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# An Examination of the Leadership Practices Related to School Culture and Organizational Learning in a Consolidated Grade 7-12 School

Krista E. Dalzell

*The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor

Dr. Augusto Barrera-Riveros

*The University of Western Ontario*

Graduate Program in Education

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### Abstract

This study aims to characterize the leadership practices related to the promotion of organizational learning and a single school culture in an Ontario, public-funded consolidated grade 7 -12 school. The research adopts a qualitative single case study approach that uses semi-structured interviews with a variety of current and former leaders in the school board, field notes and archival and current board correspondence. A brief examination of literature on educational leadership, school culture, and organizational learning will provide the necessary conceptual framework to identify and understand the practices that sustained the consolidation of 7-8 grades from various local K-8 schools and one 9-12 school into a large 7-12 school. Eacott's (2013) conceptualization of leadership as a social practice which takes into consideration the social context in which leadership practices emerge, aligns with the purpose of this study. It is the intent of this research project to provide rich descriptions of the leadership processes that have taken place during the consolidation process and to offer further recommendations for similar processes in grade 7 -12 schools across the province.

*Key terms:* school culture, organizational learning, leadership, school consolidation

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014), Ontario's education system is committed to the success and wellbeing of every student and child. A dedicated focus on policies, resources and strategies associated with improving student learning has been at the forefront of Ontario education for more than a decade. Some examples of initiatives associated with this overarching goal include: the literacy/numeracy strategy, the Ontario leadership strategy, full-day kindergarten, the enhanced integration of education and child-care as well as the early years' framework (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). All of these initiatives have been implemented to address the goal of student learning and to reduce achievement gaps in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Running parallel to the province's achievement focus has been the reality of declining school enrolments and the implications that these have on the accessibility of services and resources necessary for supporting student learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). In light of Ontario's declining enrolment, school boards are rethinking how they can support students with less money (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

How school boards respond to the challenges of improving student learning and declining school enrolment reflects their idiosyncratic context. The hard reality for some school boards is that they must consolidate or restructure schools in order to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Organizational restructuring of consolidated schools can be challenging for students, parents, educational staff, and administrators. How leaders lead through these times of

transition and how organizational learning is developed in these newly formed schools, plays an important role in developing a culture that supports student learning and well-being.

Some boards are responding to less funding as a direct result of declining enrolment by consolidating or closing underutilized schools and by creating grade 7-12 schools. One of the significant challenges that leaders face in newly formed grade 7-12 schools is the vast differences between elementary and secondary school cultures (Shaw, 1990). Differences such as student age, curriculum instruction, delivery, and assessment, as well as the distinctive elementary and secondary organizational cultures (Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Shaw, 1990) create challenging circumstances for teachers and school leaders. Lieberman and Miller (1984) noted that secondary school cultures are more conducive to the development of subcultures and greater differentiation due to teachers identifying themselves by the subject matter field and, therefore, by the inherent emphasis on subject-based departments. In comparison, elementary schools have fewer opportunities for the development of sub-cultures due to less differentiated school structures (Shaw, 1990).

When two different cultures, secondary and elementary, come together, there is an expectation from the board that the new consolidated school will create a single culture that reflects grades 7-12. Provincial and board policies, however, make it challenging for leaders to support a single school culture successfully: ministry and board initiatives and policies that are elementary or secondary specific, such as curriculum implementation, transition planning, and differentiated expectations for professional activity days that require elementary and secondary staff to focus on panel specific activities, are just a few



of the roadblocks in promoting a single school culture and in developing organizational structures that support a grade 7-12 organizational culture. Schools require policy for functionality and when there is limited policy for 7-12 schools, policy enactment becomes challenging for leaders. Currently, there are no Ontario Ministry of Education initiatives or policies that provide any direction on how grade 7-12 schools are to operate, leaving it up to individual boards and leaders to develop strategies and implement practices that promote organizational learning and the development of a grade 7-12 school culture. Policy development and enactment then becomes heavily contextualized at various levels by boards, schools and policy actors result in varying organizational structures in consolidated grade 7-12 schools. While working to meet the diverse learning needs of Ontario students in a climate of declining enrolment and decreased funding, the absence of ministry policies and initiatives to address the growing number of grade 7-12 schools creates a significant void.

An examination of the leadership practices in a grade 7 -12 school in Southwestern Ontario will provide the basis for this exploratory case study on school consolidation and restructuring. An exploratory case study is relevant for this study as it focuses on a single phenomenon and explores situations where there have been no clear, single set of outcomes, in this case, leadership practices in a single grade 7-12 school (Yin, 2003). A specific focus on leadership practices related to two key phenomena associated to the 7-12 consolidation and promotion of a single school culture and organizational learning, will be explored.

## **Problem Formulation**

### **Significance**

Ontario's demographics are changing and the education system is responding by making some adjustments to reflect these changes. Since 2002-2003, declining enrolment has primarily occurred at the elementary level (Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). However, as the projected small elementary cohorts progress into high school, what has been the norm for elementary schools will become the norm for high schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The decline in enrolment has largely been driven by a decline in the number of school-aged children in Ontario. Long-term demographic projections indicate that this trend is likely to continue well into the next decade. "The distribution of students across the province will also change" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4).

Supporting Ontario's publicly funded schools is both a provincial commitment and a priority. However, with the diversity of student learning needs increasing and the number of students decreasing, the funding structure or "funding formula" that currently exists must be revisited to meet the changing demographics of Ontario. Ontario invests more than \$20 billion per year on education to support 1.9 million students (People for Education, 2015). Education requires large amounts of funding and how the province prioritizes money to support student achievement sheds further light on how school leaders must respond and adapt to these changes.

Despite the province's significant investment in education, Ontario schools still lack funds, and boards are facing difficult choices times as they try to adequately support the province's top four priorities: achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-

being and enhancing public confidence as outlined in *Achieving Excellence*, Ontario's renewed vision for education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Declining enrolment means less money for school boards to meet the diverse needs of learners and to continually improve student achievement. "With more school boards seeing lower enrolment, Ontario's education system must adapt and evolve so that the objective of improving educational outcomes for all students continues to be met" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 54).

Some boards "resize" in order to relieve these pressures. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009), the term resizing reflects a school board's commitment to realigning and reallocating resources without compromising student learning. Although there is literature that discusses school consolidation and configuration in general, there is limited research regarding the reorganization of schools into grade 7-12 schools. Howley (2002) suggests, "that research surrounding the benefits of specific grade-span configurations is seriously wanting" (par.11).

Research focusing on leadership practices in grade 7-12 schools is equally limited. What makes grade 7-12 schools unique is their organizational structure that works to meet the learning needs of two distinct learning groups – grade 7-8 students and grade 9 -12 students. The results of this study will add to the scarce research about restructuring using a grade 7 -12 model. A core focus on practices of leaders and educators provides the foundation for exploring the process of how school culture and organizational learning structures are developed in grade 7 -12 schools. This research has significance for policy development for school boards looking to integrate two or more schools and to create a 7-12 school. In particular, this study will provide a description of

the reorganization process of schools that adopt a grade 7 -12 model and will identify some of the key leadership practices associated with this reorganization.

### **Context of the Research**

The case study school is one of two grade 7-12 schools located in the same city that has been consolidated for 13 years. The two grade 7-12 schools were each created in existing high schools. The case study school has a long history of being a grade 9-12 school prior to its consolidation, having been the first high school established in the city in the mid 1850's.

At the time of consolidation, 10 of the current schools in the city were impacted. Two schools were closed and K-6 students were redistributed to a school that was close to where they lived. The two 9-12 schools became 7-12 schools and based on where grade 7 and 8 students lived they were assigned to one of the new grade 7-12 schools. Staff from the K-8 schools was given the opportunity to move with their students to the newly formed grade 7-12 schools or to the school where their students had been accommodated.

My interest in grade 7-12 schools and the leadership within them is driven by my own experiences in a newly formed grade 7-12 school. I am a teacher with 18 years of teaching experience in Ontario which spans from Kindergarten to grade 8. I have spent most of my teaching career working with grade 7 and 8 students. When the K-8 schools in my region underwent the review process to determine the consolidation or closure, it resulted in one school closing, the existing K-8 schools becoming K-6 schools and the local 9-12 high school becoming a 7-12 school where I took a teaching position as a grade 7/8 teacher. Having experienced firsthand the feelings of the community, students

and staff when the consolidation process occurred, and the year of transition to prepare for the newly formed grade 7-12, I needed to know how other grade 7-12 schools had made the transition.

My interest was fueled by the idea of whether two schools, 7-8 and 9-12, could ever truly become a grade 7-12 school where students and staff were perceived as one, as opposed to a school facility comprised of two smaller schools: : grades 7- 8 and grades 9-12. I had my own single experience, but wanted to hear the experiences of others who had been involved in grade 7-12 schools to understand their challenges and successes in order to help inform my own choices in my new grade 7-12 school. I entered into this research study hoping to learn from the experiences of leaders who had been involved with a consolidated grade 7-12 school from the very beginning to the present day. From these conversations, I hoped to identify and share with others experiencing this type of school consolidation, the practices that had helped make a difference in the school in terms of either moving it forward as a 7-12 entity or maintaining a school-within-a-school model.

### **Purpose**

This is a study of “distinctive” practices that have appeared after the consolidation of schools to create a grade 7-12 school. Distinctive practices refer to those practices demonstrated by leaders in grade 7 -12 schools that promote a single school culture and organizational learning structure. The aim of this study is to characterize the leadership practices related to the promotion of organizational learning and a single school culture in a unique environment: a consolidated grade 7 -12 environment. It is the intent of this study to provide valuable insight for the development of future grade 7 -12 schools in the

province of Ontario. Using a qualitative research design that includes the use of semi-structured interviews, field notes, historical research and triangulation, it is the hope that this research will offer a characterization of the leadership practices that inhibit and/or support organizational learning and the promotion of a single school culture in a consolidated grade 7-12 school.

### **Research Questions**

In conducting this qualitative research, there were two overarching questions that acted as a guide for data collection and analysis:

1. What leadership practices, related to school culture and organizational learning, support or hinder the consolidation of a grade 7 -12 school?
2. How do the leadership practices, related to school culture and organizational learning support or hinder the consolidation of a grade 7 -12 school?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Organizational learning*: Definitions of organizational learning are varied across the research literature and require a clear delineation between organizational learning and learning organizations. For purposes of this research, organizational learning will reflect a process in which an organization's members actively use information to guide behaviour in such a way as to promote the ongoing adaptation of the organization (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1996).

*School Consolidation*: "School consolidation is the practice of combining two or more schools for educational or economic benefits" (Erik, 1985, par.1). In education, consolidation usually refers to combining districts and closing schools and sending students from the closed schools to other schools (Howley, Johnson & Petrie, 2011).

*School Culture:* There is no single true definition of school culture (Shaw, 2000). The most consistent definition of school culture used across the literature is one developed by Edgar Schein (2010). Culture, as defined by Schein, includes three levels - organizational assumptions about reality, shared values and observable behaviours (Shaw, 2000; Brady, 2008; Conolly, James & Beales, 2011). Peterson and Deal (1998) also provide a widely used definition of culture when they write: “Culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges” (p. 28). Furthermore, they suggest that these sets of expectations and values shape how people think, feel, and act in schools (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Together, Schein and Deal’s definitions provide the necessary criteria to understand school culture at the elementary and secondary levels. Similarly, Cunningham and Gresso (1993) suggest that school culture is the informal understanding of the way things are done in that school.

*School Resizing:* Resizing reflects a school board’s commitment to realigning and reallocating resources without compromising student learning and achievement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

*Pupil Accommodation Review:* “A process, as defined in a school board pupil accommodation review policy, undertaken by a school board to determine the future of a school or group of schools” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 15).

*Accommodation Review Committee (ARC):* “A committee, established by a school board that represents the affected school(s) of a pupil accommodation review, which acts as the official conduit for information shared between the school board and the affected school communities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 15). The duty of the ARC is to

review information collected by the board and developed in School Information Profiles (SIPs) that include a facility, instructional and other uses profile (Ministry of Education, 2015). The SIPs help “the ARC and the community understand the context surrounding the decision to include specific schools in a pupil accommodation review” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 10). Value to the student and value to the school board are first and foremost in pupil accommodation review when considering the impact of school consolidation or closure (Ministry of Education, 2015).



## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature and Background Context

Literature around grade 7-12 school organization is presently lacking. In fact, studies, articles or even information about leadership in grade 7-12 schools is almost non-existent. For this literature review, I define and present work on school consolidation, then present Ontario's current education policy context on school consolidation.

While literature about school consolidation exists (Berry, 1996; Sell & Leistriz, 1997, Alsberg & Shaw, 2007) much of it engages readers in the how and why schools close (Alsberg & Shaw, 2007, Nitta, Holley, Wrobel, 2010) and the impact of shifting students and staff to existing schools that have a similar, if not the same, type of school organization (DeYoung & Howley, 1997; Howley, Johnson, Petrie, 2011; Berry & West, 2005) There is extremely limited literature on school consolidation that creates a new organizational structure, specifically 7-12, with the exception of a recent study conducted in Ontario by the Ontario Ministry of Education. In Ontario, a newly published study considers two school boards' consolidation experiences with creating a grade 7-12 school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). However, there is no data on school leadership within the Ontario study. Furthermore, presently there is no government policy that describes or creates a working framework for school boards to develop and lead grade 7-12 schools. Although a thorough search method was conducted on the topics identified, there remains a limited amount of information about grade 7-12 schools.

The absence of research on 7-12 schools as well as Ministry and Board documents pertaining to school leadership of 7-12 schools compounds the challenges that leaders face at the school level. The province has adopted this model to respond to the

economic and demographic changes impacting education, but the Ministry has yet to address or offer support for leaders in consolidated 7-12 schools through policies or professional development.

Despite the lack of literature on grade 7-12 schools, it is important for this study to review existing literature that provides essential information about school consolidation as well as Ontario's current education context. Expanding the lens of literature to include the impact of consolidation on schools provides valuable information for leaders to navigate the diverse and rich challenges that consolidation brings to school communities as two school cultures come together to form one school.

### **Search Method**

The search was not limited to scholarly works, but included a variety of sources in order to provide a full range and scope of materials. Searches included online search portals (e.g., Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, ProQuest), provincial policy as well as the UWO Libraries' online catalogue/journal database. Specific dates of publication were not used as search criteria as historical documents for this topic would prove relevant and fundamental in establishing the context of the issue.

The next step in conducting the literature search was to determine key words and phrases that would lead to a variety of sources to review. Key words included, "middle schools" "learning continuum in K -12", "school reorganization" "leadership styles in elementary and secondary schools", "leadership impacting school culture change", and "school culture". An initial examination of the abstracts narrowed the sources and lead to identifying additional key words related to the topic. "Organizational learning structures in elementary and secondary schools" and "school consolidation" expanded the search

context. Careful examination of the selected sources resulted in additional searches for cited works in the articles in order to find primary sources. An online search occurred first, then a search of the UWO library online catalogue.

For the literature review, sources were selected based on the conceptual connections between the key themes – leadership, organizational learning, cultures in elementary and secondary school, change in elementary and secondary schools, school consolidation and reorganization and declining enrolment. The search for resources specific to grade 7-12 school organization and leadership was limited due to insufficient research being conducted on this particular setting. The identified sources provided a theoretical and contextual framework for researching themes related to leadership practices in a consolidated grade 7-12 school. The literature was organized in the following thematic areas: *school consolidation*, *culture in consolidated schools*, *Ontario's changing education context*, and *Ontario's school consolidation context*.

### **School Consolidation**

Consolidation is not a new practice in the world of education. Its roots are deeply embedded in the history of schools. In order to present the roots and origins of school consolidation much of the literature presented in this study reflects the American context. That is not to say that Canada has not experienced school consolidation, but the challenge of Canadian school consolidation has not been as thoroughly investigated. In Ontario, the re-shaping of the education system from the one room school house to more centralized school administration occurred most significantly following World War II with the growth of industry in urban areas (Gidney, 1999). As Canadians turned their attention to the kind of Canada they wanted to build post war, the Ontario government appointed a

royal commission to review the education system and recommend any changes that would better equip young people for this new modern world (Gidney, 1999; Christou, 2012). Among the many recommendations found in the 1950 Hope Report, a summary of recommendations from the royal commission as chaired by John Andrew Hope, it was suggested that the “existing system of local administration was to be replaced by large regional boards and consolidated schools to increase both the economic and educational efficacy of the schools” (Gidney, 1999, p. 23). Although Hope’s consolidation recommendation was initially met with resistance in 1950 with politicians hesitant to impose consolidation on rural Ontario deeming it was unnecessary and expensive, restructuring of Ontario’s education system did happen over the next 30 years (Gidney, 1999). Restructuring of Ontario’s education system was initially driven by the need to prepare youth for the new world ahead – politically, socially and economically resulting in school consolidation. Running parallel to Canada’s educational changes, the United States was also looking at the education system to support change.

Literature regarding American school consolidation presents a long history beginning at the end of the nineteenth century driven by political, economic and social issues to the present day (Sell, Liestritz & Thompson, 1996). At the dawn of the twentieth century, public education consisted of the traditional one-room school house that prided itself on being local, informal and community–controlled, but that would become centralized and professionally run bureaucracies as a direct result of the consolidation movement (Berry, 2006). Arguments for and against consolidation are as old as the movement itself and remain evident today. A brief exploration of the definition of school consolidation is a necessary starting point, followed by the historical journey of

consolidation and finally by a look at the impact of consolidation, all of which will help provide the necessary foundation for this study.

Consolidation is defined as “the closure or re-organization of one or more school(s) and the subsequent amalgamation into one single school either on an existing site, or in an entirely new constructed facility” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, par. 1). Similarly, Howley, Johnson and Petrie (2011) suggest that consolidation refers to combining districts and closing schools and sending students from the closed schools to other schools (or building a new school). Sell, Leistritz & Thompson (1996) specify in their definition of consolidation that school districts have formally agreed to share resources and enrolment. Consolidation, as described by Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel (2010), is a “term applied to describe the combining of schools or districts in an effort to create administrative efficiencies and provide improved academic and social experiences for students in sparsely- populated areas” (par. 3). Although not an exhaustive list of definitions, it is evident that despite varying descriptors for consolidation, such as shared resources, and administrative efficiencies, they maintain a common thread of closing schools and redistributing staff and students to new schools. The term “consolidation” is not limited to schools, but is also readily applied to school districts. A brief look at the history of education in the United States provides some background in understanding the origins of the current day rationale for consolidating schools.

### **History of consolidation.**

“One of the most remarkable yet least remarked upon accomplishments in American public education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the success of the school consolidation movement” (Berry, 2006). Alsberg and Shaw (2006) support Berry’s thoughts about the historical

significance of consolidation in America when they suggest that consolidation was considered one of the most innovative movements in the history of public education. The small community-run institutions that employed a single teacher and trusted the education of students continued to exist until the late 1930's (Berry & West, 2005). However, over the next four decades "the number of schools fell by more than 100,000 as nearly two-thirds of all schools were eliminated through the process of consolidation" (Berry & West, 2005, p. 3). As the one-room schoolhouses were consolidated, larger schools were created. School districts evolved into professionally run bureaucracies, some of which were educating hundreds of thousands of students (Berry & West, 2005).

Consolidation first began in urban centres (Berry, 2006). Those wanting to reform the education system wanted schools to adhere to the bureaucratic factory model that embodied efficiency and skills that were located in urban centres (Alsberg & Shaw 2006). Rural communities suffered losses in agriculture, manufacturing and mining jobs that resulted in districts being more susceptible to consolidation (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006). For many rural communities, the only option to obtain higher quality education and improved learning conditions was to join with neighbouring districts (Henderson, 1975). For rural residents consolidation initially meant hope for their communities, as they were able to offer a better education system (Henderson, 1975). Depending on the lens one used, consolidation meant two very different things in the early parts of the twentieth century. For urban reformers school and district consolidation reflected a factory model aligning with it greater efficiency (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006). For rural communities, consolidation was a rejuvenation of hope that their communities could survive and educational opportunities could be preserved locally (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006). However,

one particular vision for consolidation soon grew in popularity and dominated much of the twentieth century.

A frontrunner at the time for consolidation, Ellwood P. Cubberley (1922) provided three main arguments for larger schools: the promotion of efficiency and centralized administration for schools; the development of highly specialized instruction by grade and subject area; and finally, through the concentration of students and resources, consolidated schools could provide better facilities at a lower cost (Berry & West, 2005). Consolidation was a remedy for all stakeholders – urban reformers and rural residents alike by “assuring equity, efficiency and consistency aimed toward the pursuit of happiness and democracy” (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006, p. 106). The hopes were that consolidation would initially serve to bring about improvements to education (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006). “The heritage of the school district consolidation movement was based on two underlying principles: economic efficiency and bigger is better” (Sell, Leistritz & Thompson, 1986). However, as school districts became more centralized, a change of governance occurred. One of the central aims of consolidation was to change the governance of education by placing authority of schools at higher levels – township, county or state and moving it away from being locally run (Berry, 2006). Gradually, “local control over education weakens and the state governance extends their authority which is demonstrated by the rapid centralization of school funding” (Berry, 2006, p. 53).

### **Arguments for and against consolidation**

Research prior to 1970 supported consolidation on the basis of improved educational opportunities for students and reduced financial costs (Streifel, Foldes, & Holman, 1991). “On a historic note, the efficiencies secured by consolidation were generally

intended to improve educational inputs that were believed (historically) to lead to improvements in educational outcomes” (Howley et al., 2011, p. 2). Research conducted between 1930 and 1970 found the benefits of consolidation included: single-grade classes, specialized subject-matter teachers, more intense professional supervision and leadership and increasingly free transportation to and from school (Howley et al., 2005). From its inception, beginning in the late 1920’s, consolidation was primarily about improving student achievement and secondarily about cost efficiency (Howley et al., 2005). “Indeed, the originators of consolidation warned that its purpose was not to save money, but to improve schools” (Howley et al., 2011, p. 8). However, advocates for and against consolidation would argue over the true purpose of consolidation from its early beginnings until the current day.

Arguments for and against consolidation have not changed dramatically since the 1930’s (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006). Both historic and present day advocates of consolidation list many positives including: efficient and economical, well equipped staff, better facilities, resources, transportation (Smith, 1938); broadened curriculum, specialized instruction (Berry 2006); increased educational opportunities, broadened network of friends (Sell et al., 1996); enhanced diversity, greater funding and increased staffing (Sell et al., 1996); the formal organization of schooling under the leadership of professional superintendents and consolidation being the only realistic alternative for failing districts (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006).

Nitta et al., (2010) found many positive experiences with consolidation in the study they conducted in Arkansas. Advocates supporting and opposing consolidation premise their arguments on experience therefore, Nitta et al.’s study looked at the lived



experiences of students and teachers in consolidated schools in Arkansas (2010). By interviewing those working and studying inside schools whose lives and world has been the most transformed and where the primary effect impacts everyday life, an area of research was addressed that had failed to be prioritized in existing research to date (Nitta et al., 2010). From the 23 in-depth interviews that were conducted they found that students adapted better to the social disruption created by consolidation, a broader course selection was available to students and more diverse social opportunities presented themselves (Nitta et al., 2010). Among the positive experiences with consolidation identified by their study, there were also some negative experiences, which are not isolated to their study.

Research prior to 1970 supported consolidation on the basis of improved educational opportunities for students and reduced financial costs (Streiful et al., 1991). However, research conducted since 1970 indicates that consolidation has minimal advantages (Streiful, et al., 1991; Alsberg & Shaw, 2006; Howley et al., 2011). A study conducted by Sell et al. (1996) which looked at eight schools that were consolidated into four schools found that school closures were not caused by a single event, but a slow evolution over the past 30 years leading to declining enrolment. It was noted that out migration and depopulation require adjustments to public infrastructure, which lead to engaging communities in discussions about school consolidation (Sell et al., 1996). For some school communities, school closure and consolidation deeply impacts the community (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006). Howley et al., (2011) found that school and district consolidations impact the vitality and well-being of communities; specifically, “When a school closes, a community loses a part of its soul” (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006, p. 115).

Howley et al., (2011) state, “the loss of a school erodes a community’s social and economic base – its sense of community, identity and democracy” which most often impacts rural communities (p. 9). One of the primary concerns given by those who oppose school consolidation in rural communities is that schools are vital to a community’s economic and social well-being (Nitta et al., 2010). Howley et al., (2011) suggest that it is critical to consider each community’s context as unique. In other words, the impact of school closure through a consolidation process will be different from one community to the next. “Context is important, and issues of efficiency, cost, student performance, educational climate and community relations must be addressed” (Howley et al., 2011, p. 12).

Another reason given to support consolidation is improved educational opportunities for staff and students (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006; Berry 2006, Sell et al., 1996). When looking at consolidation as a means for addressing student achievement, there is enough research to suggest that bigger is not always better (Howley et al., 2011). One of the impetuses for consolidation is that a bigger school can offer students more. Historically, the move from the multi-grade one room schoolhouse, to schools that boasted same age/grade groupings and specialized teachers in the form of subject and grade, offered far more to improve student achievement than current day consolidations. Bigger schools may offer a “wider menu of educational experiences for students” however, evidence suggests that larger school and district size negatively affects desirable academic outcomes (Howley et al., 2011). “In terms of its influence on teaching and learning, contemporary school consolidation efforts often fail to deliver the promised enhancement of academic offerings (Howley et al., 2011, p. 9). Furthermore, “evidence

suggests that large school and district size negatively affect desirable academic outcomes” (Howley et al., 2011, p. 9). In a study by Kuziemko (2006) regarding “shocks to enrolment” where he looked at the impact of increasing or decreasing school size either through consolidation with another school or by removing grades, he found that increasing the size lowered student achievement significantly and resulted in a predictable future economic cost, outweighing the marginalized fiscal savings.

For staff involved in the consolidation process there are both pros and cons. As discussed prior, staff benefit from richer professional development, being able to specialize in subject and course offerings and flexible schedules as some examples (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006). However, Nitta et al., (2010) found that the consolidation experience for teachers led to stress, teacher turnover, fears of uncertainty and an overall heightened emotional cost.. With regard to building relationships with new staff at consolidated schools, teachers reported that they found it difficult to do so. Instead of experiencing collegial partnerships in the new school, the existing staff wanted things done “their way” and some noticed purposeful segregation where staff members only did things for “their own staff” (Nitta et al., 2010). With this data in mind, a brief look at how the culture of consolidated schools is impacted is necessary.

### **Culture in Consolidated Schools**

Consolidation leads to two school communities coming together. It can mean that new students and staff join an existing school or that two schools become one at a new site. Creating a balanced school culture that reflects both school communities can be very challenging. “If the school culture fails to reflect the values, norms and culture of its constituents, resistance and ambiguity are inevitable” (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006, p. 115). In

the study conducted by Alsberg and Shaw (2006), students and staff reported that they felt that the two student groups, each with unique community norms and values, were combined in the new school setting. Alsberg and Shaw (2006) suggest that when consolidation is rooted in social justice, it promotes better interaction between social groups and works to diminish rural and urban differences. However, Nitta et al., (2010) found that forming relationships in the consolidated schools could be difficult for staff and students. Their research suggested that some teachers found it difficult to connect with students and staff from the other school and some students failed to fit in (Nitta et al., 2010). Nitta et al. (2010) also found evidence that the consolidated school culture allowed students to become part of a more diverse student body and broadened their networks of friends.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, consolidation appears to occur in response to boards trying to find ways to save money first placing student achievement as a secondary thought in their decision-making. The heritage of the school district consolidation movement was based on two underlying factors – economic efficiency and bigger is better (Sell et al., 1996). Today, consolidation is about “accountability and higher student achievement in the face of decreased funding” (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006). Howley et al., (2011) present research findings on contemporary consolidation in the United States which suggest that “even if efficiencies somehow cut the costs of students in half, overall the benefit to the state would be minimal since the number of affected students is so small” (Howley et al., 2011, p. 8). “Financial claims about the widespread benefits of consolidation are unsubstantiated by contemporary research about cost savings” (Howley et al., 2011, p. 11).

Perspectives concerning the merits of consolidation are conflicting and truly depend on the lens of the stakeholder (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006). Context plays a critical role in whether consolidation will lead to benefits like improved educational outcomes and fiscal efficiency or whether it will be detrimental for students, staff, school boards and communities.

### **Ontario's Changing Education Context**

Ontario's education landscape is changing (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). With changing demographics, declining enrolment means less funding based on the current funding formula for schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). While the province continues to emphasize their four priorities for education, boards and subsequently schools, are finding it more difficult to support students with less money. "With more school boards seeing lower enrolment, Ontario's education system must adapt and evolve, so that the objective of improving educational outcomes for all students continues to be met" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 554). An overview of Ontario's educational context paints the following picture: enrolment in elementary and secondary schools has declined by more than 140,000 students since 2002/03; declining enrolment impacts funding and the viability of small schools, Northern Ontario has been the hardest hit (People for Education, 2015). In 2014/2015 the Ministry of Education applied pressure to school boards to eliminate so-called empty spaces and as enrolment declined, boards lost revenue making it difficult for boards with a high number of small schools to provide specialized programs and extracurricular activities (People for Education, 2015).

Understanding the financial commitment of the province and their need to be accountable to tax payers, has led to funding changes in education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The Ministry is working with boards to help ease the pressure that declining funds are causing by giving boards two years to adjust to this new reality.

One way that boards are responding is by consolidating schools. The consolidation of schools to create 7-12 schools helps boards address underused space in high schools as a result of declining enrolment, and to close low populated schools, as a means of cost saving. Although a viable economic solution for boards, consolidation presents leaders of newly configured 7-12 schools with unique leadership challenges that are unlike those faced by leaders in either elementary or secondary schools. The results of this study identify some of the unique challenges found in the 7-12 consolidated case study school and the leadership practices that occur in response to these challenges are characterized.

**Declining enrolment.** Ontario's education system is responding to declining enrolment and making some adjustments to reflect these changes. Since 2002-03, declining enrolment has been primarily at the elementary level (Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). However, as the projected small elementary cohorts progress into high school, what has been the norm for elementary schools will become the norm for high schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) writes that:

The decline in enrolment has largely been driven by a decline in the number of school-aged children in Ontario. Long-term demographic projections indicate that

this trend is likely to continue well into the next decade. The distribution of students across the province will also change. (p. 4)

It is critical to understand that although the entire province is experiencing the effects of declining enrolment, the rate of this decline is not equal across Ontario's 72 school boards in all seven geographic regions. While some regions will experience a large decline in student enrolment, other regions will see an increase. For example, between 2002-03 and 2007-08, Toronto declined by 9%, but other parts of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) saw growth and is projected to continue to see growth into 2014-15 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010). Eastern and South-Western Ontario each experienced declines of 7% while Northern Ontario, one of the hardest hit with declining enrolment, experienced over 12% since 2002-03 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). For schools in Northern Ontario, the reality of declining enrolment is something they have been dealing with for several years, before it emerged as a province-wide trend (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

Growth and decline in enrolment trends for 2002-2014 project that although the actual daily attendance in publicly funded elementary and secondary schools will decline by 152,000 students, 13 boards will see a growth of 78,000, while 59 others will see a decline of 230,000 students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). In response to Ontario's changing demographics and enrolment trends, the Ontario Ministry of Education will need to assess the impact these trends have on policies and funding if it is to maintain its commitment to student achievement.

Supporting Ontario's publicly funded schools is a commitment that the province has made a priority. However, with the diversity of student learning needs increasing and

the number of students decreasing, the funding structure or funding formula that currently exists must be revisited to meet the changing demographics of Ontario to support student achievement. A brief look at how the education funding formula is developed is a good next step.

**The economics of education in Ontario.** Ontario invests more than \$20 billion per year on education to support 1.9 million students (People for Education, 2015).

Although a significant investment in education, Ontario schools still lack funds (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Declining enrolment means less money for school boards to meet the diverse needs of learners and continually improve student achievement as funding is tied to student enrolment.

Ontario's education system is funded primarily through the Grants for Students Needs or GSN. "The GSN supports funding classrooms, school leadership and operations, specific student-related priorities and local management by school boards" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). GSN funding represents the majority of revenues for school boards at more than 90% (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Although the GSN represents a collection of grants, the one most impacted by declining enrolment is the Pupil Foundation Grant, which is calculated on a per-pupil basis. For 2015- 2016, the Pupil Foundation Grant is projected to be \$10.45 billion, almost half of the total revenue provided to schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

The province recognizes that declining enrolment impacts the amount of funds available to support programming. As boards tried to adjust their costs downward in response, the province established a declining enrolment adjustment that provides boards with extra revenue for two years as they adjust to a new reality of fewer students, fewer



funds while continuing to work towards meeting the provincial priorities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

For smaller boards, many located in rural or remote parts of the province, viability of smaller schools comes into question. To address this, the province offers a geographic circumstances grant that takes into consideration that there are higher costs related to remoteness and rural boards (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). This grant is anticipated to be \$193.0 million in 2015-16 and is made up of three allocations: remote and rural; supported schools and rural and small communities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). As part of a 3-year transition to a new funding method, beginning 2016, this grant will see the rural and small communities' allocation phased out (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

The necessity of the province to continually look at how education is funded must be an on-going process. In acknowledging these challenges and recognizing that conditions vary widely across the province, some allocations under the GSN are in transition as the province continues to reassess and determine the best way to support schools. For many boards, the reality of fewer students means making difficult decisions in all areas of their budget. Ontario's education context is challenging. As the province responds to declining enrolment, school boards must re-think how they strive to meet the educational needs of students with less money to do so. The growing popularity of grade 7-12 schools, as a way of maximizing underused space in high schools, is helping school boards use provincial funds more effectively. School consolidation, for many Ontario school boards is becoming a fast and difficult reality.

### **Ontario's School Consolidation Context**

Current day consolidations maintain that student achievement remains one of the key components for school consolidation. Ontario's economic situation, however, implies otherwise. Boards impacted by declining enrolment are receiving fewer funds from the government to operate the same amount of schools. Before schools can be consolidated, Ontario school boards must follow the provincial policy titled the Pupil Accommodation Review. With school consolidation becoming a growing reality for many boards, the Ministry of Education conducted a study to help boards provide appropriate support during transitional times for all stakeholders involved in 7-12 school consolidation to promote greater success. Before examining these these studies, a brief overview of the Pupil Accommodation Review will set the stage for the consolidation process in Ontario.

**Pupil accommodation review.** "School boards are responsible for managing their school capital assets in an effective manner. They must respond to changing demographics and program needs while ensuring continued student achievement and well-being, and the financial viability/sustainability of the school board" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 1). When boards identify a school that may have underutilized space and the projection is that it will remain that way, the board will look at a number of different options and, upon investigation, if the options are not viable then the board can determine that a pupil accommodation review take place. "These decisions are made within the context of supporting the school board's student achievement and well-being strategy and to make the most effective use of its school buildings and funding" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 1).

Prior to the establishment of the Pupil Accommodation Review, an initial staff report is presented to the board of trustees, outlining all the options for accommodation. All options must meet detailed criteria that support the option. During this initial stage of the pupil accommodation review, school boards must ensure that individuals for the schools under review and the broader community are invited to participate in the review consultation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). “The pupil accommodation review process must consist of the following consultations: Accommodation Review Committee (ARC), consultation with municipal governments local to the affected schools, public meetings and public delegation” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 7).

School boards must establish an ARC representing each school under review. One of the duties of the ARC is to be a conduit for information between the board and the school. Another duty of the ARC is to review information collected by the board and developed in School Information Profiles (SIPs) that include facility, instructional and other uses in the profile (Ministry of Education, 2015). The SIPs help “the ARC and the community understand the context surrounding the decision to include specific schools in a pupil accommodation review” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 10). Value to the student and value to the school board are first and foremost in pupil accommodation review when considering the impact of school consolidation or closure (Ministry of Education, 2015).

At least two public meetings must be held and facilitated by board staff where the staff report and SIPs are shared. A final staff report including a section that outlines the community consolidation is shared with the Board of Trustees which determines whether they accept the proposed options in the staff report or amend them. Proposed options

“must include a proposed accommodation plan, prepared for the decision of the Board of Trustees, which contains a timeline of implementation” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 11).

Following the decision by the Board of Trustees to accept the options in the final staff report to consolidate schools, a transition plan must be initiated (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). “The transition of students should be carried out in consultation with parents/guardians and staff” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 12). Once the decision to consolidate and/or close a school has been made, the board must establish a separate committee to address the transition for staff and students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

**School consolidation experience studies.** In September 2015, the Ontario government released results from the School Consolidation Experience Studies (SCES) regarding three case study school boards in Ontario. The study, developed and promoted by the School Board Efficiencies and Modernization (SBEM) a branch in the Ministry of Education, aimed to capture the experiences of “school consolidation/reorganizations across the province to share promising practices based on the results of these experiences and ultimately positive outcomes” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, par. 4). The overall intent of the project “is for the Ministry to supplement the data currently available by collecting information on district school boards’ and stakeholders’ experiences with consolidation of schools in order to identify successes and challenges and to help define promising practice” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, par. 9).

Those interviewed included a wide range of stakeholders such as students, parents, teaching and nonteaching staff, principals and vice-principals, academic

supervisory officers, school board business officials and community and municipal organizations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). From these interviews and on-site visits to the three case study schools, three key themes were identified: communication, transition planning, and program offerings and school culture. The study’s findings were organized within these themes. These findings provide a starting point for discussions around future school consolidations. Some of the highlights are included in Table 1– SCES Key Findings.

**Table 1 - SCES Key Findings**

<b>Communication</b>	<b>Transition Planning</b>	<b>Program Offerings and School Culture</b>
Quality and consistency of communication of board-decision making, planning and the dialogue between stakeholders had a direct impact on the acceptance and positive impact on school consolidation.	Collaborative planning coupled with efficient implementation of decisions and commitments were vital to the success of the consolidation efforts.	Larger student cohorts and consolidated staff led to increased program offerings and co-curriculars When all parties were involved in creating the new school culture an inclusive learning culture was created

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015)

Of significant interest and relevance to this project are the findings from the Algoma District School Board’s (ADSB) two case studies as they specifically deal with placing grade 7 & 8 students into a newly built grade 7-12 school, Superior Heights an existing local high school, Central Algoma Secondary School. Both Bawating Collegiate and Vocational School (Bawating) and Sir James Dunn Collegiate and Vocational School (Sir James Dunn), in ADSB closed and the new school, Superior Heights, was built and would become a grade 7-12 school. Central Algoma Secondary School (CASS) was an

existing 9-12 school, but was reconfigured to become a 7-12 school following the reorganization of five Central Algoma K-8 schools. A look at each school's consolidation is beneficial.

***Superior Heights consolidation.*** Superior Heights became a consolidated 7-12 school following the closures of Bawating and Sir James Dunn schools, 2 grade 9-12 schools. A voluntary grade 7 and 8 program, that had originally been located at Bawating, was also moved (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). In Sault Ste Marie, the 7-8 program at the secondary level is voluntary while in other areas of the board it is a mandatory arrangement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Data collected in the Superior Heights consolidation study led to the following results - Communication: overall people felt that the lines of communication were open and that board staff were approachable and willing to share information that was asked of them (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Transition planning data suggested that a clear transitional plan was developed and put in action with input from all the stakeholders. This plan and the actions around it helped minimize anxieties in the two communities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). However, when it comes to data related to teaching staff and students, it was noted that students felt that they had made the transition more smoothly than the staff (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Students felt that there was still a lingering divide between some members of the two differing staffs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). This supports the results of the study conducted by Nitta et al. (2101) with regards to both the student and teacher experiences with consolidation.

With regards to program offerings, Superior Heights reflected both

schools' histories as well as additional courses that provided all students with greater choice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Extra-curriculars allowed students to become involved in a greater diversity of clubs and teams (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). When it comes to describing the culture at Superior Heights, the data indicates that staff presented with a resistance to change; tension and animosity existed as teachers wanted to hang on to traditions from their former schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). However, after 2 years, students felt that the "staff divide" was lessening and that greater cohesion was observed (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). To facilitate this cohesion, the board transition plan focused on collaboration – a dual leadership model was introduced for the first year with a person from each school acting as co-department heads (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Ultimately, there was significant tension between the two staffs from the former schools with some territorial behaviour evident in both, with Bawating staff seeing themselves in the 'underdog' position right from the start (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). The forging of a new school culture takes time and focused collaboration (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Coupled with teacher anxiety around change, as some had been in the same school and department for more than a decade, the road to a single culture school is complicated to navigate (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Finally in the report section titled, *Areas for Future Considerations*, there are many recommendations provided to help guide other school boards through the consolidation process. Among those recommendations is the development of a School Identity Committee that would serve to represent all the schools impacted by the consolidation and would work ahead of the transition to lay the groundwork for a more

cohesive and vibrant culture (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Addressing the division among staff at the outset would help build the foundation for a more collaborative staff (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). A focus on providing ample opportunities for shared planning, staff collaboration and facilitated staff learning was viewed as a way to close the gap, bring staff together and identify emerging student needs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

*Central Algoma Secondary School (CASS)*. For this school consolidation, all grade 7 and 8 students from 5 Central Algoma elementary schools were relocated to CASS (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). The results of this case study led to the following themes: Communication: Just like the experiences of those that had been involved in the Superior Heights consolidation, stakeholders felt that the board did an excellent job of facilitating discussions and inviting all stakeholders to meetings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Transition planning for CASS involved social/orientation events that were organized for students and families to familiarize themselves with the new school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Some interviewees felt that more events and interactions, particularly with the staff and students would have been helpful (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Opportunities to participate in research trips to other schools, both locally and provincially, which had experienced similar transitions to a 7-12 school were helpful in the transition (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). The communities of many of the elementary schools expressed significant concern about the placement of grade 7 and 8 students with older adolescents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). As a direct result of these concerns, a rigid approach to segregation of the younger students from the older students was applied (Ontario Ministry of Education,



2015). However, in reflecting on the transition process, interviewers felt that a “more continuous reassessment involving parents of the need to rigidly separate junior students from older students both academically and socially might have served to reduce the sense that many interviewed observed that the school climate was somewhat fractured along age lines” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, par. 48). With declining enrolment impacting program availability at the elementary schools, it was clearly communicated to families that program enhancements at CASS would help alleviate this negative impact (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Furthermore, research trips to other 7-12 schools helped support the notion of improved school enhancements (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). In regards to the development of the school culture, data from the case study suggests that retrospectively the building of the school culture would be supported through, joint professional development days, more reliance on the student voice, and the bringing together of groups of students, staff and parents together as much as possible prior to the transition in order to contribute to program development and the growth of an engaging school environment. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, par 47). In the *Areas for Future Consideration* section some critical areas for improving the consolidation experience for students and staff are highlighted. Some interviewees felt that staff would have been better prepared to provide input into the planning and implementation of the transition had there been more opportunities to collaborate in a facilitated way (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). The strict separation of 7-8 students from 9-12 students made the older students feel targeted and untrusted which created unnecessary tension (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Separating 7-8 and 9-12 students limited the opportunities of mentoring and collaborating with all students in

the school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Although this separation was in direct response to community concerns, staff and parents now feel the need to revisit this established rule that was once believed to be essential (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). More time with staff relationships that reflect reassuring staff, soliciting and integrating their input and placing vice principals sooner in the process were deemed important to a smoother transition.

Other recommendations included: the need to outline the program and co-curricular learning opportunities that a larger cohort will make possible; the need to facilitate a visible and working collaboration among principals of sending schools to ensure consistent and cohesive support of students and families; the need to solicit and integrate input and support from teaching staff about the transition process, program facility planning and building relationships among staff who will be working together (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Furthermore, adopting a flexible staffing model to allow teachers with whom the students know to move with them; using professional development days to work on creating a “new school culture”, more integration of student and leader voice, mentoring of younger students by older students, good planning for the layout of renovations to the school, and a longer transition time after the decision to allow for more relationship building among staff and students were also included in this section of the report (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

At the outset of the SCES, the Ministry of Education suggests that part of the driving force behind the study was Ontario’s current fiscal context. The history of consolidation section of this chapter suggested that school consolidation that is in direct response to saving money, doesn’t actually save boards a significant amount of money or

improve efficiency (Howley et al., 2011). A superintendent interviewed for the SCES suggests that student achievement must be first and foremost. “While operational decisions may differ from school to school the mission and vision around student achievement has to take the lead in all conversations about facilities” (par. 6). However, research on school size and student achievement suggests that larger school size can be associated with decreased student achievement (Cotton, 1996). What appears to be missing from the SCES studies of ADSB is any data that is specific to grades 7 & 8. Work with OSSTF reflects the secondary component; however, work with the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is missing from this study. Dual leadership, with regards to department heads, speaks to leadership for secondary staff and students at Superior Heights, but absent is data about principal and vice-principal leadership for grade 7-12 students. A breakdown is lacking on how the principal and vice-principal work to develop a school culture or who makes up the leadership team – are they leaders with only grade 9-12 experience, or a combination of leadership that reflects a range of grade 7-12 experiences. Although leadership was not the focus of the SCES, in the realm of developing school culture no acknowledgment of how the leadership team of Superior Heights worked with a “divided staff” or supported students in the creation of the new school culture was included.

### **Conclusion**

Consolidation is not new to education and neither are those perspectives supporting or opposing it. From the death of the one room schoolhouse, to a ‘bigger is better’ philosophy, to one driven by accountability and student achievement, consolidation has met with supporters and resisters. Research regarding consolidation has

resulted in varied reports as to whether consolidation is positive or negative for staff, students, communities and school boards themselves. However a common theme found among the research is that context is important and that all realms of consolidation must be considered with it in mind.

In Ontario, the fiscal demands of declining enrolment are forcing the province to rethink how boards are funded. The per-pupil funding formula that currently exists directly ties funding to student enrolment. Although boards may apply to the province for other funds, the bulk of a board's budget is driven by enrolment. With fewer students, there is less money to meet the ongoing educational demands outlined by the province. As each educational region is unique, the rate of enrolment decline differs significantly, requiring different options for boards that fit their context.

The research and literature reviewed in this chapter provide the necessary background to characterize leadership practices related to the promotion of organizational learning and a single school culture in a consolidated grade 7 -12 school. The history of consolidation presents a framework to understand consolidation in terms of the political, economic, community and school impact it has. Understanding the challenges that consolidation brings when two distinct school cultures are forced to become one, coupled with the added dynamics that staff, students and community bring to the consolidation suggests the development of a single culture school is not easy for school administrators. Finally, the contextual information about Ontario's current education climate supports the notion that context is critical when characterizing the leadership practices in a grade 7-12 school.

### Chapter 3

#### Conceptual Framework

The focus of this chapter is two-fold. I begin by exploring the complex nature of conceptualizing leadership and will suggest that it cannot simply be narrowed down by listing traits or by defining it by specific behaviours. Samier and Bates (2006) support this conceptualization of leadership when they propose that leadership is more than the most recent adjective describing leadership. A brief description of some of the theories regarding leadership and what the label of “leadership” suggests, will lay the necessary groundwork to use Eacott’s (2010, 2013, 2015) idea of *leadership as a social practice* as an alternative way to conceptualize leadership. It is Eacott’s conceptualization of leadership that I will use to situate my own research. At the core of his leadership theory, Eacott proposes that leadership is about challenging the existing structures and taking into consideration the context in which leadership takes place. His careful consideration of time as actions planned and done in the present that are already imbedded with future intentions, deepens our thinking about how we understand current practice. Finally, I will explore Eacott’s ideas regarding leading relationally as an alternative way to conceptualize leadership. Through his relational approach he asks us to consider both the natural and social sciences in our investigations of leadership practice.

Secondly, a look at school culture and its impact in the consolidation process is a necessary component for this study. Each school’s culture is unique and grounds itself in artefacts, assumptions, beliefs and values (Brady, 2008). When schools come together, a new culture is promoted and it becomes critical for key aspects of each school’s culture to be included. However, schools with a long-standing history have had many years to

grow and develop their unique culture suggesting that it is deeply entrenched in the school's way of life. When a new culture is introduced there can be resistance to this change in culture and leaders must know and understand the nuances of each of the cultures in order to facilitate a new school culture that adequately reflects all contributors. Developing an understanding of the essential role that culture plays in consolidated schools will provide another lens in which to appreciate this study's findings.

Third, it is necessary to consider how organizations learn and the structures that support that learning. Conceptually, this study will define learning as a process, one that forms a continuum (Smith 2001). When learning is understood as a process, then organizational learning can be accomplished through individuals sharing their knowledge to improve the collective or organization's knowledge. How leaders develop and promote this sharing is a reflection of the types of structures they put in place to facilitate it. A collaborative community is one structure that utilizes and values the knowledge of individuals to work towards achieving the collective goals of the organization (Adler, Heckschler & Prusak, 2011). Furthermore, when school leaders understand that the learning cycle of an organization occurs at different levels, and that there are contextual factors that impact learning, they are able to develop structures and practices that reflect this reality..

Finally, I will focus on policy analysis and how actors determine how policy is interpreted, implemented, and enacted in schools. Leadership and policy enactment are interconnected. To view them as separate entities suggests that one can exist without the other in schools and that simply is not the case. Schools need policy for functionality – whether that is policy generated at the school level by staff, community or leaders, or at a

board or provincial level, policy helps guide our actions. Policy enactment (Maguire et al., 2015; Ball et al., 2011) is complex and is strongly influenced by many different factors. Looking at policy as a process rather than an attempt to solve perceived problems is a starting point in understanding the complex nature of policy. A strong consideration of context, including inside and outside of the school, helps us see the re-contextualization that policy undergoes during implementation. Finally, an examination of the policy actors and how their own experiences, beliefs, and interpretations impact how policies are implemented will provide a framework to situate my findings related to both leadership and organizational learning. What will be understood is that policy and leadership do not simply co-exist in schools; they work collectively to support the functionality of schools as learning organizations.

## **Leadership**

### **Leadership Theories**

There is a vast amount of interest and knowledge around the idea of educational leadership. Literature on the idea of “leadership style” has led to notions like: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, constructivist leadership, servant leadership, cultural leadership, and primal leadership (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006) to cite just a few. All of these approaches to leadership have inherent practices associated with them which help to differentiate one from the other. However, Leithwood et al., (2006) suggest that, “few of these qualify as leadership theories and several are actually tested leadership theories, but most are actually just slogans” (p. 7). Determining what leadership is then becomes more challenging, unless the concept of leadership can be stripped down to the core function

that it serves. Conceptually, leadership “is all about establishing widely agreed upon and worthwhile directions for the organization and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions” (Leithwood et al, 2006, p. 11). The various theories of leadership describe some of the practices of how leaders aim to direct and influence the people and organizations that they lead.

The concept of leadership has been defined in the literature as everything and nothing. The unlimited elasticity used to describe the term leadership has threatened to make it meaningless (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Theorists of leadership have tried to capture the nature of leadership and the different variables involved for hundreds of years. One popular approach described by Bass (1990) suggests that:

A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits, but the pattern of personal characteristics of the leader must bear some relevant relationship to the characteristics, activities, and goals of the followers. (p. 77)

Furthermore, Bass (1990) writes that “leadership must be conceived in terms of the interaction of variables that are in constant flux”, suggesting that leadership needs to adapt to what is going on around it (p. 77). The situational theory of leadership suggests that individuals’ characteristics make people suitable leaders in certain situations. Behaviourally influenced theories view leadership as a set of learned behaviours. Leadership as a function of a group process is another theory that considers leadership as property distributed between individuals. The work of Cathcart and Samovar (1984), and Henmann (2011) suggests that leadership cannot be isolated from a group or organization because in order to be a leader, you must have followers.



Henmann (2011) writes, “whether leaders are born with talents and traits that allow and even cause them to be successful leaders, or whether effective leadership behaviours can be learned through experience is a difficult question. There is not even consensus about universal traits that cause leaders to be effective” (p. 1). The trait-based leadership theory believes that leaders are born with an innate ability to lead and have superior qualities and personalities that make them great leaders (Henmann, 2011). Supporters of this perspective argue that leaders possess superior qualities that differentiate them from followers, thus discovering these qualities should be possible (Hodgetts, 1992). A complete list of leadership qualities does not presently exist, which suggests that leadership is a more complex phenomenon than just a list of traits. This suggests that other approaches must be explored to further understand the nature of leadership.

Leadership is pivotal in establishing, monitoring, evaluating and changing a school’s culture (Brady, 2008). Leadership is the fundamental process by which organizational cultures are formed (Shaw, 2000). The role of leaders is varied when it comes to school culture and organizational structures. Across the literature, leaders are referred to as mediators, managers, and facilitators, adopting transformational and/or instructional perspectives (Brady, 2008; Connolly et al, 2011; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). What is clear is that leadership practices have an impact on the school culture and the organizational structures (Brady, 2008). Rapid turnover of leaders in hopes of transferring successful practices, values and assumptions to other schools, misconstrues the unique culture of schools and undermines change and improvement (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Shaw, 2000). Understanding leadership in the context in which it is

required is necessary if we are to truly begin to understand the nature of school leadership.

Briefly distinguishing between management and leadership is important in furthering our notions of leadership. They are often believed to be interchangeable; however, they each serve each different purposes in organizations. Paul Kotter (1990) suggests that a leader produces change and movement in organizations. A leader, Kotter (1990) contends, creates a vision but does not do this in isolation. A leader values people, builds teams, seeks commitment and empowers others to help achieve the vision (Kotter, 1990). Bolman and Deal (2008) support Kotter's notions of leadership when they suggest that leadership is a subtle process of mutual influence. "It produces cooperative effort in the service of purposes embraced by both leader and led" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 345). Leadership is not a one-way transaction, but a mutual interplay between those leading and those being led (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This suggests that leadership is not confined to those in formal leadership roles such as principals, vice principals or department heads, but also encompasses constituents who promote change and movement in schools or organizations. Leaders create vision, align people, empower and motivate (Kotter, 1990). Leaders must be distinguished from managers.

Kotter (1990) differentiates between a leader and a manager by suggesting that a manager produces order and consistency by planning, organizing and controlling. Whereas leaders see the bigger picture, managers establish timetables, agendas and allocate staff (Kotter, 1990). When it comes to working with people, managers provide structure, establish rules and set routines (Kotter, 1990). According to Kolodziejczyk (2015), "leaders are concentrated on change and pursuing new solutions, understanding

people's convictions and ensuring their commitment, while managers are concentrated on maintaining stability and status quo, performing duties, exercising authority and achieving established goals” (p. 123). In establishing that the practices of leaders and managers lead to supporting organizations differently this further supports our understanding that leadership is complex.

### **Redefining Leadership**

Leadership is arguably the most commonly used concept or label in contemporary organizational research; however, while leadership as an explanatory category has been embraced by dominant, organizational and paradigm perspectives, the scholarly value of leadership as a concept remains to be seen (Eacott, 2015). Leadership as a label, Eacott (2015) challenges, must be destabilized due to the ambiguity that surrounds its very definition and its unclear effects on organizational performance. This is not to say that leadership is not important and necessary for organizations, or that leadership is not a real phenomenon, but we need to consider first whether we understand leadership as a socially-constructed label or an assumed empirical reality (Eacott, 2015). Eacott (2015) contends that, “the label of leadership reflects the managerialist project of the state and an historical analysis of the rise of the label of choice” (pg. 35). This has led to an explosion of the labels or adjectives that describe leadership. In Eacott’s view instead of proposing more adjectives or labels, researchers should be critiquing the label itself (Eacott, 2015).

As a label, leadership can be arbitrarily applied to almost any action or practice, implying that this action is different without specifying in what way/s it differs from other actions (Eacott, 2015). Furthermore, when we consider the label of leadership as one of recognition the label singles out an individual, a team of people or an institution

believed to be working as a coherent whole (Eacott, 2015). In considering the label as one of ‘cognition’ it acts as a label of exclusion as it becomes defined as a set of criteria or properties that some possess and others do not (Eacott, 2015). However, if we consider the importance of social space and context, the explicit criteria used to construct leadership “constitutes a specific form of leadership that exists in the social space given life through the very criteria that produced it. That is, leadership, is present “in a context in which it was already decided that leadership existed” (Eacott, 2015, p. 38).

Eacott (2013) offers an alternative conceptualization of leadership that moves beyond leadership as a behavioural trait, or a managerial task, to one of social practice. Leadership is rare, is a label of distinction, not inclusive and is arguably characterized by what it is not (Eacott, 2013). He contends that leadership is more than a constituent of parts such as tasks that might be described as management; in his view, leadership is disruptive –it is a “break” in the status quo (Eacott, 2013). Simply put, leadership is about challenging the status quo, modifying the existing structures and generating new structures (Eacott, 2013). Leadership is not the property of a single individual or a title within an organization, but a social practice that is understanding leadership in terms of the social space in which it occurs and the practices that occur in response to that social space (Eacott, 2013).

**Context.** Social space or context, Eacott proposes, becomes critical in understanding leadership as a social practice. “Leadership practice exists in a social space given life through constant power struggles. It is this contestation that defines leadership, and arguably leaders, moment-by-moment” (Eacott, 2010, p. 2). The current popularized assumptions that leadership can be captured, deconstructed and replicated elsewhere,

does not consider the importance of context. “Leadership remains a vacuous concept connected to attributes, factors, behaviours, interventions all of which lack a solid grounding in a specific context” (Eacott, 2013, p.178). It is the context that gives behaviours or interventions meaning and significance (Eacott, 2015). Values, philosophies and other aspects of individuals cannot be separated, however the “loss of context creates the illusion of leadership as a universal construct” (Eacott, 2015, p. 43). Leadership, as Eacott (2010) contends further, “cannot be captured in a static framework or separated from the context in which it occurs” (p. 2). As such, leadership cannot be simply transferred or adopted in different contexts – one recipe does not fit all (Eacott, 2015). In understanding leadership as a social practice one must consider it more as an organizational quality or phenomenon and not as a subjective attribute or property of an agent (Eacott, 2013). Strategies adopted by a single school can never be put down to a single agent, or correlated to some organizational outcome to single measure (Eacott, 2013). Leadership as a social practice needs to be considered within the context, in this case schools, and the relations with those both within and outside of the context: “as educational leadership is a social practice, any theoretical arguments relating to school leadership are by their very nature, dealing with social practice” (Eacott, 2013, p.185).

**Leading Relationally.** Eacott’s relational approach to leadership looks to recast the research of educational administration away from the proliferation of adjectives that have abounded from current research describing leadership “to offer a means of crafting theoretically charged descriptions illuminating the embodied and the embedded location of the educational leadership, management and administration scholar” (Eacott, 2015, p. 8). In considering this recast notion of leading relationally, *entity and relational*

approaches must be differentiated if one is to understand more fully Eacott's (2010, 2013, 2015) work around educational administration. Both the relational and entity approaches view leadership as a social process, however it is how the social process is attributed that differentiates them (Eacott, 2015). An entity approach focuses on "individuals and their perceptions, intentions, behaviours, personalities, expectations and evaluations relative to their relationships with others" (Eacott, 2015, p. 6). A relational approach "views knowledge as socially constructed and socially distributed, not as mind stuff constructed or accumulated and stored by individuals" (Eacott, 2015, p. 6). Eacott's (2015) relational approach proposes that when working to understand school leadership, that a relational approach explores the dynamic of organizing which goes beyond entities such as the school or individual and looks more at the phenomena in the interactions among actors in time and space (Eacott, 2015). Furthermore, the relational approach explores the space between individuals and the phenomena, but it does not see them as separate, but, rather, as coevolving in time (Eacott, 2015).

Leadership as a social practice consists of understanding the relations between schooling, policy, and the broader socio-economic conditions, which shed new light on the concept of leadership (Eacott, 2015). It is important to first differentiate between what Eacott refers to as relations and relationships. Relations, as Eacott (2015) proposes are "those active and fragile social arrangements between two or more institutions/individuals" (p. 44). Relationships are described as those that can be mapped and represented in two-dimensional diagrams (Eacott, 2015). Schools are more than just the physical building where learning occurs. They are more aptly defined by a set of

relations between dynamic groups of individuals that are always in motion (Eacott, 2015).

A relational approach to leadership moves beyond the internal tensions and external pressures of schools and recasts schools as structures consisting of dynamic relations that they hold with other social institutions (Eacott, 2015). The shifting nature of policies and reconfigurations of communities and the relations that schools hold with other institutions act as defining properties of a school (Eacott, 2015). “The relations between actors and/or materials are not static, but rather complex and ambiguous. Consequently, strategies adopted by a school, or school system, cannot be attributed to a single actor” (Eacott, 2015, p. 57). If we accept that schools are constantly being redefined and that relations change or are impacted, then leadership must be relational in order to respond to the changing social space in which schools find themselves. And yet, despite changing times and the differing or unique contexts of each and every school, “there maintains a certain level of predictability about schooling through space and time, even if the individuals within a school change” (Eacott, 2015, p. 34).

Let’s briefly consider space and time for just a moment. Much, if not all of the work in education, is future-focused; after all, the business of education itself is about preparing students for their future. Plans are made for three year increments. So, too, the aim of provincial goals has a future-focus.. In order to meet these goals a common understanding is that our practices in the present will help achieve the desired future. However, as Adkins (2009) argues, the actions we engage in in the present are already embedded in the outcomes we hope to see in the future. We need to instinctively anticipate the forthcoming as a routine part of action, suggesting that time does not

operate externally to events but unfolds with events (Adkins, 2009). Characterizing leadership practices becomes about building an alternate in the here and now, not about building an alternate or better future (Eacott, 2015). This supports Eacott's idea of leadership as a social practice that challenges leaders to change the status quo and work in the here and now (time), because the anticipation of what we hope the outcome will be is already a part of our practice as leaders respond to the current social space in which they operate.

Eacott's (2013) definition of leadership as a social practice challenges many existing definitions and theories related to educational leadership. Examining leadership as a social practice challenges the bureaucratic structures that have historically defined schools and their operation (Eacott, 2015). Leadership can only truly be understood in relation to other social objects – staff, community, families, school boards, policy and so on. If leadership practice succeeds in affecting change, those achievements cannot be attributed to a single entity as Eacott notes, but must be understood by its relations in a context, situated in space and time. As such, creating lists of leadership practices and behaviours becomes difficult because the relations within each context will differ and cannot truly be separated from the time and space in which they occur.

The main objective of this study is to characterize leadership practices related to promoting a single school culture and organizational learning that occur in the specific context of the case study school. Due to the revolving door of leaders in the case study school over a 13-year period, the examination of practices will need to be understood not only within the unique context of a 7-12 school, but also with time and space in mind.



Each school's social space or context is deeply embedded in its culture and leadership practices need to interact with a school's culture.

### **School Culture**

Culture as a concept has been defined as the accumulation of bits of knowledge and as conceptual structures used to interpret practices and behaviours (Higgins-D'Alessandro & Sadh,1998). Finding a single, overarching definition of what is meant by school culture has plagued researchers and writers for years (Schoen & Taddlie, 2008). The word "culture" came into use when Waller (1932) used it to describe life inside of schools. Waller (1932) writes:

Schools have a culture definitely their own. There are, in the school, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores, and irrational sanctions, a moral code based upon them. There are games, which are sublimated wars, teams, and an elaborate set of ceremonies concerning them. There are traditions, and traditionalists waging their world-old battle against innovators (p. 96).

Culture, as Waller (1932) describes it, can be understood as a process and that it can change. Culture is not the same as climate and should not be considered interchangeable. Cohen, McCabe, Michelli and Pickeral (2009) write that, "school climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School culture is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (p. 182). The concept of culture as a process in the development of a single culture grade 7 -12 school will be one the foci for this research project.

Schools establish cultures that center around artefacts, assumptions, beliefs, and values (Connolly et. al, 2011; Brady, 2008; Coke, 2005). Cultures can become so entrenched in schools that they can even influence student learning (Brady, 2008; Connolly et al., 2011; Coke, 2005; Hudley et al., 2003). Organizational structures such as streaming and subject specialization, promote the establishment of sub-cultures around grade-level, disciplines, and special interests (Brady, 2008; Connolly et al., 2011; Shaw, 2000; Sullivan-Duncan, 2000). Adolescence, cultural diversity, socioeconomic status, teachers and school leaders add another layer of sub-cultures within the school culture (Brady, 2008; Connolly et al., 2011; Hudley et al., 2003; Shaw, 2000). Cultures and sub-cultures are also influenced by external factors such as community perceptions, families, and societal cultural norms (Sullivan-Duncan, 2000; Schechter & Qadach, 2012).

Changing schools means changes in culture and a school's culture can either adapt to or resist change (Sullivan-Duncan, 2000). When schools are consolidated into new schools, the school culture changes in response to the new circumstances. In some cases a new culture is instituted as a result of the newly developed organizational structures (Hinde, 2004). It is important to understand that practices, values and assumptions cannot be simplistically transferred from one school setting to the next (Shaw, 1990). Eacott (2013) supports this idea when he proposes that when one tries to deconstruct, capture and ultimately replicate leadership elsewhere it fails to acknowledge the social space – both temporal and physical – in which practices take place, as it does not consider the relational properties of leading.

When grade 7 and 8 students from various schools are consolidated into a single existing, but underutilized high school, does the school's culture change to reflect the

addition of these new students from different schools? The development of a new culture in a consolidated school must take into consideration a number of factors if the unique cultures from all schools are to be imbedded into a single school culture.

The culture of grade 7 -12 schools are unique in that they work towards encompassing two distinct organizational cultures, elementary and secondary as well as parts of the individual cultures brought from various incoming schools. Developing a single school culture in 7-12 schools is challenging due to the deep entrenchment of traditions, beliefs, norms and values of two school levels that have developed independent of one another throughout history (Gidney, 1999). The more deeply entrenched values, artefacts and assumptions are, the more resistant they are to change (Brady, 2008). The development of a new school culture that seams together the values, traditions and norms of both the elementary and secondary, as well as aspects of the cultures schools bring with them to the process, is paramount in building a single school culture. In reviewing research on school culture, Fisher, Frey and Pumpian (2012) found that the work of Deal and Peterson (2009) suggests that the benefits of a strong, positive culture fosters effort and productivity, improves collegial and collaborative activities, builds commitment and helping students and teachers identify with the school, amplifies energy and motivation of staff members and students, and focuses attention and daily behavior on what is important and valued. When a positive school culture is present in a school, organizational learning is positively impacted.

### **Organizational Learning**

There has been some debate as to whether organizational learning should be defined as a change in cognition or in behaviour (Easterby-Smith, Crossan, & Nicolini,

2000). How learning is defined will lend itself to how organizational learning is defined. Is learning a process or a product? Learning as a product can be defined as a change in behaviour (Smith, 2001). In this case, learning is approached as an outcome, the end product of some process (Smith, 2001). The process may be gaining information, memorizing or storing information or acquiring facts, skills and methods that can be used as necessary (Smith, 2001). Learning as a process forms a continuum of learning consisting of a combination of both acquisition learning (concrete, immediate and confined to a specific activity) and formalized learning (arising from facilitating learning) (Smith, 2001). Learning as a process is most often observed, but not exclusively, in school settings.

Organizational learning occurs when there is a change in the organization's knowledge that occurs as a function of experience (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Fiol and Lyles (1985) write that it is important to understand that organizational learning is not simply the sum of each individual's learning. They argue "organizations, unlike individuals, develop and maintain learning systems, that not only influence their immediate members, but are then transmitted to others by way of organization of histories and norms" (Fiol & Lyles, 1985, p. 804). Organizational learning is shaped by the context in which it is applied. Fiol and Lyles (1985) identified four contextual factors that affect the probability of an organization's learning – a culture conducive to learning, a that allows for flexibility, an organizational structure that allows innovativeness and new insights and lastly an environment. What Fiol and Lyles (1985) also noted was that these four factors "have a circular relationship with learning in that they create and reinforce learning and are created by learning" (p. 804). As organizations perform tasks, experiences within the

organization grow, converting the experience into knowledge, which changes the context and impacts future learning (Argote, 2013).

Learning occurs within organizations regardless whether tasks are completed successfully or not because experience with attempted tasks creates new knowledge for an organization (Argote, 2013). It is important to note that the learning cycle of an organization occurs at different levels – individual, group, organizational and inter-organizational as well as at different paces (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999).

Organizational learning structures facilitate the movement of knowledge. Organizations learn as a result of individual learning that is then shared to enhance the development of the collective knowledge.

When one understands how critical the human element is to the development and transfer of new knowledge, organizational learning becomes a key tool in developing structures that focus on harnessing collective knowledge, not just individual knowledge. The development of structures like collaborative communities discussed by Adler et al., (2011) puts people at the centre of these configurations.

Collaborative communities create a culture where the unique talents of individuals are valued and used to achieve the collective goals of the organization, rather than for personal gain (Adler et. al., 2011). If leadership practices explicitly aim to create a culture and all participants are pursuing a common purpose, then those practices would promote organizational learning (Mulford & Silins, 2010). Continuous reflection and the development of ways to accomplish those purposes further promote organizational learning (Mulford & Silins, 2010). The process of developing organizational learning in

grade 7 -12 schools will be evaluated using the theoretical framework that organizational learning is a cyclical process and is influenced by experience and context.

### **Policy Enactment**

The world is full of policies. Policies can be found in our homes, schools, workplaces, volunteer organizations, stores, communities, provincial, nationally and internationally. Policies, simply put, guide our actions. The collective work of Ball (1994), and Braun, Ball, Maguire, and Hoskins (2011) suggests that policies do not normally tell us what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed. From the outside, it appears that policy development occurs in response as a means to solving a problem. For example, if the problem is low student achievement, policies created to address this problem may take the form of standardization of curriculum, instruction and assessment or decentralization of power, to name just a few (Houchens & Keedy, 2009). The intent of policies related to student achievement, for example, is to see improvement, which implicitly endorses schools to make changes using the guidelines outlined in the policy. However, if centrally developed policies, such as provincial policy, are meant to promote or influence change in schools, then why are some schools struggling to achieve the policy goals, while others meet them? The answer may be related to each school's unique context and social space.

Eacott openly promotes that context is crucial to understanding school leadership and change in schools. Argyris and Schön's (1978) work on organizational learning and their theory of practice framework also asserts that context is important, stating that theories are situational and that change does not happen in a vacuum, but is carried out in

an organizational context. Although I do not intend to delve into the work of Argyris and Schön, they support the idea that context is critical to understanding how change in schools occur. Furthermore, Eacott (2013, 2015) and Argyris and Schön (1978) highlight that change requires or is influenced by the participation of others and is not the sole ownership of an individual. Developing an understanding of the social construction of policies will help provide a framework for how schools implement and interpret them.

**The process of policy enactment.** Putting policies into practice is a creative, sophisticated, complex and constrained process (Braun et al., 2011). Normative policy analysis sees the purpose of policy as an attempt to solve a problem (Maguire, Braun & Ball, 2015). However, this narrow understanding of policy, that situates the government as a problem-solver, separate from society, grossly limits all “the other moments in the processes of policy and policy enactments that go into schools and other organizations become marginalized or go unrecognized” (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 485). Policy, instead, must be viewed as a process that considers all actors as important and where the process is understood to be “diversely and repeatedly contested and/or subject to interpretation as it is enacted (rather than implemented) in original or creative ways within institutions and classrooms” (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011, p. 586).

When those who are charged with enacting policy, policy actors, such as school boards, principals and teachers are bleached out or go unrecognized in the process, it emphasizes that policy-making at a legislative level is still characterized by hierarchy, placing policy actors in the single role of implementers instead of as contributing members of the process. Policy enactment must be understood as a process of social, cultural and emotional construction and interpretation, suggesting that they are multi-

layered and messy helping us understand the complicated relationship between making policy and practicing policy in complex, situated contexts like schools (Maguire et al., 2015).

If we begin to understand policy in terms of enactment, rather than implementation, it allows us to recognize the different ways in which different schools attempt to realize policy through different activities like in-service sessions or circulation of curriculum data (Maguire et al., 2015). Policy work is a process of sense-making and policy actors who are charged with implementing policies interpret them through lenses that they have developed through experience that filter their awareness (Maguire et al., 2015). Interpretation, in this context, means the way policy actors initially read and respond to policy (Maguire et al., 2015). Policies are interpreted at many different levels (e.g., school to school, senior leadership, division meetings, classroom, person to person), which can lead to interpretations of interpretations or re-contextualization (Maguire et al., 2015). Each new lens in which the policy is interpreted can account for how different policy actors enact or do not appear to enact policy. Policy enactment must be understood as being a process of becoming that it is not simply done at one point of time. In short, policy enactment is messy, incomplete and a form of interpretation and inter-subjectivity in action (Maguire et al., 2015). This links closely with Eacott's ideas related to time and space. Policy is not static and the actions or practices that follow after our interpretation of policy occur in the here and now to help build an alternate in the present.

There is little argument that schools are complex. One true testament to this complexity is the number of policies that are being implemented and enacted at any given time in a school. "There may be dominant or official enactments co-existing with



informal, less visible and undocumented policy practices” (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 487). There are different types of policies occurring simultaneously at a school such as non-negotiable, high stakes policies that demand attention and compliance, more fluid policies that are sometimes in the foreground and other times are invisible (Maguire et al., 2015).

If we consider policy enactment as a process, and not a one-off event, then some policy actors are more dominant than others depending on where they “sit” in the process (Maguire et al., 2015). “Time and space and positionality and commitments all play a part in the different workings (or not) of policy interpretation in action” (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 487). “Depending on the perspectives, values and positions of different types of policy actors and different types of policies, as well as grounded factors of time and place, enactments are contingent, fragile, social constructions” (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 487).

**Policy Prioritization.** As schools are often required to enact a wide range of policies, prioritizing occurs. How that prioritization occurs lays with the policy actors. Schools interpret policy at different levels and different forms of interpretation and practices are enacted in teams, departments and classrooms (Maguire et al., 2015). Practices, which evolve out of policy interpretation, may get enacted in different ways because of different personal and professional orientations as well as different posts of responsibility held by various policy actors in the school (Maguire et al., 2015). For example, more subject specific policies are adhered to in a particular subject area, but policy actors that have very little to do with that subject will not prioritize them and are less likely to enact them. For instance, classroom teachers who have more day-to-day

contact with students have more time/space to negotiate, while principals and board leaders have more room for ensuring that schools are compliant with broader legislated policy requirements (Maguire et al., 2015). When policies are translated into practices, from code of conduct policies, to curriculum, to assessment and so on, their enactment becomes overt and visible.

One example of these processes of policy enactment in schools can be found in the following case: presently in Ontario, the government has introduced a policy around K-8 mathematics directly related to the number of daily instructional minutes. The catalyst for this policy is the data presented from EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office) that suggests that an area in need of improvement student achievement in mathematics. There is tremendous pressure placed on teachers of mathematics. School leaders may respond to this newly legislated policy by timetabling grades, divisions, or the entire school, to hold math in the same time block to maximize supports for teachers and students. Running parallel to this new policy will be existing policies on assessment and evaluation and other curriculums, to name just a few, that will interweave with this new policy. By making math highly visible, other areas of the school become less visible or are pushed to the side, potentially creating conflict and strain with other policy actors within the school.

Subject policy prioritization is one way that policies can become more visible in schools. Another way is where policy actors, for example departments and clusters of classrooms, may be physically located in the school (Maguire et al., 2015). In a study conducted by Maguire et al., (2015) of four high schools in England, they found that when classrooms and services supporting students with learning difficulties, are tucked

away in less obvious and accessible parts of the building, pressures to enact policy – at least some of the minor and less high stake policies is removed (Maguire et al., 2015).

**Policy Actors.** Much has been said about policy actors, but little has been said about how significant their role is in policy enactment. As outlined earlier, policy is interpreted at various levels and is influenced by the experience, values and positionality of the policy actors. Enactment, thus hinges on ‘where you stand’ referring to matters of experience and day-to-day priorities, rather than any broader issues of values and/or ethics (Maguire et al., 2015). “Actors in schools are positioned differently and take up different positions in relation to policy, including positions of indifference or avoidance or irrelevance” (Braun et al., 2011, p. 625). New teachers, for example, look to policy for guidance, direction and coping mechanisms to survive the day-to-day responsibility of getting their classrooms right and responding to what they see (Maguire et al., 2015). In the case of new teachers, and I would further suggest experienced teachers in new situations or contexts, their positionality and their experience of surviving day-to-day and understanding their new situation makes them initially less invested in policy enactment in the wider school setting as their concerns are driven by their level of experience, their position and their engagement with classrooms and students on a day-to-day basis (Maguire et al., 2015).

The type of policy being enacted, the different position and perspectives of the local policy actors, experience and relativity to the actor, different aspirations and competences as well as the arduous process of sense-making, make policy enactment an on-going process (Maguire et al., 2015; Ball et al., 2011). “Enacting policy is a complicated and sometimes inchoate process. It is both contingent and specific, situated

in time/space and seen as less/more important by different policy actors in the school” (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 497). Policy interpretations do not operate uniformly across schools; teachers are subjected differently and act differently (Ball et al., 2011). In schools, different policy actors have different loyalties, different projects and policies that are “tied” to particular leaders or portfolio and when they leave their particular approach leaves (Maguire et al., 2015). In these instances actors take the role of entrepreneur, or policy advocate by championing a particular policy (Ball et al., 2011).

Characteristically, they are charismatic people and are forceful agents of change who are personally invested in and identify with the policy ideas and their enactment (Ball et al., 2011). They work to recruit others to help promote change and enact policy (Ball et al., 2011). In order to do this, entrepreneurs, or policy enthusiasts, rework and recombine aspects of different policies, draw on disparate ideas, examples of ‘good practice’ and other resources to produce something original (Ball et al., 2011). Eacott would relate this to challenging the status quo or existing structures in his conceptualization of leadership as a social practice. As a final step to enactment, policy enthusiasts crucially understand how to translate this new policy on to a set of positions and roles and organization relationships, which will enact the policy (Ball et al., 2011). Policy enthusiasts do not work to enact all policies, but those that they are truly invested in. Furthermore they act as translators of policy, recruiting and working with others to make sense of policy and gather ideas and momentum to promote change within the school (Ball et al., 2011).

At the opposing end of policy enactment are policy critics. Unions and union representatives contribute in different ways to policy work or interpretation and can

become very visible in the policy process at particular times, for instance, when policies or policy translation threaten the interest of their members, they become visible (Ball et al., 2011). Although for the most part their relationship with policy enactment is relegated to monitoring policy translation related to the conditions of work, service and well-being of teachers, they still must be considered actors in policy translation and enactment (Ball et al., 2011).

“Where you stand in terms of subject department, pedagogical value, the time of year and the range of biographical factors such as length of service, plays powerfully into where you sit and renders policy enactment a more fragile and unstable process than is sometimes imagined” (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 498).

**The Role of Context in Policy Enactment.** Just as context plays a critical role in understanding school leadership practice, it is also central in policy enactment. By taking context seriously, “policies are intimately shaped and influenced by school-specific factors even though in much central policy making and research, these sorts of constraints, pressures and enablers of policy tend to be neglected” (Braun et al., 2011, p. 585). Schools are highly complex and internally differentiated organizations that consist of high and low visibility spaces as well as discretionary spaces; corners of the school where policy does not reach, bits of practice that are made up of teacher’s good ideas or chance (Maguire et al., 2015). Although it may appear from the outside that schools are straightforwardly adopting a number of policies, schools have different capacities for coping with policy (Baun et al, 2011). Each school has their own unique culture, ethos or situated necessities; therefore, how schools and policy actors within those schools interpret or produce their own “take” on policy becomes specific for their context (Baun

et al., 2011). Policy enactment depends on whether a policy is mandated, strongly recommended or suggested but also to the degree that it fits with the ethos or culture of the school (Baun et al., 2011). Furthermore, “policies enter different resource environments: schools have particular histories, buildings and infrastructures, staffing profiles, leadership experiences, budgetary situations and teaching and learning challenges” (Baun et al., 2011, p. 586). As policies enter into varied and unique school environments, organizational perspectives, habits, and routines help provide explanations for the way policy processes are played out in practice (Baun et al., 2011).

Policies are enacted in material conditions (e.g., buildings, infrastructure) with varying resources (e.g., teaching and leadership) in relation to particular problems (e.g., low student achievement) (Baun et al., 2011). They are set against and alongside existing commitments, values and forms of experience creating a framework for policy enactment that needs to consider a set of conditions in relation to a set of subjective “interpretational” dynamics (Baun et al., 2011). Context itself is multidimensional when we consider schools. The interconnectedness of contextual dimensions such as situated, material and external contexts all play a part in how policy is interpreted and enacted. Situated contexts are those aspects of context that are historically and “locationally” linked to the school such as a school’s setting, the school’s history and its intake (Baun et al., 2011). Where a school is located influences which students it takes in which can lead to the school being defined by their intake or defining themselves by it (Baun et al., 2011). Student intake, which contributes to the unique nature of each school’s culture, adds to policy enactment by looking at the challenges and opportunities that the student population presents (Baun et al., 2011). A school’s reputation and history are another

example of context that is alive within the collective consciousness of schools (Baun et al., 2011). Couple this with the school community that constructs stories based on their own experiences or broader generalizations, situated contexts play a large part in the enactment of policy.

The professional context refers to teachers' values, commitments, experiences and policy management within schools (Baun et al., 2011). Depending on the professional outlook and attitudes of the various policy actors, policy responses become more or less possible (Baun et al., 2011). Professional context is not necessarily coherent and uncontested in schools where one or some staff supports a policy while others may not (Baun et al., 2011). Teachers as policy actors in the school are always , therefore, how they see and understand policy is dependent on where they 'are at' (Baun et al, 2011). Furthermore, the professional context cannot solely refer to the whole school, but must consider the individuality of teachers as well as groups by subject departments or organizational clusters such as primary, junior and intermediate.

Material context refers to the physical aspects of a school: buildings, budgets as well as levels of staffing, available technologies and surrounding infrastructure and “(b)uildings, their layout, quality and spaciousness can have considerable impact on policy enactments on the ground” (Baun et al., 2011, p. 592). Subject departments, classes providing extra support for students or the organization of specific grades in designated areas of the school that are isolated from the going-ons in the main part of the building, all may enact policy differently. Staffing is a school's main asset and the desire for schools to attract and keep 'good' teachers can be difficult for schools in areas where student intake provides the school with a challenging student population. Staff turnover

or stagnant staffs, where there has been very little staff movement, also influences policy enactment either through constant change in promoting or pushing back policy or through group apathy or support for policies simply as a bi-product of having been a consistent group of professionals for a long period of time.

Lastly, external contexts such as the pressures and expectations from the broader local and national policy matters, such as the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) provincial achievement tests creates pressures for schools to perform well thus influencing particular rafts of policy (Baun et al., 2011).

Context is specific, dynamic and shifting both within and outside of schools (Baun et al., 2011). A school may undergo changes in staffing, capacity, attitude, and make-up, as well as student intake, constantly putting the school context in a state of flux (Baun et al., 2011). Although not an exhaustive list of contextual factors – situated, professional, material and external-provide the necessary beginnings to understand policy enactment in schools. “Policy making and policy-makers tend to assume ‘best possible’ contexts for implementation: ideal buildings, students, teachers and even resources” (Baun et al., 2011, p. 595). However, the complexity and individuality that each school represents makes the best possible environment one of interpretation. The ‘best possible’ for one school, based on the previously outlined contextual factors, may look completely different from one school to the next.

Schools cannot be reduced to policy. Schools are classical single systems made up of multiple interacting parts (Ball et al., 2011). “A great deal of what goes on in schools in terms of policy is ‘configuration and reconfiguration’ work which aims to extend the durability of the institution in the face of de-stabilising effects of context, of change and



of policy” (Ball et al., 2011, p. 637). Policy must be understood as more than the solution to a problem, but as ongoing process that is influenced by many different factors. How policy is re-contextualized or interpreted and enacted in schools hinges on a multitude of factors that are not constant and where public policy always reflects social values (Baun et al., 2011). The prioritizing of policies places some at the forefront of schools while others fall ‘below the radar’ or are implemented marginally. This can place extreme pressure on some schools or staff to promote change. Policy actors play a significant role in policy enactment. Their decision to engage with particular policies is driven by their experiences, values and assumptions. While some take the role as entrepreneurs of a particular policy, others may use it as a guide for day-to-day survival of the rigour of the classroom. The importance of time and space on policy enactment intertwines with actors, priorities and context. Lastly, context is critical, and often overlooked, by policy makers. Context provides the answers to some of the whys for how schools respond differently to nationally, locally or school-devised policies.

### **Conclusion**

The term leadership brings with it a myriad of styles that are rooted in the types of roles, tasks and contexts that leaders take on. However, as Leithwood (2006) suggests, traditional understandings of leadership may only represent slogans with regards to the work that leaders do in schools. Leadership must be more than the adjectives and the lists of attributes that describe it. Eacott (2013) provides a different perspective that suggests that leadership is about challenging the status quo, a social practice that goes beyond the lists of tasks and traits. When social space, time and relations are considered, leadership reflects the social practices that respond to a number of school and societal variables that

change. Due to each school's unique context successful practices in one building may not be directly transferable to another, supporting the idea that leadership is not held by a single individual but is a reflection of the social space in which it occurs.

Closely coupled with leadership is school culture. The culture of a school is rooted in artefacts, beliefs, values and assumptions that define it. It is unique to each school. When schools are consolidated leaders face the challenge of creating or promoting a culture that represents both schools leading to the development of a single 7-12 school culture. A school's culture is multi-layered consisting of sub-cultures that leaders try to navigate in order to promote change. The promotion of a single school culture in grade 7-12 schools presents leaders with significant challenges as they work to seam together the values, tradition and norms of not only elementary and secondary but also the distinctive cultures that each school brings. When leaders work to understand the social space in which the new school culture must develop, leading relationally becomes paramount to developing a single school culture.

Organizational learning, or more importantly how an organization learns, cannot be separated from school culture, leadership or policy. How leaders and staff take on new learning opportunities, which are, in turn, shared with others, helps schools work towards achieving common goals collectively. Policy enactment plays a significant role in organizational learning. School leaders who understand the impact that context, perspectives, values and positions of different types of policy actors have on policy enactment are able to promote organizational learning more readily. As new policies are consistently being presented to schools, the process of organizational learning remains

ongoing and cyclic. Leadership practices that respond to the intricacies of policy enactment and the school's culture work to promote and support organizational learning.

The complexity of schools and their relationships within and outside of schools, make leadership and policy enactment multilayered. Leaders need to carefully consider and work with the relations specific to the social space in which they lead. Understanding relationally the influencing factors such as the community, board, province, teachers, staff and students, leaders work within these various layers to implement organizational change. Policy enactment, as a layered and ongoing process, requires leaders to understand deeply the context (material, external, situated and professional) and the impact this will have on promoting organizational learning.

Leadership works relationally with policy and policy actors to create learning organizations to meet the needs of the unique social space where change is happening. The social practices used by leaders shape the direction of the school by understanding and explicitly interacting with policy actors, policy prioritization, policy enthusiasm, apathy, and the context in which it is implemented. Lastly, leaders that understand how our actions now are already imbedded with future intentions allows for social practice to further challenge the status quo in order to make impactful change in the present.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

A qualitative case study approach, specifically an exploratory single case study (Yin, 2012), was used to characterize leadership practices in a grade 7- 12 school in a school board located in Southwestern Ontario. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, field notes, historical research, document analysis and data triangulation, the leadership practices related to the consolidation of a 7-12 school were explored. The decision to use a case study approach for this study was driven by my interest to study up-close, the phenomenon of leadership practices in a single grade 7-12 school from its time of inception to present day.

### **Research Paradigm**

Studies of leadership are complex when one considers the varying ontological and epistemological frameworks involved in the analysis. Hartley (2010) contends that how leadership is studied and understood is influenced by the paradigm in which the study occurs. Hartley uses Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigmatic analysis of sociologically informed paradigms to bring to light how research and studies in leadership are understood and how assumptions regarding the focus of the research can impact how results are understood.

Hartley (2010) notes that most studies on leadership have been carried out in the functionalist paradigm, adopting methods associated with the natural sciences. In this paradigm, social science tends to assume that the social world is composed of "relatively concrete empirical artefacts and relationships, which can be identified, studied and measured through approaches derived from natural sciences" (p. 273). Alternatively,

leadership studies that are understood in a paradigm of interpretivism suggest that the focus of the research is “oriented towards obtaining an understanding of the subjectively created social world ‘as it is’ in terms of an ongoing process” (p. 274). Although both paradigms appear to represent different approaches to understanding leadership, both paradigms assume a social order that is based on consensual meaning-making and both regard their research as somehow cumulative, developmental and—in the long term—of positive benefit to social progress (Hartley, 2010).

If leadership is to be understood as a movement towards radical change, then studies can be interpreted in two differing paradigms – radical humanism and radical constructivism. Research within the radical humanist paradigm is about the transformation of individual consciousness towards a state of emancipation, whereas research within the radical structuralist paradigm seeks to change social structures to overcome social injustice (Hartley, 2010).

Hartley’s (2010) use of Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) paradigms brings to the forefront assumptions about educational leadership research and the implications of the knowledge attained from it. Furthermore, he indicates that there has been limited production of studies within the paradigms of radical humanism and radical structuralism (Harley, 2010). A large number of studies, he argues, “reside wholly or in part within the paradigm of interpretivism” (Hartley, 2010, p. 281). What this suggests is that the majority of research falls within Burrell and Morgan’s dimension of social regulation, and not within that of radical change (Hartley, 2010). Simply put, historically studies in educational leadership have provided knowledge about the status quo rather than

empirical evidence of how to transform organizations for a more just and equitable society.

This study adopted elements of interpretivist and radical humanist paradigms, where I collected data from the participants' perspectives to identify organizational change that promotes equitable school environments for all students. The analysis of the data led to identifying leadership practices that promoted organizational change in the grade 7 -12 case study school. One of the benefits of conducting this research is to help inform practices of leaders in similar settings, through the transferring of the research results (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). Although it is not the intent of this case study to provide an exhaustive list of leadership practices for grade 7-12 school leaders, it is the hope that despite Anderson's (2009) thoughts that "it would be unreasonable to expect that pattern to be replicated in all improvement scenarios in the same and different schools" (Anderson et al., 2009, p.135), the conclusions of this study aim to inform further reflections on change initiatives in similar settings.

### **Case Study Method**

Case study research begins with a researcher's desire to conduct an in-depth study of a single case. Such closeness aims to produce an invaluable and deep understanding that hopefully results in new learning about the case and the context in which it occurs. Case study research allows researchers to develop an up-close or in-depth understanding of a single or small number of "cases" (Yin, 2012 Yin,2014) further suggests that a case study is an examination of a contemporary phenomenon when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context may not be clearly evident. Case study research allows researchers to go beyond the study of isolated variables to cover a broader range of

contextual and other complex conditions (Yin, 2012). For this research study, it was critical to ensure that these contextual conditions were studied in order to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership practices that emerged during the consolidation in the case study grade 7-12 school.

Case study research allows the researcher to go beyond statistical results and understand the qualitative dimensions of practice through the eyes of the participant (Zainal, 2007). Baxter and Jack (2008) write that, “a qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources” (p. 544). Furthermore, they suggest that, “this ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544).

Patton (2015) contends that, “the case study stands on its own as a detailed and rich story about a person, organization, event, campaign or program – whatever the focus of study” (p. 259). In selecting the case study method, and through the use of semi-structured interviews, I was able to collect data from the rich and detailed stories of those interviewed that provided a variety of lenses in which to deeper understand the case study school. The use of an exploratory case study approach for this research project allowed me to explore the phenomenon of leadership practices in the consolidation of a grade 7 - 12 school.

**Exploratory case study.** Exploratory case studies investigate the phenomena characterized by a lack of preliminary research (Streb, 2010). They apply to research contexts that are not clearly specified and still require data to formulate valid hypotheses (Streb, 2010). “Exploratory case studies are generally distinguished by the absence of

preliminary propositions and hypotheses. “Identifying these very often is the actual purpose of the study instead of being its origin” (Streb, 2010, p. 3). Robert Yin, the foremost author with regard to case study research, defines exploratory case studies as, “a means to define the necessary questions and hypotheses for developing consecutive studies” (Streb, 2010, p. 2). This type of case study research allows the researcher a lot of flexibility and independence with the research design giving way to critics who question the relevancy in terms of continuative studies (Streb, 2010). The primary aim of exploratory case studies is to explore the unknown (Streb, 2010). Presently, there are no published studies on the leadership practices in grade 7-12 consolidated schools, making the decision to conduct an exploratory case study essential.

One of the key advantages (and criticisms) of the exploratory case study design is the intuitive approach that it requires, as there is no prior research that informs the study (Streb, 2010). Such an approach can be a powerful research tool when one considers the “usefulness of exploratory case study research in the study of social phenomena in their original context” lending to its intuitive and flexible characteristics (Streb, 2010, p. 2). Although flexibility, independence and intuitiveness are some of the key attributes of this type of study, the research design and data collection must still fulfill the required scientific criteria of validity and reliability (Streb, 2010).

Exploratory case studies are ideally used when there is a “lack of specific, theory-based prior assumptions that are often not considered a strength but a weakness” (Streb, 2010, p. 3). Despite criticisms that are fuelled by the flexibility of this type of case study which leads to questions of validity and reliability, the exploratory case study’s potential



is underestimated since it can provide value beyond the provision of a hypothesis (Streb, 2010).

Although having an outline that clearly indicates the priorities and questions to be explored at the start of the research, one of the key features of the exploratory case study is for the researcher to remain open to new discoveries during the process (Harder, 2010). Case studies provide researchers with a wealth of in-depth knowledge. However, there are some disadvantages to consider such as: they are lengthy and difficult to conduct; they may produce a large quantity of data; the researcher does not have control over all variables and contextual features; there could be biases in data collection, interpretation and results, especially when the study is conducted by a single researcher; finally, case study methodology can be viewed as “microscopic” because of limited sampling cases (Yin, 1993), which may create difficulty in establishing reliability (George & Bennett, 2004).

**Unit of Analysis and Context of the Research.** One of the important components of case study research is identifying the unit of analysis (Yin, 2009). The unit of analysis is the “what” or “who” that is being studied and is related to the way initial research questions are defined (Yin, 2009). Units of analysis can be individuals, an event, entity or an organization (Yin, 2009). Defining the unit of analysis is critical for case studies as it limits the boundaries of the research to questions that only pertain to the unit of analysis (Rowley, 2002). Rowley (2002) writes that, “sources of evidence and the evidence gathered are determined by the boundaries that define the unit of analysis” (p. 17).

When defining the case, or unit of analysis, researchers must consider the research purpose, questions, and theoretical context (Rowley, 2002). Studies help researchers identify the relevant information to be collected about the unit of analysis (Yin, 2009). Determining the questions of the research establishes boundaries regarding sources of evidence and gathered evidence (Rowley, 2002).

The case study for this research project focused on a single unit of analysis – the leadership practices that promote one culture and organizational structures in a consolidated grade 7-12 school. The criteria for the selected case study school provided a further bounded context for the unit of analysis.

The selected school is one of the 7 -12 schools in the board with a student population of between 500 and 1000 students. Of that school population, three-quarters represent grades 9-12, while the remaining quarter is comprised of grades 7-8. Most of the student population lives within the city where the school is located. Grade 7 students came from 4 different K-6 schools all established through school district boundaries when the Gr. 7 -12 school was established 13 years ago. The case study school had to be a grade 7-12 with at least 10 years' experience to ensure that the school culture had time to develop and grow (Brady, 2008) with the addition of grade 7 and 8 students to the building. The administrative team had to represent a focus on both grades 9-12 and 7-8.

### **Historical Research**

This study used elements of historical research as another method of characterizing leadership practices that promote organizational learning and the development of a single culture in the case study grade 7-12 school. Gay, Mills and Airasian (2012) describe historical studies as the systematic collection and evaluation of

data related to past occurrences to help explain present events. Interviews with former school leaders of the case study school, the director of education, a former superintendent of the case study school as well as school and ministry policy documents provided both primary and secondary data and the basis of the historical research for this study. By developing an understanding of the past, researchers can describe causes, effects and trends of the phenomenon being studied.

Historical studies use pertinent documents, relics and other data sources to draw relationships from the past to present (Gay et. al, 2012). Data in historical studies can be characterized as either primary, that is a firsthand account or original documents, or secondary data which is any information or data collected that is not deemed firsthand (Lundy 2008). Data collected from the interviews represented primary data. Historical documents used such as the accommodation review minutes and ministry policies are secondary data. The necessity to include historical research in this study helped further my understanding of the leadership practices at the case study school.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

#### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews with the current and former administrators of the school, a former superintendent, as well as the director of education for the case study school board were conducted. The scope of the study was limited to the collection of data pertaining to leadership, the development of school culture, and organizational learning.

Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to engage in a more conversational method of data collection, using questions that have been prepared ahead of time. “Semi-structured interviews are often used when the researcher wants to delve deeply into a

topic and to understand thoroughly the answers provided” (Harrell & Bradley, 2009, p. 25). The advantages of the semi-structured interview, such as the preparation of questions ahead of time, reliable, comparable qualitative data, and two-way communication between the interviewer and the interviewee, to name just a few, will support the type of information, data, depth, and background necessary for understanding the phenomenon this study hopes to investigate (Cohen, 2006). The flexibility this style of interview offers for both the researcher and interviewee allows for deeper probing of details and discussing issues which may result in more questions being created during the interview (Ayres, 2008).

The decision to use semi-structured interviews for this research project allowed me to prepare key questions prior to the interview, but also the flexibility to delve more deeply into areas that each particular participant raised during the interview. The conversational style of a semi-structured interview worked well for both the participant and the researcher in order to keep the flow of ideas moving smoothly.

### **Field Notes**

Field notes allow the researcher to consider additional information not shared in the semi-structured interviews that may provide additional insight into the phenomena being studied. Firmin (2008) writes that memories are finite; we all forget, thus the value of recording things we observe in field notes ensures that the data are not later overlooked or forgotten. Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2011) caution researchers to document what is actually taking place and not what they expect to see so that their expectations do not affect their observations. Mack et al., (2011) further suggest that the following strategies will help make field notes a reliable tool in data collection:

date and time each entry; make time to expand field notes shortly after they are made to ensure nothing is forgotten; expand notes into sentences so anyone can read and understand the notes; write a narrative using the key words from the notes that describes what happened, what you learned about the setting and the participant; ensure that observations are objective and free from interpretations and personal comments.

The use of field notes allowed me to go back through the interview data to include observational notes that would further support what was said during the interview. They were helpful when working to make links and connections during the data analysis phase of the research.

### **Participants**

Prior to participant recruitment for this study, I submitted an ethics proposal to Western University carefully outlining how participants would be involved in the study and the ethical measures that would be taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. Following the approval of the ethics proposal, I was required to complete a research request form for the school board where the study would occur. Once this form was approved, I began participant recruitment for my study. Recruitment was informed by the sampling practice for this study. Purposive sampling was used in order to obtain participants who fit the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for participating in this study are:

1. Individuals who are current or former administrators (principals and vice principals) of the case study grade 7 -12 school; and
2. Individuals who are current or former members of the Accommodation Review Committee (a board committee in charge of school consolidations).

Patton (1990) suggests that, “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p. 169). By using the inclusion criteria for participant recruitment, only those who had in-depth knowledge of the case study grade 7-12 school were asked to participate.

The participants in this study included the 3 members of the current administrative team, 3 former administrators from the case study school, as well as the current director of education, and a former superintendent. Using the inclusion criteria for this study, and board documents, I created a list of participants who would be eligible to participate in the study. Using a non-board email address, I individually contacted the potential participants and invited them to be part of the study. A letter of information regarding the study was provided for each possible participant to provide the necessary information for informed consent. Each participant was involved in the development of the grade 7-12 school at some stage, from its inception to the present, providing a historical account of leadership practices at the board and school level.

At the time of the interview participants were asked to sign a consent form following any questions they had about the study. Participants were reminded that their confidentiality would be protected by having all identifiers encrypted including their full name and email addresses, and through the use of pseudonyms to better ensure their privacy. Participants were also informed at the time of the interview that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that their data would not be used. At the time of member checking, participants were asked again, via email, if they had any questions or

concerns about the research project and about their continued participation. A responding email from each participant and an in-person check in by me further supported continued informed consent by the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the semi-structured interviews and document analysis I coded the data using a qualitative analysis approach as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Prior to coding I created two individual tables with each of the study research questions. I began with open coding, an interpretive process where data is broken down to give the researcher new insights that are reflected in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I printed the interview transcripts and read them over several times while using highlighters to colour-code and delineate data that addressed the two research questions. From there I was able to create labels, within the appropriate research question table, and summarize my data based on the labels while also giving participant examples that supported the label. This approach led to the beginning stages of comparisons (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Before I began the next stage of data analysis, axial coding, I printed out the tables with labels I had created through open coding and began to look for relationships among the labels. Axial coding is the process of looking for relationships among the open codes which allowed me to further analyze the data through the identified relationships and to address the two research questions.

The various stages allowed me to revisit the data several times in order to ensure that data saturation had been met. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggest that, “If one has reached the point of no new data, one has also most likely reached the point of no new themes; therefore, one has reached data saturation” (p.1409). Through the various steps

of coding, no new themes emerged. Data saturation was reached with the nine interviews when through coding the data to identify themes no new themes emerged.

Linking and making connections occurred in the final stages of analysis. Dey (1993) suggests that the aim of linking data is to "provide an empirical basis for connecting categories" (p. 175). Furthermore, Dey writes that, "If we link as well as categorize our data, we can offset this initial fragmentation of the data and provide more direct empirical grounds for making connections between categories" (p. 178). Through linking and making connections I was able to draw conclusions from the data to answer the key research questions proposed by this study.

### **Trustworthiness of the research context**

A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources a strategy that also enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990). When using data from multiple sources it allows the researcher to analyze the process rather than study each source independently (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Each data source provides one more "piece of the puzzle" which in turn contributes to the researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A drawback to this type of data collection, however, is there can be an overwhelming amount of data which may consume lots of time and effort in managing and assessing it (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

"Triangulation can be used to deepen the researchers' understanding of the issues and maximize their confidence in the findings of qualitative studies" (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2002, p. 3). Furthermore, it allows researchers to obtain a more complete picture of what is being studied and to cross check information (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Through data triangulation I was able to draw on connections between



the document analysis, field notes and interviews.

To further support the trustworthiness of the data, Russell, Ploeg, DiCenso and Guyat (2005) suggest that by having: a clearly written research question, a case study design that is appropriate for the question, purposeful sampling strategies have been applied, data that is collected and managed systematically and finally data that is analyzed correctly, the validity and credibility of the study can be improved. With a clear and purposeful research question I was able to determine an appropriate research design, exploratory case study, and through the use of an explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, purposeful sampling was applied. Through the analysis stage, reviews conducted by my supervisor and my own reflection further helped to strengthen the trustworthiness of the results.

### **Conclusion**

The study is set within an interpretivist paradigm with some aspects of radical humanism. A qualitative methodology, specifically an exploratory case study, was used with semi-structured interviews, document analysis and field notes as the research tools to collect data. Data triangulation was applied to increase the reliability of the data. Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling using the inclusion criteria established in the ethics proposal submitted to Western University. Recruitment occurred through personal emails to participants who met the inclusion criteria and were invited to the study. Ethical considerations related to participant confidentiality and informed consent were provided to participants in a letter of information and through in person conversations at the time of the interview. Encrypted personal data and pseudonyms were also used to better ensure anonymity of participants. Continued informed consent was

observed throughout the data collection and analysis process for each participant beginning with the interview then through member checking. Data analysis was reflected in three distinct coding stages - open, axial and coded. Linking and making connections occurred to further support data saturation.

The opportunity to study a single school and narrate its journey as it grew as a newly formed 7-12 school reflected aspects of historical research as experiences of participants ranged from the inception of the school to the present day. Considering the data within a historical framework furthered connections and links that allowed me to view the development of leadership practices as a journey over 13 years.

## Chapter Five

### Analysis

My journey to characterize leadership practices related to the promotion of a single school culture and organizational learning in a consolidated grade 7-12 led me to interview nine experienced leaders including principals, vice principals, a former superintendent and the current director who had been involved with Amadill North Secondary School (ANSS)<sup>1</sup> as it became a consolidated 7-12 school to present day. Each narrative paints a picture that at times is interconnected, as their time at Amadill overlapped, and, at other times, stands on its own, but always describing a school that has transformed over the past 13 years. With an emphasis on their leadership practices participants describe the culture of the school, their challenges and their successes with organizational learning.

Coupled with a theoretical framework that emphasizes context, policy enactment, leading relationally, culture and organizational learning, this chapter identifies critical ideas and leadership practices at the provincial, board and school level and the impact these have had on developing a grade 7-12 school culture and supporting organizational learning. As this study is an exploration of leadership practices related to promoting a single school culture and organizational learning, subcultures have not been examined. Since no other studies of this nature have been conducted in Ontario, a finer grained examination of subcultures stretched beyond the exploratory nature of this study.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of the participants and to maintain the confidentiality of their answers, pseudonyms will be used throughout the analysis. Similarly, the school's name will be changed to the pseudonym: "Amadill North Secondary School" (ANSS) and the city's name to "Barele".

This chapter will analyze the data provided by the participants in the interviews as well as documents around the Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) for school consolidation that resulted in Amadill becoming a grade 7-12 school, from a grade 9-12 school in the city of Barele. Following a brief introduction of the participants, the remainder of the chapter will be organized into three major themes – consolidation, culture and organizational learning. Within these themes, participants' experiences and leadership practices will be foremost with connections to ideas outlined in the theoretical framework.

### **Participants**

Each story told by the participants provided a snapshot into the leadership journey of ANSS. When pieced altogether, Amadill's story cannot be described as static or unchanging. A revolving door of leaders, in both the principal and vice-principal roles, since the inception of the grade 7-12 school created new challenges for each participant. The range of experiences of the participants could have enriched the culture at ANSS and helped build a grade 7-12 school culture. However, in this case, the diversity in experiences helped perpetuate a school-within-a -model as each leader embraced their former experiences to help lead the school. A brief introduction of each participant is necessary if the leadership journey of Amadill is to be more clearly understood and appreciated for its intricacies.

- **Marissa:** Is a retired superintendent who was involved with the transition of Amadill from a 9-12 to a 7-12 school.

- **Alex:** Alex is one of the current co-principals at ANSS. He has been at Amadill for the past three years as the 7-8 Administrator. His pedagogical background is elementary-focused and he has a range of experiences from K-8.
- **Ben:** Ben is the current Director of Education for the school board where ANSS is located. In his time as Director, two more schools have become grade 7-12, leaving only two grade 9-12 schools in the entire district. His pedagogical background is focused on secondary schools.
- **Neve:** Neve is the principal of a K-6 school in the board. She was the first experienced principal to be hired as a 7-8 Administrator at ANSS. Her pedagogical background is elementary.
- **Brea:** Brea is currently a principal of a 7-12 school in the board. Her teaching experience is 9-12.
- **Jack:** Jack is currently the principal of one of the grade 7-12 schools in the board. While at ANSS, he filled two different administrative roles, vice -9-12, 7-8 Administrator. His teaching background is secondary.
- **Lucas:** Lucas is the current vice-principal at Amadill. His teaching experience is secondary and he is starting his fifth year at ANSS.
- **Paul:** Paul is one of the co-principals at Amadill. He was the principal at two previous 9-12 schools that were consolidated to form 7-12 schools. His teaching experience is solely grade 9-12.
- **Isaac:** Isaac is currently the 7-8 Administrator at a 7-12 where his primary focus is grade 7-8. His pedagogical experience is K-8.

Table 1 -Years and Role of Participants Involved with ANSS Leadership provides a graphic representation of when each participant was involved the development of ANSS.

**Table 1- Years and Roles of Participants Involved with ANSS Leadership**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Year</b>
Marissa	Principal involved in ARC	2003, 2004
	Superintendent	2004-2010
Ben	Superintendent	2005 – 2009
	Director of Education	2009 – present
Issac	7-8 Administrator	2007, 2008
Jack	7-8 Administrator	2008 (part way through the year)
	9-12 Vice Principal	2006 – 2010
Neve	7-8 Administrator	2008 – 2013
Brea	9-12 Vice- Principal	2010, 2011
Lucas	9-12 Vice-Principal	2011 – present
Paul	7-8 Administrator	2013, 2014
	Co-Principal	2015
Alex	9-12 Principal	2014
	Co-Principal	2015

Note: Years reflect September – June, indicative of the Ontario school year of 194 instructional days.

### **Leadership Practices Working Towards Consolidation**

To better understand the consolidation process and the impact it subsequently had on developing the culture and organizational learning structures at Amadill, I will review the ARC process and its direct link to the urban context of Barele. This contextual information will lay the groundwork to understanding where ANSS began as a 7-12 school and where it is now 13 years after consolidation.

#### **Context**

In 2002, the residents of the city of Barele were invited to a number of community meetings where the local school board would discuss closing the current 7-8 school,

creating only K-6 schools and moving all grade 7 and 8 students in the city between the two local high schools who were experiencing declining enrolment as part of the pupil accommodation review. The pupil accommodation review meetings discussed issues such as bussing, housing of students in the school, what the school day might look like for grade 7-8 students and safety of grade 7-8 students in a high school setting.

The idea of sending grade 7 and 8 students into the existing high schools was met with support and push back by community and school members. They expressed concerns about safety for their children in a high school setting and pressed the board to make some assurances. Ben, the current director of the school board commented how the parents, community and the board's response helped inevitably build a school-within-a-school culture at Amadill. In order to make the transition from K-8 to 7-12 more comfortable for families, the board made some commitments. The first of these was the establishment of two separate populations by creating different timetables and physically separating the classrooms to help avoid potential social issues. Despite separate timetables that boasted different lunch and dismissal times, as well as separate school clubs for 7-8 and 9-12, families still felt that a 7-12 school environment had the potential to negatively impact their child socially.

Marissa comments about the feelings of families involved in the accommodation review. "It was a real challenge between the heart and the head. Parents were clearly thinking with their heads, but a lot of emotions were tied to the heart". Some families were so opposed to the 7-12 school model that they threatened to remove their children from the board and register them in a different school system. Some families did remove their children from the board, while others took a 'wait and see' perspective. Marissa

recounts a conversation she had when she was superintendent with one mother, regarding her daughter attending the 7-12 school that came across in a threatening tone stating that she, the mother, would be keeping an eye on her, Marissa, and the school as her daughter headed to ANSS for grade 7.

The initial fears and concerns felt by families at the time of consolidation are still evident today, however they are far less. As students and families experienced the grade 7-8 environment, fears decreased. Marissa suggests that part of the decrease in fears and anxiety had to do with the positive response by most students. “I think the kids helped swing the beliefs of the parents. I would say the fears began to subside after the first three years”.

Policies guide our actions and do not normally tell us exactly what to do. However, they act to create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed (Braun et al., 2011). In the case of Barele, the board’s initiation of the pupil accommodation review presented the community with a narrowed list of options that would meet the board’s need to remain fiscally responsible and provide opportunities to support student achievement. Among the many policies that the board followed and created, the prioritization of the pupil accommodation review was driven by their need to be accountable not only to the province fiscally but also to supporting student achievement. Barele’s contextual factors shaped how this policy was enacted and the enactment process included many actors. Although each actor’s interpretation of the policy differed due to their professional context and experiences, the pupil accommodation review still maintained a process that allowed actors to interpret and respond to it.



The context in which Amadill became a consolidated school was both positive and negative. To a certain degree, fear and uncertainty about the grade 7-12 school resonated with the board and, in response to public concerns, it supported the development of two distinct school populations: grade 7-8 and grade 9-12. The leadership practices that mediated that development of the grade 7-12 school culture grew out of the pupil accommodation review and are still evident today.

### **Consolidation**

When the board decided to pursue the 7-12 model it was not without research, visits to other boards with grade 7-12 schools and conversations about how others had made the transition from K-8 to 7-12. Regardless of all these measures, an idea of how ANSS should be lead, as a 7-12 school, remained somewhat of an enigma. With an understanding that each school has its own unique culture, establishing a specific configuration of leadership in a school where the board was unsure of how the culture would evolve, was a challenge.

A single culture grade 7-12 school was not initially what the board had planned for Amadill. Like the community, the board was unsure what to expect in the newly consolidated school, so the establishment of two different schools, within the same building were developed. Ben, a colleague of the principals going through the pupil accommodation review at the time, reflects on the impact of this two-school practice. “Once those practices were established it became the norm for that school and community”. The separate timetables, clubs and placing of all grade 7-8 students together and away from the main grade 9-12 school, laid the groundwork for the school-within-a - school model. Alex, the current principal of Amadill, echoes Ben’s comments when he

states, “One of the biggest barriers to leading a 7-12 school is the school-within-a-school culture that was sold to the parents at the outset in order for them to become more comfortable”. Perpetuating the school-within-the school-model from Amadill’s start date in September 2003 until September 2014 was the placement practices of school administrators by the board.

September 2, 2003 marked the beginning of a new chapter for Amadill. For the first time in its 172 year history, it became one of two high schools in the board to be a grade 7-12 school. In preparation for this change, the current secondary principal and vice-principal remained and a new 7-8 administrator was hired. His role within the administrative organization was to run, organize and plan for anything related to the 7-8 school. The 7-8’s would have their own school name within the 7-12 setting, Amadill North Elementary School (ANES), a separate school budget and their own school secretary. The principal and the other vice-principal would continue to take care of business for the 9-12school. Ben describes the thinking behind this initial school administration organization, “We weren’t sure how the model would unfold and the principal and vice-principal were already there. We moved the 7-8’s into the building and chose not to change the principal and the model has persisted”. Essentially, each school would run independent of one another with the occasional whole school event such as the perennial Terry Fox walk.

This is an example of Eacott’s (2013) ideas of developing leadership practices based on the social space in which they are occurring. Leadership, he contends, is a social practice and must be understood in terms of the social space where it is happening (Eacott, 2013). Furthermore, Eacott (2013) suggests that leadership practice occurs in

response to the social space. Consider the social space of Amadill in the first few years of consolidation. Initially, the board and school community are unclear on what the school culture at Amadill would be like. In response to this uncertainty, which, I would suggest, was defining Amadill's social space at the time, the board responds by developing an administrative organization that reflects two schools – a 7-8 Administrator for ANES and a 9-12 principal and vice-principal for ANSS. Both occupy the same social space; however their respective 7-8 and 9-12 cultures are separately preserved. The social practice that responds to the social space then is an administrative configuration that is distinctly 7-8 and 9-12, a school-within-a-school.

In 2010 the board placed an experienced elementary principal in the 7-8 Administrator's role. Neve had asked to be placed at ANES citing many reasons, but foremost was her passion for working with intermediate students. Neve wholeheartedly contends that she had no interest in working towards a single grade 7-12 culture. However, the principal at ANSS in 2010 was beginning to make some gains in laying the groundwork for developing a 7-12 school culture. She moved her office from its current location, which was separate from the vice-principal and 7-8 Administrator, so that all three members of the administrative team would be together. Brea, the 9-12 vice principal in 2010 and 2011, and Neve, may have been witnessing the very sparse beginnings of 7-12 school leadership. Although this may appear as little more than geography, the move sent a message not only to Brea and Neve, but also to the staff, that administration would look and act more like a team leading the entire school. Neve describes this dynamic, "The three of us got along well. We did a lot of talking and planning. I maintained that I was the elementary person, the principal and other vice-

principal split up the secondary.” Brea echoes these sentiments, “We worked alongside as part of a team. We inter-mixed some aspects such as joint staff meetings and some professional development.” Despite being separate entities in organizational structure – separate budgets, timetables, etc., this movement, both literal and figurative, to work more closely together was a step closer than any other administrative team had achieved in building a 7-12 school culture.

Eacott (2013) contends that, “Leadership practice exists in a social space and is given life through constant power struggles. It is this contestation that defines leadership, and arguably leaders moment-by-moment” (p. 2). The secondary school principal in 2010 wanted to plant the seeds for the beginnings of a 7-12 school. Although the movement of her office may appear to be minor in the struggle to breakdown the existing and entrenched barriers preventing a grade 7-12 school culture, the move nonetheless challenged the status quo in a subtle way. The decision to move her office reflects Adkin’s (2009) ideas regarding space and time. Time, as Adkins (2009) suggests, does not operate externally to events, but unfolds with events. He writes that our present actions are ordinarily immersed in the forthcoming as part of our actions (Adkins, 2009). The decision to move her office in the present lended itself to future intentions that the development of a 7-12 school culture may, one day, come.

Furthermore Eacott’s (2015) ideas on leading relationally are evident here. A relational approach explores the space between individuals and the phenomena and does not see them as separate, but as coevolving in time (Eacott, 2015). If we identify the phenomena as leading Amadill as single grade 7-12 school culture and we identify the space in between as the staff, students, and community that are experiencing the school

within a school organization, then the movement of the principal's office in 2010 represents a relational approach to leadership (Eacott, 2015). The movement of the principal's office is an exploration of the relations in the social space between individuals and the phenomena. It lends itself to both the phenomena and the individuals coevolving through interconnections in a social space towards a single 7-12 school culture.

In 2014, Paul, a veteran principal with grade 7-12 leadership experience, became the new principal at Amadill. His two previous high schools had consolidated into grade 7-12 schools and he valued the development of a one school culture. Immediately the team – Paul, Alex, and Lucas, spent time talking about how they could begin to challenge the school-within-a-school culture at ANSS. Paul describes his first thoughts about ANSS:

The original configuration was one principal, one vice principal 9-12 and a 7-8 Administrator creating a school-within-a-school culture. It was set up like this for a long time and there was very little dialogue between elementary and secondary which perpetuated this school-within-a-school culture, “us versus them”, clearly not healthy in the long run (November 2015).

Since Paul's arrival in 2014, the administrative team of Alex, Paul, and Lucas have worked to help change the culture at ANSS by splitting up each person's responsibilities.. Paul valued the experiences that Alex had as a principal and felt that instead of having one principal, the school should be led by co-principals, which began September 2015. Both Lucas and Alex took an active role in the whole school by dividing up some of the duties that would give them more opportunities to interact with staff in 7-12. Alex continues to take the lead for 7-8 staffing, timetabling and parent calls, but this year was

placed in charge of the entire school budget. Staff meetings are run by Paul, Alex, and Lucas and include all 7-12 teachers. A purposeful and consistent effort has occurred to show staff, students, and the community that leadership that truly reflects a grade 7-12 school is taking shape at ANSS.

Paul, Lucas, and Alex's leadership practices and school wide vision for a consolidated 7-12 school culture epitomizes Eacott's (2013) idea that leadership is disruptive, a break in the status quo. Paul, Alex and Lucas are working towards modifying the existing structures at Amadill such as naming Alex co-principal and having one school budget, which forces all staff to interact with a leader who was traditionally viewed as only responsible for 7-8. Other practices included leading 7-12 staff meetings altogether and changing the school timetables so that start and end times were more closely aligned. These leaders have responded to the emerging social space of Amadill and, as a , they are creating change.

The lack of explicit leadership direction by the board signals two areas worth identifying: policy enactment and the development of leadership within the context. The administrative organization of Amadill, as determined by the board, reflects a hierarchal approach to leadership and policy implementation that effectually "bleached out critical policy enactors such as principals and teachers" (Maguire, Braun & Ball, 2014). This approach placed the school leaders in a singular role of implementers instead of enactors (Maguire et al., 2015). This initial decision by the board to establish a 9-12 principal and vice-principal and a 7-8 administrator was driven by the uncertainty of what the 7-12 school culture would look like. It took Amadill 11 years to truly begin to work towards a 7-12 school culture and not without the vision and experience that Paul brought to the

school in 2014. That is not to suggest that this change can be attributed solely to Paul, but it speaks to the social practice of Paul, Alex, and Lucas who took into consideration the context, space and time at Amadill and found the time was right to challenge the status quo and modify the existing structures.

### **Leadership Practices and the 7-12 School Culture**

Culture as described by Schein (2004) is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group has learned as it has solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. This description of culture could not more accurately reflect how Amadill responded to becoming a grade 7-12 school after a long-standing history of being the perceived academic school in Barele. Kaplan and Owings (2013) further suggest that, “school cultures are the shared orientations, values, norms and practices that hold an educational unit together, give it a distinctive identity and vigorously resist change from the outside” (p. 2). With the arrival of grade 7-8 students and staff, Amadill’s school culture would be challenged and administrators would need to dig deep to find practices that would begin to change the culture of the school to reflect the newly formed population. A brief description of Amadill’s culture prior to consolidation will provide the necessary backdrop that emphasizes the challenges of this cultural change.

#### **The backdrop: Amadill’s history – Values, beliefs and assumptions**

Amadill was the original high school in Barele when it was founded in 1844. Neve describes the general feelings about ANSS in the community, “It is that nice regal school up on the hill; it is beautiful. It has always prided itself on being some kind of beacon of academia”. It wasn’t until 1963, that a second high school was opened featuring many vocational shops for students. With Amadill already ‘catering’ to the

academics, the other high school began to draw students who were interested in the trades and technology. Many of their students were bussed in from rural areas to attend leaving a mainly urban population to attend ANSS. Jack describes the differences in population based on his own experience at Amadill. "I felt that the staff perceived me as a foreigner. Not as an enemy, but an outsider, you know from a rural background going into a city school." What makes this division in populations even more remarkable is that both high schools are only two km apart from one another in the city. Although the second high school offered courses at all levels and could support students attending university, college, or the work place, the long standing history of Amadill as the academic school had created an assumption in the community that it was the only option for students focusing on post-secondary education.

As the years moved forward, the belief that the two high schools catered to certain populations was perpetuated. The richness of Amadill's history was embedded in generations of students who had attended. Neve observed that generations of families attended Amadill and that it got to a point where parents would choose the high school they wanted their child to go to when 7-8 students were still attending the feeder schools. Furthermore, the majority of staff at Amadill had been together for a long time with very little movement in and out of the school. It has been previously noted that staff stagnation can have both positive and negative effects. Brea, a new teacher to ANSS for several years before being promoted to vice-principal in the building, describes the negative impact of a long-standing staff. "The staff were unhappy with each other from old disagreements that just never got sorted out and those things sit with people and create further fragmentation and cliquishness." It got so bad at times that people were afraid to



voice their opinions at staff meetings, afraid to speak up and contribute their voice to a conversation which made moving forward difficult. Brea reflects that due to resentment issues that had not been dealt with between staff, they became disengaged from each other and, ultimately, the school. Paul also noted that the lack of movement of staff to and from Amadill further impacted the school's culture. He states:

There has not been an influx of different adults at Amadill in years. There are a number of teachers that I would describe as "lifers", that have been here for 12, 13, 14 years and live close to the building. The danger with limited movement of staff in and out of the building is that they become complacent (October 2015). Amadill's school culture, prior to consolidation, valued the long-standing assumption in the community that it was a regal and academic school that had educated many generations of families. Little movement of staff in and out of ANSS resulted in a disengaged staff that reflected a professional group of people working in isolation. Unresolved issues and cliques further stagnated change by creating, at times, a school culture that prevented staff from voicing their ideas and concerns out of fear of not "going with the status quo". So in 2003 when Amadill consolidated to form a grade 7-12 school, the existing culture was shaken to its core and would force administrators to work hard to find leadership practices that would begin to change the school's culture to reflect the new population of staff and students and to create a unified grade 7-12 school culture.

### **The Complex Nature of the School -Within -a -School Culture**

To suggest that Amadill can simply be described as school-within-a-school culture does not acknowledge the existence of the many other features that give it complexity. At Amadill the complex nature of the school-within-a-school culture is

highlighted by perceived differences between elementary and secondary-aged students, new staff and existing staff, elementary and secondary curricula and assessment practices, to name just a few. The leaders at Amadill would have had to begin their journey of promoting a single school culture by understanding all the parts that make up the two existing school cultures.

As part of the Pupil Accommodation Review, the board had assured the community that the school would endeavour to keep the 7-8 students away from the grade 9-12 students as much as possible. A timetable that boasted different start and end times and separate lunch times helped limit the interaction between the elementary (grade 7-8) and secondary (grades 9-12) students, but also distinguished extracurricular activities as strictly elementary or secondary due to the differing timetables. In addition to these measures, elementary students were geographically isolated from the 9-12 students.

The addition of 300 elementary students and accompanying staff to a three-floor school that already had 800 secondary students provided another layer to an already challenging school culture. Segregation of elementary students and staff from secondary students and staff worked to intensify a school culture that was fragmented by cliques and resistant to change. “For many years, for sure, there was a dedicated place in the building for 7-8 students – they travelled together, had a different lunch hour, different schedules and an entirely different staff of course” reflects Ben, the current Director, about the establishment of 7-8’s at Amadill.

Isaac recalls that some of the secondary staff was resisting the changes that the 7-8’s brought with them. Rather than move the resistant teachers, new classrooms were built in the basement of the school, in a honeycomb setting, for the incoming 7-8

students. This initial set up created many problems for staff and students. Marissa describes the new grade 7-8 classrooms as having no windows in the rooms and being very crowded. The honeycomb setup also made it difficult to monitor who was coming and going out of the building which led to discipline issues. After many complaints by elementary staff regarding safety and poor work conditions due to the crowded nature of the classrooms, in 2006, the grade 7-8 students were moved upstairs and given a wing of their own that had windows in their classrooms and an exterior door.

Once elementary students and staff moved to the second floor it did not get any easier for them. Finding space for staff to work with students outside of the classroom proved difficult as secondary staff were unwilling to give up workrooms that had traditionally been used for the high school yearbook or other activities. Brea remarks, “There was a line of thinking that we (secondary) own this and you can stay there.” Furthermore, as Marissa pointed out that when the 7-8’s were in the basement the rest of school did what they always had done without having to contend with the new population of staff or students. Once the 7-8 staff and students were provided with classrooms on the second floor of the building, there were hard feelings by 9-12 staff who felt that they had to make accommodations for the 7-8’s. Neve describes the feelings of the 9-12 staff regarding the 7-8 students and staff as “little gomers invading their territory”.

Even though the 7-8’s now had a designated space within the main part of the school, making them at least more visibly part of the school culture, they continued to rotate together, and have their lockers together further creating their own distinctive culture within the school. “Location of lockers and groupings of classrooms makes it hard to get over the visual of two distinct cultures,” comments Lucas about the distinctive 7-8

area in the school currently. Not only was a growing school within a school culture evident in the placement and timetables of grade 7-8 students, but could also be seen in the collegial relationships, or lack thereof, between elementary and secondary staff.

As alluded to earlier, the staff at Amadill prior to consolidation, was not a cohesive and close-knit group. With the arrival of the 7-8 staff and students and the resistance demonstrated by some of the 9-12 teachers by having to accommodate the new group, the 7-8 staff felt like second-class citizens right from start. Neve, the 7-8 Administrator from 2010-2013 states that, “We had to fight tooth and nail to get space for elementary. It always had to fit around the secondary timetable and practices.” Compound these feelings with being a minority population in comparison to the secondary staff, the location of classrooms, the individual timetables that prioritized 9-12 over 7-8, the two completely different curriculums that boasted differing teaching and assessment practices, and finally, different cultures, that reflected K-8 and 9-12 as well as the sending schools’ cultures, the school within-a-school-culture is definitely complex and subdivided.

The clear division between 7-8 and 9-12 staff was also evident in how each panel referred to one another and to their limited interaction. Brea reflected that elementary and secondary staff didn’t know each other’s names despite having worked together for several years. Each staff had its own social fund and own staff parties. Although there was a lunchroom for all staff, the 7-8 staff carved out their own space, further limiting the amount of interaction between the 9-12 and 7-8 staff. Lucas describes his own observations regarding the staff many years after consolidation as school that is struggling with working together as one school culture.

Waller (1932) writes, “There are, in the school, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores and irrational sanctions, a moral code based upon them (p. 96). The secondary staff at Amadill personified Waller’s (1932) ideas regarding a school’s culture. For the 9-12 staff at Amadill, an irrational sanction was the arrival of 7-8 students and staff into their existing building and culture. The moral code that existed at the time of consolidation and persists to a degree today, was that “secondary staff would stick together” and the “elementary would stick together” became the norm following consolidation. As Sullivan-Duncan (2000) suggests a school’s culture can either resist or adapt to change. Amadill’s culture initially resisted change. The deep entrenchment of a culture that had developed over 172 years was going to take time and purposeful leadership practices by the administration to affect change.

### **Leadership practices that support a 7-12 culture**

Administration at ANSS had a giant mountain to climb. Not only were members of administration coming and going, but the school culture was also fractured across many areas. In order to begin to plant the seeds for a more positive and supportive culture that would make everyone feel valued as an equal contributor, the Amadill administrators did three crucial things – they observed, they built, and they moved.

**(a) Observation and understanding.** Schools need to have slow change suggests Brea when she thinks about creating long lasting change in schools. When administrators moved to ANSS, many of them spent their first year there observing the staff and listening to them. “Let teachers do their own thing that first year. I spent time building trust – trust with me, trust with them. I needed to hear each teacher’s voice”, Paul reflects about his first year at Amadill. Jack took the approach of immersing himself in the

culture of the school and making connections with staff to build trust. In this school context, taking the time to understand the staff and build trust was vital for leaders, if they hoped to propose change. The culture of the school had resulted in staff not feeling valued. “If staff don’t feel valued, then they shut down. They become disengaged and if you don’t engage and invest in them, then it becomes hard to create a movement of change,” declares Brea. Building trust was a necessary first step if leaders were going to use their observations to plant the seeds of change.

**(b) Building professional relationships.** Leaders would need to involve themselves more directly with staff and act as intermediaries to create opportunities for relationship-building. Lucas acknowledged that with the majority of his time spent with the secondary panel, he barely had any collegial relationships with 7-8 teachers other than knowing their names. As a practice, he started spending more time with the 7-8 staff and as a result he feels this helped them feel more valued and willing to contribute their ideas. Helping to find ways to promote professional relationships in and between staff helped the leaders build a shared philosophy of a single school culture. Isaac suggests that you cannot force consolidation. He suggests that by helping people understand their differences, administrators are able to promote the whole school identity and at the same time not lose sight of the importance of all the parts. Furthermore, by modeling and providing opportunities for staff to connect and to develop relationships they begin to see common strands that can link people together.

**(c) Finding the movers.** One of the identified barriers to creating long lasting change at Amadill was the inconsistent identification of leaders or ‘movers’ from the teaching staff. . Brea recalls the practices of the principal she worked with in 2010 who

knew her own strength as a leader and identified other's strengths to put those people in the right places to champion change. Paul shares his idea of finding the right people and building leadership capacity within the school:

When looking at your staff you try and identify the movers and the shakers. I define a mover and a shaker as a person who has influence over others and who others will follow. You need to build leadership capacity within the school so that capacity can influence others in the school and take risks. (November 2015)

Isaac endorses both Brea and Paul's practices of developing people to promote change by acknowledging the need for school administrators to put the right people in the right places to help drive change. Paul describes the kind of momentum he hopes to create with the school culture through identifying and empowering these leaders within the teaching staff:

We are trying to create a culture that allows people to broadcast – these are my glorious failures, but this is what I have learned through modeling. Instead of a culture of isolation, a 'we do our own thing', 'we don't share or collaborate', we are trying to build collegial relationships with staff by identifying the common strands between us. (November 2015)

These three identified leadership practices reflect Eacott's (2010, 2013, 2015) ideas that leadership is one of social practice that it is understood in terms of the social space in which it occurs and that practices occur in response to the relationally constructed social space. He contends that it is the context that gives behaviours or interventions meaning and significance (Eacott, 2013). The social space of Amadill created the opportunity for administrators to identify the practices they would need to begin to make change.

Listening to the staff and building collegial relationships that developed trust is how administrators responded to a social space that was littered with feelings of resentment, of staff not feeling valued, and of overall disengagement from each other and the school. The practice of identifying and cultivating leaders within the staff made way for others to begin to challenge the status quo. This capacity building speaks to Eacott's (2015) conceptualization of leadership as intervening in the social space and time by working to create an alternative in the present.

In taking time to observe the social space of Amadill first, administrators took a relational approach to their determination of the best practices by which to respond. They looked beyond the individuals and worked to understand the phenomena, a compromised school culture, and by addressing the space between the staff and culture they were able to affect them both as they coevolved in time. The three identified leadership practices speak strongly to the concept that schools are defined by a set of relations between dynamic groups of individuals that are always in motion (Eacott, 2015).

The school culture of Amadill has changed over the past 13 years. What was once two clearly divided staffs is now working towards becoming a more cohesive and positive school culture that is beginning to value all staff and students. The initial response to the Pupil Accommodation Review policy placed the policy actors at Amadill in the role of implementers, instead of enactors due to the hierarchial nature of the engagement process. Through policy translation and re-contextualization, at both an individual and school level, policy actors were able to incorporate and contextualize the consolidation policy into their practices.



The administrators at Amadill took the time to live and experience the culture and social space. The leadership practices that evolved in response to the social space worked to promote a more positive school culture while making staff feel valued. Both the culture of the school and the staff within it evolved together creating an alternate in the here and now. The administrators' understanding of the social space and the complexity of the relations within the school led to practices that worked to modify existing structures. The practice of identifying staff leaders and building capacity relationally suggests an understanding by administrators that knowledge is both socially constructed and distributed. What is clear is that leadership practices have an impact on the school culture and organizational structures (Brady, 2008).

### **Leadership Practices and Organizational Learning Structures**

Organizational learning is shaped by the context in which it is applied (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Context or social space keeps coming up as a critical framework in which to understand how and why things happen in schools. When an existing high school is consolidated to create a newly formed 7-12 school, there are unique organizational challenges that this type of school reorganization brings. Different curriculums, assessment and reporting practices as well as different collective agreements for each respective bargaining unit can make establishing school-wide organizational structures difficult to navigate for school administrators. A brief description of Amadill's learning context will set the stage for this final section of the chapter.

### **Amadill's Learning Context**

The long ingrained assumption that Amadill is an academic school stems from its rich history of providing a strong academic program, generations of families attending

and the community's resolve that it is an academic school. Despite the other 7-12 school offering courses for all pathways – university, college, and work, the Barele community remains firm in their belief that if you want to go to university, you go to ANSS.

The staff at Amadill set high expectations for themselves and for their students. For the most part, the type of learners that the staff was accustomed to teaching also valued high expectations and marks. Brea comments that, “Teachers held themselves in high standard and so did the students. Students felt that culture of high expectations and excelled in many ways.” Neve echoes Brea's thoughts, “There were definitely a group of teachers who really wanted the cream of the crop to teach and anyone else should go elsewhere.”

When the board placed the French Immersion program at Amadill stating that it was the best fit for the program, it implicitly supported community and staff assumptions that ANSS was ‘the academic school’. It became touted as ‘The Arts School’ with the availability of courses in dance, choral and instrumental music, and drama, as well as being home to the Specialist High Skills Major in Arts. During Neve and Brea's time at ANSS, 2010 – 2013, a new mantra for the school was designed to highlight its strengths – Arts, Academics, Athletics.

The value placed on marks was deeply entrenched in the culture at Amadill. However, this cultural value of high achievement and high expectations left a new and growing population at Amadill out in the cold. “At times it feels like the school cares and prepares kids who want to go off to university more than those that go off to college or the world of work” Paul comments. He also observes that students who are not in

traditional academic pathways are often viewed as an afterthought and that this practice by staff bothers him.

Over time, with the significant emphasis on course marks, the subject departments became siloed or isolated from one another. People worked in physical proximity in the building, but did very little collaborating.

With the arrival of the grade 7-8's, the marks-valued culture would be challenged. No longer were only the top academic students attending Amadill, but students with varying learning needs and aspirations were also part of the student population. "No longer would there be a distinction about the type of learner you would receive at your school," states Marissa.

**The board's inclusion policy.** In 2013 the local board implemented a policy around inclusion. The board's decision to move away from self-contained classes and to place all students with special needs in regular classes added another layer of change that shook Amadill's learning context. Students with various needs, intellectual, developmental, and physical, had not historically attended ANSS. They had always been placed at the other high school due to the many self-contained classrooms that it had. Lucas describes the response of Amadill staff to inclusion students,

The arrival of inclusion students shook up the existing culture, opening the eyes of 9-12 staff. There is an idea that this school is an academic school and that there are 2 schools in the city – one for inclusionary [sic.] students and ours. (November 2015)

The culture needed to adapt in response to these changes; practices needed to change. A continued focus on academic students and sorting students by those who would be going

to university from those who would not, a strategy that had been used for years, began to result in student and staff disengagement and greater department isolation.

Through various levels of interpretation the school and staff at Amadill had managed to make the consolidation policy initially less visible in the school and less of a priority in some aspects, while other board policies were prioritized and made more visible. Policies relating to subjects such as English and math were being prioritized in an attempt to address and improve EQAO scores. The implementation of two new board policies in 2012 and 2013 – one focussed on inclusion and the other on the use of technology in the classroom, referred to as New Generation Learning (NGL), became prioritized and highly visible, leaving policy actors in a position where they were compelled to engage in the policy process. Although subject-based policy prioritization was not new to the school, the inclusionary and NGL policies challenged the status quo and forced policy actors to respond and to enact the policies to the changing social space that was occurring at Amadill. Maguire et al., (2015) suggest that practices that evolve out of policy interpretation may get enacted in different ways because of personal and professional orientations, as well as different posts of responsibility held by various policy actors in the school. Not only did Amadill's 7-12 school organization consist of staff with different personal orientations and beliefs, but also professional orientations that ranged in experience from K-12.

### **Barriers to 7-12 organizational learning structures**

The culture of the school could not be viewed as a separate phenomenon to the organizational learning structures, but relationally, as one coevolved with the other. Argote (2013) writes that as organizations perform tasks, experiences with the

organization grow, converting the experience into knowledge, changing the context and impacting future learning. Eacott (2013) and Adkins (2009) suggest that the practices administrators do in the ‘and now’ create an alternative in the present, because the anticipation of what administrators hope the outcome will be is already a part of their practice. Therefore, administrators were creating an alternative in the ‘here and now’ by virtue of the practices they were using to promote organizational learning.

There were three key barriers to promoting organizational growth at Amadill that the emerging leadership practices would need to respond to: (a) siloed culture where staff worked in isolation or in small pockets, (b) deep-rooted assumptions about elementary and secondary and (c) two different unions, with differing collective agreements.

**(a) Siloed culture.** As has already been shared in the previous section, collaboration between and among staff was limited. Paul observes that there is limited to no discussion within departments and very little crossover between departments. Part of that, he suggests, is based on the school’s culture. Paul feels that if staff cannot find ways to connect then students do not connect or engage in the culture of the school.

Some staff who, regardless of their department or panel, do create informal collaborative relationships. By ‘informal relationships’ participants refer to the connections between teachers who take it upon themselves to collaborate. Neve reflects, “There were 3 or 4 grade 7 English teachers who worked together and did a lot of co-planning. They did a lot of great things together. They would search out secondary teachers on their own to share ideas.” Neve further suggests that part of the willingness of staff to collaborate informally with others had to do with the personal relationships they had with one another outside of school.

**(b) Assumptions about elementary and secondary.** Longstanding assumptions about each panel made working collaboratively difficult. One of the assumptions is that secondary are ‘experts’ in their curriculum area and elementary are ‘generalists’ with some knowledge of all subjects. Brea shares her experiences with this assumption,

There is staff insecurity on both parts – grade 7-8 teachers feel that they are not perceived by secondary as being as strong or as important or as defined by their subject areas. This insecurity presents itself at cross panel discussions, creating a segregation between adults where the kids feel it leading to students not feeling connected to school. (November 2015)

Neve echoes Brea’s thoughts by stating, “There is a natural condescension that secondary seem to have for elementary. As a generalization, secondary teachers are there for the subject, elementary teachers are there for the kids.” This condescension was also visible in comments by secondary staff suggesting that elementary teachers are babysitters.

Another assumption is that things like, equipment, or instructional practices as an example, are either only elementary or only secondary. Comments like, “That is elementary” and “That is secondary” perpetuate assumptions that things can only be one or the other but not both. Alex, the current co-principal at Amdill, shares an experience that illustrates this assumption in action. When purchasing stand up desks for an elementary classroom at the teacher’s request, he approached some secondary classes to see if they were interested in them as well. The feedback he received was that was an ‘elementary thing’. He challenged those staff to think about what is the best fit for kids and that stand up desks have nothing to do with what panel students are in but more about what helps build a classroom environment that promotes learning.

(c) **Unions.** Contractual differences between the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) made it difficult to promote single school organizational structures. Brea noted that having the same federation would have helped overcome the things that were keeping the staff apart. Specific language in each respective contract around such items as instructional minutes, prep time, staff meetings, division meetings, duty, hiring practices, assessment and reporting and professional development emphasize the differences between elementary and secondary. The development of a whole school timetable would have helped support a 7-12 culture; however, following the collective agreements of each respective bargaining unit made this virtually impossible. Ben reflects that the distinct teacher unions are an impediment to developing organizational learning structures, “If we were able to have staff teach in both panels, I think it would go a long way to promoting continuity of instructional and assessment practices”. Although it would be beneficial for organizational growth if there were opportunities for staff to move between elementary and secondary, it is an area where, Ben acknowledges, the board and schools have limited to no impact due to provincial bargaining.

### **Leadership practices that support 7-12 organizational learning structures**

Fiol & Lyles (1985) note that their factors, “have a circular relationship with learning in that they create and reinforce learning and are created by learning” (p. 804). Organizations learn as a result of individual learning that is then shared to enhance the development of the collective knowledge. When one understands how critical the human element is to the development and transfer of new knowledge, organizational learning

becomes a key tool in developing structures that focus on harnessing the collective knowledge, not just individual knowledge.

Fiol & Lyles (1985) identified four contextual factors that affect the probability of an organization's learning – corporate culture conducive to learning, strategy that allows for flexibility, an organizational structure that allows innovativeness and new insights and lastly the environment. The leadership practices used by Amadill's administrators to develop and promote organizational learning are reflected in these contextual factors.

**(a) Corporate culture conducive to learning.** In order for administrators to begin to work towards implementing organizational learning structures they first had to live and experience the culture. What they found was that the staff wanted to be heard and valued. Jack comments, "From 7-12, no student, no staff member is more important than the other. Self-reflection is critical and you have to be constantly reminding yourself if you are thinking of all the students and the staff." Brea suggests that one way to ensure people feel valued is to be open, honest, and willing to engage in tough dialogue if needed. A practice she uses is to be very direct about all the possible concerns and thoughts people might have coming to the meeting and then addressing them up front. Isaac agrees that by explicitly acknowledging and recognizing differences, it allows staff to be more open about accepting that there is a time and place for 7-12 meetings, but there is also value in focussing on the unique needs of each panel, department or subject.

One more way to promote a culture that is conducive to learning is to use the informal leaders in the staff. Paul comments, "when you find that 'champion', a person who is passionate about a curriculum area, strategy, or practice, you provide opportunities for them to be the impetus of change." Staff leaders are tapped to provide



“in-house” professional development providing an opportunity for staff to learn from each other.

**(b) Strategy that allows for flexibility.** Administrators observed that the lack of collaboration between staff sometimes occurred as a direct result of personality conflicts. By strategically grouping staff to maximize people’s strengths and separate those with personality conflicts, administrators isolated the fighting and created opportunities for valuable discussion for members of the group. Furthermore, flexible groupings by subject, panel, grade, cross panel, or gender, to name a few, gave staff chances to engage in different dialogues with a range of people.

In a 7-12 school the range of curriculum knowledge and experience in the school may extend beyond those of school administrators. To address this, Amadill administrators exercise flexibility by being leaders, learners or facilitators, when they are engaged with staff who demonstrate greater curriculum knowledge or experiences with instructional and assessment practices. The alternative to taking on the role of learner is the acknowledgement of staff leadership in specific areas that can lead to discussions and to increased momentum for trying something new.

**(c) An organizational structure that allows innovativeness and new insights.**

One leadership practice that Amadill’s administrative team tried for the 2015 - 2016 school year was to block-timetable the grade 9 classes for English and math so that they were taught in the same period. The purpose behind this new structure was to promote more dialogue and deepen professional growth. “We blocked the timetable with the idea that if there are three teachers teaching the same math course at the same time

and they have the same prep period, then there will be some natural dialogue that will occur,” states Paul.

Another organizational structure that Amadill is currently trying is to rework the role of the learning services team to support students deemed at risk. The establishment of monthly and bimonthly meetings that include special education teachers from 7-8 and 9-12, student-success teachers, the learning-for-all coach (who supports inclusion), and any other staff working with the student, aims to not only support students but also staff. The meetings allow staff to give an update about the successes and challenges they are experiencing, to work collaboratively on next steps, and to apply them in the classroom to support student achievement.

**(d) Environment.** In order to promote organizational learning, administrators had to carefully balance the need for stability and the need for change, both of which are needed for organizational learning (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). The learning culture at ANSS had been stable for many years with limited staff movement in and out of the building and teaching practices that had been geared for a high achieving student population. For ANSS, too much stability had resulted in a lack of initiative for staff to try new things, therefore limiting organizational learning. With the arrival of grade 7-8 students, changes to organizational learning were needed in order to meet the academic needs of all students.

The leadership practice of observing and understanding the culture allowed Amadill’s administrative team to see the complexities within the school’s existing culture and determine how much stability the school needed and how much change the staff could undertake without making the school environment too turbulent to sustain the changes.

To help minimize turbulence in the environment, yet still move forward with changes that would promote growth in Amadill's organizational learning, administrators used the leadership practice of empowering leaders within the staff. This strategy provided an effective balance between stability by having a staff member model new learning and trying new things with change through in-school professional development, PLCs and collaborative partnerships (through flexible groupings) that promoted 7-12 organizational learning.

### **Conclusion**

Amadill's leadership practices consistently place people at the heart of change. Although at times this can create bigger barriers through assumptions, personality conflicts and disengagement from other staff and the school, when the right people are tapped and put in the right place, they can be the stimulus for change. Practices like valuing all staff members, acknowledging differences, self-reflecting, being flexible, building school leadership capacity, modelling learning and trying new structures that lend themselves to professional growth and supporting all students are indicative of Amadill's organizational learning growth.

Administrators work to create a school culture that supports sharing the organization's failures and successes. The organization grows a little bit more as their experiences become part of the collective learning. Learning occurs within organizations regardless of whether tasks are completed successfully or not, because experience with attempted tasks creates new knowledge for an organization (Argote, 2013).

Administrators at Amadill will come and go; however the practices they use in response

to the social place become an important part of the fabric that helps ANSS grow a little more each time.

## Chapter Six

### Discussion and Findings

Analysis of the data resulted in six key findings regarding leadership practices in the case study school- (i) *Intentional separation of grade 7-8 students from grade 9-12 students fails to promote the establishment of a single school culture;* (ii) *A clear transitional plan that emphasizes the organization of school administration would promote a consolidated 7-12 school culture;* (iii) *The 7-12 school culture must value all constituents equally in order to overcome the school-within-a-school culture;* (iv) *Staff cohesion requires purposeful leadership practices;* (v) *School consolidation does not always improve educational opportunities for students;* and (vi) *Organizational learning in a consolidated 7-12 school is inhibited by assumptions about elementary and secondary cultures.*

The purpose of this study was to characterize leadership practices in a consolidated 7-12 school that promote organizational learning and the development of a single school culture. Literature relating to school consolidation includes its historical roots, reasons for it, arguments against it, contextual factors, as well as studies on the experiences of teachers, students, board members, and the community. What remains absent from consolidation literature are studies and data that pertain to school leadership practices, specifically those of school administrators working in 7-12 schools. With the absence of existing literature specific to leadership practices in 7-12 consolidated schools, my findings used literature concerning the much broader topic of school consolidation to confirm or contrast existing work on this topic. The findings from this study will add to the almost nonexistent research around leadership practices in consolidated 7-12 schools.

## Findings

### **Finding # 1: Intentional separation of grade 7-8 students from grade 9-12 students fails to promote the establishment of a single school culture.**

The separation of grade 7-8 students from grade 9-12 students was a direct result of parent concerns around the safety and well-being of their children attending the high school setting at Amadill. In response to these concerns, the local school board made assurances to families that 7-8 students would be separated geographically within the school as well as boast separate timetables that would lend themselves to different start and end times as well as different lunch times. This supports the results of the School Consolidation Experience Studies (SCES) conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Education in September 2015 where “a rigid approach to segregation” was applied as a result of community concerns regarding safety of students attending Central Algoma Secondary School (CASS).

Existing research regarding the separation of 7-8 and 9-12 students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015) suggests that this strict separation creates unnecessary tensions, that older students feel targeted and endure a perception as being untrustworthy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Additionally, the separation of 7-8 and 9-12 students limits opportunities for mentoring and whole school student collaboration (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Inevitably, separating 7-8 and 9-12 students results in a school climate that is “fractured along those lines” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). However, research also suggests that as time moves on and anxieties around the social and academic influence of 9-12 students on 7-8 students decrease, a

reassessment of the school's organization as two separate entities should be revisited to further promote a more single school culture (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

The data from this study supports the finding from the SCES as it pertains to the "fractured" school climate. The initial location of grade 7-8 classrooms at Amadill created a visible division between the 7-8 and 9-12 students. The current location of lockers and classrooms at ANSS may lend itself to more interaction between both sets of students, however the 7-8 area remains clearly defined. Fracturing is also evident in the differing timetables of each respective group of students. Contractual obligations to OSSTF and ETFO make it challenging for school administrators to create a whole school timetable therefore collaborating on school clubs and extracurricular opportunities remains limited. Separate 7-8 and 9-12 morning announcements, student councils, clubs and sports still persist at Amadill today.

The separation of 7-8 and 9-12 students also promotes the division of teaching staff in the building interfering with the establishment of 7-12 professional collaboration. The initial location of the grade 7-8 classrooms at Amadill resulted in the 7-8 staff being isolated from the 9-12 staff at a critical time when building collaborative partnerships would have supported the transition of staff and students to ANSS. Differing timetables limited opportunities for staff to connect due to separate lunch times, preps, and instructional blocks.

Finally, the literature promotes a reconsideration of the separation of grade 7-8 and 9-12 students based on the decrease of parental concerns over time. The results of my study align with this notion of decreasing the distinctiveness of 7-8 and 9-12. Once students had experienced 7-8 at Amadill, and many had enjoyed and thrived in the new

school culture, most parental concerns subsided and the vigilance of keeping 9-12 students away from 7-8 students became less of a priority for parents. Unfortunately, this shift in thinking of Amadill as two distinct populations, 7-8 and 9-12, to a single 7-12 school was more difficult for the staff. Long standing experiences with different student age groups, curricula, instructional and assessment practices, distinct K-8 and 9-12 school cultures, as well as separate collective agreement requirements , suggests much deeper issues that make the promotion of a single 7-12 culture more complex and difficult for staff than it is for students and families.

**Finding # 2: A clear transitional plan that emphasizes the administrative structure would promote a consolidated 7-12 school culture.**

Currently there is no literature or studies of consolidated schools that emphasizes the organization of school's administration in 7-12 schools. Although one of the recommendations from the SCES pertaining to the CASS consolidation suggests that placing vice-principals sooner in the process would have supported a smoother transition, there is no other reference to the structure and organization of the school's administration. The data from this study highlights the need for creating a clear transitional plan that outlines the administrative structure in a 7-12 school.

The local board's uncertainty around what they could expect by placing 7-8 students and staff in an existing 9-12 school coupled with parental pressure to define two distinct populations, led to the school administration being distinctly 7-8 and 9-12. The board's decision to visibly and intentionally establish a 7-8 administrator and separate 9-12 administration confirmed with staff and students that Amadill's school culture would reflect a school-within-a-school model.



Those interviewed stated that when they were assigned to Amadill they were hired as a 7-8 Administrator, vice-principal 9-12 or principal 9-12. Duties such as staff meetings, staff hiring, school budget, professional development, student discipline and parent calls were handled by the administrator of each respective panel (7-8 or 9-12). This division in roles and responsibilities was further compounded by each leader's own personal beliefs regarding how administration should be organized at ANSS which was evidenced from the time of consolidation until September 2014. Starting in September 2014, the administrative team shared the same philosophy of leading ANSS as a 7-12 school. Furthermore, roles and responsibilities were no longer divided as 7-8 or 9-12, but were organized so each administrator's portfolio reflected grades 7-12. The model of administration placement at ANSS at the start of consolidation was to keep the current 9-12 principal and vice-principal in place and hire a 7-8 Administrator. Pedagogical practices and experiences were often indicative of the role leaders assumed on Amadill's administrative team. Jack is the exception to this as he held both the 9-12 vice-principal role as well as the 7-8 Administrator role in his time at ANSS. Former experiences in either elementary or secondary placed administrators in a position to support and understand one panel's needs more than the other. Staff was more apt to approach an administrator who had experience with "secondary concerns" or "elementary concerns", instead of seeing each leader as supportive regardless of their previous teaching and leadership experience.

In response to the growing success of transitions for other consolidated 7-12 schools within the board and pressure from the current administration team at Amadill to embrace a 7-12 school culture, the administrative structure was changed. The board

agreed to co-principals of 7-12 and a vice-principal 7-12 where roles and responsibilities reflect working with staff, students and community as single culture 7-12 school. This push by the current Amadill administration team reflects their collective vision to lead ANSS as a 7-12 school. It also acknowledges the experiences of the 7-8 Administrator who is an elementary principal.

**Finding # 3: The 7-12 school culture must value all constituents equally in order to overcome the school-within-a-school culture.**

The results of this study suggest that not all constituents feel valued at Amadill and, as a result, the school's culture continues to perpetuate a school-within-a-school culture. Study participants described an existing 9-12 school culture that reflected a disengaged staff that worked in isolation in their departments or on their own. Unresolved old arguments between staff and very little staff turnover further defined the culture as fragmented and cliquy.

When consolidation occurred some of the 9-12 staff refused to give up classrooms and space for the 7-8 staff and students; their actions sending the message that this was 'their' school. Access to specialty rooms such as the tech shops, music, gym and drama was prioritized for 9-12, and 7-8 could use them if they became available. Some of the study participants described the treatment of 7-8 staff and students as 'second-class citizens' referring to the constant battle for the 7-8 panel to gain some equity with the 9-12 panel.

The treatment of the 7-8 staff as 'second-class citizens' at Amadill could be described as marginalization. The 7-8 staff and students were already at risk of being marginalized based on their population compared to the secondary. 7-8 students made up

approximately one third of the entire school population. With fewer students and fewer staff, than the 9-12 panel, the elementary panel did not feel they had the leverage to push for classrooms on the main floor and to access specialty rooms for their students. With two-thirds of the school population being 9-12, once school timetabling was done for them, there was nothing available for 7-8 students to use. The board's decision to build the 7-8 classrooms in the basement of the school, away from the main pulse of the school, exacerbated the feelings that 7-8 and 9-12 were not equal partners in the new 7-12 school.

The SCES results from the Superior Heights consolidation align with the findings of this study related to the 9-12 staff's initial resistance to change. At Superior Heights, the initial development of a single school culture was impeded by staff resistance, tension, territorial behavior of both staffs and animosity due to staff wanting to retain the traditions that had been associated with each of their schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Bawating staff viewed themselves as the 'underdogs' right from the start (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). At Amadill, the resistance of teachers to give up their classrooms illustrates not only territorial behavior but also how the 9-12 staff wanted to keep what had been traditionally theirs.

Alsberg & Shaw's (2006) national survey of school superintendents who have experienced school mergers in the United States looked at a number of issues concerning social justice in school consolidation. They write that, "If the school culture fails to reflect the values, norms and culture of its constituents, resistance and ambiguity are inevitable" (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006, p. 115). Because the school culture at Amadill predominately reflected the practices and norms of 9-12, those associated with 7-8 are either nonexistent or very minimal. As a result, resistance and ambiguity at the outset of

Amadill's consolidation were evident. Furthermore, the lack of equity in the norms and practices between 7-8 and 9-12 cultures leads to the marginalization of 7-8 staff and students.

The only study that has looked at how leaders at the school and board level help newly consolidated 7-12 schools build and support the school's culture is the SCES. Their recommendations include – “joint professional development days, more reliance on the student voice, bringing groups of students, staff and parents together as much as possible prior to the transition to contribute to program development and the growth of an engaging school environment” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, par 47). Furthermore, the SCES suggests that soliciting and integrating input and support from teaching staff as well as building relationships among staff who will be working together would also help a newly consolidated 7-12 school's culture develop.

Absent from the Ontario Ministry of Education's study is a specific focus on the leadership practices of administrators of 7-12 consolidated schools. Previous to my study, no data existed on leadership practices of administrators in 7-12 schools and how these lead to building the school's culture. My findings will add new information to the limited literature of 7-12 school consolidation and leadership practices.

The data from Amadill suggests that there are three essential leadership practices that contribute to the development of a 7-12 school culture: *observations and understanding, building relationships and finding the 'movers' in the school*. When administrators take the time to observe or immerse themselves in the existing culture and develop an understanding of the staff, students and the community, they place themselves in a position to begin the dialogue about changes to school culture. Secondly, direct

efforts on the part of the school administrator to get to know the staff, to spend more time with them and to develop professional relationships, makes staff feel valued and a sense of trust occurs between staff and administrators. Staff that build trust with administrators are more apt to engage in discussions and actions related to changing and building a school's culture. Lastly, when administrators identify and empower leaders within the teaching staff, they are putting the right people, in the right places in order to support cultural change.

These three essential leadership practices of administrators in consolidated 7-12 schools leads to both dialogue and action that helps develop and support a culture that values all constituents.

**Finding # 4: Staff cohesion within a consolidated 7-12 school context requires purposeful leadership practices.**

Consolidated schools consist of one or more schools coming together to form a new school (Howley, Johnson & Petrie, 2011). With the transition of new students, there is also new staff. Work by Nitta, Holly, & Wrobel (2010) and the Ontario Ministry of Education (2015) suggest that building a cohesive staff in a consolidated school is challenging, and Amadill has been no exception. The cliquy, siloed, and disengaged 9-12 staff that existed prior to Amadill's consolidation remained that way when the school became a 7-12 school. With the marginalization of the 7-8 panel and a determined refusal on the part of 9-12 staff to share rooms and space the hopes for a cohesive staff were off to a rocky start.

The 9-12 staff's resistance to sharing 'their space' reflects the findings by Nitta et al., (2010). Whole school staff meetings resembled two opposing teams playing a sport:

9-12 sat together and 7-8 sat together with very few intermingling. If staff from either panel sat together it was more indicative of a personal relationship that a staff member held with another than a change in school culture. Considering the complex nature of the school-within-a-school culture at Amadill, it was difficult for staff to connect.

Even if the staff had wanted to make connections through their own endeavors, there were other reasons that made this difficult. The divided nature of Amadill's school administration with roles and responsibilities clearly delineated as 7-8 and 9-12 did very little to exemplify a cohesive staff. Differing timetables that resulted in separate lunch times and instructional blocks made making staff connections difficult due to the limited amount of shared time. Coupled with the school's three floor geography, it was not unusual for staff not to see others beyond those in their own close vicinity all day.

One participant highlighted this visible and palpable division in the staff by sharing that each staff had their own staff funds to acknowledge particular occasions such as births, deaths, and weddings, with separate staff meetings and parties. Nitta et al., (2010) identified the same practice in one of the consolidated schools where it was noted that one staff member baked a birthday cake for only members of her former school's staff. Brea, the 9-12 vice-principal from 2006 to 2010 noted that even years after consolidation, staff still did not know everyone's names and could identify them only as elementary or secondary. This observation aligns with a finding from Nitta et al., (2010) that making connections often remains difficult even several years after consolidation.

Difficulties with staff cohesion were also found in the data associated with the Superior Heights consolidation. Despite strategies such as team building activities and special staffing provisions done in partnership with OSSTF during the transition,

developing a cohesive staff was stalled by the Bawating staff who initially felt like they were not as influential as the Sir James Dunn staff in the planning and transition (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Students at Superior Heights observed the division in staff when staff wore former school logos despite the students being encouraged not to (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

The absence of literature and research pertaining to leadership practices of 7-12 administrators and the building of cohesive staffs makes the findings from this study new research. The SCES did make recommendations regarding strategies that they felt, based on their consolidation experience and research, would help develop stronger staff cohesion; however, specific leadership practices for administrators were not identified. Among these recommendations were: spending more time on staff relationships, reassuring staff, soliciting and integrating input from staff during the transition and placing vice-principals sooner in the process (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Data from this research suggests that if 7-12 school administrators want to build a cohesive staff, their leadership practices must be purposeful in this pursuit. Leaving staff to make their own connections was not happening at Amadill. Administrators at ANSS had to create opportunities for staff to engage with one another. In addition to using the three critical practices outlined in finding # 3: observations and understanding, building relationships and finding the 'movers' in the school, administrators used flexible groupings to help build collaborative professional relationships among the staff. Groupings were created using knowledge of the staff, their strengths and areas of improvement, with the goal of promoting a more cohesive staff and increasing school engagement by building collegial relationships. At meetings, such as staff meetings,

professional learning communities, or other whole group activities, the administrators would pre-arrange the groupings, determining who sat or worked with whom. A practice that occurred in the privacy of the administrators' offices prior to meetings, staff was organized into groups that would promote greater engagement and the sharing of ideas. Flexible groupings considered various combinations such as by grade, by subject, by gender, by cross panel, by birthday etc. It is a practice that required staff to work with different people but the purposeful nature of the groupings was not left to chance. This strategy was certainly not used daily or even at every meeting, but, rather, in response to the social space that was occurring at the moment.

**Finding # 5: School consolidation does not always improve educational opportunities for students.**

Unlike some of the other findings discussed in this chapter, there is much literature regarding school consolidation and educational outcomes (Alsberg & Shaw, 2006; Berry, 2006; Berry & West, 2005; Howley et al., 2011; Sell & Leistritz, 1997; Striefel, Foldes, & Holman, 1991). This literature offers mixed conclusions regarding the value of consolidation. The conclusions range from claims that consolidation lowers student achievement (Kuziemko; 2006), to claims that consolidation is better for students academically (Sell & Leistritz, 1997). Even the time frame in which research was conducted on school consolidation and educational opportunities reflects different ideas. For example, research prior to 1970 supports consolidation on the basis of improved educational opportunities (Streifel et al., 1991). Research conducted after 1970 resulted in a wide range of thoughts and findings about the impact consolidation had on educational outcomes for students.



During the Pupil Accommodation Review families believed that the placement of grade 7 and 8 students into a high school would mean greater access to specialty rooms such as technology classes, shops, and the drama room. At the CASS Pupil Accommodation Review it was communicated to families that program enhancements would improve as a result of consolidation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). However, once timetabling was done for grades 9-12 at ANSS, there was limited to no space available for 7-8 students to access any of the specialty rooms. In this instance, the educational opportunities available to 7-8 students did not improve at Amadill. This situation supports the research by Howley et al., (2011) that consolidation does not necessarily mean students will receive a wider menu of educational experiences. Furthermore, Howley et al., (2011) reinforces that school consolidation efforts often fail to deliver the promised enhancement of academic offering.

The 'high achievement' culture of ANSS and the ingrained belief by the community, staff, and board that Amadill was the academic school in Barele, endorsed a learning culture that catered primarily to academic students. Following consolidation, a wide range of learners began attending ANSS. Amadill had not traditionally had students in the locally developed pathway or students with various learning challenges such as mild intellectual disabilities or developmental delays because, historically, they had attended the other high school in Barele. The inclusion of these students challenged the existing learning culture at Amadill leaving staff ill-prepared to meet their learning needs. Alex commented that students who were not in the academic pathway were essentially invisible to the secondary staff, as classroom practices primarily met the needs of academic learners. At the beginning of consolidation, learners outside the academic

pathway experienced educational challenges due to reduced learning opportunities.

Although this example refers to a specific population of learners at Amadill, those on the pathway to work and even students heading to college, did not benefit from Amadill's consolidation, Howley et al., (2011) found a similar situation in their research, supporting my finding that consolidation does not necessarily lead to improved educational opportunities.

Advocates of consolidation cite many positives. Among this list are well-equipped staff (Smith, 1938), broadened curricula and specialized instruction (Berry, 2006). Many years of teaching in an academic school equipped the Amadill staff for working with academic students; however, did very little to equip them to teach a broad range of learners which characterized the school's population following consolidation. Through cross-panel professional learning communities, the establishment of a much broader student success team and professional development by staff who championed various instructional and assessment strategies, the staff became more equipped over time to improve the educational outcomes for all students at Amadill.

When considering broadened curricula, Amadill did not see a large influx of new courses as a result of consolidation. One reason for this is that the 9-12 population changed very little due to consolidation. What did change at Amadill was the total number of students in the building. Specialized instruction reflected the reduction of split grades in 7-8 to primarily single grade classes with some rotary for different subjects such as French. What consolidation did do for 7-8 students and staff was give staff the opportunity to focus on curriculum that interested them and teach it as a rotary subject. In

this aspect, students benefitted from “specialized instruction” because they learned from a range of teachers who were passionate about what they were teaching.

The data from my study both supports and challenges the literature around improved educational outcomes for students as a direct result of consolidation. Amadill’s newly consolidated 7-12 school initially did not meet the needs of learners, limiting their educational outcomes. Students did not benefit from increased educational opportunities such as access to specialty rooms. Initially, 9-12 staff were ill-equipped to work with a wide range of learners; however, over time the staff has slowly become more equipped to support student achievement. Lastly, 7-8 students did benefit from more specialized instructions if we frame it as teachers teaching what they are interested in.

**Finding # 6: Organizational learning in a consolidated 7-12 school is inhibited by assumptions about elementary and secondary cultures.**

Data from my study suggests that one of the biggest roadblocks to promoting 7-12 organizational learning is the set of assumptions held by staff. At Amadill, these assumptions were intricately tied to each respective panel, elementary and secondary. 7-12 school consolidations work to create a culture that not only reflects the values and norms of each transitioning school, but also the distinct values and norms that define elementary and secondary. Assumptions about elementary and secondary cultures, which for the purpose of this study included curriculum, assessment and responsibilities of educators, interferes with collaborative structures meant to support student learning. When staff from each respective panel confined instructional and assessment practices to being only elementary or secondary, developing a continuum of practices that support student achievement was, and remains, difficult.

There is currently no literature or studies that suggest this finding for consolidated 7-12 schools. Data from both the Superior Heights and CASS consolidation provided recommendations to improve staff collaboration which included ample opportunities for shared planning, facilitated staff learning as a way to close the gap, bringing staff together and identifying emerging student needs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). When differences between staff were interfering with collaboration, SCES recommended addressing the division among staff at the outset (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Although these appear to be reasonable recommendations for addressing challenges with staff collaboration, they do not identify assumptions about elementary and secondary as one of their findings.

My study identified two assumptions that made working collaboratively across panels difficult: the assumption that secondary teachers are experts and elementary teachers are generalists, and that if something is identified as elementary or secondary then it can't be shared across the two panels.

Efforts to create and maintain cross panel professional learning communities (PLC) at Amadill is challenging for administrators. One of the reasons is staff insecurity that stems from the assumption that secondary teachers are experts in their curriculum subject and elementary are generalists with some knowledge of all subjects. Brea commented that the 7-8 teachers feel that secondary staff do not view them as strong, as important or as defined by their subjects, which leads to insecurity at PLCs. Neve suggested that a natural condescension exists when secondary teachers believe that their role is more important than the role of the elementary teacher. She illustrated this when she shared comments by secondary staff that suggested elementary teachers are

babysitters all day. When staff does not perceive each other as equal partners in a student's learning journey, students can become disengaged and achievement of student outcomes is decreased. Assumptions about curriculum knowledge and day-to-day support of student learning divides staff, making it difficult to find common ground.

A second assumption that this study noted as a barrier to whole school organizational learning is the idea that if it is identified as elementary or secondary, then it can't be shared or be beneficial to the other panel. Alex's story about the stand-up desks illustrates how assumptions about something can interfere with the creation of positive learning environments. Distinctly different curriculums, streaming, instructional, and assessment practices all work to define the responsibilities of each panel. That does not mean that they are exclusive to that panel, but many teachers continue to work on the assumption of 'that is elementary' and 'that is secondary'. This approach creates roadblocks when school administrators try to develop organizational learning structures that reflect a continuum of learning for students and assessment practices for staff.

I would be remiss if I didn't briefly discuss the role that different unions play in supporting assumptions about elementary and secondary. Contractual differences between ETFO and OSSTF such as assessment and reporting, professional development and instructional minutes to name just a few, further perpetuates these assumptions about the differences between the elementary and secondary panels. Membership in each respective union further identifies staff as either elementary or secondary.

Another new finding that this study contributes to the literature on 7-12 school consolidation is the leadership practices that 7-12 administrators use to address assumptions and develop cross-panel collaboration that supports student achievement.

These leadership practices include: acknowledging differences, identifying staff leaders, flexible groupings that maximize strengths, leaders as learners or facilitators and being innovative with existing organizational structures or creating new ones. A brief description of how each practice addresses assumptions is beneficial.

To create a “safe” environment for PLCs, staff meetings, or division meetings, Brea endorses a practice of being direct about people’s concerns and addressing them at the beginning so that ground rules are established and the meeting can accomplish the task it sets out to complete. . Furthermore, as Isaac pointed out, when you acknowledge and recognize differences openly it allows people to be more open to them.

As has been discussed previously, tapping leaders within the teaching staff or ‘movers’ that others will follow helps breakdown assumptions and develop collaborative structures. When school administration identifies staff that is passionate about a curriculum area, strategy or practice, they are encouraged to share it and provide in-house professional development. This practice works to acknowledge teacher strengths and is not contingent on what grade a teacher teaches. Furthermore it works to develop a school culture that supports risk-taking as teachers share their experiences, good and bad, with others to promote organizational learning.

I have already touched on the power of flexible groupings in getting staff away from their “regular” spots and strategically grouping so that it results in positive experiences for all involved. Flexible groupings support different dialogues with group members and create opportunities to work with a wide range of staff.

Traditionally, administrators of schools have been viewed as the instructional leader of the school. In a 7-12 school, curriculum and assessment knowledge is more

diverse as it reflects both elementary and secondary. Taking on the role of learner or facilitator when it is required allows administrators to benefit from in-school staff leaders who demonstrate greater curriculum knowledge or experiences with instructional and assessment practices. Furthermore, in the role of learner, administrators model and normalize that it is okay for others to acknowledge that they may lack experience in a particular area and a willingness to learn from others who have experience.

Administrators need to revisit organizational structures to determine how effective they are or if they could be more effective. Amadill's administrative team in 2014 reworked the 9-12 timetable to block grade 9 math and English. The motivation behind this was to provide more opportunities for teachers who were teaching the same course to connect and collaborate. Revisiting how the learning services team supports students deemed at risk led to the establishment of monthly meetings that now include a wider range of staff from 7-12. The administrative team wanted staff to become more involved with success planning for students and to carry some of these practices back into their classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study support, challenge, and contribute to the body of literature surrounding consolidation. The emphasis on leadership practices of administrators in this study adds to the limited amount of existing research for consolidated 7-12 schools. The results reflect the experiences of administrators in a single school over a 13-year period. As with any case study, the context in which this data occurred is unique to Amadill. I have tried to present the findings in such a way that they may be relevant to other consolidated 7-12 schools.

The key to a strong and vibrant consolidated school is developing a school culture that values all the constituents and promotes academic outcomes for all students. This can be accomplished by living the school culture, observing staff and students, identifying leaders in the staff, revisiting and reworking existing organizational structures and building collegial relationships that lead to trust. School administrators need to arm themselves with the knowledge of how the school works and runs before they can engage in dialogue about making change. As Brea noted, “schools need to have slow change”. It has taken Amadill 13 years to become more open to the dialogue of change and to become a single culture 7-12 school.



## Chapter 7

### Summary

The intent of this research project was to characterize leadership practices that promote a single school culture and organizational learning in a consolidated grade 7-12 school in Ontario. My interest in pursuing a study related to consolidated 7-12 schools grew from my own experiences in a newly formed 7-12 school as a staff member. In particular, I wanted to investigate whether a consolidated 7-12 school could ever truly be a single culture school. Studying and analyzing another school's journey with consolidation over a 13 year period helped me identify their challenges and successes with promoting a single school culture and organizational learning as well as the practices utilized by leaders to address them.

A qualitative research design that used an exploratory case study methodology was selected to collect data for this project. By triangulating the data collected from semi-structured interviews, historical research, field notes, and document analysis, emerging themes and findings were identified. The use of semi-structured interviews provided me with the flexibility to capture each participant's journey as an administrative leader at Amadill. Each narrative painted a picture of a fractured school culture that consisted of two distinct populations - grades 7-8 and 9-12. Entwined in this school culture were the challenges leaders faced in creating organizational structures and leadership practices that would support organizational learning.

Throughout this thesis I drew on a conceptual framework that emphasized the work of Eacott (2010, 2013, 2015) on leadership practices. His definition of leadership as a social practice that is always responding to the ever changing social space of schools

describes the unique challenges that the leaders of Amadill faced and the practices they used to promote and support change. The conceptualization of school culture as consisting of values, beliefs, traditions and artefacts that make each school unique readily pertained to Amadill (Brady, 2008; Connolly et. al, 2011; Coke, 2005; Waller, 1932). The board, community and staff's entrenchment of Amadill's culture prior to consolidation paired with distinct elementary and secondary cultures made the road to a single 7-12 school culture problematic for administrative leaders.

Defining organizational learning as a change in an organization's knowledge as a function of experiences describes Amadill's journey to develop 7-12 learning structures (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). With an emphasis on context and acknowledging leaders within the staff, the administrative leaders at ANSS maximized individual knowledge and created organizational structures, such as in-house professional development for staff that built the collective knowledge of the school and slowly began to move them towards 7-12 collaboration.

Finally, policy enactment and engagement theories were evident in the data from Amadill. Beginning with the pupil accommodation review to the transition of grade 7-8's to ANSS an emphasis on policy actors as implementers instead of enactors, policy prioritization and an understanding that context is critical in how policy is interpreted and enacted were present in my findings. My research confirms the importance of understanding policy engagement as a process that is constantly impacted by context and the interpretation of policy actors who bring with them varied and unique experiences.

The almost nonexistent literature regarding grade 7-12 school consolidations in an Ontario context made adding to the existing body of knowledge limited. My research

supports consolidation literature and studies related to the challenges teachers face at newly consolidated schools and the difficulties with building a school culture that is representative of all constituents. The data from this project supports more recent research that suggests that consolidation does not always improve educational opportunities for students.

In the Ontario context, data from SCES pertaining to the concerns of the community and families about placing 7-8 students in a 9-12 setting were evident in my research as well. Findings from the CASS and Amadill consolidations identified that families wanted each respective board to make assurances that the 7-8 students would remain as separate as possible from 9-12. Additionally, both studies, CASS and Amadill, noted that families became less vigilant about keeping 7-8 and 9-12 students apart after student experiences with the consolidated school.

Research and literature surrounding leadership practices that support schools making changes to their school culture and organizational learning in consolidated 7-12 schools is extremely limited. Some of my findings from the case study of Amadill contribute new ideas to this area hopefully stimulating further exploration and investigation into the leadership practices of administrators in consolidated 7-12 schools. My finding that when school administration is hired to lead a specific panel, 7-8 or 9-12, a school-within-a-school culture is perpetuated contributes new research to 7-12 consolidation literature. Although there are studies that discuss the importance of a cohesive staff in consolidation literature, there are no studies that identify the practices that school administrators use to help build more cohesive staffs. One final finding that

resulted in new information on 7-12 consolidated schools is how the assumptions about elementary and secondary cultures inhibit organizational learning.

As declining enrolment in Ontario forces boards into a position of having to ensure their own fiscal responsibility while retaining their commitment to supporting student achievement, further consolidation of schools may become a more common strategy. Adding more research to the consolidation literature that investigates and explores the experiences of administrators in consolidated schools is essential if consolidation becomes the answer to protecting student achievement and promoting educational outcomes for all students.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Analysis of Amadill's data resulted in six key findings from my research. As outlined earlier, some of the findings supported or challenged existing literature, while some findings contributed a new body of knowledge to consolidation research. A brief summary of each finding follows.

The intentional separation of grade 7-8 students from grade 9-12 students fails to promote the establishment of a single culture was a finding that was supported in existing research. This study found that when the board assured families that 7-8 and 9-12 students would co-exist in the same building, but be kept as separate as possible by having different timetables, and that the 7-8's would be located in their own area of the school, this planted the seeds for a school-within-a-school model. The repercussions of this decision led to 7-8 students and staff having their own administrator as well as clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of staff as either 7-8 or 9-12. The results of this study align with other literature that suggest as students experience the 7-12 school

life, parental concerns decrease and they become less concerned about separating 7-8 students from 9-12 students.

A clear transitional plan that emphasizes the administrative structure that would promote a consolidated 7-12 school culture was the second finding from this study and contributes new knowledge to consolidation literature. Uncertainty around what to expect at Amadill's newly formed 7-12 school, led the board to keep the existing principal and vice-principal in the school and hire a 7-8 Administrator to take care of ANES. The hiring practice of the board to purposefully split Amadill's school administration to lead each respective panel further emphasized a school-within-a-school model. This division in responsibilities allowed administrators to lead their area of school based on their own philosophy. A shared vision to lead ANSS as a 7-12 school, by the current administrative team, led to changes in how responsibilities for each administrator are divided. Co-principals and a 7-12 vice-principal is the current organization of administration at ANSS.

My finding that the 7-12 school culture must value all constituents equally in order to overcome the school-within-a-school' culture contributes to existing literature on consolidated school culture. My research found that not all staff felt valued within the Amadill school culture. The 7-8 staff felt like second class citizens through various actions including prioritizing grade 9-12 timetabling thus limiting access to specialty rooms for 7-8 students; the initial location of 7-8 classrooms on the lower floor of the school; and the territorial nature of the 9-12 staff regarding them giving up their rooms to accommodate the 7-8 staff and students all contributed to these feelings. A new contribution to research from this finding is the identification of three essential leadership

practices that contribute to the development of a 7-12 culture. These practices are: observing and understanding the culture, building collegial relationships and finding the movers in the school. Combined, these three leadership practices helped promote the beginnings of a single school culture at Amadill.

My research identified the finding that staff cohesion within a consolidated 7-12 school context requires purposeful leadership practices. Part of this finding adds to the existing literature regarding school consolidation and another part contributes a new finding regarding leadership practice. In my study, participants described the 9-12 staff as siloed, cliquy and disengaged and this didn't change much following the arrival the 7-8 students and staff. Collegial relationships were challenging due to the complex nature of the school-within-a-school culture at Amadill. Differing timetables made connecting with staff difficult, the geography of the school and the existence of separate staff funds and social activities made connecting with colleagues problematic.

Current literature supports my findings that achieving cohesion in consolidated schools can be problematic. With the focus of this study on leadership practices, the discovery of a leadership practice that helps address staff cohesion will add new information to consolidation studies. In addition to using the three leadership practices identified in finding # 2, school administrators also used flexible groupings as a practice to help staff engage with a variety of people and to get the most out of their dialogue.

My finding that school consolidation does not always improve educational opportunities for students is supported in more recent literature. The data from this study found that Amadill had a history of being deemed the "academic school" in Barele, the school's culture valued high marks and prioritized students going to university and ANSS

9-12 staff had limited experience in working with students with varying learning needs. Educational opportunities for students not attending university were limited partially due to the existing high marks culture but also due to secondary teachers being ill-equipped to work with a diverse range of learners. Students at Amadill did not benefit from increased educational opportunities that the pupil accommodation review had led grade 7-8 families to believe such as having access to specialty rooms. Grade 9-12 students did not experience a broadened curriculum due to the fact that their population numbers did not increase substantially as a result of consolidation.

My final finding from this study was that organizational learning in a consolidated 7-12 school is inhibited by the assumptions about elementary and secondary cultures. Although there is research that provides recommendations for improving staff collaboration, there is currently no research that identifies elementary and secondary assumptions as barriers to organizational learning in 7-12 schools. The findings from this study contribute new knowledge to existing work regarding consolidation. The data from Amadill suggests that an assumption exists that secondary teachers are experts and elementary teachers are generalists when it comes to curriculum knowledge. This assumption impedes collaborative learning structures such as professional learning communities as it suggests that teachers are not equal contributors supporting the achievement of students. Secondly, assumptions that equipment or practices can only be elementary or secondary and not shared, prevents staff from exploring a range of options for supporting student learning. Different unions further highlight differences between elementary and secondary making it difficult for leaders to develop 7-12 organizational learning structures.

The identification of practices that school administrators use in response to these assumptions as they endeavor to strengthen 7-12 learning structures through cross-panel collaborations, contributes new research to consolidation literature. Findings from my study indicate that school leaders that engage in open dialogue that acknowledges differences, identify leaders within the staff, use flexible groupings, model the role of learner and facilitator and challenge existing organizational structures in order to improve them or create new , are practices that were found to help build collaborative learning structures at Amadill.

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

The exploratory case study of ANSS aimed to address two questions regarding leadership practices in the consolidated grade 7-12 school:

- (1) What leadership practices, related to school culture and organizational learning, support or hinder the consolidation of a grade 7 -12 school?
- (2) How do the leadership practices, related to school culture and organizational learning support or hinder the consolidation of a grade 7 -12 school?

The search to find answers to these research questions led to study findings that supported existing research as well as contributed new knowledge to literature concerning school consolidation. A look at how my study data addresses these questions follows.

#### **1) What leadership practices, related to school culture and organizational learning, support or hinder the consolidation of a grade 7 -12 school?**

My research findings indicate that leaders need to understand the school's unique culture before initiating changes. By developing collegial relationships with staff that



build trust in one another, the staff became more open to the dialogue of change and at implementing ideas that are shared. Acknowledging leaders within the staff who have a following, gives momentum to the changes or ideas that leaders have regarding a school's culture and puts them in the driver's seat for motivating and supporting change.

Some leadership practices that interfere with the development of a 7-12 school culture encompass those at the board and school level. When board leaders do not provide a clear vision of how school leadership will be organized at the newly consolidated school, existing administrative structures remain for the current population and another administrator is hired to support the new population attending the school. By clearly identifying administrators as 7-8 and 9-12 the board sends a message that the consolidated school reflects a school-within-a-school model. Maintaining this hiring practice continually for the years that follow consolidation further perpetuates a school-within-a-school culture. Data from my study suggests that some of the school leaders clearly envisioned their role as leading their own distinct populations, thereby utilizing practices that only addressed one population. The lack of a shared school vision made the development of a grade 7-12 school challenging.

My research identified six practices that leaders exhibit that support the development of organizational learning structures in a consolidated 7-12 school. Leaders who openly engage in dialogue with staff and acknowledge differences and concerns provide the necessary groundwork for conversations where people feel safe to share and contribute their ideas. Identifying leaders within the staff looks beyond what panel a teacher teaches in and celebrates their individual knowledge and the role their knowledge plays in strengthening the collective knowledge when shared. By sharing their own

successes and failures staff leaders help create a culture where trying something new, whether it works or not, is all part of the organizational growth of the school through these experiences.

The use of flexible groupings by school leaders to get staff out of their “regular spots” and create groupings that provide opportunities for staff to work with different people, to engage in different dialogues and to find common ground among staff, supports collaborative structures such as PLCs and school improvement teams. When leaders take on the role of a learner or facilitator in groups or meetings it models an acceptance that it is okay to be a learner to improve knowledge and professional practice.

Finally, when administrative leaders challenge existing organizational structures either by making changes to them or by creating new ones the organizational learning in the school grows. As staff experience the new structures their experiences help build the collective knowledge of the school and impact organizational growth.

## **2) How do the leadership practices, related to school culture and organizational learning support or hinder the consolidation of a grade 7 -12 school?**

At the core of many of the leadership practices characterized in this study, knowing and understanding the people and the culture is critical. When administrators spend time immersing themselves in the culture, listening to and understanding the people, they collect valuable information that helps them better determine ‘the how’ and the ‘how much’ of change they can encourage to support consolidation. This contextual information helps determine the leadership practices that administrators will use to support consolidation. Two of these practices include the identification and empowerment of leaders within the staff and the development of collegial relationships.

It is challenging for administrators to develop collegial relationships and trust with all staff at the same rate and pace. The leadership practice of identifying leaders within the staff marks a starting point for administrators wanting to promote change. By empowering the leaders within the staff, administrators harness their influence to support cultural and organizational learning changes that support 7-12 consolidation. It is, however, important to acknowledge that there will also be leaders within the staff who hinder change and administrators must be aware of who they are in order to begin to develop collegial relationships with them. By developing collegial relationships with staff, administrators begin to nurture trust that is reflected in staff trusting administrators and administrators trusting staff. When mutual trust exists, it allows administrators to challenge existing structures, to be innovative and to promote 7-12 consolidation while recognizing that there will be support.

By taking the time to get to know the staff and the school culture, administrators are able to use the leadership practice of flexible groupings to create groups, committees and professional learning communities that promote 7-12 organizational learning. By developing groups based on staff information such as: professional strengths and weaknesses, personal relationships and disagreements and varying teaching experiences, to name just a few, 7-12 organizational learning is endorsed because the groupings transcend barriers such as subject specificity and elementary and secondary differences. Flexible groupings allow administrators to create a culture where 7-12 staff can openly share, professional dialogue is supported and collaborative partnerships can be developed. By using flexible groupings that engage staff 7-12 consolidation is championed.

A leadership practice that hinders the consolidation of a grade 7-12 school is identifying administrators as either 9-12 or 7-8 creating a distinctive school within a school culture. By distinguishing administrators as 9-12 or 7-8, board leaders exacerbate other barriers to consolidation such as assumptions about elementary and secondary cultures and separating 9-12 staff and students from 7-8 staff and students. The placement of separate administrators sends a message to staff, students and the community that 9-12 and 7-8 must be different because they each need their own leader. With a designated focus on either 7-8 or 9-12, leadership practices hinder consolidation as each administrator takes care of their own “school” limiting their involvement in the other “school”. This fragments a school vision of a single grade 7-12 consolidated school and further reinforces the school within a school model.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The focus of my research was on characterizing leadership practices in a consolidated 7-12 school with an emphasis on promoting a single school culture and organizational learning. Data was analyzed with the two key questions at the forefront; however the data also highlighted other themes that would be worthy of deeper exploration and future studies. The following recommendations would add to the almost nonexistent literature regarding consolidated 7-12 schools in Ontario.

**(1) The role of unions.** A closer investigation on the impact that two different unions with different collective agreements has on building a cohesive staff, for hiring staff with a shared vision of 7-12 and developing 7-12 organizational learning structures would be beneficial.

**(2) Differences in the leadership approaches by male and female**

**administrators:** Although not exclusive to 7-12 consolidated schools, there were times during the data analysis that I wondered about whether the leadership practices by administrators differed as result of their teacher training and experiences, or whether it was an indication that men and women may lead differently. Investigating these questions further would add to the literature around leadership in schools.

**(3) Elementary and Secondary differences:** Data from my study highlighted assumptions as one of the barriers to building a 7-12 school culture and organizational learning. A deeper look at whether there are other elements related to combining elementary and secondary staff that may impact consolidated 7-12 schools would be worth exploring further.

**(4) Rural and urban consolidated 7-12 schools:** Amadill's consolidation involved closing and restructuring schools within the same city. Even though all families lived in Barele, there were still challenges with creating ANSS as a single 7-12 school culture. A few questions that came to mind following the data analysis included - Would this culture challenge be more complex if students and staff came from diverse communities? Would similar challenges exist if the consolidated school had been located in a rural area? My questions go back to the importance of context and how the findings from this study may differ in a different context. More research that looks at a wide range of consolidated school contexts will add to 7-12 consolidation literature.

**(5) Board policies on school leadership:** Another finding that grew out Amadill's data was the role of the board in determining the leadership vision for consolidated 7-12 schools. Further studies on how boards develop a leadership plan for consolidated 7-12

schools could provide recommendations for other boards that are considering this type of school restructuring.

**(6) Provincial policies on accommodations of intermediate and senior students:** This recommendation came from the CASS consolidation and my research supports a need for more research and studies into the need for the province to provide boards with some guidance on accommodating elementary and secondary students in a consolidated school. Although context heavily restricts specific accommodation guidelines, a provincial policy that outlines some key things to consider in the process may be helpful for boards and schools engaging in grade 7-12 school consolidations.

**(7) How the use of language relating to two different panels impacts the development of a 7-12 consolidated school:** Another area that Amadill's data shed some light on was how the use of language adds an additional layer to the school within a school model. Language such as, "that is elementary", "that is secondary" was mentioned in my findings, but it is also reflected in professional discussions relating to instructional and assessment practices as well as the school name. For example, the name of the school Amadill North Secondary School does very little to suggest that it is 7-12 school. A more thorough exploration of how the use of language interferes with the development of 7-12 school culture and organizational learning structures would be another recommended area for future research.

**(8) Re-culturing in consolidated 7-12 schools:** Each school has its own unique culture and when schools consolidate each of these cultures should be reflected in the new culture. In consolidated 7-12 schools, re-culturing is further complicated by not only each school's culture but also the distinctive cultures of elementary and secondary. A

deeper exploration of the challenges associated with re-culturing consolidated 7-12 schools would add more research to the field of school culture.

**(9) An examination of how sub-cultures impact the development of a single culture grade 7-12 school:** My study of Amadill's culture and the leadership practices that either supported or hindered the development of a 7-12 school culture encompassed a broad approach to culture. Because the nature of this study was exploratory, a more fine grained examination of sub-cultures in a 7-12 school and their impact on consolidation would be a worthwhile research focus for future studies.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Letter of Information

##### 1. Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in this research study about the leadership practices that either inhibit or promote re-culturing and organizational learning in grade 7 -12 schools. You are being invited to participate because you have experience with leadership practices related to grade 7-12 schools.

##### 2. Purpose of the Letter

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

##### Purpose of this Study

It is the intent that this study will provide valuable insight for the development of future grade 7 -12 schools and the leadership practices that inhibit and/or support its successes related to re-culturing and organizational learning. Objectives of this study include: identifying leadership practices that inhibit and support school re-culturing to reflect a grade 7-12 school culture; identifying leadership practices that inhibit and/or support organizational learning in a grade 7-12 schools.

##### 3. Inclusion Criteria

1. Individuals who are current or former administrators (principals and vice principals) of the case study grade 7 -12 school
2. Individuals who are current or former members of the Accommodation Review Committee (a board committee in charge of school consolidations) are eligible to participate in this study.
3. Only individuals who agree to be audio-recorded will be considered for this study

##### 4. Exclusion Criteria

1. Individuals who have not played a leadership role, as director, superintendent, principal or vice principal, in the grade 7 -12 school will not be considered for this study
2. Individuals who have not participated in the Accommodation Review committee will not be considered for this study
3. individuals who do not wish to be audio-recorded during the interview will not be included in the study

##### 5. Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview, with the student researcher, Krista Dalzell. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy of responses. If you do not agree to an audio recording, you cannot participate in the study. It is anticipated that interview will

take approximately 90 minutes. There could be one follow-up interview, in case some data needs further clarification. It is anticipated that the follow up interview could take 90 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon time and location by the student researcher, Krista Dalzell and the participant.

#### **6. Possible Risks and Harms**

While there are no foreseen or presumable risks involved in this study, the interview can be stopped at anytime should you experience any discomfort or fatigue during the process.

#### **7. Possible Benefits**

A possible benefit to you is that you can use the data and its analysis to self - reflect and inform your own practices.

The possible benefits to society may be that current and future grade 7 -12 schools will be able to use this study to inform leadership practices around re-culturing and organizational structures in grade 7 -12 schools.

#### **8. Compensation**

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

#### **9. Voluntary Participation**

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

**Version Date: May 3, 2015**

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

#### Ice Breaker

1. What is your leadership experience, beginning with your first day as a leader to present day?

#### Context

1. How many years have you been involved with grade 7-12 leadership?
2. What has been some of the challenges and what have you learned after all these years?
3. What are the advantages / disadvantages of the 7-12 model compared to the K-8 and 9-12 schools model?

#### Leadership

1. How is leadership configured or shared in the school? Who does what?
2. How has this leadership configuration changed in your experience?

#### Culture

1. Describe the school you work in.
2. Do you perceive the existence of different school cultures (school within a school) in the school? If so, how would you describe each of them?
3. What leadership practices have you experienced that work towards or hinder developing a single school culture?

#### Organizational Learning

1. How do you work out curricular integration, continuity of assessment and instruction, discipline, parental involvement, etc.?
2. In your experience, how have these practices changed since the beginning of the consolidation?
3. How do you engage in the process of professional development, promotion, hiring retention, support etc.?

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Krista Dalzell

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:**

- The University of Waterloo  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada  
1993-1996 Bachelor Arts, Social Development Studies
- The University of Windsor Ontario  
Windsor, Ontario, Canada  
1996-1997 Bachelor of Education, Primary/Junior
- Western University  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2000-2002 Masters of Education, Curriculum

**Related Work Experience:**

- Teacher at Amethyst Demonstration School  
September 2016
- Acting Vice Principal, 7-12 school  
2015 – 2016
- Teacher with the Avon Maitland District School Board  
1998 – June 2016  
Teaching experience K - 8

**Publications:**

Dalzell, Krista (2002). Rediscovering the passion to teach. Masters Directed Research Project. Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario