose both identified benefits that come from involving outside agencies in schools. In

both of these circumstances, the principals wanted positive experiences and mentoring that

would ideally translate into positive change in their students. Both principals believe increasing

physical activity and providing opportunities for positive play, as well as ensuring academic

support and fostering leadership skills, improve student learning and build self-confidence.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings from my four research subquestions: (a) How do

elementary school principals understand accountability in their work? (b) What strategies do

elementary principals use to meet accountability expectations? (c) What challenges do

elementary principals face attempting to meet accountability expectations? (d) What supports

need to be in place for principals to meet work-place accountability expectations? The elementary school principals who participated in this study described their circumstances with passion and, at times, regret that they were not able to do more for their schools because of time constraints and the need to prioritize certain processes over others. While participants acknowledged feeling bound by policies, they shared a strong sense of commitment to serving their school populations and accepted upholding policy as part of the job. This included striving to find a balance between the multiple accountabilities mandated by legislated policies and board initiatives while creatively incorporating aspects of moral accountability. By accessing supports, principals successfully developed strategies that enabled them to meet diverse needs within their schools. In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings from my research subquestions.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

In this chapter I present my analysis of how principals manage multiple accountability expectations in their work (Pollock & Winton, 2015); I interpreted my findings by looking at the lived experiences of the participants in my study. I have organized the tensions surrounding managing multiple accountability expectations into four categories: (a) bureaucratic accountability dominating principals' time, (b) the impact of technology, (c) competing forms of accountability, and (d) accountability and intrinsic motivation. Within this chapter, I refer to my conceptual framework and the different forms of accountability that comprise principals' work and discuss how principals' work is changing (Pollock et al., 2014).

Changes to Principals' Work Resulting from Increased Accountability

The work of Ontario elementary school principals is complicated by multiple forms of accountability. According to the participants in this study, prioritizing the issues that arise in their work is both necessary and challenging. Striking a balance between the forms of accountability that are integral to professional success "forces principals to juggle competing demands" (Pollock & Winton, 2015, p. 8). The principals in this study identified this juggling act as a significant challenge because their decisions impact all aspects of how their schools function: Their actions and choices directly impact the lives of hundreds of people each day. According to the data, for principals to be successful they require support from colleagues, supervisory officers, and teacher leaders from within their respective schools. The principals also found it advantageous to involve outside agencies and professional resources in their schools as a way to manage the accountability expectations in their work.

Ontario Principals' and Work Intensification

Over the last few decades, there has been a notable increase in the demand and complexity of principals' work, which is collectively making the work more stressful (ATA, 2014). The work of Ontario's elementary school principals is laden with accountability (Pollock et al., 2014; Pollock & Winton, 2015) and not surprisingly, the participants in this study felt they were constantly working at a deficit and attempting to catch up. Workplace stress resulting from increased workload and pressure has the potential to create feelings of burnout (Pollock et al., 2014), which is emerging as a significant issue. As principals contend with increasing demands from all directions, "it is inevitable that principals will struggle more compared to the past" (Ozer, 2013, p. 386). According to Maslach and Jackson (1986), "burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment" (p. 1). Considering the continuous struggle facing principals as they juggle multiple accountabilities (Pollock & Winton, 2015), the increase in burnout is not surprising. In fact, the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) report a notable increase in the number of principals accessing the Long-Term Disability (LTD) services reporting that "Psychiatric disorders (stress, anxiety) now account for 50 percent of the cases on LTD" (CPCO, 2009, p. 8). While my participants did not share any personal information regarding medical interventions, the majority expressed experiencing stress as a result an increasing workload and the extension of the work day into their personal time—as Henry mentioned, he felt as though he was always behind and was constantly trying to catch up. Thus, there is reason for concern that principals may not be able to continue working at their current pace for an extended period of time. This apprehension is supported by the OECD (Moorman, Nusche, & Pont, 2008): "there is growing concern that the role of school principal designed for the industrial age has not changed enough to deal with the

leadership challenges schools are facing in the 21st century" (p. 29). Principals work extremely hard and they are often the last to leave the school at the end of the day. Continuous workplace stress may deter other aspiring leaders from leaving the classroom and moving into school administration. Similarly, principals may decide to move back to the classroom or seek other employment within education because working as a school principal consumes too much of their personal time.

A *Globe and Mail* article from 2014 challenged the assumption that principals are primarily disciplinarians and highlighted the reality and complexity of principals' work. In their article, education reporters Caroline Alphonso and James Bradshaw indicated the number of teachers interested in moving into school administration was declining. They emphasized that 21st century principals must "ensure that their school scores highly on standardized tests" (p. 1), which was not a consideration for Ontario principals in the 1990s. The work of elementary school principals was not less demanding 20 years ago; rather, what principals contend with today are the job requirements of two decades ago with the added responsibility of performance-based accountability. As a result of these changes principals are often conflicted between what is significant to the school community and the expectations of their respective school boards and provincial government (Wallin, 2008).

Currently the only formal training principals receive is the two sections of the Principals Qualification Program and various board-mandated training sessions. This may be changing, however, as some school boards now require aspiring leaders to complete a Master's degree. Similarly, the Ministry of Education has recognized that people moving into the role of principal need more support; the Ministry has adopted a mentor/mentee process that has proven mutually beneficial to both experienced and newer principals. This process has "motivated experienced

principals who were also on steep learning curves with new system initiatives" (Robinson, 2011, p. 24) while also supporting principals new to the field.

Tension One: Bureaucratic Accountability Dominating Principals' Time

Principals' work is driven by layers of accountability that structure how schools must function, and there are many mandatory, policy-based aspects of this work (Pollock et al., 2014). There was consensus among the principals of this study that supervisory officers, the board, and the Ministry of Education place too much emphasis on bureaucratic forms of accountability, including whether or not the health and safety bulletin boards were displaying current information rather than ensuring classrooms were meeting the specific needs of students. While the principals did not minimize the importance of staff compliance training and maintaining a safe school site for all members of the school community, they felt conflicted because this focus on bureaucratic accountability means they cannot prioritize other important aspects of their work. Unsurprisingly, the participants were deeply concerned about future student learning and well-being. Principals' work in schools is critical to setting the tone and school culture, and this complicated role is directly influenced by the increasing demands of the school community and the public. As mentioned earlier, Pollock et al. (2014) discovered that principals spend approximately 59 hours working per week; their findings also suggest that the majority of principals' time is spent engaging in managerial tasks, when 82% would prefer to spend more time working as an instructional leader within their school than the approximately five hours currently available to them. Thus, a tension is created between what principals feel they should be engaged in during the school day and the heavy focus of their work on bureaucratic accountability-based tasks.

Limited opportunities for instructional leadership. Lunenburg (2010) views an

instructional leader as a person who "helps the school to maintain a focus on why the school

exists, and that is to help all students learn" (p. 1). While the Education Act does not specify that

principals must provide instructional leadership within their school, it is implied by the Ontario

Leadership Framework (OLF) that they have a responsibility to ensure ongoing improvement:

"As instructional leaders, principals and supervisory officers embed direct involvement in

instruction in their daily work through teamwork with all staff focused on improved school and

classroom practices" (p. 7). Within the OLF, expectations for elementary principals are more

defined: It states that principals "will need to take personal responsibility for enacting most of

the leadership practices or working closely with a small leadership team to do so" (p. 8). While

this may have been a more regular occurrence a few decades ago, the participants in my study

felt they had very little time to provide this level of support because of their many other

responsibilities. According to Pollock and Hauseman (2016), urban Canadian principals "spend

two to three times more on administrative tasks than on tasks involving instruction because they

face a heavy administrative burden" (p. 230). In previous years, school principals were able to

look to Teaching and Learning Coaches and Instructional Leaders for support, however,

according to several participants cost-cutting measures have reduced the number of these

positions significantly. This restructuring at the board level returned the responsibility to

principals' and reduced the amount of access to support for new and struggling teachers. Pollock

and Hauseman (2015) discovered in their study, "Principals' Work in Contemporary Times," that

these changes have heightened principals' accountability and notably increased the demand for

principals' time. As a result, principals reported having less time to engage in instructional

leadership with their staff members because of increased paperwork and other bureaucratic tasks.

Inadequate resourcing, resulting from cuts to monetary funding, is negatively impacting how principals engage in their work—and ultimately, their effectiveness (Faubert, 2012).

The principals in this study expressed that they do not have much time to conduct professional development with their staff members; as a result, they consider seeking expertise both from within and outside the school to be a viable alternative. Although the principals reported that many central board positions have been cut, scheduling instructional leaders to come into schools to provide in-service remains an option to address teaching and learning deficits. Similarly, principals can address the lack of time they have for instructional leadership by using experienced teachers leaders who can provide support to their colleagues. Accessing these in-house resources not only builds capacity within schools, but also provides a cost-effective option for teachers' professional growth. Pounder and Merrill (2001) support this thinking: They argue that to serve the multitude of needs within schools and address the various accountabilities, school leadership should be distributed to move the school learning community forward.

Tension Two: The Impact of Technology

Pollock et al. (2014) discovered that many principals struggle with how technology blurs the boundaries between their lives at work and at home. Each school administrator receives a Blackberry (or some other comparable brand of smart phone) to remain connected to their schools when outside the building, which extends their work day into what would otherwise be personal time. An Alberta Teachers' Association (2014) study identified challenges that advancements in technology have created for principals today, as there "is an increasing expectation that principals will be constantly accessible, whether via email or phone or in person,

to perform various functions" (p. 20). Thus, the integration of technology into principals' work has made maintaining a work-life balance even more challenging (Pollock & Hauseman, 2016).

According to the elementary principals in this study, while technology has streamlined how principals work in the 21st century, it keeps them more connected to their work and diminishes personal and family time, which they find frustrating. For example, Read shared feeling conflicted between his family time and checking his Blackberry for emails. The expectation that principals should be accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week because they have a board-issued smart phone seemed to take an emotional toll on some participants, because it interfered with life outside of work.

Pollock and Hauseman's research (2015) highlights many of the challenging realities facing Ontario's principals today. A resounding "58.5% of principals identified a seemingly endless number of emails making them feel 'on call,' as a challenge in their work" (p. 3). The infusion of technology into principals' work has added another layer to their workplace accountability. The board-issued smartphones continuously connect principals to their school site through access to their email accounts and their assigned work phone numbers. One participant described the inclusion of technology and the subsequent expectations as "an electronic leash." Some of the principals believe smartphones contribute to work intensification because the phones give the board too much access to their personal time and adds to their work days.

Tension Three: Interconnectedness of Accountability Systems

In education, accountability systems are not mutually exclusive. Rather, there is an interconnectedness among the different forms of accountability that can make it difficult to determine where one ends and another begins. My analysis of the participants' responses has revealed that certain accountability systems are closely related, while other forms overlap and

compete. For instance, professional and moral accountability are closely linked because one can assume that a professional person could monitor his or her own actions through a sense of moral accountability. This line of thinking assumes that a professional person is also morally accountable, because they need to uphold standards of practice (Bivins, 2006). Similarly, many elements of bureaucratic accountability are closely tied to legal accountability, because much of principals' bureaucratic and administrative work is guided by policy and legislation. For example, principals must adhere to the legislation contained in the Occupational Health and Safety Act otherwise their schools can be closed down until the identified deficiencies are rectified.

All of the principals in my study felt that increased accountability has impacted their ability to complete their professional expectations. These increasing accountability expectations contribute to principals' work intensification: The principals often struggle to complete all aspects of their work during the school day while also remaining part of the school community. According to the OECD (Moorman, Nusche, & Pont, 2008), principals are experiencing stress that:

> results from the expansion and intensification of roles and responsibilities, from ambiguity and conflict raised in the new functions, from the pace of change and demands of managing others in change, from heightened accountability for results and public scrutiny… such stress may diminish principals' ability to do their best work and over time it can erode their commitment to the job. (p. 31)

The participants expressed feeling torn between meeting the expectations of the formal policy-based components of their work and the less formal but equally important and valued aspects of their work. For instance, the principals considered being available to support students and staff, establishing relationships with students, and being present to celebrate the various aspects of student learning as important aspects of their work. Many participants spoke about the

importance of fostering positive relationships with both students and staff, but also noted that

this interpersonal time often left other bureaucratic work incomplete by the end of the school

day. As a result, they must decide whether to make the time during formal school hours or take

time away from their personal time with family and friends. Many principals expressed "feeling

pulled between their work and their families" (ATA, 2014, p. 25) and not able to conduct their

personal lives with ease due to the demands of their work. All of the participants expressed this

sentiment—they felt there was not enough time to complete everything that was expected of

them. However, several principals confidently stated their commitment to home superseded their

work and proudly made a point of telling me that they would always prioritize their families.

These decisions were likely informed by a realization that their spouses and children must take

precedence because balancing all of their personal and professional expectations is impossible

for extended periods of time.

Tension Four: Accountability and Intrinsic Motivation

Ontario is not a high-stakes testing environment because potential job loss, school

closures, and sanctions are not a concern for Ontario's principals. However, there are still

challenges associated with managing multiple accountability systems. According to Adams and

Kirst (1999), many educational stakeholders consider accountability to be "a springboard to

school improvement" (p. 463). Fullan (2011) confirms this thinking and identifies what he

considers to be "the drivers" that lead to ongoing, successful change and increase opportunities

for improved student outcomes. He names intrinsic motivation as one of the critical components

for making positive changes in systems of education: "The drivers I am recommending create the

very fundamentals...learning and teaching become driven by the individual and collective

intrinsic motivation that has permanent staying power" (p. 18). As management figures at their

school sites, principals are responsible for encouraging each staff member to be accountable to the needs of their students and to foster a school-wide focus on improvement.

According to the OECD (Moorman, Nusche, & Pont, 2008), the expectations for principals have changed because "increasing accountability requirements put pressure on school leaders to produce documented evidence of successful school performance" (p. 26). The OECD also recognizes that this may, "substantially add to the paperwork and time constraints for school leaders because they are required to carefully record, document, and communicate school-level and student-level developments" (p. 26). The principals in my study are passionate about their work and committed to maintaining high standards in education. They recognize the impact that multiple accountability systems have on their time and they juggle many priorities to manage these different forms of accountability. Despite these challenges, the principals are motivated to continuously seek supports and strategies that will help them meet their professional expectations.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I interpreted the findings from my study. I began by looking at the data and describing how elementary principals currently view their work in schools. The principals in my study recognized that different forms of accountability drive their work and that their work has intensified. I organized the tensions that surfaced surrounding how principals manage multiple accountability expectations into four categories: (a) bureaucratic accountability dominating principals' time, (b) the impact of technology, (c) competing forms of accountability, and (d) accountability and intrinsic motivation. In the next chapter, I will present the implications for professional practice, implications for research in educational leadership, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter6: Summary, Assumptions, and Recommendations for Future Research

This study has explored how Ontario elementary school principals understand and manage competing accountability expectations in their work. My study conducted qualitative, semistructured interviews with 12 elementary school principals in Ontario. The participants described their work experiences, how they balance multiple forms of accountability, and how the expectations of their work has, and is, changing.

Summary of Study

How do Ontario elementary school principals understand and manage competing accountability expectations in their work? Ontario public elementary principals manage within the performance-based accountability system of education. By examining the experiences of the principals in this study, it is clear that they are deeply passionate about their work and extend themselves on a daily basis to fulfill the varying needs of the students and staff in their schools. The principals acknowledge the competing forms of accountability and they use their colleagues, teacher leaders, and outside agencies to manage the pressures they face. They also combine different accountabilities to deal with time constraints. My study also revealed that the role of elementary principals is changing—they are experiencing a significant increase in professional expectations. My research shows that one of the main contributing factors to these increasing work expectations is mounting levels of accountability. My findings also suggest that work intensification is taking a toll on family time and increasing principals' stress levels.

The changing demographics and diversity in Ontario's schools have created important challenges for elementary school principals. To create a welcoming school community that provides adequate learning opportunities for all students, principals must foster inclusive and

equitable learning environments. They must also recognize the needs of entire families, which

can necessitate aligning outside agencies for additional support.

Summary of Findings

This section presents a summary of my findings for each research subquestion.

**Research subquestion one: How do elementary school principals understand

accountability in their work?** The elementary principals in this study recognize that their work

is driven by multiple forms of accountability: bureaucratic, performance-based, professional,

legal, political, moral, and market accountability. The participants expressed that numerous types

of accountability must be managed in their work. All forms of accountability require their

attention and these can conflict because each involves different responsibilities. This makes the

work of elementary school principals increasingly challenging and complex.

**Research subquestion two: What strategies do elementary principals use to meet

accountability expectations?** The principals in the study stated that the strategies they use to

fulfill their work-place responsibilities help them meet accountability expectations. The

principals recognized prioritization and delegation as viable strategies to circumvent time

constraints. Given that there is insufficient time for principals to conduct instructional leadership,

the participants described seeking in-school support from teacher leaders. Many of the principals

also acknowledged that, because they had been out of the classroom for many years, they are not

as conversant with current teaching and learning methodologies. Thus, teacher leaders who keep

abreast of developments in teaching and learning are a tremendous asset to principals. These

leaders also frequently organize and facilitate different programs and initiatives that support

aspects of moral accountability in schools.

Research subquestion three: What challenges do elementary principals face meeting accountability expectations? The participants identified time limitations as the most significant challenge they face in their work. There are often simply not enough hours in the day to complete all of their required tasks. The principals also stated that technology is increasing the length of their work day and blurring the lines between work and family time. Many principals believed that technology contributes to their work intensification because it prevents them from separating home and work life.

The principals saw the elimination of many central board positions as a tremendous loss because it took away needed resources. Previously, Instructional Leaders and Learning Coaches could be brought in to mentor struggling staff members. Without these resources, however, principals have the added responsibility of providing instructional support to struggling and/or newer staff members. The principals also find the unpredictable nature of their work challenging because their day can shift in a moment depending on what issues arise in their schools. The principals explained that, because their schedules keep getting pushed back, they often fall behind in their work.

Research subquestion four: What supports need to be in place in order for principals to meet work-place accountability expectations? The principals in this study agreed that their principal colleagues are vitally important: they can share firsthand experiences, strategies, relevant resources; they can provide emotional support and a sympathetic ear. They can also look to colleagues within their own school for support. Further, the principals benefit from having positive relationships with people who work in different departments—especially when they need information.

The elementary principals also saw their own experiences and good reputations as a form of support. They agreed that it is difficult to be a new principal coming into the role today; they are grateful that their experience helps them meet daily challenges. Many principals also saw their reputations as a form of support: They gain positive reputations because they are known to work hard and attempt to solve issues independently before turning to the board or their supervisory officers. The elementary principals also reported accessing outside agencies to meet the specific needs of their respective school communities. They emphasized that there are tremendous needs in schools today and outside agencies can help meet different accountabilities by providing specific information, training, and support as needed.

Assumptions

I made several assumptions within my research study. First, I assumed that the information the participants provided was true to their actual experiences and beliefs, and not what they believed was the "correct" answer, or what I wanted to hear. Second, I assumed that the participants would not simply state the board's position on the different topics. Instead, I assumed that each participant was confident that the ethics procedures in place would ensure anonymity and confidentiality, and would participate fully in the research.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study could be expanded and conducted with secondary principals to determine how accountability is managed at the high school level. It would be interesting to compare the findings from my research and analyze how accountability is potentially viewed and managed differently. A future study could look at how elementary principals in the independent school system view accountability, as it would provide insight into a privately-funded system of education. In particular, it would be interesting to discover whether market accountability is

more prominent in the private school setting and, if so, how it influences principals' work. It would also be interesting to see if different forms of accountability become more or less prevalent in the private school system. Specifically, a future study could examine how bureaucratic accountability influences the work of the principals and vice-principals in the independent school system, because they must navigate several different layers of school administration in addition to the Ministry of Education.

There is no indication that, going forward, policy-based accountability will be reduced. In fact, it is reasonable to assume that because new policies are currently being added to principals' myriad responsibility, the trend of downloading responsibility to principals will continue for years to come. That is, unless there is greater awareness at the board and the Ministry levels about the impact that work intensification is having on principals' well-being. My research has confirmed that principals feel conflicted: They want to be more involved in their schools, but feel unable to participate because of their administrative workload (ATA, 2014). Amending the Education Act to include instructional leadership as a component of what is expected of principals might resolve this ongoing tension between bureaucratic and moral accountability.

Implications for Professional Practice

The various universities and professional organizations that offer principal qualification programs should also provide a view into the realities of a career in school administration. Specifically, these programs should address work intensification and the frequently overwhelming and conflicting expectations that comprise principals' work. Doing so would allow future principals to further prepare and find facts, as well as increase networking opportunities so they can create future support networks. The OECD (Moorman, Nusche, & Pont, 2008) suggests that providing additional training and support for principals "promises to be

a highly cost-effective human capital investment" (p. 30) because of the large impact principals

have on their school environments and student learning. For this reason, the OECD argues

principals are "a key policy lever for educational improvements" (p. 30). Unfortunately, many

principals feel as though "they are constrained and confined to being small, frustrated cogs in a

larger educational machine" (Blakesley, 2012, p. 12). With increased awareness and recognition

of the conditions and circumstances influencing principals' work, however, the potential for

change is real.

Implications for Educational Policy

       The Ministry of Education should consider adjusting the Education Act to reflect the

realities of the Principalship. As it currently stands, the expectations for principals are quite

similar to those for teachers, which is not indicative of the actual responsibilities facing

principals. Another option would be to revise the Education Act to lessen the intensification of

principals' work and/or mandate in-built supports to help them manage increasing expectations.

Given the greater policy requirements and insufficient time principals have to complete their

work, the Ministry could also consider dividing the role of principal into two different jobs. The

"principal" would continue to oversee the teaching and learning processes within the building,

and an operations manager could supervise the maintenance of the school site. This would lessen

the impact of work intensification on principals.

       In addition, making the language of the Ontario Leadership Strategy and the Education

Act consistent would provide clearer guidelines and a defined job description for principals. As

Meyer (1993) importantly wondered: if school principals do not have a solid understanding of

what their work entails, how can they be held accountable if they make a mistake?

Finally, the Ministry of Education should seek regular feedback from principals to ensure they are aware of principals' needs and other areas of concern. A regular feedback system could lower the number workplace absences due to medical leaves, and prevent principals from leaving the profession.

Chapter Summary

In the final chapter of this thesis, I have presented a summary of the findings for each research subquestion, the assumptions of my study, recommendations for future research, and implications for educational policy and professional practice. Work intensification has changed the role of elementary school principals in the province of Ontario, and the structures within the system have not adjusted to help principals manage. However, the passion and resiliency and of these education workers empowers them to make adjustments and seek out supports and strategies that will help them meet the challenges facing the Principalship and continue to create optimum learning environments.

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Appendix A

Western Research

Research Ethics

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

Principal Investigator: Dr. Katina Pollock
Department & Institution: Education\Faculty of Education, Western University

NMREB File Number: 106716
Study Title: How Public Elementary Principals Manage Performance-Based Accountability Expectations
Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: July 24, 2015
NMREB Expiry Date: July 24, 2016

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol		2015/05/08
Other	Letter to Dr. Joanne Robinson	2015/07/06
Recruitment Items	Email	2015/07/06
Revised Letter of Information & Consent		2015/07/06
Other	Interview Questions	2015/07/06

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 IRB 00000941.

███████████████████████████████████   delegated board member

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

███

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Appendix B

July 6, 2015

How Do Principals Manage Performance Based Accountability Measures?

Interview Questions

Background:

1. Can you tell me about your professional career up to this point?

Probe for:
How long a principal? How long in current school?
Worked in another school board?
How long she/he was a teacher?
Professional development? (what kind, how beneficial, any connected to performance-based accountability?)

Elementary principals understand performance-based accountability expectations

2. Scenario:
"How would you respond to this scenario? An individual recently travelled to your region and has never heard of performance-based accountability. How would you explain this to them? And how would you explain your role within performance-based accountability?"

3. Understanding of performance-based accountability expectations

Probe for:
What is the purpose of performance-based accountability?
From what you know about performance-based accountability, how does it align with your values as an elementary school principal?

Strategies elementary principals utilize to manage performance-based accountability expectations

4. Can you tell me how performance-based accountability influences your work?

Probe for:
What current policies influence how you are accountable to your school and school community?
Do you see the role of principal changing due to the influence of accountability? If so, how? If not, please explain.

5. Has accountability changed during your years as principal?

Scenario:
"In the USA, many schools are teaching to the test in order to increase test scores. Do you think this is happening in Ontario? How would you explain the rationale for teaching to the test?

6. How do your Board's formal policies? Informal accountability policies/practices influence your work?

Probe for:
If 'teaching to the test' was happening in Ontario schools, do you think the Principals' would know? Why or why not?

Challenges principals experience as a result of accountability expectations

7. Can you describe for me some of the challenges you experience meeting the expectations of accountability in your school?

Probe for:
Influence on teachers
Pressure from parents/community (in support of/or against EQAO testing)
performance-based accountability

8. What supports exist that help you manage accountability expectations?

Probe for:
School Improvement Planning policy
Board Improvement Planning policy
Networking with your principal colleagues from other school
EQAO information/training sessions
Teacher leaders and their expertise
Access to Instructional Leaders and other resources from the Board
How does your school effectiveness plan tie in?

9. Is there anything else you would like to add or expand upon before we end this interview?

Appendix C

Dr. Joanne Robinson
Director of Professional Learning
The Ontario Principals' Council
███████ ████████████
██████

RE: Proposed study seeking to explore how public elementary school principals experience performance-based accountability expectations in their work

Dear Dr. Joanne Robinson,

My name is Carolyn Ball and I am a doctoral candidate from Western University working under the guidance of Dr. Katina Pollock. I am extremely grateful that you are willing to publish information regarding my study, as part of the recruitment strategy for my research, in the weekly email blast to Ontario principals.

My intended area of research seeks to explore how public elementary school principals understand and experience performance-based accountability expectations in their work. Ideally, I would appreciate the opportunity to conduct face-to-face interviews with approximately 25 principals who are working in the Greater Toronto Area. The inclusion criteria for this study are as follows: each elementary principal must have at least five years of experience working in the role of principal and have had at least one full year working in their current school. The principals' must also have a full-time vice-principal working with them at their school. The exclusion criteria for this study are as follows: elementary principals with less than five years of experience working as a principal, principals with at least five years experience and have been at their current school for less than one full year, and principals who have at least five years of experience and more than one year of experience at their current school, but do not have a full-time vice-principal. Principals from the secondary panel would also be excluded from this research.

I truly appreciate your time and support,

Sincerely,

Carolyn Ball
Ed. D Candidate, Year II

Appendix D

How Elementary Principals Understand and Manage
Performance-based accountability Expectations

LETTER OF INFORMATION – Revised July 6, 2015

Introduction

My name is Carolyn Ball and I am a Doctoral Candidate at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am conducting research into how public elementary school principals understand and manage performance-based accountability in their work and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study

The aims of this study are to investigate how elementary principals understand and experience performance-based accountability expectations and how they may be influencing your work.

If you agree to participate

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to meet with the researcher for one 45 – 60 minute face-to-face interview at a conveniently agreed upon location. The interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy. Objecting to the audio recording would negate participant eligibility from the study.

Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information, which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. The data obtained in this study will be stored separately from the main data set on a separate hard drive that is encrypted with BitLocker. All data will be kept for five years in accordance with Western University policy. After five years, the laptop and memory stick will be wiped and reformatted and all paper copies of the data will be shredded

Risks & Benefits

There are no known risks to participating in this study. However, participation in this study may provide opportunities for reflection on your work and a heightened awareness of how other principals may or may not be experiencing performance-based accountability.

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.

Questions

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University at ▬▬▬▬▬ or ▬▬▬▬▬. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Carolyn Ball at ▬▬▬▬▬ or Dr. Katina Pollock at ▬▬▬▬▬ or by telephone at ▬▬▬▬▬.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

How Public Elementary Principals Understand and Experience Performance-based accountability Expectations

Researcher: Carolyn Ball - Doctoral Candidate
Principal Investigator: Dr. Katina Pollock

CONSENT FORM

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

Name (please print):

Signature: Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:

Appendix E: Interview Guide 2

1. Please tell me about your career in education up to this point.

2. Please tell me about how you view accountability in your work?

3. Do you face any challenges meeting accountability expectations?

4. What supports, if any assist you with meeting accountability expectations?

5. In your opinion, has the role of the elementary school principal changed since you first became a principal? If so, how?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Probes:

Could you please describe for me a situation where you have experienced this?
Why do you think that?
Please tell me more about that.
How do you know?

Vitae

Name: Carolyn Ball

Post-secondary   The University of Western, Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada
Education and   2013-2016   Doctor of Education (Educational Leadership)
Degrees:

Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada
2000-2003   Master of Education (Curriculum Studies)

The University of Maine at Presque Isle, Presque Isle, Maine, USA
1996-1997   Bachelor of Science in Education

York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
1991-1995   Honours Bachelor of Arts (Specialized English)

Related Work   Elementary Teacher
Experience: 1998-present   Toronto District School Board

Position of Responsibility
2009-present   Toronto District School Board