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# The Ontario Leadership Framework and Leadership Interactions in a Sustained Working Group in Ontario Education

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Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Education

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THE ONTARIO LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK AND LEADERSHIP INTERACTIONS IN A  
SUSTAINED WORKING GROUP IN ONTARIO EDUCATION

(Monograph)

by

Daniel John Ballantyne

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
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## **Abstract**

This study investigated the prevalence of the five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) in the work of teachers and administrators charged with developing an integrated Grade 10 curriculum incorporating student use of emergent electronic and web-based technologies. Retrospective interviews were conducted with members of this group --known as the Futures Forum Project (FFP)-- to elucidate and explore their professional interactions for traces of the CLCs. The researcher concluded that the CLCs were not used as an intentional framework for leadership, but did detect traces of distributed leadership closely linked to exchange theories of power. These and related findings invite critical examination of the OLF and its constituent CLCs as a defensible framework for the development of autonomous professionalism amongst school and system leaders.

## **Keywords**

Educational Leadership, Ontario Leadership Framework, Core Leadership Capacities, Futures Forum Project, Waterloo Region District School Board

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family.

To my sons, Rhys and Cole, you are more precious to me than words can express. I hope that this work can serve as a testament for you that the hard work and perseverance needed to achieve your goals is always worth the investment.

To my wife, Corrie, you are my best friend, most trusted confidant, and love of my life. No one else has shared the trials and tribulations of this process with me more than you. Thank you for your unending patience, love, and support. I love you.

“Because I master all things by The Messiah who empowers me.” Phillipians 4:3

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I am deeply indebted to Dr. Derek Allison for taking up the cause of this endeavor through his agreement to become my advisor. His patient and thoughtful review of numerous drafts, and timely reminders that writing a thesis is an educational *process* in itself, made all the difference. Your tutelage has made me a better writer and educator. Thank you!

I am also beholden to Dr. Jerry Paquette for his careful review of the final draft. His input was challenging, yet edifying, bringing a new dimension to the analysis.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the consent and participation of those involved in the Futures Forum Project. Listening to the recollections of their experiences working together have both inspired and fascinated me.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth - J. M. Burns (1978, p. 2)

As Burns suggests, the nature of leadership is elusive, but continuing interest in it implies that widespread disagreement over what constitutes leadership does not diminish its importance.

The situation is no different in the case of leadership in education. There exists an extensive literature on the subject of educational leadership, with theories that seek to explain its distributed properties currently holding a position of prominence. This study sought to explore the practice of leadership, with a focus on its enactment among professional participants in a sustained working group within a specific education context.

The study was conducted in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) in Ontario and focused on a sustained working group called the “Futures Forum Project” (FFP). Three aspects of this group made it attractive for the study of leadership. First, the composition of the FFP provided an unusual opportunity to examine the interactions of a broad spectrum of individuals from across the organizational hierarchy of the school board. This membership diversity presented an opportunity to observe leadership enactment within an education context that was not readily available in a normal school environment. Second, from within this diverse collection of participants there was no formally designated individual leader who was responsible for the FFP. In place of this were two separate groups responsible for directing the business of the FFP. This arrangement appeared to provide an opportunity for leadership enactment to occur across various individuals and in a variety of situations. Third, the nature of the task given to the FFP participants was, to use Heifetz, and Linsky’s (2004) phrase, an “adaptive challenge” that “require[ed] leadership” because participants needed “to learn a new

set of competencies” (p. 35). The combination of broad organizational representation and the complex nature of the group’s task made the FFP an attractive context for the study of leadership.

This localized context for leadership was and is subject to influence from the larger system in Ontario where the Ministry of Education has recently sought to increase its influence over the conceptualization and practice of leadership in Ontario’s publicly funded schools, as discussed further below. Given this strong attempt on the part of the Ministry to bolster its influence over leadership theory and practice, it appeared reasonable to expect that Ministry policy related to school leadership would have an influence on the practice of leadership in the FFP. More specifically, the Ministry’s recently developed and promulgated Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) was expected to have an influence on leadership enactment within the FFP.

### **The Problem**

The FFP provided a potentially unique opportunity to examine educational leadership in the natural context where it occurs, within organizational structures and cultures. In this respect the FFP exhibited key characteristics of a small group as studied in previous leadership research: each of the participants knew each other, all viewed the group as a distinct entity with a defined membership to which they belonged, and with which they shared a set of common values and norms (Li & Allison, 2005, p. 5).

Being conceived as a planned effort to change the classroom practice of participant teachers and framed within the leadership policy context of the OLF, the FFP offered a rich, yet manageable context for the study of educational leadership within the context of Ontario’s publicly-funded school system. Therefore, this study sought to describe the experiences of participants in the FFP in order to gain insight into the enactment of leadership in a small-group

educational setting in Ontario. The problem addressed by the study was formally phrased as follows:

To analyze reported experiences of FFP participants with a view to identifying the presence of the Core Leadership Competencies identified in the Ontario Leadership Framework in their professional interactions.

### **The OLF and the CLCs**

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) was created to act as the “foundation for all aspects of the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS)” (Ontario, 2010c, p. 6). The OLS itself was developed as a “a long-term systematic leadership development initiative” underpinned by the belief “that school leadership, especially by the principal, is second only to teaching in terms of the impact on student learning” (Ontario, 2010c, p. 3). Launched by the Premier of Ontario in 2008, the OLF has become the Ministry’s guiding framework, or “road map,” for leadership development in Ontario (Ontario Institute for Education Leadership, 2008, p. 6).

The OLF seeks to outline the core capacities of education leaders in Ontario so as to encourage existing leaders to become high-functioning curriculum leaders and to attract other individuals into positions of leadership (Ontario, 2009).

The OLF describes what good leadership looks like and provides the foundation for implementing the OLS. The framework supports career-long professional learning, helping to stimulate and guide learning-focused conversations about effective leadership practice and approaches for resolving specific issues and challenges that face school and system leaders. (Ontario, 2010a, p. 1)

The purpose of the OLF is to influence the daily business of the Ministry, boards, and schools.

The Ministry’s focus on leadership development is intended to build leadership capacity that improves student achievement in schools through increased collaboration, and alignment with Ministry goals for student achievement.

Real and lasting improvement in Ontario schools requires every school to have a culture of collaborative professionalism, in which educators work together to use evidence to improve their practice and students' learning. The creation of thousands of such schools is a call for high quality leadership throughout the system. In addition, development of school and district leadership can improve the ability of leaders to act together within and across districts to implement the three core priorities<sup>1</sup> and provide the supporting conditions for learning (Ontario, 2010a, p. 1).

An assessment of the quality of leadership development in the province's education system conducted by the Ministry of Education had concluded that education leaders in Ontario lacked certain skills considered to be central to developing a culture of collaborative professionalism (2010c, p. 10). To address this perceived lack of leadership "skills" and develop the leadership capacity in schools desired by the Ministry, the OLF outlines the five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) shown in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> These are "high levels of student achievement and well-being, reduced gaps in student achievement, and increased public confidence in publicly funded education" (Ontario, 2010, p. 4).

**Table 1**

**Core Leadership Capacities of the Ontario Leadership Framework with Definitions**

<b>Core Leadership Capacity</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Setting goals	This capacity refers to working with others to help ensure that goals are strategic, specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound (SMART) and lead to improved teaching and learning.
Aligning resources with priorities	This capacity focuses on ensuring that financial, capital, human resources, curriculum and teaching resources, professional learning resources and program allocations are tied to priorities, with student achievement and well-being as the central, unambiguous focus.
Promoting collaborative learning cultures	This capacity is about enabling schools, school communities and districts to work together and learn from each other with a central focus on improved teaching quality and student achievement and well-being.
Using data	This capacity is about leading and engaging school teams in gathering and analyzing provincial, district, school and classroom data to identify trends, strengths and weaknesses that will inform specific actions for improvement focused on teaching and learning
Engaging in courageous conversations	This capacity relates to challenging current practices and fostering innovation through conversation, to listen and to act on feedback, and to provide feedback that will lead to improvements in student achievement and well-being.

Taken from “Ideas Into Action: Five Core Capacities of Effective Leaders” (Ontario, 2009c, p. 4-5).

According to OLF documents, adherence to the CLCs is intended to build leadership capacity that improves student achievement, so called “instructional leadership” (Ontario, 2009c, p. 2).

This aspect of the OLF became the main focus of this study because it was directly relevant to the declared task of the FFP participants as they endeavoured to create enhanced classroom curricula, as discussed further below. As such, the CLCs offered an officially sanctioned framework through which the leadership interactions of the FFP participants could be studied.



The OLF provides a contextually relevant prescription for leadership activities in Ontario and, by extension, the WRDSB and the FFP. Given its status as official Ministry policy, I anticipated that the OLF-- and particularly the CLCs--would be reflected in the awareness and actions of FFP participants who occupied formal leadership positions in the WRDSB. The official expectation that the OLF and CLCs will improve instructional leadership amongst principals and vice-principals suggested that they would be evident in the activities and related discussion of the FFP participants who occupy these positions.

### **Leadership and Distributed Leadership**

While the OLF appears to be primarily directed towards the actions of formally designated leaders, theories of distributed leadership suggest that, in practice, leadership occurs across various individuals occupying formal and informal roles, as well as aspects of the context within which they work. When one examines leadership in schools, what often come to mind are individuals who occupy formal leadership positions, typically principals (Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003). Recently, the literature has moved away from role-based understandings of leadership in schools and a distributed view has begun to emerge (Richmon & Allison, 2003, p. 47).

Spillane (2005) states that “a distributed perspective frames leadership practice in a particular way; leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation” (p. 144). Sun and Allison (2005) argue that “leadership may be best understood as a distributed process embedded within dynamic, varied and locally known social systems, rather than a set of qualities, characteristics and behaviours attributed to individuals in particular leadership settings” (p.10). Harris (2008) notes that “at the core of the concept of distributed leadership is the idea that leadership is not the preserve of an individual but is a fluid or emergent property rather than a fixed phenomenon” (p.2).

Based on theories of distributed cognition, distributed leadership theories focus on the interactions that emerge among “... leaders, followers, and their situation in the execution of particular leadership tasks” (Spillane *et al.* 2004 p. 11). An important characteristic of such interactions is that they are not exclusively social and interpersonal. As further explained by Spillane and his colleagues:

... leadership activity is constituted in the interaction of multiple leaders (and followers) using particular tools and artifacts around particular leadership tasks. In this scheme, what is critical are the *interdependencies* among the constituting elements—leaders, followers, and situation—of leadership activity (author’s emphasis, Spillane *et al.*. 2004, p. 16).

As discussed further in Chapter 2, emerging theories of distributed leadership highlight that leadership does not occur through the efforts of just one individual, but rather the collective influence of leaders, followers and their situation.

## **Formation and Work of the FFP**

The Futures Forum Project was established in order to have students “...actively engage in collaborative knowledge building, critical thinking, problem solving, thoughtful decision making and purposeful action” (WRDSB, 2009, p. 1). The rationale for pursuing this type of project focused on supporting a “learning society” that was subject to the increasingly complex societal change driven by new technologies.

Developing and sustaining a society where all people are successful, contributing and happy should be a predominant goal for any community. The ability to meet this goal is increasingly challenging. Factors contributing to these challenges include changing skills needs, expansion of the concept of the “knowledge worker”, demographic shifts, globalization and transformational technology. The implication is a need for a “learning society” with a culture of learning, innovation, flexibility, creativity, and high levels of competency for all. (WRDSB, 2009, p. 1)

Initially, the intended product of the FFP involved vaguely defined ideas associated with imbuing students with “21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills” in order to “...better prepare students, organizations and the Waterloo Region community to thrive in an unpredictable future” (WRDSB, 2009, p. 2).

Subsequently it became focused on the design of a classroom curriculum, labeled the “FFP core curriculum” for the purposes of this research, which embodied specific concepts that were adopted by the formal leadership of the group. These concepts included inquiry-based learning, technology and curriculum integration, with the anticipated outcomes of student engagement and success.

In retrospect, the work of the FFP fell into the three distinct phases of Initiation, Planning, and Implementation as outlined in Table 2. A more detailed chronology can be found in Appendix A.

**Table 2**  
**Phases of the Futures Forum Project**

Phase One – May 2009 to March 2010	Initiation
Phase Two – June 2010 to January, 2011	Planning
Phase Three – February 2011 to Present	Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cycle One – February 2011 to June 2011</li> <li>▪ Cycle Two – September 2011 to June 2012</li> </ul>	

This study was delimited to the Planning Phase and the First Cycle of the Implementation Phase.

With reference to Table 2, the time frame this study concentrated on what occurred between June 2010 and June 2011.

The FFP was initiated in May 2009 through a series of eight meetings between senior WRDSB administrators and, on a number of occasions, members of the local business community, primarily representatives from a technology-sector advocacy group called Communitech. These meetings were held regularly throughout the Summer and Fall of 2009, the Initiation Phase ending with the drafting of a budget proposal in February 2010 which led to the creation of “The Futures Forum Project” for the 2010-2011 school year. The representatives from Communitech who had participated in the Initiation Phase then ceased to be involved.

During the Initiation Phase, it was decided that the FFP would focus on integrating three mandatory Grade Ten courses: Civics CHV20, Careers GLC20, and Academic English ENG2D. The impetus for this decision was threefold. First, the mandated nature of the courses provided the opportunity for district-wide implementation. Second, these three courses were understood as providing opportunities for combining skill-oriented inquiry-based learning and technology integration. Lastly, the Careers and Civics courses were areas in which the WRDSB sought to improve student outcomes, particularly those related to boy's literacy, and it was thought this could be advanced through integration with the Academic English course. Developing a classroom curriculum that integrated three courses with emerging electronic and web-based technology (EWT) and sought to improve student engagement and achievement appeared to be a rich context to explore leadership. I anticipated that the focus on integrating EWT and three courses into a single classroom curriculum would present an engaging environment that would lead to improved student outcomes.

Once budgetary approval was granted by the WRDSB, a memo was drafted and circulated on March 31, 2010 amongst secondary school principals to solicit vice-principal and Grade Ten teacher volunteers. The memo described the purpose of the FFP as being to “explore the delivery of innovative practices to engage students utilizing some technology, and an interdisciplinary, inquiry based approach to learning” (WRDSB, 2010, p. 1). Three distinct goals were outlined as follows:

- Increasing student success rates in grade 10 credit accumulation specifically, for board identified target groups particularly boys.
- Increasing central, school wide and teachers' knowledge and expertise in using [electronic] technology to engage students and promote learning
- Increasing effective and engaging use of WRDSB research-based strategies, tools and techniques for improving written communication (e.g. Student exemplars, anchor charts, non-fiction writing, graphic organizers/frameworks, open-ended critical questions) (WRDSB, 2010, p. 1-2)

Individuals from seven of sixteen secondary schools volunteered for the project by responding to this memo. The vice-principals and teachers who responded to the FFP memo, along with consultants from WRDSB Learning Services and Information Technology Services, joined the senior administrators who had participated in the Initiation phase to form “The Futures Forum Project.” Once participants were identified, the FFP transitioned to the Planning Phase in June 2010.

This group met on eight occasions during the Planning Phase and eight occasions during the Implementation Phase. These meetings that occurred during the Planning Phase focused on establishing the core principles underpinning the FFP and designing the FFP core curriculum that would embody those principles and be implemented by the teacher participants in their classrooms. These Planning Phase meetings were usually attended by all FFP participants (see Table 3), with the notable exception of a meeting on December 10, 2010 when the teachers met by themselves for the first time. Meetings during the Implementation Phase had a broader focus and included two teacher-only meetings. Three meetings during this phase included opportunities for data collection by the FFP participants. The first of these meetings occurred on March 4, 2011, and involved the teachers collaboratively marking student results on a standardized test. The second involved gathering data for an action research project initiated by an external consultant group hired to assist the FFP participants. The third was a review meeting where FFP participants were invited to provide feedback on their experiences in the FFP. As discussed further in Chapter Three, acquiring and analyzing these data was beyond the scope of this research.

In essence the FFP was a sustained collaborative working group composed of twenty-four individuals from a variety of positions within the WRDSB. This study uses the term “position” to

indicate the formal roles within the organization, such as supervisory officer, principal, teacher, and consultant. Table 3 provides a list of positions represented in the FFP and the number of participants from each position.

**Table 3**  
**Number of FFP participants by position**

<b>Position</b>	<b># of FFP Participants</b>	
Grade Ten Teachers	8	
Vice-Principals	7	
Senior Administration	Supervisory Officers	2
Advisory Group	Principals	1
	Chief Information Officer	1
	Learning Services Coordinator	1
Central Staff	Learning Services Consultants	2
	ITS Consultants	2
Total		24

FFP participants worked together to assist the teacher members in producing a classroom curriculum that focused on integrating the three Grade 10 course curricula (Academic English, Civics, Careers) in ways that were intended to positively influence student achievement, while also increasing the use of EEWT by teachers (WRDSB, 2010, p. 1). While this study did not focus on EEWT integration explicitly, the effect this had on the practices of participants was expected to have implications for understanding leadership interactions and their distribution. It is also

worth noting that most (n=6) of the teacher participants self-identified as being most familiar with the Grade Ten Academic English curriculum.

The FFP brought together participants from a diverse array of positions within the WRDSB including teachers, vice-principals, consultants, and supervisory officers. Formal leadership of the FFP appears to have been shared between members of the Senior Administrator Advisory Group (SAAG) and the Project Lead Group (PLG). The SAAG involved participants who occupied senior positions in the WRDSB and had taken part in the Initiation Phase. The PLG was comprised of three individuals who joined the FFP at the beginning of the Planning Phase, each of whom represented the vice-principals, Learning Services, and Information Technology Services respectively.

The Planning Phase involved many instances (i.e., formal meetings) where participants from these diverse positions were able to interact. One significant context for these interactions occurred as activities facilitated by an external group, the education consultancy Professional Learning Practice (PLP). The purpose of including the PLP was to guide FFP participants through professional development activities that sought to improve their understanding of EEWT and explore strategies for integration in the classroom with the goal of developing a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning environment. The PLP organized FFP participants into four working groups consisting of teachers and vice-principals co-led by a central staff member and a member of the SAAG. This structure provided opportunities for what was perceived to be unusual interactions among participants from the various positions. For example, classroom teachers could engage in extended discussions with supervisory officers about pedagogy and philosophies of assessment.

Interactions among FFP participants were not limited to formal, all-member meetings.

Participants met in a variety of sub-groups throughout the Planning and Implementation Phases.

Two sub-groups are notable in that they were officially sanctioned by the SAAG: the Project Lead Group (PLG) and the Summer Curriculum Writing Team (SCWT). The three-person PLG consisted of one vice-principal, one consultant from Information Technology Services (ITS), and a consultant from Learning Services (LS). This group met separately from the rest of the FFP and was tasked with overall management of the FFP, coordinating activities, organizing meetings, and managing allocated resources. The SCWT, which met twice during the summer of 2010, consisted of the LS consultant who was also a member of the PLG and three teachers. They were tasked with developing a draft classroom curriculum that modeled the FFP goals of inquiry-based learning, curriculum and technology integration.

The FFP provided an opportunity for investigating leadership practices in education within a fixed working group whose members represented a variety of organizational positions working together on an ill-defined, adaptive challenge for their school board. These individuals interacted in scheduled and unscheduled meetings and, because the problem they were working on was adaptive in nature, there were many opportunities for different individuals to perform various leadership functions. As such, the FFP provided a rich opportunity to study leadership in action.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach that sought to “probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context perceive them” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 12). This was considered appropriate given the intent to identify evidence of the CLCs in the professional interactions of FFP participants. An obvious method for studying leadership interactions in the FFP would be to adopt or modify Bales’ Interaction Process Analysis (IPA), a seminal framework for the study of the interactions within small groups (Fahy, 2005). Bales (1950) viewed small



groups as “...systems of human interaction” (p. 257) that could be studied by analyzing data generated by a structured observational framework. This approach appeared applicable to the study of leadership interactions in the FFP given that it satisfied the criteria for a small group given by Li and Allison (2005, p. 4-5) and the research problem addressed focuses on professional interactions.

The approach adopted in this inquiry differed from that pioneered by Bales for a number of reasons. The research problem required a data collection method that would be unintrusive and allow for some flexibility and retrospective interviews were viewed as an appropriate method to gather data. Temporal and resource considerations also factored into the selection of this method of data collection. Temporal reasons were important because the process of planning and implementing the FFP had begun before this research was considered. Ethical approval was obtained in March 2010, almost half way through the first phase of the FFP, two months after the formal launch, and ten months after the first meetings with all participants had occurred (see Table 2 and Appendix B). A combination of observation and interview methods would have been preferred if the research could have begun concurrently with the Planning Stage. Yet even if this had been possible, resource considerations would likely have proved insurmountable. As single part-time researcher, I could not have attended all the FFP meetings in person given that there were a total of sixteen meetings between June 2010 and June 2011. Having this study run concurrently could also have biased the data as early information could have influenced subsequent observations. Conducting one interview with each of the 19 participants was demanding in itself and created a large pool of data for analysis. This approach also allowed participants to reflect on a completed sequence of integrated events and interactions when responding to the interview questions. An explanation of the analytical framework used for data analysis is presented and discussed in Chapter Three.

Before the interview process began permission was obtained from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Ontario and the Waterloo Region District School Board. Once ethics approval was granted, participants were approached for their consent to participate via email and then in person at the FFP meeting on May 6, 2010. Formal consent forms were signed by participants at this May 6 meeting or before each interview was conducted.

As described earlier, twenty-four employees of the WRDSB participated in the first cycle of the FFP. All were identified as potential interview participants and were invited to participate in this study. Nineteen agreed to be interviewed, spanning a broad range of official roles within the WRDSB, as shown in Table 4. For the purpose of this study, the FFP designations were used to derive codes to designate participants as follows: Teachers, Vice-Principals, Central Staff, members of the Senior Administrator Advisory Group (SAAG) and Project Lead Group (PLG). These groups are described further in Chapter Three.

Interviews were conducted with eight high school teachers, five secondary school vice-principals, five members of the SAAG, three Learning Services (LS) consultants, and one Information Technology Services (ITS) consultant. The LS and ITS consultants were subsequently grouped together under the label of "Central Staff" to provide a greater degree of individual anonymity. Two teachers shared one FFP classroom due to a maternity leave that began during April 2011 and were coded separately. Two vice-principals, one consultant, and two members of the SAAG did not participate in this research. It is also important to note that the researcher was not a participant in the FFP.

During the process of analyzing the data, two significant groups emerged, one of which was comprised of all of the teacher participants and the other all of the interviewees who were not

teachers, which was designated the non-teacher group. These became the principal groups used during the analysis, as shown in Table 4, with teachers being coded as T-n, and members of the non-teacher group coded using the prefix “N” and a two letter code corresponding to their position. For example, vice-principals were coded with NVP-n.

**Table 4**  
**Research participants by position designation**

Position		Number of Study Participants	Coding (n= participant #)
Teachers		8	T-n (n = 1,2 ...8)
Non-Teachers	Vice-Principals	5	NVP-n (n = 1,2...5)
	Senior Administration Advisory Group	3	NSA-n (n = 1,2,3)
	Central Staff		
	Learning Services	1	NCS-n (n = 1,2,3)
	ITS	2	
<b>Total FFP Participants</b>		24	
<b>Total Study Participants</b>		19	
<b>Total Coded Analyses</b>		19	

In order to make the interview process as efficient as possible, a survey of participants was conducted to gather general demographic data before each interview was conducted. This was done via email using an electronic form in Google Docs. A list of the survey questions can be found in Appendix D. Participants provided their own name for verification purposes and were asked to indicate their age, sex, school, position in the organization (classroom teacher, vice-principal etc.), total number of years in the teaching profession, and specific Ministry curriculum experience for each subject being integrated in the FFP classroom (number of years teaching

Civics, Careers, and Grade Ten Academic English). They were also asked their reason for joining FFP (volunteer or assigned).

Interviews took place between May 15 and June 27, 2011. Interview length ranged from 30 minutes to 100 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations including individual's homes, offices, classrooms, and on three occasions, a coffee shop. Each interview followed a standardized format as shown in Appendix B with questions structured according to the five CLCs in the OLF, as discussed further in Chapter Three.

## **Data Analysis**

Professional interactions constituted the core units of analysis for this study. The term professional was understood as referring to those activities that directly relate to the official tasks and business of the FFP. This study adopted Hutchins' (1995) description of the behaviour of a US Navy navigation team to define interactions. As described by Harris (2008),

[Hutchins] proposes that the action of observing and describing navigational tasks reveals that there are a group of individuals who in interaction with each are learning, communicating and acting collectively. They are in essence a learning system, a form of distributed cognition or learning in action (p.175).

A two-stage process was used to analyze the transcripts. First, each participant's transcribed responses to the interview questions were grouped together and each set of responses were classified according to the interviewee's position within the FFP. For example, each participant's response to questions relating to "Setting Goals" was grouped according to formal position (i.e., teachers, vice-principals, central staff, or SAAG). Each set of responses arranged by position was then examined with a view to identifying common themes, each emergent theme being recorded in a separate document for each interview question. Notes were included with each emerging theme to identify and cross reference specific instances of professional interactions and indicate frequency and distribution across participants. When clear patterns were evident

in the data – when, for example, many participants mentioned or alluded to an emerging theme – this was noted for inclusion in the next stage of analysis.

During the second stage of data analysis, transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo 9, a software program for qualitative data analysis, and then coded using Nvivo 9 nodes (category labels). Examples of nodes used included the CLCs and the emergent themes identified in the first stage of analysis. A more detailed explanation of the coding process is included in Chapter Three.

It was from these data that instances of leadership were identified using Gronn's (1996) definitions of influence and identification. As discussed further in Chapter Two, these definitions emphasize the connection between the recognition of leadership by followers and its effect on the group.

### **Strengths & Limitations**

Any research involving such a contested concept as leadership will undoubtedly be a reflection of the researcher's own understanding given the concept's ambiguous and disputed nature. This study was limited by the reliance on participant perceptions and memory. Participants may have only been able to recall a small number of the important interactions that actually occurred within the work of the FFP. They may also have only discussed those that they considered would place themselves in a positive light. In other words, in an effort to appear to have made important or otherwise notable contributions to the group, they may have only responded to interview questions in ways that advanced accounts and interpretations supportive of such contributions. This is an important argument for including observational data in the analysis but ultimately was beyond the resources available to the researcher. Another weakness may have been in the definitions used for the data analysis. Defining leadership as identification and

influence likely excluded other forms and manifestations of leadership not readily captured by these criteria.

Given the noted limitations concerning data collection and resources available for this study, a focused investigation of the micropolitics of the FFP could have yielded more accurate descriptions of interdependencies within the group. As Malen and Cochran (2008) point out,

Given the prevalence of more covert and murky manifestations of power, scholars who focus on micro-politics of schools may have to make comparable investments (a great deal of time at the site of study) to display, more explicitly and systematically, how all the faces of power might be manifest in schools. (Quoted in Flessa , 2009, p. 344)

Mapping the micropolitics that existed in the relationships of the FFP participants would almost certainly have provided valuable insight into how leadership was enacted. Unfortunately such mapping was also beyond the scope and resources of this study.

## **Definitions**

**Central Staff** – refers to study participants occupying formal roles in the ITS and Learning Services departments at the head offices of the WRDSB

**Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs)** – Five ‘capacities’ presented in the Ontario Leadership Framework literature, namely: (1) setting goals, (2) aligning resources with priorities, (3) promoting collaborative learning cultures, (4) using data, and (5) engaging in courageous conversations. Foundational to the CLCs is Levin and Fullan’s concept of “capacity building” which “...is defined as any strategy that increases the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning” (2008, p. 295). The CLCs are considered to be embedded in all “...provincially-sponsored professional learning and resources for school and system leaders” beginning in the 2009/10 school year (Ontario, 2009b, p. 3).

**Emergent Electronic and Web-Based Technologies (EEWT)** – hardware and software tools that were examined by the FFP participants for possible inclusion in the Planning and Implementation stages. Examples include netbooks, iPads, Wordpress weblog software, and Waterworks (WRDSB email client).

**Futures Forum Project** – a sustained working group that was struck by the WRDSB to explore the use of EEWT in the integration of three course-curriculum documents with the goal of increased student engagement and success.

**Interaction** – “the foundational element of leadership practice that occurs between leaders, followers, and situation” (Spillane, 2005, p. 144)

**Leadership** –influences “on an individual or group’s well-being, interests, policies or behaviour” that is perceived as legitimate and identified by followers (Gronn, 1996, p. 9)

**Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)** – described by the Ministry of Education as “the foundational piece in leadership development” (2010c, p. 10). It is intended to inform the development of formal administrative leaders in Ontario. The OLF is a description of “core leadership practices and competencies in five domains and describes what good leadership looks like” (Ministry of Education, 2010c, p.6)

**Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS)** – is a “plan of action” (Ministry of Education, 2010c, p.8) mandated in 2008 by the Ministry of Education, “designed to support student achievement and well-being by attracting and developing skilled and passionate school and system leaders” (Ministry of Education, 2010a, p.1)

**Participants** – refers to individuals who participated in this study

**Project Lead Group (PLG)** – three individuals responsible for the planning of the FFP; representing the vice-principals, and Central Staff from Learning Services, and Information Technology Services

**Senior Administrative Advisory Group (SAAG)** – five individuals responsible for the initiation and oversight of the FFP

**Summer Curriculum Writing Team (SCWT)** – five individuals, one member of the PLG and four FFP teacher volunteers, responsible for creating a draft FFP classroom curriculum for other FFP teachers. Begun in the summer of 2010, this group's final draft was intended to integrate three course curricula, EEWT, and the purpose/goals of FFP. Presented to the FFP group in September 2010, this became an artifact of the group which framed future discussion and decisions

**Sustained Working Group** – two or more individuals who share a clearly defined goal and engage in shared task relevant activities in a formal organization over a period of time

**WRDSB** – Waterloo Region District School Board



## **Chapter Summary**

It is a widely held belief that leadership is important but the literature shows there is no agreed-upon definition of the term. In Ontario, leadership is viewed by the Ministry of Education as an important factor for improving student achievement. Despite the lack of consensus in the literature, the Ministry has developed a policy for leadership practice amongst school and system administrators called the Ontario Leadership Framework. Within the OLF, leadership is further prescribed through five Core Leadership Capacities. This study emerged from questions regarding how prevalent the CLCs would be within the practices of Ontario educators. A small working group in the Waterloo Region District School Board, called the Futures Forum Project, provided a unique opportunity to observe leadership interactions and investigate the presence of the CLCs on a manageable scale. This introductory chapter presented the research problem, defined important terms like leadership interactions, briefly described the OLF and CLCs, the context for the study, and the methods employed.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

Leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student outcomes. Principals and vice-principals play an essential role as school leaders to achieve this impact. Supervisory officers, in turn, play an essential role by putting in place supportive system practices and procedures for school and system leaders, and provide critical system-wide leadership. The ministry made a commitment to a number of initiatives intended to develop, support and sustain the highest quality leadership possible in schools and boards across the province. To ensure a consistent and effective approach to implementing these initiatives, Ontario's Leadership Framework was developed, and evolved to include a framework for principals and vice-principals and a framework for supervisory officers (Institute for Education Leadership, Ontario, 2008, p.5).

This chapter discusses the theoretical groundwork for this study under three main headings.

First, literature underpinning the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) and that informing the Core Leadership Competencies (CLCs) is considered. These literature summaries are followed by selected overviews of theories of educational leadership with a view to establishing connections with theories of distributed leadership. Finally, I present a more extended discussion of distributed-leadership theory concentrating on the interactive elements at the core of these theories.

#### **The Ontario Leadership Framework**

The foundational document that launched the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) is entitled *Putting Ontario's Leadership Framework Into Action: A guide for school and system leaders* (Institute for Education Leadership, 2008). However, the main document that outlines the details and purpose of the OLF is the *Ontario Leadership Strategy: Strong and Sustainable Leadership for Improved Student Achievement* (Ministry of Education, 2010a). According to this Ministry of Education document, the OLF provides the "foundation" for achieving the improvement of student outcomes through improving the practices of "principals as instructional leaders" (2010a, p. 6):

The OLF describes what good leadership looks like and provides the foundation for implementing the OLS. The framework supports career-long professional learning, helping to stimulate and guide learning focused conversations about effective leadership practice and approaches for resolving specific issues and challenges that face school and system leaders. (Ministry of Education, 2010b, p. 1)

In essence, the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS), a policy intended to support and improve the leadership practices in the Ontario education system, is underpinned by the goal of improving student outcomes, with the OLF serving as the conceptual framework through which the OLS is to be implemented. The goal of the OLF is “...improved system and school leadership capacity in the province” which then “...produces improved conditions for teaching and learning in schools and classrooms” (Ontario, 2010a, p. 7). The OLF is described as a “roadmap to successful leadership” (Institute for Education Leadership, 2008, p. 3).

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

This section highlights the literature that provides the conceptual foundation of the OLF and the Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) that lie at its heart.

The OLF was developed from the ideas of a number of researchers, the most prominent appearing to be Kenneth Leithwood who is cited seven times in *Ontario Leadership Strategy: Strong and Sustainable Leadership for Improved Student Achievement*, the main document presenting the OLS (Ministry of Education, 2010c). At the core of the OLF, which is the means through which the OLS is intended to be implemented, is Leithwood et al.’s (2004, p. 5) claim that school leadership is second only to teaching in its influence on student outcomes. This finding forms a theoretical cornerstone for the OLF and subsequently the CLCs. Embedded in this contention is the implied assumption that formal, or positional, leaders—that is principals, vice-principals and superintendents—are the key locus of and focus for educational leadership.

Another notable document underpinning the OLF is Elmore's (2006) exploration of relationships between leadership and school improvement. This scholarly essay examines links between leadership and accountability in school improvement efforts in the United States. Elmore focuses on shortcomings of accountability policies and their impact on school improvement efforts. Specifically, he critiques the No Child Left Behind legislation in the United States, arguing it provides inadequate support for what he sees as the investments in teacher knowledge and skills which he argues will be required to improve student achievement. He views site (that is school) leadership as the prime means through which school improvement can be realized, treating leadership as a practice, rather than an attribute of an official position, that is distributed across schools and school systems. As such, he argues leadership is,

...primarily about (a) managing the conditions under which people learn new practices; (b) creating organizations that are supportive, coherent environments for successful practice; and (c) developing the leadership skills and practices of others. Leadership of improvement, if it is to result in the improvement of quality and performance at scale, must be conceived as a practice—a collection of patterned actions, based on a body of knowledge, skill, and habits of mind that can be objectively defined, taught, and learned—rather than a set of personal attributes. As improvement advances, leadership refracts; it ceases to follow the lines of positional authority and begins to follow the distribution of knowledge and skill in the organization. (2006, p. 26)

Levin and Fullan (2008) describe the lessons learned from their experiences observing and leading system-level reforms in education. From this work they identify seven “premises” in a “theory of action” for creating improvement across education systems (p. 292). Building on Elmore's call for improved development and articulation of the knowledge and skills required by effective leaders, they propose the idea of “capacity building with a focus on results” saying that it is “the most important single item on our list” (Levin & Fullan, 2008, p. 295). They also make a connection between leadership and student achievement, stating, “capacity building is defined as any strategy that increases the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close

the gap of student learning” (Levin & Fullan, 2008, p. 295). Citing Elmore (2004) they argue that capacity building is a process that “requires many opportunities for ‘learning in context’” (Levin & Fullan, 2008, p. 296).

In sum, Levin and Fullan, Leithwood and Elmore made mutually supportive contributions to the OLF by advancing a view of school leadership as a skill-based process which has a significant impact on student outcomes which can be intentionally developed as a key component of a system change initiative.

### ***The Core Leadership Capacities***

The *Ontario Leadership Strategy: Strong and Sustainable Leadership for Improved Student Achievement* document introduces the CLCs as “key areas” that support the development of “instructional leadership” in the province (Ontario, 2010a, p. 10-11). The document further explains that the CLCs were developed in response to “specific gaps in leadership practice” (Ontario, 2010a, p. 10) present in pre-OLF activities needed to support leadership development, specifically “mentoring for new school leaders and performance appraisal for all school leaders... which focused on supporting the work of principals as instructional leaders seeking to improve student outcomes” (Ontario, 2010a, p. 6). No specific evidence is cited in the document to support this claim, however.

The foundational document, the *Ontario Leadership Strategy: Strong and Sustainable Leadership for Improved Student Achievement* is supplemented by a series of five articles, published by the Ministry of Education, called *Ideas into Action* which provide specific information about each of the five CLCs, suggestions for their implementation, and supporting documentation. The Ministry of Education notes that:

It is important to avoid viewing the five Core Leadership Capacities – Setting Goals, Aligning Resources with Priorities, Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures, Using

Data, and Engaging in Courageous Conversations – as isolated practices or processes. In fact, all of the CLCs can and do interact with and support each other. (2011, p. 16)

I drew upon these articles to form the basis for understanding the CLCs used in this study.

The CLC defines Setting Goals as:

...Working with others to help ensure that goals are strategic, specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound (SMART) and lead to improved teaching and learning. (Ontario, 2009c, p. 4)

The Ministry of Education cites research that indicates the importance of goal setting (Locke & Latham, 2002) and its impact on performance in school contexts (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009; Leithwood & Reihl, 2003 cited in Ontario, 2010/11, p. 2). The Ministry document also emphasizes that goals should be clearly understood by leaders and followers and should be developed collaboratively (Ontario, 2010/11, p. 3). The authors of the CLC argue that the presence of shared and clearly understood goals is a hallmark of effective leadership and in educational contexts the presence of such goals will have a positive impact on student achievement. The authors also provide a framework for setting so-called “SMART” goals that are “strategic, specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound” (2009c, p. 4). It is clear that, while the CLC authors describe setting goals as having equal importance to the other four CLCs, goal setting is also a prerequisite for putting the others into practice.

The second CLC, Aligning Resources with Priorities, was without its own “Ideas into Action” document<sup>2</sup> thus making it difficult to elucidate for the purposes of this research. Therefore, the brief outline provided in the CLC summary document, *Ideas Into Action: Five Core Capacities of*

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<sup>2</sup> The Ministry released the document for this CLC, *Ideas into Action: Aligning Resources with Priorities: Focusing on What Matters Most*, in the Fall of 2012.

*Effective Leaders*, was used to apprehend the Ministry's intentions for this CLC. It is defined as:

... ensuring that financial, capital, human resources, curriculum and teaching resources, professional learning resources and program allocations are tied to priorities, with student achievement and well-being as the central, unambiguous focus. (Ontario, 2009c, p. 4)

This suggests that resources brought to bear within the business of education in Ontario should be focused on supporting and enabling, but not be restricted to, the goals established through pursuit of the previous CLC. The document also states that resource alignment includes "mak[ing] connections to ministry goals to strengthen commitment to school improvement efforts" suggesting that alignment with Ministry objectives is an important component in the attainment of this CLC (Ontario, 2010/11, p. 7). As such, it would appear that the allocation of resources in the FFP would be expected to support the goal of technology integration in the classroom and the goals established for the project. As resources were assigned to, developed, and deployed in the FFP, the expected focus would be on achieving the goals of the project but also on supporting implementation of the other CLCs, with an over-arching confluence with Ministry goals.

The third CLC is Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities and is defined as:

... enabling schools, school communities and districts to work together and learn from each other with a central focus on improved teaching quality and student achievement and well-being (Ontario, 2009c, p. 4).

The goal of this CLC is given as "a dramatic improvement in the culture itself that builds teaching capacity and improves student achievement" (Ontario, 2010B, p. 2). This cultural change is seen as being difficult to accomplish due to a tendency to misunderstand its complexity. Creating a collaborative learning culture is described as an "adaptive challenge"

with unclear problem and solution definition, where the associated work occurs amongst various stakeholders (Ontario, 2010b, p. 3). Three key elements in the process are identified as:

...professional community (shared norms, values, reflective dialog (*sic*), public practice, collaboration with collective responsibility for students), organizational learning (cooperation to gather info about teaching & content, discussions & critique of new ideas), and trust (integrity, honesty & openness, concern and personal regard for others, competence, reliability, consistency). (Ontario, 2010b, p. 9)

Underpinning the collaborative portion of this CLC is the principle of “networked learning” (p. 11). The Ministry document adopts Jackson and Temperley’s(2007) argument that a “a knowledge-rich and networked world” requires the development of networked learning communities that go beyond the school as a unit for professional learning to encompass the broader system (2010b, p. 10).

The fourth CLC Using Data is defined as:

... leading and engaging school teams in gathering and analyzing provincial, district, school and classroom data to identify trends, strengths and weaknesses that will inform specific actions for improvement focused on teaching and learning. (Ontario, 2009c, p. 4)

Similar to Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities, this CLC is described as being commonly used in the language of educators but often misunderstood. The source cited in support of this CLC (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010) points to a gap in understanding the connection between the use of data and student achievement (Ontario, 2011, p. 1). The research is said to indicate “...that much of what passes for ‘evidence-based’ decision making is in fact based on our own beliefs and assumptions – as individuals and as a profession – about what works and what doesn’t.” (Ontario, 2011, p. 2). The term “data” is defined as “...as information that is collected and organized in a systematic way and can be used to make instructional or organizational decisions” (Ontario, 2011, p. 3). Types of data are identified as “student achievement, demographic, program, and perceptual” (Ontario, 2011, p.



3). The Ministry identifies the need for a “data culture” where "educators recognize that they need to go beyond their tacit knowledge and intuition." (2011, p. 3). The authors of this CLC document claim that the research demonstrates that the presence of a data culture enables professional accountability, informs instructional practice, and improves school effectiveness. Leaders are recognized as having an important role in the creation of a data culture. Leaders who show strength in this CLC will,

...collect, analyze and interpret relevant data in a timely way... move beyond technical aspects of Using Data to address adaptive challenges such as gaining support for data use, managing emotional issues that may arise, and building staff confidence and efficacy related to all aspects of Using Data; use data to promote a collaborative learning culture in which staff: have high expectations for student achievement, assess student performance and modify instructional practices based on findings, and take ownership of the results. (Ontario, 2011, p. 16)

The final CLC is Engaging in Courageous Conversations. Linked with the cultural change associated with Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities, this CLC describes the practice of engaging in conversations that “...build credibility and trust” between leaders and followers (Ontario, 2010a, p. 2). It is viewed as,

...challenging current practices and fostering improvement and growth through conversation, listening to and acting on feedback, and providing feedback that will lead to improvements in student achievement and well-being. (Ontario, 2010a, p. 2)

Three concepts are cited as fundamental to this CLC, namely: constructive problem talk, relational trust, and open to learning conversations. Constructive problem talk is described as a multi-directional process between leaders and followers that reveals “...possibilities for change by identifying, describing and analyzing problems” (Ontario, 2010d, p. 6). Relational trust is described as foundational to any attempt at culture change and characterized by vulnerability amongst stakeholders. Openness to learning conversations requires a reciprocal process where leaders interact with followers to identify and challenge the assumptions held by followers.

Feedback is described as a multi-directional flow of information between leaders and followers, used to evaluate the alignment of the organization with core priorities. This collaborative process supports similar patterns in other CLCs, the most obvious being “collaborative learning communities”, but also “Using Data”.

The OLF, and specifically the CLCs, are a tightly focused, outcomes-based, prescription for leadership in the Ontario context. For example, when describing the CLC for promoting collaborative learning cultures, the Ministry documentation focuses on the intended outcomes of the policy, which are supporting Ministry defined objectives, as follows:

In viewing collaborative learning cultures as a process or practice – or worse, as the latest educational “innovation” – we risk losing sight of the intended outcome: a dramatic improvement in the culture itself that builds teaching capacity and improves student achievement. Far beyond process or practice, this is a profound shift away from isolation and autonomy, and toward deprivatized practice, away from the traditional silos of classroom, school, district, and province and toward a genuine, system-wide learning organization. (Ontario, 2010a, p. 2)

Another example can be found in the description of the CLC Setting Goals, which explains that it is intended to “establish important linkages between individual goals, school improvement plans, and school board and provincial priorities” (Institute for Education Leadership, 2009, p. 4). Both of these examples suggest that the CLCs are intended to encourage greater compliance and tighter harmonization of local events and outcomes across the Ontario education system.

### **What is Leadership?**

Leadership is a term that is often used but largely misunderstood (Burns, 1978). This broad misunderstanding is largely due to the difficulties in reaching a precise and widely accepted definition. Each of the authors discussed below approach leadership from a different perspective, but all agree that the concept of leadership is increasingly being seen as a collective process in the educational literature (Ryan, 2005, Rottmann, 2007, Richmon & Allison 2003).

Ryan (2005) discusses the dichotomy between what is termed “traditional” approaches to understanding leadership and those he called “alternative” or “emerging” (p. 1). His short article discusses how each of these opposing perspectives defines leadership, understands the purpose of leadership, and the types of relationships among individuals within an organization. The significant point made by Ryan is that the ways in which individuals view leadership are important in understanding how power or influence will be exercised and for what reasons. For the purpose of this research, this point is an important justification for examining participant reflections for evidence of the enactment of leadership as understood by participants in the FFP. Understanding the influence of context informs how leadership is understood and exercised, and how it is distributed across participants in a working group such as the Futures Forum Project (FFP).

Richmon and Allison (2003) present a more comprehensive yet “tentative” conceptualization of leadership that addresses two key issues (p. 44). The first is what they term the “conceptual incoherence” of the leadership literature (p. 32). The source of this, they claim, can be found in “... a lack of a broadly shared understanding of what leadership means” (p. 32). They describe what appears to be a consensus in accepting the lack of a clear definition of the term due to the tentativeness of leadership scholars, exacerbated by a plurality of culturally based definitions. This creates a sense that extant leadership theories lack credibility. The authors propose a conceptual frame to account for the variety in leadership theory which, they argue, is a preferable alternative to seeking a uniform definition of the term. They explain,

...leadership can be (and has been) understood as a process of exercising influence, a way of inducing compliance, a measure of personality, a form of persuasion, an effect of interaction, an instrument of goal achievement, a means for initiating structure, a negotiation of power relationships or a way of behaving. (p. 34)

The purpose of adopting such a broad conceptualization of leadership and focusing on documenting its variety is to allow practitioners to assess which theories appear most appropriate for their organizational contexts and analytical interests. This addresses the second issue identified by Richmon and Allison (2003), which is the lack of practical application of extant theoretical approaches to leadership in action. By providing an overview of major existing leadership theories, the authors believe that administrators will be better equipped to understand their own roles and develop an informed understanding of their organizational circumstances.

Their response to these two issues is what Richmon and Allison call “an integrated typology of leadership theories” which postulates three distinct types of leadership theories: autonomous, interactive, and provisional (p. 43). Autonomous theories focus on a single set of variables and view leadership as a function of the individual. Interactive theories view leadership as a function of the interaction between individuals and particularly the relationships between leaders and followers. Provisional theories view leadership “...as a function of the situation...” (p. 43). These categories are useful for comparing various theories of education leadership and how policy documents such as the Ontario Leadership Framework define various actions as “leadership”.

Rottman (2007) defines leadership as “...a relational form of influence that may exist at the individual, organizational, or discursive level” (p. 2). The idea that leadership is influence rather than embodied by a specific individual or role would appear to be consistent with Ryan’s “alternative or emergent” and Richmon and Allison’s “interactive” and “provisional” classification of leadership theories. Rottman (2007) claims that empirical research in educational administration has characteristically focused on leadership as a source of influence emanating from individuals occupying formal positions of authority, often referred to as

'positions of added responsibility' in educational discourse in Ontario. Where she departs from the authors above is her inclusion of "leading ideas" as agents of influence and therefore leadership (p. 4). She explains that,

... publicly available ideas lead individuals and organizations in powerful ways which must be acknowledged in the field of educational administration if our theories of leadership and change are to move beyond their current individualistic and behaviouristic focus. (p. 4)

By drawing attention to ideas which frame the thinking of individuals and organizations, Rottman broadens the scope of leadership theory and asks readers to consider how these ideas have shaped their own thinking.

This concept is relevant to this research in two main ways. First, given the prominence assigned to them by the Ministry, the CLCS enumerated in the OLF represent officially sanctioned ideas that may, or may not, be leading ideas for how leaders should act. As such, the Ontario Leadership Framework seeks to frame how formally designated school and system leaders should view themselves and are expected to come to understand how to go about the business of leading in Ontario's publicly funded education system. Second, the leadership-related ideas and concepts adopted or constructed by FFP participants could also be expected to shape – or perhaps reflect and rationalize – their actions and understandings. Viewing ideas as initiators and enablers of leadership was an important part of the analysis of the leadership interactions in the FFP.

The notion that ideas can lead presents the ontological problem of where they reside. Can these "leading ideas" exist by themselves or do they require human consciousness to exercise influence? This question relates to Burns' (1978) notion of "transactional opinion leadership" (p. 265). He describes opinion leaders as existing "...at all levels ... serv[ing] as relays and channels

for opinion" (p. 264). His theory describes the "interactions and transactions" of various groups with these so-called opinion leaders as following a "multifold" flow between formal leaders, highly influential intermediaries, and the "ultimate recipients of ideas and information" (p. 265). Burns (1978) gives greater depth to Rottman's ideas (2007) by exploring how opinions and the ideas that shape them are disseminated and interpreted through a population via trusted agents. Burns' focus on transactions between individuals does not specifically address how that situation can also act as a source of leadership. While Rottman claims that ideas can lead, Burns contends that how and by whom they are communicated will also significantly shape recipients' perceptions, reinforcing the view that interactions lie at the core of understanding leadership, and that leading ideas exercise influence through the actions of group members.

Gronn (1996) briefly discusses the evolution of the study of leadership, contending that, since the 1970s, the focus of leadership theory has moved from an assumption that leadership was embedded in a role and that transactions (processes) between leaders and followers were important, to a focus on leadership outcomes or so-called "transformations." Interestingly, while many theorists saw this as a new paradigm of leadership, he argues that there is more continuity than differentiation. From this argument, Gronn sets the stage for the introduction of distributed leadership. He argues that theories of leadership that are primarily concerned with outcomes are inadequate due to their "impoverished understanding of context and process," similarly indicting managerial approaches to leadership for "[over-emphasizing] the constraints of structure" (p. 8). Gronn then proceeds to identify influence and identification as two core aspects of leadership. He defines influence as "a significant effect on an individual or group's well-being, interests, policies or behaviour," noting "its exercise is usually thought of as legitimate by those subject to it" (p. 9). He defines identification as that which "expresses the emotional connection between leaders and followers," in which the leader is someone "whom

followers identify, the one whom they would prefer to imitate, who inspires them or who represents their deep-seated aspirations and hopes” (p 9).

The conception of leadership as a symbolic activity is also worth noting (Gronn 1996, p. 9). This can be seen as relating to both Rottman’s (2007) “leading ideas” and Burns’ (1978) opinion leaders as “media” for the operation of leadership. The ability to frame the way members of a group understand their context through the ideas they use to construct knowledge and conduct discourse can have a powerful influence on their actions.

The significance of a leader’s act of sense-making is her or his capacity to invoke key symbols which reinforce the meaning of the events and circumstances they frame. And the willingness of followers to be influenced and to identify ensures their almost automatic preparedness for leaders to frame meanings on their behalf and to submit themselves to the former’s version of events. (Gronn, 1996, p. 9)

### **Emergent Leadership Theory**

When considering Ryan’s (2005) dichotomy of leadership theory, it appears that the OLF could be viewed as somewhat “traditional” with its focus on formal roles and outcomes, whereas “emergent” theories of leadership are more contextual in their focus.

At their core, these emergent leadership theories contend that interactions are the fundamental component for understanding leadership. As expressed by Ogawa and Bossert, it is the “potential resources of power and influence embedded in interactions between individuals, rather than as the overall numerical sum of individuals’ actions within an organization” that are of prime concern (as quoted by Sun & Allison, 2005, p. 5). Spread across organizations, these leadership interactions can have a “multiplicative” effect where their sum is more powerful than individual actions (Smylie *et al.* 2002, p. 177).

Distributed leadership is described by Ogawa and Pounder (Ogawa & Bossert,1995; Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995); Leithwood & Jantzi, (2000); Richmon & Allison (2003); Smylie, Conley,

& Marks (2002); Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2000, 2001, 2004); Sun and Allison (2005) as an emerging idea that focuses on how leaders, followers, and situation interact to create leadership practices.

Spillane (2005) identifies two problems with the leadership literature that frames leadership as being solely enacted by formal or, in the words of Richmon and Allison (2003), “autonomous” leaders. First, such approaches equate leadership with the actions of a single individual, characteristically the principal in school contexts (Spillane, 2005, p. 143). Second, the focus is on the “what of leadership” at the expense of the “how” (Spillane, 2005, p. 143) by which he means the enactment of leadership has not been adequately examined “...beyond some generic heuristics for suggested practices” (Spillane *et al.*, 2004, p. 4). In contrast, Spillane and his colleagues view distributed approaches to leadership as recognizing that enacted leadership involves many individuals in a wide range of formal roles and may also involve others outside of the formal role structure of an organization. Autonomous approaches to leadership also frame followers as primarily passive, characteristically lacking agency. These two points, that leadership involves more than a single individual in a formally designated role, and that followers participate with leaders in the production of leadership bring us to the focal point of distributed leadership theory: the interdependencies of leadership practice.

Sun and Allison (2005) build on Spillane’s conception of distributed leadership by attempting to extend and better integrate its central components. The authors focus on developing a conceptual framework that could assist both academics and school leaders in understanding the possibilities offered by distributed-leadership theory. They present two objections to the then current conceptions of distributed leadership. First, they suggest that literature arguing for increased distribution of policy development and decision making in attempts to create



instructional innovation and improve student learning remain focused on designated leaders while tending to ignore or minimize other important factors central to the conceptual essence of distributed-leadership theory (Sun & Allison, 2005, p. 2). Second, they suggest that the many disparate treatments of distributed leadership available in the literature militate against the emergence of a well-established and accepted understanding of distributed leadership. In response, Sun and Allison offer a framework where "...leadership is best understood as a process distributed across interactive webs of groups and work partners embedded within dynamic, varied and locally known social systems" (p. 6). This framework has three components or "distributions of leadership:" social, environmental, and cultural (Sun & Allison 2005, p. 11). The social distribution of leadership "...encourages investigation of how leadership activities are cooperatively (and perhaps unconsciously) accomplished within the culturally infused sets of objects, means, and ends shared by role incumbents" (p. 13). The environmental distribution of leadership "...argues that leadership is distributed over various aspects of the situation such as tools, artifacts, and structural properties associated with an organization" (p. 13). The cultural distribution of leadership "...suggests that leadership is distributed across an interactive web of social interactions embedded in specialized cultural contexts and elements" (p. 15). The result of incorporating these three views of distribution is a multifaceted framework that moves beyond a focus on designated leaders and requires the consideration of situations, tools, permanent and temporary organizational members' motivations and ways of constructing meaning and purpose.

Analogous to Sun and Allison's concept of environmental distribution of leadership, Spillane asserts that what is important "...for instructional improvement and student achievement is not that leadership is distributed but how it is distributed" (Spillane, 2005, p. 149). This expands the

notion of interactions to not only include relations between individuals, but also the tools, routines, and contexts where they occur.

From a distributed perspective, leadership is a system of practice comprised of a collection of interacting components: leaders, followers, and situation. These interacting components must be understood together because the system is more than the sum of the component parts or practices. (Spillane, 2005, p. 150)

Therefore leadership can be stretched over a situation through tools (e.g., data, protocols for teacher evaluation, curriculum documents and so forth), routines, and structures. For example, operational data can focus leadership, but can also be used by leaders in a variety of ways, thus illustrating how the concept of interactions lies at the core of distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2005). Situations and routines can both enable and constrain leadership practice in a similar multidirectional fashion.

## **Chapter Summary**

The context for this research was the publicly funded education system in Ontario where the Ministry of Education has developed a conceptual structure for leaders, and the development of leaders called the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF). Building on the ideas of Levin and Fullan, Leithwood, and Elmore, the Ministry has identified five Core Leadership Competencies (CLCs) that are intended to strengthen school and system leadership and leadership development across the province.

However, the educational literature or the broader academic literature suggests that the concept of leadership is notoriously difficult to define and there is no one agreed-upon definition. Yet leadership is still widely held to be important for achieving the goals of education systems and especially for implementing planned system change. I have come to accept, as

Richmon and Allison do, that there may never be a final definition of leadership and thus it is more useful is to focus on choosing a well-established definition from the research literature and clarifying how it frames our understanding of the term in the context being investigated.

Peter Gronn's (1996) definition of leadership as influence and identification was selected to distinguish instances of leadership within the data of FFP participant perceptions. Close attention was also given to any traces in the data that resembled Rottman's (2007) concept of a "leading idea." My attention in that respect follows from Gronn's point that "leading is an inherently symbolic activity" (1996, p. 9) and that a leader's use of symbols will be grounded in the ideas that have been imposed or agreed upon by the group. However, I also accept the role of Burns' (1978) "opinion leaders" as intermediaries in this process. This role facilitates identification and broad adoption of ideas that constitute, and are constitutive of, group purpose and goal-creation, thus influencing member behaviours.

One trend that is prominent in the literature is that leadership theory is increasingly focused on the distribution of leadership interactions between individuals in an organization. This chapter reviewed selected emergent theories that highlight the interactive nature of leadership enactment. More precisely, these theories are rooted in the contention that leadership is a collective process, distributed across social and situational contexts.

Now that I have elucidated the theoretical underpinnings of the OLF and the CLCs , and discussed select emergent approaches to educational leadership, I turn in the next chapter to the task of describing how the CLCs were used to develop interview questions for participants and explore the extent in which they were evident in their responses.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

There is often a difference between what people do and what they say about what they do. (Spillane *et al.* 2004, p.14)

This study employed a qualitative methodology in order to explore the enactment of leadership in a small working group, the Futures Forum Project (FFP), in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) in Ontario. The Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) were employed as a conceptual framework through which instances of leadership in the professional interactions of participants could be identified.

#### **Data Gathering Method**

Data were gathered using retrospective, semi-structured interviews with participants. All FFP members were identified as potential study participants, with the intention of obtaining consent from representatives of each organizational group identified in Table 3. Participants were contacted via email in May 2011, and face-to-face at an FFP meeting on May 6, 2011. As previously indicated in Table 4, nineteen individuals agreed to participate, including at least one representative from each of the seven formal organizational groups participating in the FFP as summarized in Table 3. In sum, all eight teacher participants, five of seven vice-principals, four of five Central Staff, and three of the five members of the Senior Administrator Advisory Group (SAAG) agreed to participate in this study. Using the group designations created for the data analysis, all of the eight teachers and eleven of sixteen non-teachers participated in this study.

As discussed in Chapter One, interviews were conducted between May 15 and June 27, 2011. They occurred in a variety of locations and all interviews were recorded using the voice memo application on an iPhone and stored in password-protected files on a computer that was backed up via a file sync utility called Dropbox. Typed notes were also taken during interviews using a

program called Evernote. Notes and recordings of each interview were then transcribed into a digital format using Microsoft Word, with the resulting printed transcripts ranging from thirteen to sixty-five pages of double-spaced print.

As participants were interviewed it became apparent that their formal role within the WRDSB was influencing their responses. The first interview was with a teacher and was very cordial, comfortable, and detailed. The next two interviews were with non-teachers who appeared to be less comfortable describing their experiences and thoughts in detail. This may have been due to the researcher's status as a teacher in the WRDSB. In subsequent interviews I took more time to explicitly stress that the interview was being conducted for research purposes and that any information disclosed would be kept anonymous. More specifically, I carefully explained that the research process was anonymous for all participants but that I could only ensure a limited degree for those participants who occupied positions with limited representation from their participant group. It is unclear if my efforts to clarify how the interview data would be used mitigated or aggravated the influence of a participant's official position within the WRDSB, but it was reasoned that it would be better to make note of it rather than not.

### **Interview Schedule**

Interview questions were based on the five CLCs explicated in the OLF: (1) setting goals, (2) aligning resources with priorities, (3) promoting collaborative learning cultures, (4) using data, and (5) engaging in courageous conversations. The complete set of interview questions can be found in Appendix B. Questions were modelled on this framework because it reflects the Ontario context within which the potential leadership actions occurred. I hypothesized that the CLCs would also frame participants' understanding of leadership and influence the language they used to describe it.

The first question (What is the purpose of the FFP?) was intended to explore participant impressions of the reasons behind the establishment and objectives of the FFP and also provided opportunities to probe the consistency of participants' understandings and their agreement with the stated purposes of the FFP as given in the WRDSB memo announcing its formation. A sub-question (What were the goals of the FFP as you understood them?) further probed these issues and provided an opportunity for participants to identify any other perceived goals. Following these two initial questions, I probed for additional information on purpose and goals by asking how, when and by whom the FFP had been created if the interviewee had not already voiced such information.

The second set of questions (What resources were made available to FFP participants? How were they allocated and used? Were resources used to support FFP goals? If so, how?) concentrated on the second CLC, Aligning Resources with Priorities. Participants were asked to identify resources in as broad a sense as they could imagine. Many needed to be given an example (i.e., time, money, human) to stimulate their thinking. Once they had identified some examples, I probed for their views on how the selection and deployment of resources supported the goals and purposes they had identified in the first set of questions. This question was important for evoking participant perceptions related to leadership interactions that might be embedded in decisions regarding resource selection and allocation. I believed that the dynamics of influence in these decisions would provide insight into how leadership was enacted in FFP.

The third set of questions (Did the members of the FFP work well together? Why do you think that was the case?) focused on the third CLC Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures by asking participants to describe their perceptions of the group's working relationships and environment. The question was worded to allow for responses that described instances of

effective and ineffective working relationships. The second question was posed in order to provide opportunities for participants to reflect on underlying causes or factors that contributed to the way the group worked. Occasionally participants were asked additional follow up questions probing any similarities or differences in the work culture within each of the participant groups and the overall culture of the FFP. Participants were also asked if the work environments had any perceived correlation with the FFP goals and purpose, as they understood them.

The fourth set of questions (What kinds of information were considered by the FFP when making decisions? Where did this information come from and how was it used?) was intended to explore the fourth CLC Using Data in decision making. It was designed to focus on participants' awareness of various 'metrics' that were used to make decisions in the work of the FFP. Often, the concept of data needed to be explained and some educationally relevant examples provided. Student grades were commonly used as an example of quantitative data and teacher-student conversations as an example as qualitative data when necessary. Generally, participants struggled to identify sources of decision-relevant data sources and examples of their use.

The last set of questions (Were there any difficult moments or confrontations as the FFP did its work?) sought to reveal any instances where the CLC concerning engaging in courageous conversations could be identified. The use of the phrase "courageous conversations" was deliberately avoided in anticipation that it could be misunderstood. Instead it was explained that any organization will encounter obstacles and participants were asked to describe what these might have been in the FFP. Some participants were reluctant to describe situations that would be perceived to be critical of others, while other participants readily shared situations or

relationships they found frustrating. When a participant identified a difficult moment or confrontation I asked her or him to describe if and how it was resolved. This set of questions provided unanticipated insights into the culture that developed in the FFP, yielding examples of how incidents were viewed differently by members occupying different formal roles.

### **Participants**

The pre-interview survey indicated that there were seven female and twelve male participants in the study. The teacher group evenly split between males (n=4) and females (n=4), while in the non-teacher group (n=11), the gender distribution was predominantly male (n=8). During data analysis, gender did not appear to be related to participant responses. Amongst the entire group, years of employment in public education ranged from five or less years (n=1), six to ten years (n=5), eleven to fifteen years (n=3), sixteen to twenty years (n=3), and over twenty years (n=7). When asked about their years of experience teaching the courses that were the focus of the curriculum integration aspect of the FFP, as would be expected, most non-teacher participants (n=10) indicated they had very limited (<5yrs) experience teaching each course. Amongst the teachers, the majority also indicated they had five years or less experience teaching Grade Ten Academic English (n=6), Civics (n=8), and Careers (n=8). Finally, participants were asked their reason for joining the FFP, with a relatively even split between volunteers (n=11) and those who were assigned (n=8).

With nineteen of twenty-four FFP participants volunteering to participate in this study, a broad range of organizational roles and perspectives were represented. With the inclusion of a representative from each of the official role positions the interviewees constituted a well-rounded sample from which to gather data about leadership practices in the FFP. Finally, self-selection may have encouraged participants to share their reflections in an open manner, which may have increased the accuracy and fidelity of the accounts provided.



## Data Analysis

As noted in Chapter One, professional interactions between the participants were the core units of study for this research. Gronn's (1996) definitions of influence and identification were used to identify professional interactions that appeared to be associated with leadership actions in the transcribed interview responses. Gronn (1996) defines influence as "a significant effect on an individual or group's well-being, interests, policies or behaviour, and its exercise is usually thought of as legitimate by those subject to it" (p. 9). Identification "expresses the emotional connection between leaders and followers" where a leader is someone "whom followers identify, the one whom they would prefer to imitate" (Gronn, 1996, p. 9). When study participants identified instances that they believed were influential, this was coded as a leadership interaction. In light of Spillane's theory of distributed leadership, Gronn's definitions were extended to include participant responses that indicated the influence of interactions with non-human aspects of situations such as tools, artifacts, organizational structures and positions. For example, many teachers and non-teachers (n=12) identified the WRDSB internal email system as being influential in facilitating collaboration between the teacher members of the FFP. The identification of this particular tool and its description as being influential in the practice of the teachers was taken as an instance of leadership in the professional interactions of this subset of FFP participants.

The process of data analysis followed a series of steps. First, the transcribed responses to the interview questions were grouped according to each interview question and formal participant designations as shown in Table 4. For example, teacher responses to the questions relating to setting goals were grouped together, with the same process being applied to vice-principals, senior administrators and central staff. These grouped responses were then examined for

themes that were consistent across members within each formal participant group. For example, within the teacher participant group there emerged a theme of feeling overwhelmed which was noted and incorporated in the next stage of analysis. Themes were then recorded, with related participant quotations, in a summary document. For example, themes of flexibility and collaboration emerged during this stage.

Once this theme-identification step was completed, the transcripts were uploaded as individual files into the qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo 9 (2011). The transcripts were then reviewed individually and coded with Nvivo 9 nodes (category labels) that were created for participant roles (as summarized in Table 4), each CLC, and the emergent themes that were identified during the first stage of analysis. For example, each official FFP goal was coded as a separate node but grouped together under a tree-node corresponding to goal type as shown in Table 5.

Participants were coded into two categories: teachers and non-teachers. However, participant membership in each participant group was retained, in accord with the designations shown in Table 4. For example, all of the teacher participants were coded T-n, while the non-teacher participants were coded N-n. The five vice-principals were coded from NVP-1 to NVP-5, the members of the SAAG were coded NSA-1 to NSA-3, and the central staff were coded NCS-1 to NCS-3. This coding allowed for comparisons between the two dominant groups that emerged, while retaining the finer grained distinctions between official positions held by participants.

Once participant responses for each set of interview questions had been coded and grouped together, the patterns for each CLC were analyzed. To limit the scope of analysis, nodes that met the following primary and secondary admissibility criteria were included in the findings:

1. identified by at least forty percent of the total participants in the study (i.e., found in eight or more transcripts), or
2. identified by at least forty percent of group members (i.e. four or more teacher participants, and/or four or more non-teacher participants)

An example of the application of the first, or primary, admissibility criteria would be the nodes associated with the CLC Resources Aligning with Priorities, which were as follows, where “n” equals number of interview participants: time (n=19), software and web 2.0 tools (n=17), and human resources (n=14). Clearly, a majority of the nineteen study participants (all participants in the case of the node time) identified these resources which were consequently included in the findings. An example of the application of the second admissibility criteria would be the node ‘overwhelmed’ associated with the CLC Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures. Responses from teacher participants (n=7) met this criterion whereas those from non-teacher participants (n=2) did not. The process for coding each CLC is described below.

### **CLC 1 – Setting Goals**

As discussed above and shown in the interview schedule included in Appendix B, participants were asked two open-ended questions about the purpose and goals of the FFP supplemented by additional probes intended to clarify or expand initial responses. The term “purpose” was included in order to solicit a broad range of responses that not only encompassed the explicitly stated goals from official FFP literature, but also the underlying reasons and justifications for the project as understood by participants.

Participant responses to this CLC were organized into three categories: official, implementation, and outcome goals. Official goals referred to the goals that were explicitly stated in the FFP documentation as described in Chapter One. These goals were coded as six nodes: (1) student

engagement, (2) student success, (3) technology integration, (4) reimagining classroom practice, (5) boys' literacy, and (6) use of WRDSB research-based strategies.

Participant responses also included goals that were not related to the official goals but connected to the process undertaken during the planning stage and their own beliefs about the intended outcomes of the FFP. These 'secondary' goals relating to how the FFP participants worked together were labelled as implementation (goals), and those concerned with what participants hoped would be achieved by the FFP, were labelled as outcomes. Table 5 describes the goal categories and their related sub-nodes, the n=N entry showing the number of participant transcripts containing that coded entry.

**Table 5**

<b>Summary of goals identified by study participants according to coded category</b>		
<b>Category Node</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b># of Transcripts coded (n)</b>
Primary Goals		
Official FFP Goals	Student engagement	16
	Student success	13
	Re-imagine classroom practice	13
	Technology integration	12
	Boys literacy	2
	Use of WRDSB research-based strategies	0
Secondary Goals		
Implementation Goals	Inquiry based learning	15

	Curriculum integration	12
	Sustainable	6
	Scalable	4
	Student collaboration	3
Outcome Goals	System change	8
	Student preparation for work	6
	De-privatization of teacher practice	3
	Miscellaneous personal goals	4

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The nodes that satisfied the admissibility criteria for inclusion in the analysis related to this CLC were: (1) student engagement, (2) student success, (3) reimagine classroom practice, (4) technology integration, (5) inquiry-based learning, (6) curriculum integration, and (7) system change.

### **CLC 2 – Aligning Resources with Priorities**

As explained in Chapter Two, this CLC was without its own *Ideas into Action* document at the time of writing, which left an unclear explanation of priorities, as they would apply to the OLF. For the purpose of this study it was assumed that goals that emerged from the previous CLC would reflect priorities. Participants were asked directly if resources were deployed in support of the FFP goals they identified in order to establish any linkages between resources and priorities. Therefore resources that were identified as supporting the pursuit of any of the goals listed in Table 5 were taken as instances of aligning resources with priorities.

Participants were asked about resource allocation decisions and how the selection of resources related to FFP goals. Participant responses were coded individually and then grouped into the following five categories (tree-nodes): (1) time, (2) software and web 2.0 tools, (3) human resources, (4) hardware, and (5) curriculum. Unspecified participant references to the use of

time were coded as “time-unassigned”, while specific references were coded as “meetings.” Both of these nodes were grouped under the tree-node “time.” The node “software and web 2.0” tools included any references to emergent electronic and web-based technology (EEWT) by participants that fitted this description. For example, many participants identified the WRDSB internal email system Waterworks as a resource and it was coded under this node. Any references to EEWT, such as iPads or netbooks, which did not fit this category were coded as “hardware”. Data labelled “human resources” included references to individuals or groups that were identified by participants as providing assistance to the FFP. The majority of these references identified the Summer Curriculum Writing Team (SCWT) and non-FFP members from Information Technology Services (ITS). The node “Curriculum” was used to code participant references to the Ministry of Education’s curriculum documents for Grade Ten English, Civics, and Careers. The resource nodes that met the admissibility criteria were time (n=19), software and web 2.0 tools (n=17), human resources (n=14), curriculum (n=11), hardware (n=10).

### **CLC 3 – Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures**

Participants were asked to describe how the FFP participants worked together and then asked to explain why they thought this occurred. Participant responses were coded in three categories: (1) general characteristics, (2) decision making, and (3) dealing with difficulty. The category general characteristics was a tree-node with fourteen individual sub-nodes, as outlined in Table 6. Both decision-making and dealing with difficulty were individual nodes.

**Table 6**  
**Summary of participant responses describing culture of the FFP by coded category**

<b>Category Node</b>	<b>Node</b>	<b># of Transcripts coded</b>
General Characteristics	Collaboration	18
	Supportive	16

Flexibility	10
Engagement	9
Overwhelmed	9
Trust	8
Prescriptive	7
Excitement	6
Diversity	5
Equality	5
Familiarity	5
Open-minded	4
Decision Making	17
Dealing with Difficulty	11

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Whenever possible, responses were coded with each of these nodes if they included the term itself in reference to a participant's description of the culture within the FFP. For example, if a participant described the culture within the FFP as "collaborative," this comment was coded as such. However, some responses that did not explicitly use a term were also coded as such if they alluded to the definition of the term itself. For example, participant responses that described the process in which the FFP participants discussed and responded to each other's observations and comments were coded as "collaborative." This process was followed for the other nodes in this category.

The nodes that met the primary admissibility criteria for this CLC were: collaboration (n=18), supportive (n=16), decision making (n=17), dealing with difficulty (n=11), and flexibility (n=10). Nodes that met the secondary admissibility criteria, with at least forty percent of one group's

participants identifying them, were: overwhelmed (n=9), trust (n=8), and excitement (n=6). A fuller account of these nodes is given in Chapter Four.

#### **CLC 4 – Using Data**

Participants were asked two open-ended questions about the types of data that were collected and used by the FFP participants when making decisions and were also asked about specific types and sources of data that were used to inform the decision making process within the FFP.

The Ministry of Education defines data as “information that is collected and organized in a systematic way and can be used to make instructional or organizational decisions” (2011, p. 3).

The Ministry of Education further recognizes four types of such data, namely: student achievement, demographic, program, and perceptual (2011, p. 3). Examples of student-achievement data include report-card marks, student work samples, and student results on standardized tests. Examples of demographic data include aggregated student population characteristics. Program data includes curriculum and instructional practices. Perceptual data includes survey results reporting opinions of various stakeholders (i.e., parents, students, teachers).

For the purpose of this research participant responses were coded and then designated as either empirical or anecdotal. Empirical data was defined as “originating in or based on observation or experience” (Merriam-webster.com, 2012). This was understood to mean any data that were collected in a structured way, as referred to by the Ministry of Education. An example of this type of data would be the Ontario Comprehension Assessment (OCA) that was used by all FFP teachers as a diagnostic student achievement measure. Anecdotal data were defined as “based on or consisting of reports or observations” (Merriam-webster.com, 2012).



This distinction between anecdotal and empirical data assumed greater importance when it became clear that while participants identified instances of the four types of data recognized by the Ministry (and thus coded in the analysis), they were not usually referring to information collected and organized in a systematic way. For example, many teacher participants mentioned what were coded as anecdotal data derived from their opinions about the FFP, which were very different from the empirical data derived from opinion surveys conducted by the FFP to gather parent and student feedback about the project.

The nodes that met the primary admissibility criteria for this CLC were FFP participant feedback (n=13) and student feedback (n=11). These nodes were categorized as anecdotal data. The node associated with this CLC that met the secondary admissibility criteria was OCA (n=10) and was categorized as empirical.

#### **CLC 5 – Engaging in Courageous Conversations**

Participants were asked to identify specific instances that presented difficulties or created confrontations as the FFP conducted its business with a view to revealing instances where current practices were challenged and innovation occurred. Participants were then asked to describe the process by which these difficulties or confrontations were resolved. Specific attention was given to the manner in which feedback was solicited and acted upon.

Participant responses were coded in two groups: difficult situations and coping strategies.

Difficult situations were defined as instances that were identified by participants as presenting challenges to the work of FFP participants during their interactions with each other. Coping strategies were defined as the specific responses to the difficult situations that participants identified.

It was anticipated that participants would describe instances where feedback was solicited and acted upon in their responses to these questions. This did not occur. Participants were hesitant to provide specific information about “difficult moments”, apparently because they interpreted this as revealing a weakness in the FFP and perhaps a mark of disloyalty on their part. Table 7 outlines the categories and nodes for this CLC.

**Table 7**

**Summary of participant responses describing difficult situations and coping strategies by coded category**

Category Node	Node	# of Transcripts coded
Difficult Situation	Assessment	9
	Design of FFP Core Curriculum	11
Coping Strategies		6

Teacher participants were perhaps the most forthcoming, but generally reserved their comments on difficulties encountered to assessment (n=6), or frustrations with the task of designing the FFP core curriculum (n=6). A small number of non-teacher participants also identified designing the FFP core curriculum (n=5) as a difficult situation, meeting the secondary admissibility criteria.

The sole node that was included in the findings that met the primary admissibility criteria was designing the FFP core curriculum (n=11).

### Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methodology used by this study to examine how leadership emerged amongst the participants of the Futures Forum Project (FFP). Semi-structured interviews were conducted, using questions based on the Core Leadership Competencies (CLCs) of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF). This Ministry-mandated policy was viewed as a contextually

relevant conception of leadership that would emerge from participant reflections on the workings of the FFP. Study participants represented a broad range of positional roles from within the FFP and the Waterloo Region District School Board where it took place, allowing for a robust amount of data to be collected. Responses were coded and analyzed, revealing a distinction between two groups: teachers and non-teachers.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

I think we were a little too quick to congratulate ourselves for being innovative, because like I said at the beginning, some of the things that we proposed to do I'm not sure were any different from any other English class. But because it was online, we were revolutionary! (T-2)

As described in Chapter Three, participants answered interview questions that were modeled on the five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF). Initial examinations suggested that there was a significant amount of data and clear evidence for each CLC in the professional interactions of the FFP participants. Upon further analysis, it appeared the structure of the interview questions gave the impression of the CLCs playing a more prominent role than they did in the business of the FFP. Contrary to initial impressions, the detailed analysis reported in this chapter failed to identify evidence that the CLCs were used as an intentional framework for leadership in the activities of FFP participants.

#### **Evidence for the CLCs**

As described in Chapter One, the research problem addressed was assessment of the presence of the CLCs in the professional interactions of FFP participants. This section describes patterns related to each CLC that emerged from the data analysis described in the previous chapter.

While clear traces of the CLCs emerged during this analysis, their presence was not as obvious as would be expected if they were intentionally used as a leadership framework. Some CLCs appeared to be completely absent, while others were not present as extensively as expected. A clear pattern of divergence emerged between two groups: the non-teachers consisting of participants who were members of the SAAG, PLG, the VPs, and the Central Staff groups on one hand, and the teacher participants on the other. Members of each group consistently differed in

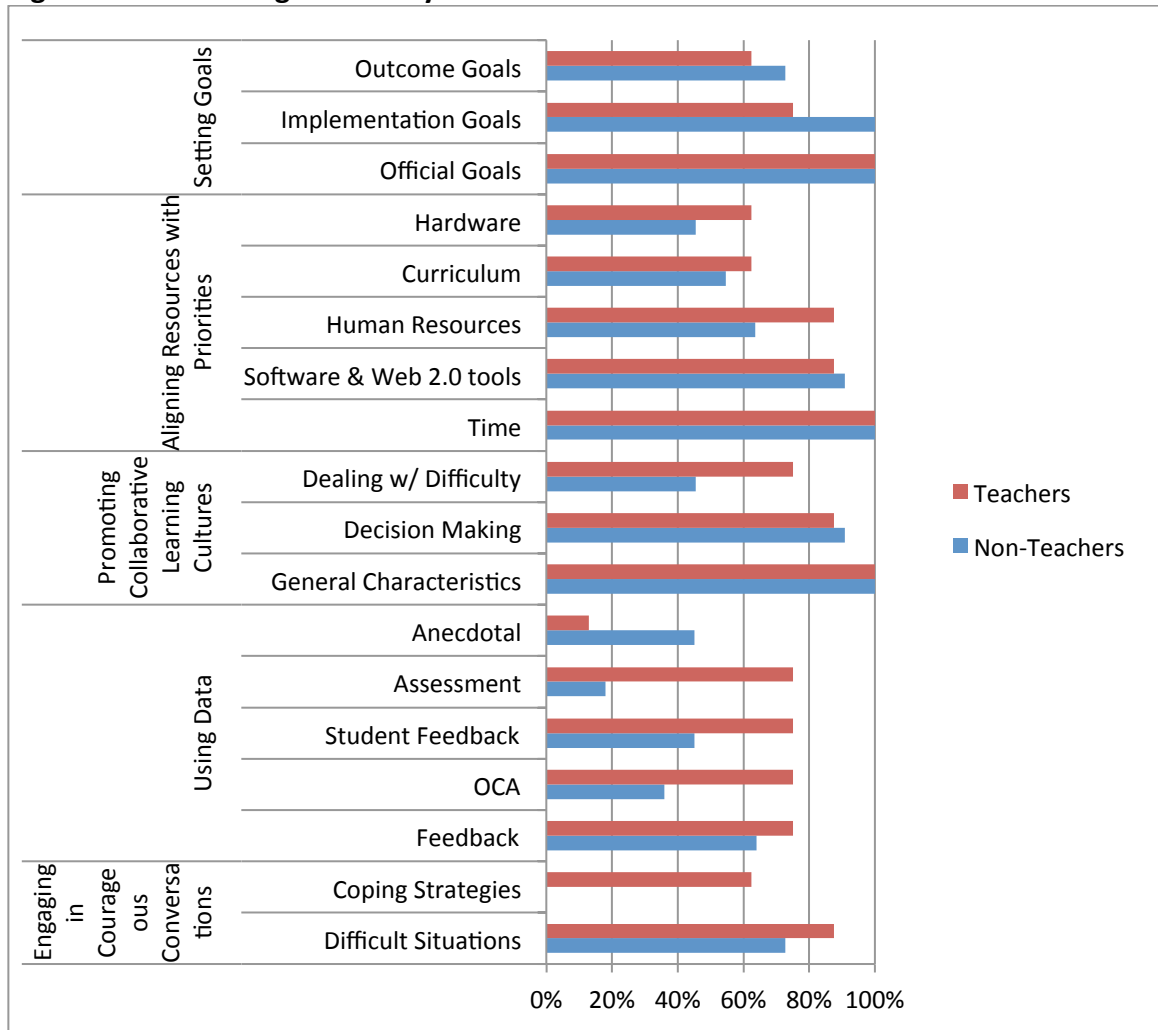
their descriptions and recollections of activities undertaken pointing to an absence of the CLCs in the work of the FFP.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of participants for each participant group that identified the sub-nodes for each CLC. As discussed in Chapter 3, this data display and those that follow in this chapter were constructed from data satisfying primary and secondary admissibility criteria. If the number of total study participants whose responses were coded under a node were forty percent or greater, then the node was included in the chart. For example, the total number of study *participants* that identified an official FFP goal ( $n=19$ )<sup>3</sup> was greater than forty percent. The second admissibility criteria dictated that if the *responses* within a single group that were coded under a single node were equal to or greater than forty percent, then this category was also included in the chart. For example, responses to the questions relating to the CLC Engaging in Courageous Conversations that were coded as coping strategies were exclusive to the teachers ( $n=5$ ) and represented sixty-three percent of the participants in that group. While no non-teacher responses were coded as such, this category was still included in the analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> This convention is used to show the number of study participants concerned, in this case nineteen.

**Figure 1 - CLC Findings Summary Chart**



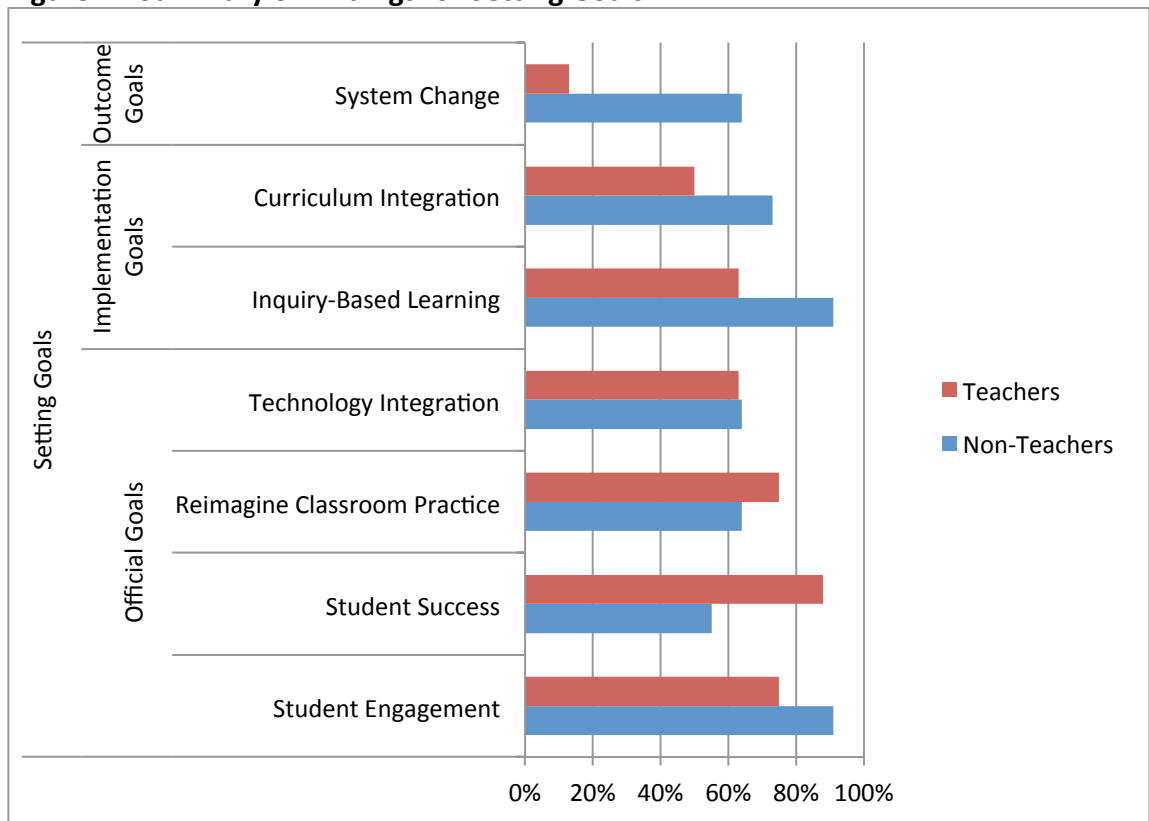
**Setting Goals**

This section will describe the data from the reflective interviews that related to the CLC Setting Goals. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Ministry of Education views the creation and communication of clear goals, based on their “SMART” criteria, as a foundational element in the practice of effective leadership in Ontario schools (2010/11, p. 1).

Participant responses to the interview questions based on this CLC were grouped into two categories (primary and secondary) and three sub-nodes: official FFP goals, implementation goals, and outcome goals. Official FFP goals referred to the goals that were identified in the FFP

documentation as described in Chapter One and Three. Implementation goals referred to participant responses that were not official goals, but related to the process of how participants worked together during the Planning Phase. For example, the goal of inquiry-based learning emerged as a strategy to meet the official FFP goals of student engagement and technology integration. Outcome goals referred to participant responses that indicated their anticipated outcomes of the FFP.

**Figure 2 - Summary of Findings for Setting Goals**



There appears to have been relatively consistent identification of the official FFP goals across both the teacher and non-teacher groups. As indicated in Figure 2, the majority of study participants in both groups identified four of the six official goals. Boys' literacy (n=2) was not widely identified and the use of WRDSB research-based strategies (n=0) was not mentioned in any of the interviews. The most widely identified formal FFP goal was student engagement

(n=16), with eighty-three percent of study participants identifying it in the interview data. It appears that this was understood to be the penultimate goal for the FFP as many participants indicated that it would be achieved through realizing the goals of technology integration and reimagining classroom practice. As NVP-5 stated, “the purpose initially when I was brought in was to try in the most basic way, to try to use technology to try to better engage students.” Many participants believed that once this had been achieved, students would become more successful. T-6 explains how he saw the official FFP goals reinforcing each other,

The last idea is the inquiry based learning, so, being focused more on student centered rather than teacher centered. So making it more open to what the students’ interests are, and hoping that generates an experience that they are more accepted to, that they are more successful in, and hopefully that makes them sort of a lifelong learner, and hopefully that engages them and gets them to sort of want to be in school and be more engaged in school as opposed to it just being exercises that they have to do.

The next most commonly identified official goals were student success (n=13) and reimagining classroom practice (n=13). A noticeable majority of teachers identified student success (n=7) and reimagining classroom practice (n=6), indicating these were clearly understood priorities for this group. An identical number of non-teachers identified student success (n=7) and reimagining classroom practice (n=7). NSA-3 viewed student success as a foundational goal for the FFP, “optimizing learning achievement for students. I mean that was our big goal.” For the other members of the SAAG, NSA-1 and NSA-2, student success was understood as “credit accumulation”, meaning earning required credits to satisfy Ontario Secondary School diploma requirements. T-5 echoed this understanding, “If I think of my take on the goals that were communicated, I think of achievement levels, so credit accumulation”.

Participant responses coded as reimagine classroom practice differed slightly between participant groups. Non-teachers described this in a broad, generalized sense of avoiding the



use of "traditional practices" in the classroom. NVP-5 stated, "I think the other goal was to avoid, wherever possible, the default to the old standard. Try it differently; don't fall back. And I think we've held true to that." NCS-1 refined this by suggesting the FFP was intended to spark increased teacher collaboration and use of technology.

For this whole project, a lot of it has been about changing teachers' practices, right? And Futures Forum was a vehicle for changing teacher practice... to bust open the old molds of teaching and bringing in more technology into the classroom but bringing it in with purpose, and integrating the courses rather than teaching in silos, which secondary tends to do.

Teachers saw the FFP as changing their relationships with each other and their students. T-7 describes how collaboration among teachers represented a change in classroom practice by increasing transparency.

I think the project was facilitated in an environment where everyone is collaborating so we already had broken down the walls but I think what people get intimidated by is that as teachers we're supposed to be experts of our own classrooms and our own domains and there is that concept of teaching where people can say, and I hear this all the time, "oh you know they're trying to make changes, blah blah blah. . . but when I close the door, the classroom is my kingdom." That concept that we're all individuals in a honeycomb and that's a very, to me, old style of education and not as exciting and not as fun and not as effective as what we are trying to do in FFP.

Many teachers (n=6) said that a key component of how their classroom practices would be changed involved a different role for students. Related to the implementation goal of inquiry-based learning, many described how the FFP was intended to shift the relationship between teacher and student in the classroom. As T-4 described,

So again, from a goal perspective, the idea of letting the kids redirect what they're doing, starting from a place of respect with kids, and acknowledging that they're natural learners... With my students I found this much more respectful because they know I want them to learn because I think it's important for them to learn, and be good at learning, and learn what they're passionate about and find out what they are passionate about and question things. I don't find that's necessarily what they feel when they walk into a normal careers class for example, or civics class, necessarily, right? ... But it was the idea of independent inquiry and ... the trust that they can regulate their own time with guidance. You know, that's a skill they are going to need. I find so often we don't give them enough trust, and I think that is one of the big differences [with the FFP] as

well, by saying “no, I trust you enough that you’re under control”, and then dealing with it if they’re not.

Technology integration (n=12) was the fourth official goal to be identified by all participants.

Most non-teachers (n=6) described this goal in a general sense, unrelated to other goals. For example, NVP-1 described his initial understanding of the role technology would play in the FFP as follows:

It was called Futures Forum, I think right from the get-go, but if I remember correctly the simple description was we're looking to throw some resources at it, we're looking to have a classroom with wi-fi access, with some extra technology, and they didn't really say what that was initially.

However, NVP-5 described an evolution of this initial goal for technology integration to be understood as supporting other goals: “technology simply became the platform... there’s other things that we really wanted to get to and we just crossed our fingers that technology would help us get there.” This description was more consistent with the teacher responses coded for this node. T-6 understood the incorporation of technology as supporting the goals of reimagining classroom practice and system change, observing

One [goal] would be the idea of integrating technology in the classroom, and integrating it in a way that is scalable. Because from what I understood it was integrating technology in a way that then could be used in other classrooms, that is something that they could move into the rest of the school, the rest of the board, it’s sort of a vision, it’s sort of a pilot project that can then be transplanted wherever it needs to go, wherever it’s wanted.

T-1 described the goal of integrating technology as supporting the goals for reimagining classroom practice through inquiry-based learning: “it was reiterated to us over and over and over again, it’s not about the technology, it’s not about using technology in education, it’s about facilitating this project-based learning.” As illustrated by these quotations, more than a few teacher participants (n=4) understood the goal for technology integration as supporting other goals.

Implementation goals were identified by almost all participants (n=18). As charted in Figure 2, inquiry based learning (n=15) and curriculum integration (n=12) were the most widely coded goals in this category. Non-teachers identified both of these goals more often than the teachers, but both viewed these goals as mutually supportive of the official goals. NVP-5 described how the official goals of technology integration and student engagement shaped the development of the implementation goals:

I think what has happened from there is they then said we can't just throw a ton of technology at this, we've got to fundamentally change how we deliver the program. So that created another conversation, "well, what's going to engage kids?" So that's how we started to delve into the idea of inquiry-based learning.

T-8 echoed this, describing the connection between the goals for curriculum integration, technology integration, student success, and student engagement:

So my understanding is that [pause] is to bring those three courses together. And, I would assume they chose those three because they go together well, but also because civics and careers are not seen as the most exciting courses in this school. Careers have a huge failure rate. So, I think the purpose was to try and bring those three together and use technology to get students more engaged.

T-3 saw a relationship between the goals for student engagement, curriculum integration, and technology integration.

I thought when it started it was almost two-fold, to engage students in both careers and civics a little bit more, to see if a two-period structure would work, to trying out wireless technology in the classroom... new web tools. So that was my brief understanding of how the beginning was... yeah expose them [students] to how web 2.0 tools would work, how can wireless be used, how can texting work... all the stuff that they are exposed to. How would [technology] be used to engage them, and if it were given a longer period of time with the students, combining three courses.

The final goal category that emerged from the data was coded as outcome goals. Responses in this category were coded under the node 'system change', with most of the responses being from non-teachers (n=7), rather than teachers (n=1). For example, NCS-3 described the FFP as having system-wide support with system-wide implications.

I think this is pretty significant as well and I think this is part of what is making this so much different than other pilots and other projects even ones within this board. There is really clear sense and not just because of [SAAG involvement], but there was a real clear sense that this wasn't just a little pilot [project] off in the corner. This was a system driven initiative and that the board was willing to put the full resources of the learning services ... we are going to put the full resources of ITS behind this and I think that itself was powerful, that also communicating some powerful things to people involved in the project that this was, in many ways, a huge project intended to be scalable and that I think they felt that sense.

NSA-2 echoed this sentiment, saying "the potential I think is unbelievable. To me this is the model that should really transform what happens in secondary schools." NSA-1 also believed this:

And so, there were really two parts to it; there was what we were trying to achieve on behalf of students and staff and supporting them, but also what we had to do as a system to make sure all of this is sustained and could carry on and scale so it wasn't just about a classroom, it was about changing a system.

One notable finding, or absence, in the data for this CLC was that participant responses made no mention of the Ministry of Education's criteria for setting goals, the so called "SMART"<sup>4</sup> goals described in Chapter Two. More importantly, none of the participant responses could be described as meeting this standard. The closest any transcript came to meeting these criteria was NVP-5's comment, as follows:

The goals, initially, when I was brought in was to try in the most basic way, to try to use technology to try to better engage students... So that is what kids are into, that's a format they're into. Now how do we use that? How do we leverage that technology to better engage kids?

While this statement appears to be strategic, specific, attainable, and results orientated, it does not include specific references to measurement or timelines. For example, there is ambiguity around what student engagement and the use of technology would look like if this goal were met.

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<sup>4</sup> Defined as strategic, specific, measurable, attainable, results-orientated, and time-based.

This ambiguity implies that little attention was paid to this CLC in the work of the FFP. Indeed, there appears to have been some uncertainty with regard to the goals of the FFP. As T-6 explained, for example:

I don't know if we had specific goals we had to achieve. I don't think so. I go back to those three things; were we able to do those things, were we able to combine certain elements of each course? Were we able to, one of the goals was to try out the idea of inquiry-based learning, so leaving some of this in the kid's control... So I don't think there's a goal in the sense there, just maybe try this out to see if this is workable.

T-5 also indicated that goals were vaguely understood, explaining

It was kind of vague. So to begin with it was more like, "do you want to teach Academic English, Careers and Civics, and you can have computers in the class?" That was kind of the message. So it just wasn't well communicated because students would ask me, "What's it about? [replies] Oh, we're going to use technology and have computers. That's what I can tell you so far."

The non-teachers also identified uncertainty about the goals of the FFP. For example, NCS-1 said, "I think we could say we had no idea where we were going." This suggests that what was generally understood to be goals within the teacher group could more accurately be described as 'guiding concepts' or 'principles' that provided focus and direction rather than as "...measurable, results oriented or time-bound" targets as envisaged in the Ontario Leadership Framework (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4). It also suggests that this may be the source of a particularly marked division between the teachers and non-teachers throughout the data.

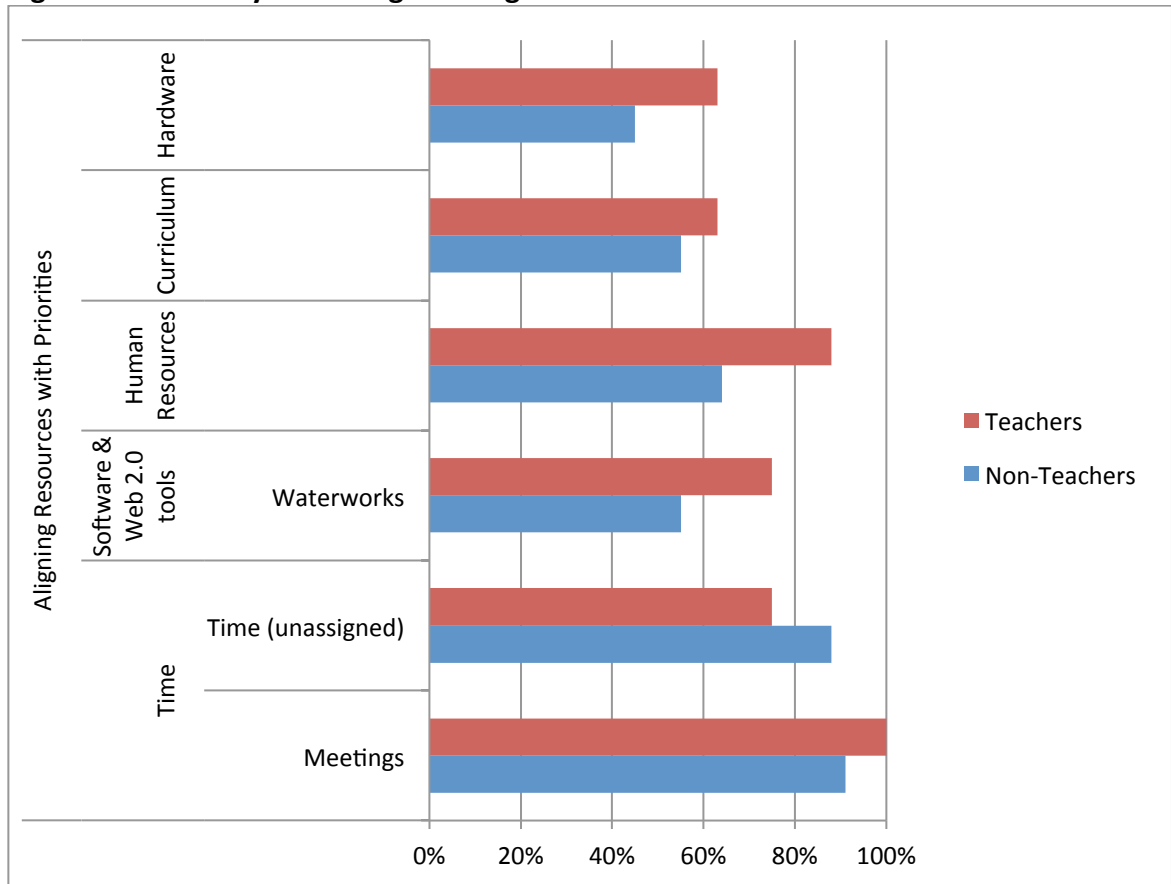
### **Aligning Resources with Priorities**

As discussed in Chapter Two, the presence of this CLC would be characterized by the effective deployment of resources to support "priorities" with a clear focus on "student achievement and well-being" (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4). As also discussed earlier, the absence of an OLF foundational document for this CLC was an impediment to coding. Resources were defined using the Ministry's definition of "...financial, capital, human resources, curriculum and teaching resources, professional learning resources, and program allocations" (Ontario, 2009c, p. 4). As

described in Chapter Three, participants were asked what resources were used to support the FFP goals they identified in order to establish any linkage between resources and priorities. I assumed that any resources that were described by participants as being deployed in support of the identified goals of the FFP above would be viewed as evidence, albeit tenuous, for the alignment of resources with priorities.

Figure 3 illustrates that participants were able to provide ample information on various resources made available to the FFP, with relatively consistent identification between both the teacher and non-teacher groups for each resource node. Even so, a notable pattern that emerged from the data pointed to differences in the priorities identified by teachers and non-teachers. Subsequently, this difference influenced how each group perceived the alignment of resources.

**Figure 3 - Summary of Findings for Alignment of Resources with Priorities**



As illustrated in Figure 3, the most commonly coded resource category was time (n=19), and the most commonly identified node within this category was meetings (n=18). As noted in Chapter One, meetings usually involved all FFP participants, with some significant exceptions. The first, and most frequently coded meetings (n= 15) were those that were facilitated by the external consultant group Professional Learning Practice (PLP). The second most commonly identified meeting (n=14) was the first teacher-only meeting that occurred on December 10, 2010 during the Planning Phase. Both of these meetings are discussed in greater depth below.

Software and web 2.0 tools (n=17) was the second most commonly identified type of resources. Participant responses identified a variety of hardware and software tools that were used by the FFP participants but no clear patterns emerged as to how they were viewed as aligning with the

goals identified earlier. One exception was the WRDSB internal email system, *Waterworks*, (n=11), which was singled out as a tool that facilitated collaboration through the establishment of a professional learning network (PLN) between the teachers, as discussed further below.

Responses coded under the human resources category node were comprised of references to individuals within and external to the FFP. The most frequently coded node that met the admissibility criteria in this category was the summer curriculum writing team (SCWT) (n=9). The references to the SCWT, by the teachers (n=5), focused on ideas that emerged from the creation of a draft FFP core curriculum by this group as it sought to incorporate many of the FFP goals. T-5's comment was indicative of many teachers' attitudes towards the SCWT, "[SCWT] had good ideas over the summer. The book club for example; Civic elections, which morphed into using Civic Mirror; Careers doing online applications for online, job ads. They had some really good ideas." The SCWT was viewed by both teachers (n=5) and non-teachers (n=3) as a human resource that shaped the design of the FFP core curriculum.

Another resource frequently coded in participant responses (n=11) was curriculum. This refers to the Ministry of Education mandated documents that outline expected student learning outcomes for each of the three courses intended to be integrated in the FFP core curriculum, Grade Ten Academic English, Civics, and Careers. These resources aligned with the goal of curriculum integration by defining the expected learning outcomes for FFP students. The Ministry curriculum also served to provide a constraint to the goal of reimagining classroom practices. T-5 described how the curriculum documents were referenced during the process of designing the FFP core curriculum,

The overall [curriculum] expectations, we looked at those and the specific expectations and how we were going to connect or align what we were doing [in the FFP core curriculum] with those overall and specific expectations. I think we did a good job explaining that.



NSA-1 also described how this resource influenced the work of the FFP participants, particularly the teachers as they designed the FFP core curriculum,

So what we went back to was, “what are the expectations in the courses, really?” And the [Ministry] curriculum was the driver for a lot of this. So when teachers sat down and mapped the [FFP core] curriculum and said “what are we trying to accomplish?” We said you know if we can accomplish this in a way that gives everyone their own pathway to do that, great. But there are some things that we know will lend themselves to us accomplishing those curriculum expectations that would benefit from all of us being involved.

The last resource category node that met the admissibility criteria was hardware (n=10). Sixty-three percent of teachers (n=5) and forty-five percent of non-teachers (n=5) identified various tools used by the FFP participants when discussing resources. The most frequently coded examples were netbooks (n=8), wifi (n=6), and iPads (n=5). Responses coded with this node generally identified a resource, without further comment on alignment with goals, making patterns difficult to discern due to limited data. However, there appears to have been general acceptance, amongst the limited responses, that wifi played a significant role in enabling the integration of technology in the FFP classrooms. NCS-3 described how important wifi was to the FFP, “I think the wireless access... that was the one thing that is making all this happen.” Perhaps underlying this point were T-6’s comments on his reaction to the failure of the wifi network during the first cycle in the Implementation Phase: “[Wifi malfunctions were] a real source of frustration. It went down for like two weeks, which is, it's death in a program like this when you're relying on technology. Boy, oh boy, it's so frustrating!”

The most significant pattern that emerged in the analysis revealed that the non-teachers’ priorities were primarily focused on clarifying the purpose and goals of the FFP to the teachers and each other. In contrast, the teacher group was more focused on planning and implementation and how resources were to be allocated so as to enable collaboration. In other words, the non-teachers appeared to have been focused on the ‘why’ while the teachers

appeared more concerned with the 'how', and this influenced each group's perceptions of how resources were aligned with priorities.

Examples that illustrate these differences in priorities were evident in transcript discussions of the December 10, 2010 teacher-only meeting and the meetings facilitated by the external third party consultant group, Professional Learning Practice (PLP). Both are notable due to the frequency with which they were mentioned and how participants described them.

A substantial majority of participants (n=14) mentioned the first teacher-only meeting as a key moment in the work of the FFP. It was widely viewed as the beginning of significant collaboration between the teachers as they developed the FFP core curriculum. This meeting was typically perceived by the teachers to represent a clear example of alignment with the FFP's goals and purpose. T-7 explained that, in her opinion, this meeting represented a nexus between the 'why' and the 'how' of the FFP:

It wasn't a combative experience it was a collaborative experience. There were a lot of different perspectives ...there was a lot of listening... It was a meeting that propagated the high ideals [of the FFP] but also knowing that the deadlines were soon so that we needed to hammer out the details.

Teachers also tended to view this meeting as marking a shift towards using FFP resources to address their priorities. T-8 described this as follows:

The other big difference is at the whole group meetings it's all very philosophical, very "edu-babble", very presentation style, or "let's talk about that whole philosophical outlook of it" as opposed to, "ok what are we going to do for book club?" where you have something specific. So there [at the teacher-only meeting], it was the specifics of it, not the philosophy of it.

The non-teachers appear to have been aware that the teachers were struggling with a perceived lack of focus on planning and implementation. NCS-3 stated,

And again, a lot of it was talking sort of on a very non-practical level. In December the teachers were getting overwhelmed. It was interesting because none of us, who were

the leadership, were going to be there. So it was basically said, here is an opportunity, you are together for the day, go with it.

The non-teachers viewed this meeting as an example of the flexible deployment of resources that met the needs of participants as they arose. In this respect, NVP-5 described how this all-teacher meeting influenced future resource decisions.

[Dec 10 teacher-only meeting] is still one of the things I remember vividly and it's important to me, and I share it with everyone I can, where it was going to be a half-day, but we decided we needed a full day. It turned out the [non-teachers] couldn't come in the morning, so it was just the teachers in the morning, and they got so much done. Self-directed, no agenda, they formed their own agenda. It was just [that] they needed the working time. And [NSA-3]...saw the value in that. So, when we proposed things similar to that later it was automatic.

In sum, the first teacher-only meeting in December 2010 represented a significant moment in the FFP where the non-teachers' resource priorities appear to have become more closely aligned with that of the teachers.

The second most identified resource coded under the node meetings, and also illustrative of the different priorities between teachers and non-teachers, was the work of the external consultants from PLP. As noted in Chapter Two, the PLP was a third party group hired to conduct online and face-to-face professional development activities with the FFP participants.

The non-teachers viewed the meetings facilitated by the PLP, as supporting the goals of technology integration and inquiry-based learning. The former was viewed as being advanced through the introduction and exploration of various EEWTs during meetings with the PLP consultants, while the latter was seen as being promoted through the development of a professional learning network (PLN) amongst FFP participants as they collaborated to develop the FFP core curriculum. NCS-1 described how the meetings with the PLP were intended to support these goals:

The PLP had these ten steps pre-game activities that they wanted us to go through. That was getting a twitter account, getting a blog account, getting our access feeds and all those things. They came in and talked to us about developing a personal learning network, a network of people that you learn from and building that. And then in our teams that we had created, discover a problem and work on solving that throughout the year.

For the non-teachers, it appears that the outcome of the PLP sessions was to introduce the idea of professional learning networks (PLN) to the teachers in particular. As a participant in the PLP facilitated meetings, NCS-2 described her understanding of the intended outcomes of these meetings as follows:

Part of the plan was that to support teachers in their professional learning related to what they are going to need to do in the classroom, which was how learning cycles grow and everything. That is how it was envisioned so since the vision of the Futures Forum was that networked learning environment, you were then to do your own professional learning in that networked PLP environment.

Comments from non-teachers implied that there was a shared view among this group that the intended outcome of the PLP facilitated meetings was to increase teachers' knowledge of various technologies that could be integrated in the classroom, as well as modeling a professional learning network where all FFP participants could experience inquiry-based learning.

Generally, comments from the teacher interviews echoed the sentiment that the PLP facilitated meetings were useful as an introduction to the integration of EEWT in the classroom. Where teachers primarily differed from non-teachers was in their perception that the PLP focused on ideas that they had already accepted as participants in the FFP, rather than on their main priority, the planning of the FFP core curriculum. T-6 talked about this as follows:

And I don't think that it [time dedicated to the PLP sessions] was particularly well spent. It was a little bit frustrating because I thought it was going to be a lot more planning than the actual [experience of], let's just talk about the idea. Because we got there and we would talk about how we would put technology in schools, and here's why it's great.

And I was like, “we know it’s great. You've already put the money into it; we’ve already agreed to do this. Do we really need to talk about this, why it's a good idea still? No, we're going forward, so let's figure out what it's going to look like.”

Many teacher descriptions of the PLP facilitated meetings were illustrative of the perception by teachers that FFP resources were too focused on discussing the “why” rather than the “how” of the project. T-5 described being engaged in the activities facilitated by the PLP consultants but quickly becoming frustrated by a lack of practical application to the classroom.

It was still a bunch of “why we need to do this” instead of “how we need to do this.” It felt very much like a university lecture of theory and I was really disappointed because I needed practical “how to do this”, not the “why” anymore. So I would categorize it as disappointing.

Two official FFP goals that the PLP appeared to have been aligned with, to some degree, were reimagining classroom practice and technology integration. The first meeting that was facilitated by the PLP appears to have been focused on these goals despite being negatively perceived by many participants, particularly the teachers. T-3 described how this meeting connected the goal of increasing teachers’ technological knowledge and expertise with the goal of reimagining the classroom.

I think, when the PLP [consultants] came in, to kick things off and get you excited was really important. So that supports the goals in saying here is what 21<sup>st</sup> century learning should look like. So I would say that definitely supported and got my mind going about what the classroom should look like.

Yet, while the PLP meetings appear to have supported the goal of increasing teacher knowledge and expertise in using emergent electronic and web-based technology (EEXT), they did not seem to sustain a learning environment amongst all FFP participants as was initially intended.

NVP-1 described this function of the PLP facilitated meetings as follows:

When [the PLP consultants] came in at the beginning of the year and said here's what it looks like and showed us all the tools, the Ning, Twitter, wiki's. Shoot, there was tons of learning and lots of engagement, but the follow through ... man, did people fall off the radar.

From the perspective of the non-teachers, the PLP sessions enabled a culture of collaboration and learning amongst the teachers even if the teachers did not explicitly understand that this was occurring. NCS-3 observed,

Why that first PLP [facilitated] meeting was key, that continuing working together, that collaboration that was started at that PLP [meeting], which carried through the entire course. You looked at the FFP conference, on *Waterworks*, [teachers] continued to really sense that this was not just me and my students, that this was us and our, all of our classes together.

So that manifested itself over and over and over again, that we ourselves were a learning community and working together and learning from each other. That was in part the lesson from the PLP [facilitated meetings].

The interview transcripts support the view that the non-teachers tended to believe the goal of technology integration was met, but not in the manner that was initially intended. NCS-2 suggested that the purpose of the PLP, in the context of the FFP, was not clearly understood by the teachers.

I don't know if the teachers really grasped that [the PLP meetings were a] part of signing on for the Futures Forum: it was almost like it was an extra piece. So I think what ended up happening was that [Professional Learning Network (PLN)] happened more naturally within the real structure of the Futures Forum and it is a good lesson in authentic learning, right? Because here we talk about how all of this is really authentic learning, but then we sort of set up a false framework for it.

NSA-2 explained that the professional learning network encouraged by the PLP sessions became established on the WRDSB internal email system, *Waterworks*: "The PLP, some people may say it failed. No it didn't fail... the PLP [online social network] didn't serve as a communication site, *Waterworks* did." NCS-1 expanded on this, explicitly stating, "*Waterworks* became our personal learning network that everyone came to, to share." T-8 separately endorsed this view when she described the important role *Waterworks* played in facilitating collaboration among the teachers,

Probably the most valuable resource for me was the conference on *Waterworks* and lots

of input there from other teachers and samples of what they were doing and talking back and forth on how to approach things. For me, that was the most valuable.

T-1 describes a pattern of activity that evolved in the FFP conference on *Waterworks* as follows:

[Early in the planning phase, postings] were coming from [the PLG] ... those administrative people right? And then once we hit probably November that's when you really started to see the teachers take over that conference and we were on there all the time, sharing resources, sharing ideas, working collaboratively, using [*Waterworks*] when we couldn't speak to one another directly.

In sum, the interviews provided ample evidence of the various resources that were made available to the FFP participants, but clear patterns of alignment with priorities, as defined by the goals that were articulated in the previous section, were difficult to discern. The most clearly aligned resource appears to have been curriculum, described as a reference point used by teachers to design the FFP core curriculum, which appeared to support the goal for curriculum integration. Another resource type that indicated limited alignment with priorities was the participant responses that were coded as human resources. The SCWT was identified as a significant resource that shaped the FFP core curriculum, through their design of a draft FFP core curriculum. No clear pattern of alignment emerged for the resource type categories of software and web 2.0 tools and hardware. Participant reflections described *Waterworks* as supporting teacher collaboration which indirectly reinforced goals for reimagining teacher practice. Wifi was also identified, in a partial way, as supporting the goals of technology integration.

A pattern that did emerge from participant descriptions related specifically to the use of time, and suggested that there was a clear distinction in the perception of resource alignment between the teacher and non-teacher groups for this resource type. Teachers characteristically viewed the use of time, in the form of meetings, as being misaligned with their priorities of designing the FFP core curriculum, and identified the first teacher-only meeting as a significant

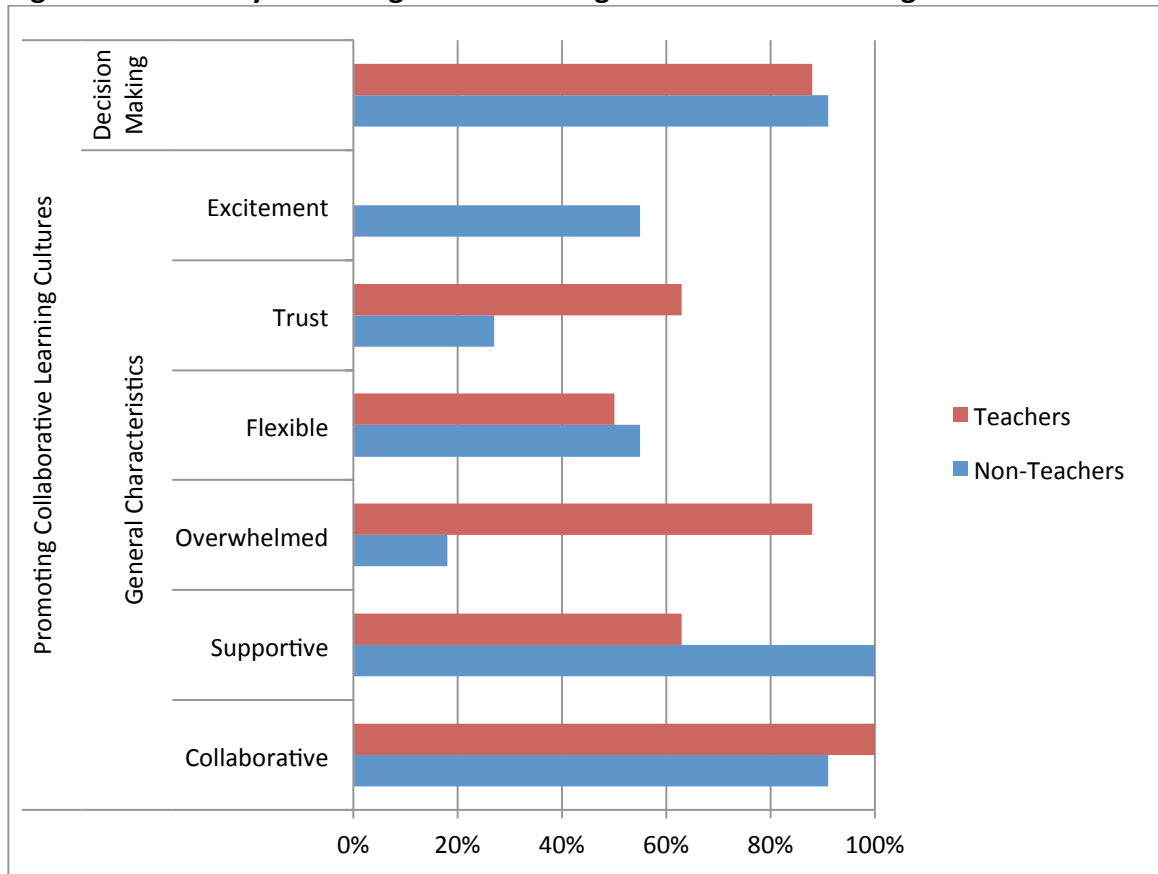
moment which enabled their collaboration. Non-teachers tended to view the use of meetings as being aligned with their priorities related to communicating the FFP's official goals. While neither teachers nor non-teachers enthusiastically embraced the work of the PLP consultants, there was wide agreement that the professional learning network that they promoted as a means of pursuing the FFP goal of technology integration was realized through the teachers' use of *Waterworks* to discuss and develop classroom materials and activities.

### **Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities**

According to the Ministry of Education, this CLC represents a "...profound shift away from isolation and autonomy, and toward deprivatized practice ... toward a genuine, system-wide learning organization" (2010b, p. 2). As discussed in Chapter Two, the Ministry documents referenced describe the establishment of networked learning communities where teachers' professional development advances beyond the school to include the broader system. Three core elements of a collaborative learning community identified in the Ministry literature dealing with this CLC are: professional community, organizational learning, and trust. When coding the interview transcripts, professional community was defined as shared norms and values, reflective dialogue, public practice, and collaboration with collective responsibility for students (Ontario, 2010b, p. 9). Organizational learning was defined as cooperation to gather information about teaching and content, discussions and critique of new ideas (Ontario, 2010b, p. 9). Trust was defined as integrity, honesty and openness, concern and personal regard for others, competence, reliability, and consistency (Ontario, 2010b, p. 9). Identifying these core elements in the data proved to be a challenge. Tentative evidence of the development of professional community and trust were noted, but exclusively amongst the teachers.



**Figure 4 - Summary of Findings for Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities**



There was remarkable consistency in the description of the culture of the FFP as ‘collaborative’ (n=18). Many participants used the term to directly describe the working culture that existed among FFP participants. As T-7 described it, “I think, in general, the people who are in this project are extremely positive people that don’t put up defensive spurs. So, there’s been a consistency with people willing to collaborate.” NVP-5 echoed this belief that collaboration was characteristic across the FFP.

From the school side, ITS side, Learning Services side, there’s been collaboration at that system level. There’s been collaboration between senior admin, learning services, the admin folk. The program is the focus, not IT’s vision, not learning service’s vision, not administrative service’s vision. It’s the goal of whatever Futures Forum is about. Because I think that’s good because I think that has brought us back to why are we here? It’s teaching kids, it is kids’ learning. So, the Futures Forum has forced us back to those basic principles to say, this is why we’re here, this is why we get together every day, this is why ITS exists. It’s because of the kids in the classrooms.

Many of the teacher (n=5), and several non-teacher responses (n=3) that were coded with this node also identified the collaborative working relationship within the teacher group as they designed the FFP core curriculum. T-6 described this as follows:

The seven of us definitely collaborated a ton. So which is really exciting which is fun, because you get on [*Waterworks*] and there'd be two new projects. And someone is doing something different with what you did the other day that worked, this presentation of this TED talk<sup>5</sup>. And then which led into this activity, which worked well in your class. You put it out there, and then you get different ideas and sort of get this idea started so you can work through what you would like to do

Interestingly, T-1 believed that the collaborative nature of the FFP participants was not intended by the formal leaders, but was the result of the work done by the SCWT.

That [collaboration] came more when we were writing the course in the summer. [SCWT members had] this idea that, well I think a lot of it actually started when we started talking about this idea of the book club and the idea that the kids could read books that were being taught by other teachers. Well then didn't that make sense that we could extend that further and have more collaboration not only between the kids but between ourselves? And I think we had a really unique... the seven of us as we went through the lead-up to the launch of the FFP in February, built those kind of interpersonal relationships that pushed collaboration to the forefront. And then I think it seemed like admin was the same thing. Like we would meet with admin, all of us together and then we would meet as teachers and admin would meet as admin. So that collaboration I think grew out of that six month period. I don't . . . yeah; I didn't get a sense that was a big goal for [non-teachers] at the start. It was mostly what was going on in the classroom that was the big deal.

The nature of the collaboration that occurred between the FFP participants and the teachers is specifically discussed further below.

While collaboration was consistently identified, where the two participant groups diverged was in their second-most-common responses. For the non-teachers this was "supportive" (n=11) and for the teachers it was a feeling of being "overwhelmed" (n=7).

It appears that teachers felt overwhelmed throughout the Planning and Implementation Phases

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<sup>5</sup> Referring to online videos from the website TED.com

due to a perceived misalignment of resources with their own priorities. At the end of the planning stage, in December 2010 and January 2011, before the Implementation Phase began, teachers often described an increase in collaboration that resulted from this sense of feeling overwhelmed. T-8 explained,

I think everybody at [the December 10, 2012 teacher-only meeting] was starting to feel panic because it was getting to the start date and all of a sudden they realized, and Christmas was in there so there wasn't a whole lot of time left. So, so sometimes you need to be kind of under the gun and, and then after that everybody worked really well together.

T-6 also described an increase in teacher collaboration at the end of the planning phase but attributed it to a deficiency in the structure of the FFP.

And we really banded together... and I'll say this though it doesn't sound very good... but because at times we felt sort of pushed on an island with an oar that doesn't really, or a boat that doesn't really work. So now we really have to make it work. So sort of a half formed program that we have been pushed into. And now it's happening so now there's a bit of a bonding experience, that we have sort of all felt like we all sort of felt like. "Oh man I am feeling so overwhelmed. I am underprepared for what I am about to take on." That was certainly my feeling. And think that we bonded in that sense. And so then it was a really sort of, pulling together experience. You really wanted to help someone else, because they were going through the similar experience.

While the feeling of being overwhelmed appeared to drive teacher participants to be more collaborative at the end of the planning phase, it appears to have led to a decline in collaboration as the first cycle came to an end. As T-6 explained,

So there was a lot of collaboration. It dwindled by the end of the term dramatically. I would say that in the last two months there was very little collaboration.

This may have been encouraged by the FFP goals themselves. T-4 described a sense of dissonance between the goals of the FFP and the reality in the classroom.

There was a struggle I think between trying to maintain the pedagogy behind this program in the "rainbow sunshine ideas" and then not freak out all semester. So a lot of people, I think, fell into some semblance of what we already know. So instead of being 100 percent what FFP could have been I guess more classes are operating on a 50-50

model of what I have already done and what I am doing that is new.

T-6 articulated this feeling of being overwhelmed, attributing it to the input of the non-teachers in the planning of the FFP core curriculum.

There was seven of us that were running the program, and there were all these other people that are putting their two cents in, ... [but were] maybe a little out of touch with what actually goes on in the classroom.

The second most commonly coded response from non-teachers (n=11) describing the culture of the FFP was supportive. NCS-2 described how the involvement of various individuals gave the FFP visibility and thus support.

Then at a very high level in the Board [the FFP] was seen as a pretty audacious kind of project to do, and pretty high profile, and a lot of people watching it, and that was made very clear to us from the beginning, right. So it sort of set the standard, and I guess the upshot of that was there was a lot of support for it.

NVP-2 believed that this culture was created through the presence and leadership of a single individual: NSA-1,

I've commented a lot of times to a lot of people, just seeing how many times [NSA-1] would be there for a whole day was such a visual signal of okay, people are taking this one seriously, right. It wasn't just, sometimes the superintendent is there, they say one thing and then they're gone. He devoted the time to it.

T-1 described how the relationship with her vice-principal fostered a sense of support.

They [VPs] didn't need to sit and listen to us talk about how we were going to make book club work. They didn't, because as long as it worked, and as long as we felt supported, that's what they were concerned about. [NVP-1] made that very clear, he's like, "If you feel like there's something that's not working, let me know and I'll try and help you work through it. But if you feel like you've got a handle on things, I trust you." There's a lot of -- at least I felt that way with my [vice-principal].

T-5 described how he perceived support from the other teachers and the non-teachers.

From my colleagues, the other people teaching, very supported in terms of ideas and things that we could do in the classroom. From people above us, I think they were just letting it run once it got going, I don't think they were going to interfere too much. I think they just kind of tried to keep it focused.

Flexibility was a node used to identify participant responses that described aspects of the FFP

culture which indicated instances of adaption or evolution by participants. For example, NVP-5 described how this characteristic emerged in the goals of the FFP, observing that, “there were definitely goals and we were goal-oriented, but I think we were also prepared to readjust those, to recalibrate those as we needed to.” For teacher participants like T-6, flexibility emerged in how the FFP core curriculum was delivered, particularly in responses to technology issues like the failure of the classroom wifi.

The outcome was I went back to look at what I had been doing previously. So I had taught Civics, I mean, I taught it. I went back to some of the other things that I needed to cover. We also did, I wasn't going to do a play, but I went back. We did a play instead of during that time because then we could act it out, and then once the technology came back in, when the Internet came back on, I had them do a project where they came up with an alternative ending and they filmed their own scenes.

T-5 believed that the FFP gave teachers more flexibility in delivering the FFP core curriculum. “I just really think it was more flexible, you could change up on the go, which I really liked,” he said. Flexibility was also used as a strategy for dealing with difficult situations and will be discussed further in the findings for the CLC Courageous Conversations.

The Ministry of Education highlights trust as an important aspect of a collaborative learning culture and this was a common characteristic identified by the teachers. However, the references to trust in the transcripts typically referred to relationships between teachers and select members of the Project Lead Group (PLG). T-1 described this in these words:

[FFP teachers] have this preexisting relationship, particularly with NCS-1 and NCS-3 because they've been with us the most consistently and the longest; they've almost become the 8th and the 9th teacher, really. Because we don't feel like we have to sugar coat with them.

Greater levels of trust appear to have developed between the teachers in the second half of the planning phase and during the implementation phase through the development of the FFP classroom curriculum. T-1 discussed this with reference to sharing of resources:

T-3 and I had a bit of a rough start. But I put some stuff on the [*Waterworks*] conference for everyone to use. There was a lot of stuff that I did around Civics, but there was an English component to it as well. And he sent me a personal email that said 'I just really appreciated that you put this out there and it's helping me out so much, and thank you.' That was all it took.

The sharing of classroom resources was an activity exclusive to the teachers that clearly strengthened the collaborative nature of the group by building trust. But when this behaviour declined in the second half of the implementation phase, so did the collaborative nature of the teacher group.

The involvement of non-teachers in the development of the FFP classroom curriculum was often described as limited to reminders to adhere to Ministry curriculum documents, undermining their influence amongst the teachers. As T-6 explained, the input of non-teachers in the planning of the course curriculum was both a source of frustration and at times a constraint.

I feel, especially when you've gotten non-teachers in there that don't really teach anymore. Who kind of, will always, you come up with an idea about this, and they all, not nay-say, but will sort of be like "well, again, you have to make sure it connects up with the curriculum, and da-de-da-de-da." You can ruin any good idea by saying it has to connect up, you know what I mean? You can, I can take any great activity and say "well I'm not sure it's enough connection to the curriculum."

This view appeared to have further reinforced the pattern of limited collaboration between the two participant groups, with teachers viewing the contributions of the non-teachers as being more of a constraint than a help.

When describing the culture of the FFP, the second most frequently coded node was 'decision making' (n=17). Participant responses described a variety of decisions that were made, but one pattern emerged from the data regarding the manner in which decisions were made. NVP-1's comment sums up where the locus of decision making lay: "I think [decision making] basically came down to hierarchy."

It appears the decisions associated with the design of the FFP core curriculum were made by the teachers, but within a framework determined by the non-teachers. NVP-1 describes how the structure of the FFP group reinforced this.

I think the release time and how it was used was brilliant because we didn't just release the teachers to get together as teachers and dream up a fictitious world that couldn't be supported with resources. What you did was release the teachers, the vice principals, the Ed center service people, IT services, learning services and in most cases NSA-1 was there and so you were able to make some good decisions.

NVP-4 described the non-teacher role in the design of the FFP core curriculum as vetting the work of the teachers, "to be honest, a lot of the shaping of the [FFP core curriculum] didn't involve vice principals. It was consultants and the teachers, but they did bring us in to get another pair of eyes on it." As discussed previously, the December 10, 2010 meeting amongst the teachers was a crucial moment in the decision-making process for the FFP core curriculum.

NCS-1 believed this was enabled by the decision, made by the Project Lead Group (PLG), to allow the teachers to meet by themselves.

I think another pivotal [decision] was when we [the PLG] gave teachers an unstructured agenda at [the December 10, 2012 meeting] where they got to sit down with the [Ministry curriculum] documents and run with them and decided how they were going to make them work. That was about taking all the theory and ideas we talked about and making them concrete.

This hierarchical nature of the decision-making was perhaps due to the belief that the SAAG comprised the views and interests of each participant group in the FFP. NSA-3 describes this stating,

We had the key players at the table in the [SAAG], which would be tech ITS obviously if we're embedding technology, curriculum, which was my area, administrators, and superintendents. I would say we had teachers as well since I would still consider myself part of the teacher union, a teacher too, so I don't think you ever lose that. We had that voice there as well.

Within the SAAG, it appears that NSA-1 wielded considerable influence over decision making.

Identified by both teachers (n=4) and non-teachers (n=4) under this node, he was perceived as

having the ability to move things forward. As NVP-1 stated,

So you would say "I think we should go down this route" and NCS-1 says "well, you know that's going to be hard because from learning services that's not our mandate" or NCS-3 says "you know we don't have the technology to do that or here's why we're not going down that road" or, on the other side, NSA-1 says "yes, we can make that happen" and all of a sudden it's like "ok we've got approval."

In sum, certain aspects of a collaborative learning community appear to have been partially realized amongst the teachers, but limited by temporal considerations and the perception of non-teacher interference from the teachers. Both groups identified collaboration as an important characteristic of the entire FFP group, but teachers in particular emphasized collaboration. This emphasis appears to have been driven by a sense amongst the teachers of feeling overwhelmed that led initially to increased collaboration but then hampered it as the first cycle came to an end. Non-teachers believed that the FFP culture was supportive, evidenced by the presence of individuals like NSA-1 and through their interactions with the teachers.

Notably, teachers described a high degree of trust amongst themselves but in turn found the non-teachers' focus on Ministry curriculum documents and the inability to realize the goals of the FFP as hindering the collaborative learning culture in the FFP. Decision-making was described as being influenced by the positional designations of FFP participants. Not surprisingly, those with greater formal authority outside of the FFP, the SAAG and NSA-1 for example, were also influential in the decisions that were made. That said, it appears that participants believed that the majority of the decisions related to the FFP core curriculum were left to the teachers, but framed within parameters determined by the non-teachers.

Amongst the non-teachers, two individuals emerged as significant in their influence on the shaping of the parameters adhered to by the teachers. Both NSA-1 (n=6) and NCS-1 (n=6) were



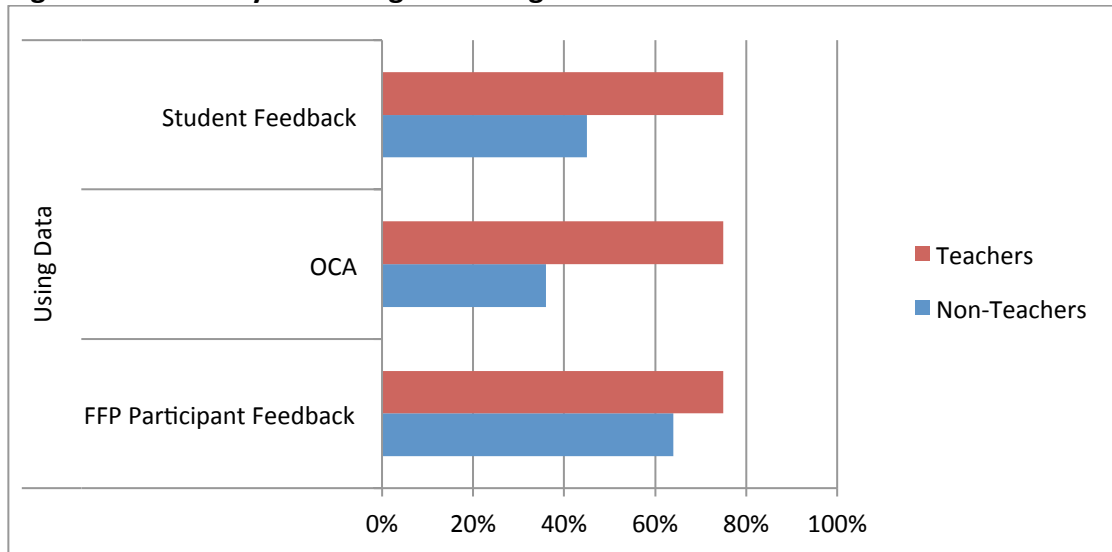
widely identified as providing leadership to the FFP participants. This will be discussed further at the end of this chapter in a discussion of emergent evidence for characteristics of distributed leadership.

### **Using Data**

This section describes findings from the interview data for the CLC “using data.” As discussed earlier in Chapters Two and Three, the Ministry of Education OLF documents identify four types of data that school and system leaders are expected to use in exercising leadership: student achievement data, demographic data, program data, and perceptual data (2011, p. 3). In the context of the OLF, leaders are expected to not only use data for decision making, but to also foster a “data culture” which encourages the promotion of collaborative learning cultures, managing expectations for student achievement amongst followers, and adjusting instructional practices (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 16). Data are viewed as having diagnostic and summative functions that will assist leaders and others to monitor progress and nurture the internal culture of an organization.

Participant interview responses revealed very little evidence of either the use of data or the presence of a data culture within the FFP, with interviewees struggling to identify specific instances where data were used. Clear differences between the non-teacher and teacher groups emerged in how members of each group viewed the nature and use of data. Relatively few examples of the use of empirical data were identified, with informal perceptual feedback provided by teachers often being identified as the most influential type of data.

**Figure 5 - Summary of Findings for Using Data**



Three nodes were used to code participant responses to the questions based on this CLC: student feedback (n=11), Ontario Comprehension Assessment (OCA) (n=10), and FFP participant feedback (n=13).

As noted in Chapter Three, the only type of empirical data that was identified by participants were the results of the Ontario Comprehension Assessment (OCA). This standardized test was administered by the teachers twice during the first cycle and used specifically as an assessment tool for student learning generally, and was viewed as an indicator of the efficacy of the curriculum materials and activities produced by the FFP participants.

Many of the teachers perceived the OCA negatively. For example, T-8 did not see the OCA results as a valid measure of student achievement: “When I looked at the students in my class who had been red flagged [by their OCA results], and I look at what they've done in class, I see no connection whatsoever.” T-1 believed that the OCA provided data that were redundant and thus unhelpful: “I am going to be absolutely honest, the OCA, as far as affecting my practices in the classroom, it did not.”

Another explanation for the teachers' generally negative response to the OCA was a perception that it did not align with the purposes of the FFP. T-6 expressed this sentiment, explaining that the underlying purposes of the FFP and the OCA were mutually exclusive.

We did OCA... and it was funny because we do that testing and it's like, we have this certain alternative program we're going to run, and we're going to do things differently, and we're going to think about education differently, and we're going to sort of reinvent the wheel in a sense and really go about it differently. And do you want to know how it's working? This test that we've used that uses all the metrics that we've just said aren't good.

Doubt about the relevance of the OCA data was not exclusive to the teachers. NVP-4 expressed reservation, saying "certainly I'm interested in the OCA data, but I'm not sure that is going to be significant." While frequently mentioned by the FFP participants, there was substantial mistrust of the OCA data, particularly amongst the teachers.

There was an initial commitment to use surveys to assess student, parent, and teacher perception of the FFP classroom activities. However, only student and parent perception surveys were carried out, and these were limited. In this respect, even though then interview responses identifying these surveys did not meet the admissibility criteria for analysis, it is worth noting that all three members of the SAAG identified surveys when asked about the use of data. Their comments suggested that this type of data had significant support within the SAAG, but it appeared that the data were not used in a meaningful way. NSA-3 described the surveys and their use as follows:

We did a [student] survey, a parent survey, and was [sic] working on a teacher survey. So we have surveys. We administered them after the first couple of weeks, maybe the first month, and [NCS-1 is] administering a second one. The parent one we didn't get really good turn back from parents... I made the executive decision that we wouldn't bother doing the parent one [again] because really it would not be useful, because they all said, "My kid loves school. My kid loves school." You know, it was like about their kids and how great they are. But not useful because we were trying to [measure] attitudes about, you know, English, Careers, and Civics, and school in general, and [the]

use of technology... Those were interesting, but not enough to give a second survey. It appears that methodological difficulties, poor data validity, and a decline in support led to the abandonment of this type of data. It also does not appear that any resources were focused in this area which may suggest there was a lack of priority given to its collection and use.

In sum, the only empirical data identified by participants were the OCA and survey data. The use of the OCA data as a tool for measuring student achievement was constrained by the negative perceptions of the teachers and the questionable causal link behind those perceptions, while various difficulties led to the surveys being discarded. No other traces of empirical data were found in the interview transcripts.

Although it was not mentioned frequently, the most consistent response to the interview questions probing the use of data referred to informal anecdotes provided by the teachers during meetings, which were coded as "FFP participant feedback". As described by T-1,

There was a lot of informal stuff, sharing in regard to "This is what's working." When we would get together during the semester, "This is what's working for me, this isn't working for me."

NVP-1 also referred to this informal sharing:

From what I saw there was good feedback, every time you went to these project meetings with the teachers for the planning, all that stuff, ... it was "there's progress, the teachers are getting their heads around how to deliver this", there was excitement around it. As we started to talk to the kids in the first few weeks, yeah, they were engaged right. So everybody is looking at that anecdotal stuff and going yeah, this seems pretty clear.

NSA-1 said,

Part of what we are doing is sharing what we've done but also assessing where we're going and that is part of it too, sitting down with the teachers and saying "ok, we've got this far, what do we need to do to improve?"

NVP-4 noted that teachers' perceptions were not formally collected and analyzed. "It seems to

me a lot of the data is just captured in the teachers experiences. I don't know that they've tried to formalize any of that.”

The third node that was coded for responses for this CLC was student feedback. Teacher responses for this node (n=6) focused on student reactions to the FFP core curriculum. As T-7 described, “I certainly think I collected data by talking to our students and asking for input and suggestions.” T-5 expanded on this, describing how he solicited feedback from the students about the FFP core curriculum in his classroom.

In terms of information, a lot of it comes from the students. You have 30 critics who are sitting in front of you every day and you get feedback from them, as to "this is engaging" or "this isn't engaging," or "this is useful," or "this isn't useful."... So a lot of information, or data, comes from them, just anecdotally, saying what they liked and didn't like.

Non-teacher responses (n=5) were limited for this node. They either referred to teacher descriptions of student feedback or their own reflections from talking to students. For example, NVP-2 described a conversation he had with an FFP student, noting, “One of the really significant statements I heard from one student was you know what, I probably wouldn't be going to school nearly as much as I am if I wasn't in this course.” NVP-3 described her informal conversations with parents and students: “from the parents and students that I've talked to, I mean, there was nothing that's come up that it was a negative experience, but you don't know until later. How do you measure that really?” NSA-1 described the student feedback that he received from the teachers as follows:

You hear testimonies from the teachers about how powerful it is for their students to be able to say “I'm putting something out there and other kids will be editing it”, and those other kids who are editing it are saying; “first of all the kids is putting up the material, the content, so I'm really paying attention because of the audience I'm working with.” And the kids who are editing it are saying, “wow, I'm doing this for somebody I don't know and will expect me to do a good job.” That's a total transformation of things, to do that.

What is evident for this CLC is that no formalized data collection occurred beyond the OCA

testing, which was not viewed by many teachers as useful. It appears that anecdotal perceptions were the dominant source of data informing the actions of FFP members. Without any other means for collecting data and identifying emergent patterns, the use of data appears to have been limited.

### **Engaging in Courageous Conversations**

This CLC emphasizes the use of feedback and purposeful interactions between leaders and followers to build trust in order to transform organizational culture and support the other CLCs. The use of “constructive problem talk”, or openly discussing organizational challenges, and being “open to learning conversations” is claimed by this CLC document’s authors to create “relational trust” that allows for adaptive challenges to be addressed (Ontario, 2010a, p. 8).

Participant responses to the interview questions based on this CLC were categorized into two groups: difficult situations and coping strategies. As discussed in Chapter Two, difficult situations were delineated as instances that required individuals or the group to solve a common problem or mediate a conflict. Coping strategies were defined as deliberate efforts that participants described as responses to difficult situations. I hypothesized that, by identifying when difficulties were encountered and how they were dealt with, I would be able to identify instances that revealed the use of courageous conversations by FFP participants. Consistent with the other CLCs, it appears that courageous conversations were not deliberately embedded in the leadership practices of the FFP.

The difficult situations that were identified by both the teacher and non-teacher groups related to the creation of the FFP classroom curriculum and student assessment, but only 20 percent of non-teachers identified each of these difficult situations while a majority of teachers did. With limited data, it was difficult to identify a clear pattern between the groups that related to the

development of the FFP classroom curriculum. That said, student assessment did emerge as a commonly identified problem by the teachers.

The concerns related to student assessment were diverse. Some teachers highlighted the difficulties associated with reporting three separate course marks on report cards when a goal of the FFP was to integrate three course curricula. Others chafed at efforts to impose a uniform assessment structure across the various FFP classes. T-4 explained:

I'm not a lockstep type of person to start with... there was a point where we were given a bunch of instructions [by the PLG], like "Here's what we'll do for mark breakdown." At least T-2 and I, and I'm not sure which other one, but probably T-3, back and forth, balked at the mark breakdown. It was ridiculously detailed and very antithetical to what we were doing with this sort of "pursue your own interests" philosophy. We [SCWT] had that same struggle with the curriculum in the summer.

T-6 believed that the topic of assessment was discussed but as an ongoing issue that emerged from translating the various FFP goals into practice and without enough detail to mitigate the difficulties that emerged.

For instance, assessment really wasn't discussed. But there really wasn't much at all, so that was a big talking point for us throughout the term was, "how are we going to assess the students? Do we have an opportunity to assess them differently than they've been assessed in the past?" Taking advantage of this because *we really have carte blanche to do what we want* [emphasis added]. So doing it that way and then using it as a platform to change the way we assess and mark and things like that. And so that was one thing that certainly wasn't mentioned that certainly came about.

Many teachers reinforced this belief that they had "carte blanche" in all aspects of the FFP classroom curriculum, and when structure was imposed upon them by the non-teachers, or they were asked to reach a consensus, they naturally found it difficult. This tension illustrates Corwin's point that "teachers' interests and responsibilities may be inimical to bureaucratic goals and objectives" (Glanz, 1991, p. 31). In fact, a trend of teachers identifying various conflicts between their professionalism and bureaucratic goals of the non-teachers emerged in the data

for this CLC at numerous junctures.

From the perspective of the non-teachers, the data suggested that they viewed any difficult situations as symptoms of diverse perspectives amongst the teachers. NVP-2 observed that “building the curriculum, and the teachers really formalizing their ideas about ‘okay, what are the significant things we're going to do in common with one another.’ That was a lot of give and take.” NVP-1 echoed this, observing,

So once we realized the curriculum wasn't being thrown out and we still had to live in that box, 90 percent of the people said great, let's keep moving. But again, the one dissenter in the room makes it a bit harder to handle. So there was a bit of a tension in our culture in first semester as we were doing the planning... . I'll call it frustration. So the frustration [for the teachers] is “we're out of the class, we're going to put together our guided inquiries, right. But yet we're not settling on what they are because of the dissension.”

NSA-3 viewed the difficulties amongst the teachers as the result of some individuals resisting attempts to create consistency.

One of the big things with this implementation was the teachers. I have one in my head, obviously. A teacher, and there's probably more than one, who did not want to be forced to do the same as other teachers.

The pattern in the identification of coping strategies was similar to that with the difficult situations, but, once more, constrained by the limited amount of data. Participants in both the teacher and non-teacher group identified flexibility as a strategy that was used to deal with difficult situations, with 63 percent of the teachers commenting on this, but only 47 percent of the non-teachers. NSA-3 stated that,

I think what people found is in the end they really did have lots of flexibility. But we agreed on certain things and we wanted them to use technology to varying degrees, but I'd say it was probably stressful to many people because of that.

When discussing the difficulties that emerged around building the course curricula, NCS-3 described how individual FFP teachers worked within their schools to resolve any issues, without



the involvement of the other FFP participants,

It's been left. It's probably a school-by-school decision; so that the teacher in consultation with the department heads, and with their administration to figure out what is best... I think there are different degrees of flexibility in each school involved.

T-3 described how the non-teachers, particularly NCS-1, used flexibility to mitigate any tension that emerged between the teachers when they were designing the FFP classroom curriculum.

I didn't feel there was any tension between us. There would have been tension if someone had said "You are not allowed to do the five paragraph essay". Then I would have been pissed off. Yeah. But nobody, NCS-1, in his wisdom, knows that, ok, back off a bit, yeah we would like to try all these new things but people have to teach within their comfort level. So they have done that which, if there was to be tension, umm resolved that.

With regards to student assessment, T-8 believed that the strategy of flexibility allowed each teacher to determine their own final summative assignments:

Interviewer: How did the teachers' respond to that tension that, "Okay, we need a summative, we're not getting the time in this meeting, on the [May] sixth, or whenever it was. So what did they do? What did you guys do as a group?"

T-8: Nothing. I think we just all went off on our own ways.

Where the teachers differed from the non-teachers in their identification of coping strategies, was their recognition of various instances of "creative insubordination", defined by Spillane (2004, p. 19) as the conscious opposition to attempts to control by others in positions of authority. These instances most often involved covert actions on the part of the teachers. For example, when T-3's arguments that the plans for the online magazine were too onerous were dismissed by NCS-1, he lobbied the teachers separately. As he told the tale,

On a couple of occasions I tried to tactfully say, 'there is no way we are going to do 14 editions of the online magazine, it is impossible'. But [NCS-1] said 'well, this is what we are doing'. So I talked to the other teachers about it.

T-4 suggests that this strategy of excluding the non-teachers from discussions about proposed classroom activities became common practice for the teachers: "eventually we just sort of kept

the [non-teachers] out of most of the actual planning 'cause their concerns were so, sort of... limiting to what we were planning to do." The presence of non-teachers also appears to have diminished the willingness of teachers to offer their honest feedback at times. T-6 described how teachers resisted voicing their objections in the larger group, partially out of deference to the larger organizational interests represented in the FFP.

I guess it's the philosophy it's easier to ask forgiveness than it is permission, in some sense, I suppose... also because I knew nothing was programmed right? Someone else came up with this idea. I mean, who am I to come in and say this isn't going to happen, this isn't going to work, so um, probably, that's the reason why I wouldn't say anything, um. And it's a big group of individuals, and some quite high up in the board office.

T-4 described feeling discouraged by the tendency of the FFP participants to get mired in debates that hindered decision making.

Yep, just smile and nod, "Oh ok, I see your point", just let it lie. And if others engage, I just tend to not engage. I just sit back because I was at the point where I was getting so worked up about stuff; because I didn't agree with some of the things that were being said, and those people didn't agree with me, and we were at an impasse. We were getting to the point where, there's just no way we're going to reconcile our ideologies. It's not going to make a difference. So I was frustrated, because I was like, "Why am I even talking?" This isn't getting us anywhere, we're just bickering. Not even bickering, just getting stuck. I think that's what it was, it was getting stuck on things.

T-4 believed that the June 8th FFP meeting offered an opportunity to give feedback but found his attempts rebuffed.

I felt like it was supposed to be [an opportunity to provide feedback], but I felt like it was a "justify why we've been spending this money. Tell us that it's worthwhile." And so that was frustrating for me because I wanted to be more forthright but I felt like there were no questions that allowed me to do that, other than taking a question off-topic, which I tried to do once but it was sort of redirected, so then I stopped.

T-6 described how he circumvented this by disguising his feedback as a question from a new FFP teacher, who was joining FFP for Phase Two,

The new [FFP] teachers gave us questions, and then so we'd answer them, so some of them were given to [NCS-1] if they thought it pertained to him, and some questions

were given to us, about us and then I wrote my own question and put it in there, and I read it.

The most frequently described strategy of creative insubordination was regression to what could be labeled as pre-FFP curriculum strategies and practices. T-6 described his response to various difficulties as follows: “the outcome was I went back to what I had been doing previously.” T-5 suggested this strategy of regression to pre-FFP curriculum strategies and practices was the result of a lack of time.

I think we tried to collaborate and if we ran out of time, people just did what they had to do or could do without waiting to see what everyone else wanted to do... You switched to what you had in mind without sharing it with everybody else.

The purposeful solicitation of feedback between leaders and followers underpins this Courageous Conversations CLC. The intended outcome is the development of relational trust between leaders and followers. It appears that feedback did not flow in this manner between the teachers and non-teachers in the FFP, once again suggesting that this CLC was not intentionally encouraged, promoted or incorporated in the life and work of the group.

If the CLC Engaging in Courageous Conversations was not intentionally incorporated into the interactions between FFP participants, it then appears to have manifested as a lack of trust felt by the teachers towards the non-teachers. This was reinforced by the absence of open discussions of organizational difficulties, so called *constructive problem talk* in the OLF documents (Ontario, 2010d, p.6). In response to these deficiencies, teachers developed strategies that resisted the influence of formal leaders. These strategies included, the exclusion of non-teachers from planning decisions, withholding or finding subversive ways of expressing feedback, and regression to pre-FFP curriculum strategies.

The data for this CLC is imbued with tension between the teacher and non-teacher participants.

This tension is illustrative of Corwin’s contention that conflict in schools exists primarily

“between teachers and administrators over the control of work particularly over institutional and curricular matters” (quoted in Glanz, 1991, p. 31). In the context of the FFP, teachers resisted attempts at standardization of assessment and classroom practices, while non-teachers excluded the teachers from any substantive decision-making and rebuffed their feedback. As mentioned above, this fostered a climate lacking trust between the two participant groups. It appears that any meaningful dialogue addressing this issue was mitigated by a policy of “flexibility”.

### **Notable Observations of Leadership Interactions**

It was anticipated that the membership diversity of FFP participants and the nature of the task they were engaged in would influence how leadership was enacted within the group, creating unique and unusual interdependencies. The data suggests that leadership did emerge in a distributed fashion, but that this was significantly influenced by the social power of various individual participants related to their organizational position.

In Blau’s (1964) seminal work, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, he differentiates between social and economic exchange, defining the former as “...voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others” (p. 80). In the context of work groups like the FFP, these interactions serve to establish group norms that form a dominant social framework amongst its membership.

When people are thrown together, and before common norms or goals or role expectations have crystallized among them, the advantages to be gained from entering into exchange relations furnish incentives for social interaction, and the exchange processes serve as mechanisms for regulating social interaction, thus fostering the development of a network of social relations and a rudimentary group structure. Eventually, group norms to regulate and limit the exchange transactions emerge, including the fundamental and ubiquitous norm of reciprocity, which makes failure to discharge obligations subject to group sanctions (Blau, 1964, p.81).

While Blau's point that social exchange within a newly formed group leads to a patterning of future social interactions would appear to be applicable to FFP participants, they also occupied a variety of organizational roles within the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) and it appears the social power associated with these positions was transferred to their group interactions. In other words, the organizational hierarchy of the WRDSB was strongly evident, and influential, in the business of the FFP participants. For example, the exclusion of the teachers from decision-making related to resource allocation and goal setting illustrated their subordinate status to the non-teachers. While the observation that the organizational hierarchy of the WRDSB, and the power associated with various positions, was transferred to the FFP may not be surprising, it is worth noting the dynamics of power exchange within the group. This differentiation in power helps to explain the distinctions that emerged between the two participant groups, teachers and non-teachers.

As noted in the discussion of the findings related to decision-making for the CLC Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures, the formal leadership of the FFP was shared between the members of the SAAG and PLG. For example, the task of defining and communicating the vision of the FFP involved a linear process that progressed through the organizational hierarchy of the WRDSB that was present in the FFP. Members of the SAAG, particularly NSA-1, set in motion the discussions during the Initiation Phase that led to the drafting of the system memo which was circulated amongst secondary schools to solicit FFP participants. Once volunteers were identified, members of the PLG were tasked with facilitating the FFP, organizing meetings and managing resources that were made available by the SAAG. For example, the SAAG approved budget requests made by the PLG such as funding for release time to allow FFP teachers to attend FFP meetings. Unsurprisingly, with this influence over resources, the status of the SAAG and PLG as superordinate to the rest of the FFP participants was reinforced. This also may have

served to limit the emergence of distributed characteristics of leadership amongst the entire FFP participant group, particularly amongst teacher participants. However, the voluntary nature of participation in the FFP imbued some power in the teachers and mitigated any potential for the use of coercive force by the SAAG and PLG. In effect, the teachers and the non-teachers needed the cooperation of each other. As Blau (1964) points out,

The high-status members furnish instrumental assistance to the low-status ones in exchange for their respect and compliance, which help the high-status members in their competition for a dominant position in the group. Without the contribution of the highs to the performance of collective or individual tasks, the lows would be deprived of the benefits that accrue to them from improved performance and joint achievements. Without the compliance and support of the lows, the highs cannot attain positions of power and leadership (p.117).

If the teacher participants could be described as “low-status” members of the FFP, it appears that NSA-1 and NCS-1 could be classified as “high-status” members. The transcript responses of participants indicate that NSA-1 played a critical role in communicating the “vision” of the FFP to the rest of the participants. NSA-3 stated that “[NSA-1] was the impetus for it” amongst the entire group and identified NSA-1 as an important person within the SAAG as well, “[NSA-1] was the driving factor to move us forward.” NCS-1 describes a significant encounter with the Summer Curriculum Writing Team (SCWT), which was also mentioned by the rest of the SCWT members (n=4), that illustrates the influence that NSA-1 had on how the vision of the FFP was conceptualized by other participants. NCS-1 describes the impact:

We were sitting there thinking. We kept thinking “what we're doing here is making a regular English course with tools. Is that what Future Forums is? Is it just a course with tools or something different?” We actually went up to [NSA-1]'s office and asked if he'd meet with us. He was in a meeting, but within 20 minutes he came and sat down with us and spent a half hour to an hour with us and we just said, “what can we do? How far can we go? Can we blow the walls off the school?” And he said “Yes, do that; really push the boundaries of what we can do.” And we walked away and dreamed big. We said “let's take that novel study we were going to do, a blog in class, and why not have an online book club? Have a teacher in a different school teach the novel.” Some of those guided inquiries with the big assignments, we really ran with those.

This encounter was mentioned by each of the four members of the SCWT, highlighting the perceived significance to their work. Indicative of differentiation of power within the FFP, the endorsement of the SCWT participant's ideas by NSA-1 served to reinforce NSA-1's preeminence in the eyes of the SCWT members.

Once the vision for the FFP was established, it became the responsibility of the PLG to transfer it into PD activities and meeting agendas so that participants could create the FFP core curriculum that would be implemented by the teachers in their classrooms. NCS-1 emerged as a prominent figure throughout this process during the planning and initiation phases. This could be partially explained by the disproportionate amount of time, relative to other FFP participant groups, given to the PLG members in meetings. Blau (1964) suggests that "time ... is a generalized means in the competition for the variety of social rewards" (p.114). In this sense, members of the PLG were at an advantage in the competition for status amongst the FFP participants.

The unequal distribution of speaking time produces an initial differentiation that gives some an advantage in subsequent competitive processes... The group allocates time among various members in accordance with their estimated abilities to make contributions to its welfare based on the initial impressions (Blau, 1964, p.114).

This preference for speaking time does not fully account for the emergence of NCS-1 as the member of the PLG most often identified in participant responses. It appears that NCS-1 was also viewed as making significant contributions towards the goals of the FFP participants, particularly the teachers. Blau (1964) explains this differentiation in social status, "earning superior status in a group requires not merely impressing others with outstanding abilities but actually using these abilities to make contributions to the achievement of the collective goals of the group or the individual goals of its members" (p.114). In particular, NCS-1 was viewed as influential in creating a collaborative process amongst participants, and for introducing and communicating the inquiry-based learning model that was intended to form the pedagogical foundation of the FFP core curriculum. NVP-2 describes NCS-1's role:

People had different ideas. Even at that level [with all FFP participants], in those meetings, it became quite collaborative too because everybody's ideas and perspective, and I don't know how this happened, but it kind of naturally just funneled down. And I think [NCS-1] was critical in that piece.

T-5 described NCS-1's role emerging in the Planning Stage, once the group began meeting regularly, "come September [2010] though, I would say mainly it was [NCS-1] who started to bring things together."

This placed NCS-1 in a position of tremendous influence over the direction of the FFP teachers.

T-2 said that "[NCS-1] was very sure of his ideas, of what he wanted to see, and he was very good at pushing those and I didn't see many people challenging them for whatever reason."

NVP-1 observed that "[NCS-1] probably had more decision-making power than a lot of individuals, because he was there guiding the teachers in his role." For example, NCS-1 appears to have been very influential in the selection of the OCA as a data collection tool. "[NCS-1] said he really likes OCA, so, away it goes. That was pretty much exactly the reasoning. Well, he thinks it's good, so here it goes" (T-6). However, as influential as NCS-1 was in the selection of the OCA as a diagnostic tool, it appeared to lack legitimacy in the eyes of the teachers.

The actions of both NSA-1 and NCS-1 described in participant responses are examples of how leadership tasks, such as the construction and communication of a vision in the FFP, are reflections of social exchange and the distribution of power within a group. Participant descriptions also suggest that NSA-1 and NCS-1 displayed joint interdependency characteristic of Spillane's (2005) distributed leadership theory. Joint interdependency refers to leadership tasks that are performed in a sequential and interdependent manner (Spillane, 2004). NSA-1 was responsible for defining the vision of the FFP, while NCS-1's role was that of a 'guide' for the rest of the FFP participants, especially the teachers. Both individuals performed significant leadership actions that occurred sequentially, thus illustrating the social interdependency



characteristic of distributed leadership theories. However, this distribution of leadership was limited to a select sub-group of non-teachers and did not extend to all group members. NSA-1 and NCS-1's influence also appears to have been rooted in their organizational roles within the WRDSB.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the findings from the participant responses to the interview questions for this study. These questions were modeled on the Core Leadership Competencies (CLCs) of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) in order to gauge their presence in the professional interactions of Futures Forum Project (FFP) participants. While the retrospective responses of participants provided a robust amount of data, they did not indicate that the CLCs were intentionally used by formal leaders as a framework for leadership in the activities of the FFP participants. Any vestiges of the CLCs appeared to emerge among the teacher participants — and mainly in the form of their resistance to the top-down implementation strategy pursued by SAAG in general and by NCS-1 in particular, with a resulting marked divide between teachers and non-teacher participants. For example, while there were similarities between each group in responses related to FFP goals, they did not satisfy the Ministry criteria for setting goals.

Another example emerged in the responses related to the CLC Alignment of Resources with Priorities where both groups indicated divergent priorities in the use of meetings.

While there appeared to be little evidence of the CLCs in participant reflections, traces of exchange theories of power and the distributed properties of leadership were evident. This emerged in the identification of NCS-1 and NSA-1 by participants as being influential in the business of the FFP. Specifically, both were identified as playing important roles in the

conceptualization of the FFP's goals that appears to illustrate the social interdependency characteristic of distributed leadership theory but ultimately rooted in their positional authority. However, the methodology employed by this study did not include any systematic attempt to collect and analyze the distributed nature of the leadership interactions of FFP participants. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Part of it is there is an ambiguity here, because we say we've got a vision and we're sticking to it but the reality is that the vision keeps evolving and changing. What we are really sticking to is a commitment that we will continue to evolve and change the vision. (NSA-1)

As its leadership development efforts continued, the Ministry decided that a more systematic approach to supporting and developing leadership in schools and districts was required. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010c, p. 6)

This study endeavored to explore the obfuscated concept of leadership in education by examining the experiences of participants in a small working group called the Futures Forum Project (FFP). The FFP was an attractive context due to the composition of its membership, which drew from a wide variety of organizational roles (i.e., teachers, vice-principals, central staff, and supervisory officers) within the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) where it occurred. Most notably for this research, the FFP *appeared* to be without a formally designated leader. Rather, two groups, the Senior Administrator Advisory Group (SAAG) and the Project Lead Group (PLG) executed various leadership functions for the FFP, though it appears that the leadership responsibilities of each group were not clearly defined. In addition to this notable leadership and membership structure, the task that was the business of the FFP was also of interest in that it appeared to present an adaptive challenge requiring the adoption of a new set of competencies by participants that would represent a significant shift in the culture and practice of education (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004, p. 35). Specifically, participants developed a classroom curriculum, designated the FFP core curriculum for identification purposes in this study, that sought to integrate three Ministry-mandated course curricula with emergent electronic and web-based technologies (EEWT) using an inquiry-based learning framework. The

FFP core curriculum was then implemented by teacher participants in their classrooms with students.

The FFP provided a rich context to investigate leadership in action at a local level, but I recognized that this project scenario would be situated within the broader provincial policy context including the expectations contained in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF). I hypothesized that this policy, which seeks to define and enhance leadership in publicly-funded education in Ontario, would influence and be evident in the actions of individuals within the FFP. I further hypothesized that the role-spanning characteristics of the FFP membership, the absence of a formally defined leader, and their challenging task would provide an opportunity to observe the enactment of leadership as conceptualized by the OLF, specifically through the content of the five Core Leadership Competencies (CLCs) that lie at the heart of this model of education leadership.

There can be little doubt that leadership was present in the life of the FFP and central to the work accomplished, with participants engaging in activities and tasks that both required, and allowed for, leadership to emerge. Yet, while it was clear that leadership was present in the interactions of FFP participants, what became increasingly evident as the analysis proceeded was that the CLCs were not unambiguously represented or, for the most part, reflected in those interactions.

### **Genesis of the Study**

This study grew out of my own experiences and interests as a teacher in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB). I expected the FFP would present a compelling context in which to investigate the intersection of my interests in educational leadership policy and EEWT integration. I found the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) a fascinating policy and wondered

how it would influence the work of the FFP. I was especially curious about how the nature of the FFP, with its stated goals and membership, would shape the emergence of leadership in what was, in the absence of a pre-designated leader, ostensibly a leaderless group, and about the extent to which this team would reflect the OLF policy documents. The CLCs were identified as centrally important components of the OLF because they were a response to a perceived lack of leadership capacity in the practices of system leaders in Ontario. I hypothesized that the context of the FFP, framed within the OLF, would provide a rich instance to observe and gain a greater understanding of the practice of educational leadership.

### **Conceptualizing Leadership**

The contention that leadership is an often-studied but rarely agreed-upon concept was evident in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. However, one point of agreement that appears to be emerging in the literature is the view that leadership is a collective process, influenced by both social and situational aspects. Ryan (2005) proposes a dichotomy for classifying leadership theories that differentiates between those described as “emerging” and account for the collective aspects of leadership practice, and those termed “traditional” which do not (p. 1). Richmon and Allison (2003) also recognize this distinction, proposing three discrete types of leadership theories: autonomous, interactive, and provisional. Autonomous theories correspond with Ryan’s traditional designation, with a role-based conception of leadership rooted in individual behaviours. Interactive and provisional leadership theories account for the social and situational aspects of leadership characteristic of the emerging view that leadership is a collective process.

In exploring the emerging view of leadership as a collective process, particular attention was given to how ideas can be used to both constitute and constrain attempts to understand leadership. The symbolic nature of leadership was illustrated by a discussion of Burns’ (1978)

“opinion leadership,” Rottman’s (2007) “leading ideas,” and Gronn’s (1996) definitions of identification and influence in the process of leadership. These concepts highlight the importance of understanding the role of context and process, in particular, how leaders, followers and situation intersect in the enactment of leadership. Also highlighted was Gronn’s (1996) critique that outcomes-focused and managerial approaches to leadership tend to ignore context and process making them inadequate for understanding leadership when it is framed as a collective process. Building on this, two theories of distributed leadership were briefly discussed, drawing on Sun and Allison (2005) and Spillane (Spillane, Diamond, & Jita 2003; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004; Spillane, 2005). Both of these theories highlight the interactive nature of leadership characteristic of Ryan’s (2005) “emerging” and Richmon and Allison’s (2003) “provisional” theories of leadership, and challenge views that leadership is exclusively embodied in or initiated by incumbents of formally designated roles within an organization characteristic of “traditional” theories of leadership.

Despite these themes in the academic literature, the published material from the Ontario Ministry of Education presenting the OLF was found to adopt a more explicit position-focused, outcomes-based, and prescriptive stance toward leadership in Ontario schools and education systems. In retrospect it became clear that the intended audiences for the OLF are formally designated education leaders in Ontario and those who aspire to such status, as primarily represented by superintendents and school principals, with the latter described as “instructional leaders” (Ontario, 2010c, p. 6). The intended product of implementing the OLF policy is the improvement of student outcomes. In order to achieve this goal, five CLCs were presented as “key areas” for developing “instructional leadership” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010c, p. 10-11).

The OLF, and the CLCs, are based primarily on the work of (1) Leithwood and his colleagues (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004), which emphasizes the importance of school leadership as a means for improving student outcomes, (2) Elmore (2006), who argued that leadership is a set of competencies rather than attributes of an official position, and (3) Levin and Fullan (2008), whose concept of “capacity building” links effective leadership with improved student outcomes. While these authors have at least touched on aspects of distributed leadership in other work (e.g. Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, & Yashkina, 2007; Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2006), such an awareness was not evident in the Ministry documents presenting the OLF and CLCs. However, the implication of this did not become evident until after the analysis was completed.

## **The Study**

A qualitative methodology was used to investigate the presence of the CLCs in the professional interactions of the FFP participants. While suitable for investigating leadership in a small group, Bales’ (1950) Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) framework was rejected, due to time and resource constraints, in favour of nineteen semi-structured retrospective interviews using open-ended questions based on the CLCs. Participant responses were analyzed by grouping them together according to participant position; teachers, vice-principals, central staff, and Senior Administrator Advisory Group (SAAG) members (indicated in Table 3), to reveal emergent themes and then coded using Nvivo 9. Coding was reviewed and admissibility criteria were applied to select data for detailed analysis.

## **Findings**

As discussed in detail in Chapter Four, this study found that, while there were traces of the CLCs in participant’s interview responses, their presence was not as obvious as would be expected if

the FFP participants used them in a deliberate and conscious manner. Some CLCs appeared to emerge, but in a limited sense, while others were completely absent. Certain individuals were identified by participants as having influence over certain activities that illustrated the partial enactment of some CLCs. However, these patterns appeared unsystematic and did not indicate the presence of a formally designated individual leader intentionally implementing the CLCs as OLF documents suggest. For example, NSA-1 a member of the SAAG, and NCS-1, a member of the Project Lead Group (PLG), were both identified as providing significant influence over the decisions and work in the group. NSA-1 was viewed as having influence on the establishment and communication of FFP goals, indicating emergent influence for the CLC Setting Goals. NCS-1 was identified as having influence on the emergence of collaboration between FFP participants and the adoption of inquiry-based learning as an implementation goal, indicating emergent influence for the CLCs Setting Goals and Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities.

The partial emergence of the CLCs was evident in transcribed responses to interview questions probing CLC-3 Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures, and CLC-2 Aligning Resources with Priorities. A collaborative learning culture appears to have emerged among the teachers, driven primarily by collective feelings of being overwhelmed by the task and a sensed mistrust by some of the non-teachers. There were no indications in the responses to the interview questions probing this CLC that a broader collaborative learning culture existed in the FFP as a whole. In the responses to questions probing the alignment of resources with priorities, both teachers and non-teachers described the resources of *Waterworks* email service, the Summer Curriculum Writing Team (SCWT), and the Ministry curriculum documents as being aligned with the FFP's priorities as indicated through the official and implementation goals. However, descriptions of the most frequently identified resources, namely the December 10, 2010 teacher-only meeting and the meetings facilitated by the external consultants from Professional Learning Practice



(PLP), suggested a significant divergence between the two main participant groups and their perceptions of the alignment of these resources with what appeared to be their own priorities.

Findings that illustrated the absence of the deliberate use of the CLCs by participants in the FFP were evident in the participants' transcript responses for: CLC-1 Setting Goals, CLC-4 Using Data, and CLC-5 Engaging in Courageous Conversations. A substantial amount of data were gathered from participant responses to the interview questions focused in these CLCs, but it was not obvious that these CLCs had been consciously implemented in the work of the FFP, or that they had been promoted or pursued through the deliberate actions or expectations of any individual. Data gathered for the CLC Setting Goals showed broad identification of goals in discussions between FFP participants and in various decisions made as the work progressed. For example, goals related to student engagement and inquiry-based learning were frequently identified in the interviews. Study participants were most closely aligned in their identification of goals categorized as official and implementation, but not with outcome goals, such as those coded as system change. Both teachers and non-teachers consistently identified many of the official FFP goals as stated in the memorandum establishing the group, with student engagement being the most frequently acknowledged. Participants also frequently identified certain goals as being secondary to others. For example, the goals of technology integration and curriculum integration were perceived to support reimagining teacher practice, which was understood to support student engagement, which was viewed as supporting student success. Even so, differences also emerged between the teacher and non-teacher groups in their identification of outcome goals. Non-teachers typically identified the FFP as a catalyst for broad system change, whereas teachers did not. Most notably what emerged from the data related to this CLC was the absence of any indication of the Ministry criteria for "SMART" goals as stressed in the OLF literature (2009c, p. 4). This suggested that what were identified as goals by participants could

more accurately be described as guiding principles, or perhaps imputed purposes rather than “the object or aim of an action...a goal reflects one’s purpose and refers to quantity, quality or rate of performance.” (Locke & Latham (2002) as quoted in Ontario, 2010/2011).

The data collected for CLC 3 Using Data pointed to a clear absence of this CLC from the awareness of FFP participants. Responses to questions probing this CLC suggested that there was no formal process for collecting and analyzing data by the FFP participants beyond the administration of a standardized test, the Ontario Comprehension Assessment (OCA). Moreover, teacher responses indicated significant distrust of the information provided by the OCA, thus minimizing its influence. The only data that appeared to have been used in discussions by the FFP members were anecdotal reflections of teacher participants concerning student engagement in FFP core curriculum activities. However, this information does not appear to have been collected or formally analyzed, indicating this CLC was also absent from the work of the FFP and the expectations of its members.

It also seems that FFP participants did not actively or purposely engage in CLC 5 Courageous Conversations, at least as envisaged by the Ministry literature. While responses to the interview questions designed to probe for this CLC were not extensive, the data showed that teachers viewed the design of the FFP core curriculum and student assessment as difficult situations in the experiences of FFP participants. The strategies identified for coping with these difficult situations differed between the two groups, non-teachers describing a strategy of flexibility, which enabled teacher participants to adopt strategies that suited their own contexts and purposes, while teachers described instances of creative insubordination where they either regressed to pre-FFP practices in their classrooms or actively excluded the non-teachers from discussions of proposed classroom activities for the FFP core curriculum. These patterns in the

data suggest that relational trust, identified by the Ministry as foundational for this CLC, was not present between teacher and non-teacher groups. This lack of trust also seems to be the result of conflict between teacher professionalism and the bureaucratic goals of non-teachers.

Despite the absence of a formally designated leader of the FFP, teachers found that positional authority had significant influence over the decision-making process in the FFP when many expected this to not be the case. Examples of this, which were discussed in Chapter Four, emerged in participant identification of the influence of NSA-1 and NCS-1, whose positional authority appears to have played a role in the influence that these individuals had in the work of the FFP. In the data collected for CLC-3, Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures, NSA-1 was described as having influence over decisions that could supersede the PLG, suggesting the source of this was rooted in his role as a supervisory officer. Even the attendance of NSA-1 at FFP meetings was interpreted as an indication of official support for the FFP, also suggesting his influence was based, in part, on positional authority. Similar to NSA-1, participant reflections that indicated NCS-1 as having influence were based on his positional authority, which was rooted in his membership in the PLG. NSA-1 emerged as the most often identified, and influential member of the PLG and this appears to be related to the PLG's positional authority to determine meeting agendas and direct the overall activities of the FFP participants.

## **Conclusions**

This study sought to identify the Core Leadership Competencies (CLCs) of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) in the reported experiences of participants in the Futures Forum Project (FFP). I hypothesized that the absence of a designated leader, the diverse positional backgrounds of the FFP participants, and the complex nature of their task would provide a telling context in

which to examine leadership within a small group context. It was also theorized that the FFP participants occupying formal leadership positions would be aware of the CLCs and they would be evident in the activities of the FFP participants. Subsequently, during the course of the analysis, it became apparent that this was not the case. The findings show that the CLCs did not explicitly emerge in the participant descriptions of the professional interactions of FFP participants. In addition to the absence of the CLCs, the data also points towards traces of the distributed characteristics of leadership, closely linked to exchange theories of power, despite this not being a core focus of the study.

### **Absence of the CLCs**

As noted above, the purpose of this research was to analyze the reported experiences of FFP participants in order to identify the presence of the CLCs in their professional interactions. The lack of robust evidence for the presence of the CLCs in the data can be explained in a number of ways; however, the assumption that they would emerge despite the absence of a formally designated leader seems the most significant. In other words, it now seems evident that had there been a designated leader who was well trained in and consciously implementing the CLCs, then they might have been apparent. This assumption can be grounded in one of Fayol's principles of management, unity of command, which was formally absent in the work of the FFP and had a significant impact on the outcome of this study (cited in Fells, 2000). The importance of a clearly designated leader as a focus for the identification of the CLCs did not become apparent until after the analysis was completed.

Perhaps the most glaring inconsistency may be that the Ministry prescribes the outcome of effective leadership, namely improved student outcomes. The findings of this research imply that the CLCs were not central and consistent principles in the FFP, suggesting that the "opinion

leaders” (Burns, 1978) in the FFP — superintendents and vice-principals — were unable to fully adopt and integrate them in their work or they were unaware of them.

The Ontario Ministry of Education claims that the OLF and the CLCs are the “foundation” (2010a, p. 6) for “good leadership” (2010b, p. 1) practice in Ontario. Good is defined as “instructional leadership”, actions that lead to improved student outcomes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a, p. 10-11). However, if these individuals do not find the CLCs useful or compatible with their current conceptions of leadership, then it is unlikely that they will be adopted and implemented. For example, the delimitation of goal setting to the OLF’s SMART criteria ignores the fact that organizations pursue multiple and conflicting goals.

Actual goals are discovered only when the public or official goal is factored into operational goals – those for which specific operations can be discovered. Once this is done, it turns out that there are several goals involved, and maximizing one will usually be at the expense of the other. (Perrow, 1972, p.160)

While it is perhaps implicit to the business of public education to identify the improvement of student outcomes as a provincial education goal, it is ambiguous and difficult to operationalize.

As Perrow (1972) states, “to describe the single, specific goal of an organization is to say very little about it” (p.166).

The lack of dissemination of the CLCs could also be due in part to their positional focus, which according to current leadership literature, is too limited in its explanation of leadership practice as it actually occurs. Sun and Allison (2005) suggest that,

Leadership is best understood as a process distributed across interactive webs of groups and work partners embedded within dynamic, varied and locally known social systems. In this view the appropriate unit of analysis becomes interdependencies between participants’ knowledge, thinking, actions and situations, rather than the traits, behaviors, styles and/or understandings of formally designated or emergent leaders. (p. 6-7)

Ontario's education system leaders may find that the CLCs are internally inconsistent, not providing an adequate framework to describe and enact leadership, implicitly understanding that it occurs between various individuals within organizational contexts.

Another explanation for the limited evidence of the incorporation of the CLCs by FFP participants would be methodological issues with this research. In short, while the data collected were robust, providing a detailed picture of the professional interactions of FFP participants, they may not have been suitable for identifying the CLCs in the professional interactions of this small group. As mentioned in Chapter Three, observational data were not collected at the formal FFP meetings, and Bales' (1950) Interaction Process Analysis, or a similar data analysis instrument, was not employed despite its suitability for the research context. However, if the temporal and resource considerations inherent in this alternative approach could have been overcome, the more structured observational framework offered by the IPA may have yielded data that brought forward the use of the CLCs by the FFP participants.

Another methodological issue that may have hampered this research was in the selection of participants. Perhaps, by examining the reflections of the broad cross-section of FFP participants that agreed to participate in this study, the presence of the CLCs was muted in the data. Another approach, one that considered the focus on system-leaders of the OLF, would be to only gather data from the FFP participants who occupied these positions in the WRDSB.

### **Traces of Distributed Leadership**

The second conclusion to emerge from this study was that traces of leadership interactions, as they relate to Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond's (2004) theory of distributed leadership, appeared to be present in the data even though the methodology used was not designed to collect data compatible with this theory. As discussed in Chapter Two, leadership interactions are defined as the influential interdependencies that are shared between leaders, followers, and

their situation; with the focus of this theory on the enactment of leadership tasks and how they are “...stretched over the social and situational contexts of the school” (Spillane et al., 2004, p.5). It appears that hints of the social and situational distributions of leadership were present in the transcript responses of FFP participants.

### ***Social distributions of Leadership Practice in the FFP***

As described in Chapter Three, Spillane *et al* (2003) identify that interdependencies between leaders, followers, and situation are at the core of the social distributions of leadership and this appears to have been illustrated in the professional interactions of the FFP participants. For example, the leadership task of defining and communicating the vision of the FFP involved a linear process that progressed through the organizational hierarchy of the WRDSB that was present in the FFP. Members of the SAAG, particularly NSA-1, were described as setting in motion the discussions during the Initiation Phase that led to the drafting of the system memo which was circulated amongst secondary schools to solicit participants. Once volunteers were identified, members of the PLG were tasked with facilitating the FFP, organizing meetings and managing resources that were made available by the SAAG. For example, the SAAG approved budget requests made by the PLG such as funding for release time to allow FFP teachers to attend FFP meetings.

Reciprocal interdependencies are created by the “...inter-play between two or more actors” (Spillane, 2004, p.17). This type of interdependency is perhaps best illustrated by the dependence of leaders on followers. As discussed in the Chapter Four, the teacher-only meeting appears to have brought to the surface, and reinforced, a lack of trust creating what appeared to be reciprocal interdependency amongst the teachers, but not all FFP participants. T-2 describes how the productivity in teacher-only meeting differed from previous meetings:

When we finally did get just the teachers together I thought it was so effective at the

meeting because we got down to I think the real questions. Things about, “what's it going to look like? How far are we going to push? How are we going to actually implement here? What are our real challenges? What is this going to look like? Who's going to take lead in what?” Those questions... I'm not sure we really broached those enough [before the teacher-only meeting]. And it's funny because I know in talking to some of the other teachers at that meeting where we were given just the time, the first half was just dynamite and then the consultants showed up.

Despite this cleavage between the teachers and the non-teachers rooted in their divergent priorities, both groups exhibited reciprocal interdependency strongly influenced by their social exchanges of power. In other words, both groups needed each other in the execution of the business of the FFP and received social rewards from these exchanges.

If a group of individuals who work on a collective task regularly follow the good suggestions of one of them, thus marking him as their leader, a mixed situation exists. Carrying out his suggestions that advance their work benefits the entire group, those who accept them as well as the one who gives them. They are apt to continue to follow his lead, not only because his suggestions are respected, but also because the others become obligated to him for his contribution to their welfare, enabling him to make them accede to his wishes even when this is not to their immediate advantage. (Blau, 1964, p.120)

For the teachers, despite their complaints about the constraining effect of the non-teachers, the opportunity to associate with them provided a social reward that compelled them to comply with their directives, reinforcing the superordinate status of the non-teachers. Blau (1964) observes that “the fact that many people find it rewarding to associate with superiors means that those of superior status can furnish rewards, and expect a return for them, merely by associating with others of lower status” (p.121). This seems particularly true for NSA-1, whose mere presence in FFP meetings was interpreted as a signal of support by various participants.

However, as much as these social rewards apply to the teacher participants, they would equally apply to the non-teachers. Blau (1964) notes “superiors obtain much satisfaction from associating with inferiors, who usually look up to them and follow their suggestions” (p.123).

The aspiration that the FFP was to become a catalyst for broader system change, as indicated by



various non-teacher participants' goal descriptions, suggests the benefit they accrued was in being associated with the FFP. Therefore, it appears that the diverse membership of the FFP allowed for participants occupying low-status and high-status positions to secure social rewards from each other.

### ***Situational distributions of leadership practice in the FFP***

The interdependency of leaders and followers with their situation is another core element of a distributed perspective of leadership. Situation "...is both constitutive *of* and constituted *in* leadership activity" (author's emphasis, Spillane et al. 2004, p.21). In other words, leadership is both constrained and enabled by the situation in which it occurs and this seems to have been illustrated in the participant reflections related to the core task of the FFP participants.

The complex and uncertain nature of the task of building the FFP core curriculum appears to have acted as both a constraint and a constitutive element of leadership in the FFP. Emblematic of an adaptive challenge, this constrained the ability of leaders to monitor followers. For example, a specific factor that contributed to task uncertainty was how the non-teachers communicated the importance of the Ministry curriculum. It appears that NSA-1's encouragement to "push the boundaries" was interpreted by some teachers as license to do whatever they wanted. T-5 believed that "[NSA-1] was sort of making these, 'by the way you have carte blanche' kind of comments." This was countered by other non-teachers who communicated that the Ministry curriculum was a "non-negotiable" aspect of the FFP. T-5 describes the tension that was created by these different messages:

[NSA-3] in learning services could be far more, the same day in fact, came down and was pulling back immediately...because the real question was: "do we need to cross-reference all this with curriculum expectations?" And [NSA-1] said, "no, just do it". And [NSA-3] was like, "Urgh! No, we want that all the way through."

The tension between these two positions served to enhance the complexity and uncertainty

surrounding the task of creating the FFP core curriculum. This tension seems to have been exacerbated by the absence of a clearly designated leader who could clarify the “official” FFP position on the role of the curriculum. The result appears to have led the teachers to turn inwards, developing their own strategies to complete the task of creating the FFP core curriculum and constraining the influence of the non-teachers.

## Implications

### Implications for Policy

The Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS) was developed in response to the Ministry of Education’s internal research into the leadership practices of Ontario’s non-teachers. Based on the information gathered during this process, “the ministry decided that a more systematic approach to supporting and developing leadership in schools and districts was required” (Ontario, 2010c, p. 6). From inception, it appears that the OLS was deliberately designed to be an outcomes-oriented guide for practitioners to follow.

[The Ontario Leadership Strategy’s] goals are to attract, retain, and develop people for school and district leadership roles so that schools are led by passionate, skilled educators with the *capacity to effectively support* [emphasis added] the province’s overall education strategy. (Ontario, 2010c, p. 6)

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) emerged as the “foundation” of the OLS, “describing what good leadership looks like” by making “explicit the connections between *leaders’ influence* [emphasis added] and the quality of teaching and learning in schools” (Ontario, 2010c, p.6).

Rooted in Leithwood et al’s (2004) contention that leadership is second only to instruction for its impact on student achievement, the OLF identified the CLCs as fundamental practices for leaders in Ontario’s publicly funded education system. Framed as a description of what effective leaders do, the CLCs have become the hub of the Ministry’s efforts to, in Levin and Fullan’s

(2008) words, “build capacity” related to school and system leadership in Ontario. This capacity is explicitly linked to the Ministry goal of increasing student achievement.

While not intended as a critique, this study demonstrated that the emergence of the CLCs of the OLF has been, at best, nascent in the context of the FFP. While the data revealed some traces of the CLCs, as the analysis proceeded, it became apparent that they were not embedded in the practices of members of the FFP, suggesting the accuracy of the findings from the Ministry’s own pre-OLF research that CLCs as a way of improving educational leadership were not widely present in this group. This finding suggests that Ministry efforts to implement the OLF, and particularly the CLCs, across Ontario schools have been slow — or that the WRDSB FFP experience was atypical.

Another issue that emerged with the OLF is the apparent endorsement of a “traditional” model of leadership, with little acknowledgement of a leader’s effect beyond intended outcomes (Ryan, 2005). In other words, the focus resides in expected outcomes with little account of the interactive aspects of leadership which occur among various aspects of a leadership context.

This finding leaves the CLCs open to Gronn’s (1996) critique of outcome-based leadership theories that overemphasize organizational structure, and underemphasize context and process. For example, the CLCs assume rationality in the goals that leaders develop but this ignores the relational and situational contexts in which they occur. Participants’ identification of collaboration as a goal was widely held to be a positive attribute of the FFP, but this identification appeared to be driven by the push of feeling overwhelmed and eventually diminished as the first cycle ended. Following from the underestimation of context and process, the CLCs completely ignore power as an exchange process within educational hierarchies. In short, the CLCs make no allowance for influence of situation or followers, with the exception of

CLC 5 Engaging in in Courageous Conversations, viewing non-designated leaders as largely passive in the enactment of leadership.

Using Richmon and Allison's term, the OLF and CLCs appear to exhibit the characteristics of an "autonomous" theory of leadership with its focus on the individual and a single set of leadership variables (2003, p. 43). This view implies a "rudimentary and parochial" approach to understanding leadership which "converges solely on the leader as a source of insight into leadership" (Richmon & Allison, 2003, p. 43).

Spillane *et al's* (2004) critique of autonomous leadership theories and their impoverished explanation of leadership enactment also appear to ring true for the CLCs. With a focus on "system leaders" and by defining the CLCs as "good" leadership, the CLCs ignore the interdependencies at the core of distributed leadership theory (Ontario, 2010c). Indeed, with the exception of the Engaging in Courageous Conversations document, the CLC documents do not recognize any interactivity between leaders and their followers, and ignore the influence of situation in the enactment of leadership. In other words, in this conceptual approach leadership is both constrained and enabled by the situation in which it occurs. For example, it appears that the complex nature of the task of designing the FFP core curriculum served to constrain the leadership of the non-teachers but enabled it to emerge, to some degree, within the teacher group. This emerged in the data as a marked difference between the two groups.

It is clear that at least the first four CLCs do not account for the interdependencies suggested by distributed leadership theories as the core elements of leadership practice. Therefore, if the Ministry really believes in the central importance of leadership in improving student outcomes, it would be incumbent upon Ministry policy makers to acknowledge the current state of leadership theory. This could be done in two ways, first by being less prescriptive in their

approach and definition of leadership in Ontario's educational contexts. Second, by accommodating more recent theoretical approaches to leadership, in particular those which highlight its distributed properties.

Most noticeably what was lacking from the CLC documents was a method of appraisal. While each CLC was defined and described in detail, with the accompanying literature to justify its importance, finding its locale in the context where it would be applied and assessing if it was adequate for its context was not incorporated in the OLF literature. The *Ideas into Action* article for Setting Goals was likely the most specific in its attempt to define and describe a CLC by specifically providing criteria for assessing goals, and therefore the presence of that CLC. However, the focus of the document is largely centered on justifying the need and usefulness of setting goals but doesn't identify the context where it should occur.

The second aspect of appraisal that appears to be missing from the CLCs is a method of assessment. While each CLC is described in detail, empirical tools for assessing the attainment of each CLC are absent or difficult-to-develop. For example, the concept of culture change is foundational to the CLC Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities. Heifetz and Linsky's (2002) concepts of technical and adaptive change are used to describe the challenges inherent in attempts to transform a culture. "Problem definition" and "solution" identification are described as "requiring learning" with the "locus of work" being "stakeholders" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p. 3). What appears to be missing is a process or framework for mapping how stakeholders would identify problems, develop appropriate solutions, and assess the success of their response. Another example illustrating the absence of any consideration of the assessment of the CLCs is provided by the importance given to "relational trust" in promoting collaborative learning communities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p. 4).

Trust is a key element of organizational culture that is often taken for granted, and routinely overlooked. High trust, [Herold and Fedor (2008)] assert, is associated with improved performance on a variety of measures such as student achievement and parent engagement. Low trust is associated with stress and anxiety... Trust, then, is required for the development of effective collaborative learning cultures, and a factor that must be considered. Although leaders can't be solely responsible for creating a trusting culture in the school or district, their words and actions set the tone and lay the foundation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p.5).

By identifying trust as a key element for promoting a collaborative learning culture and noting that it is beyond the complete control of leaders, simply so identifying it begs the question of how one would differentiate between instances of "high" or "low" trust and if there is enough to facilitate this CLC. This appears to be a prime example of the need for some means of assessment, for without a sense of the presence of relational trust, how could a leader be able to engage in this CLC?

What is apparent is that there is the need for more critical reflection and comment on the roots and coherence of the OLF and the justification for the CLCs as presented in it. This critical reflection appears to have begun with Leithwood's (2012) latest re-examination of the OLF, but needs to be undertaken by those not directly responsible for the policy's inception. In other words, there is a need for a courageous conversation about the CLCs.

### **Implications for Practice**

Educational leadership is a tremendously difficult task, often requiring practitioners to invoke actions that suggest it is more of an art than a science. What seems evident in these contexts is that formal leaders require adequate autonomy in order to adapt their responses to their circumstances. But they also require sufficient grounding in both academic and experiential knowledge of effective leadership. In short, what is needed is the development of autonomous professionalism amongst school and system leaders. However, the message embedded in the OLF and CLCs, appears to implicitly emphasize subordination and submission over autonomy and initiative.

The findings revealed the presence of a cultural divide between teachers and non-teachers which hampered the leadership of the latter. Another implication of this research would then be the more deliberate promotion of a collaborative culture between these two groups that is informed by distributed leadership theory and adaptable to the unique characteristics of local contexts. For example, greater engagement and representation of teachers in system initiatives would provide opportunities to bridge this culture gap. In the context of the FFP, adding a teacher representative to the Project Lead Group (PLG) would have allowed for more multidirectional feedback between the teachers and non-teacher groups. Such feedback might mitigate the constraint of differing perspectives inherent in organizational hierarchies by increasing communication. NCS-3 described the influence that different positions had on how participants communicated,

[NSA-1] is a very eloquent man, but he speaks superintendent language, right and then even here in Learning Services everyone speaks of bit of different language than even ITS and ... then the teachers were sort of coming into all of that with their own unique perspectives too.

It is no surprise that teachers and non-teachers have different priorities and concerns that reflect their position within the organization, but this needs to be identified and leveraged by leaders to be most effective.

### **Implications for Research**

The conclusions of this research demonstrate that further study — as well as critical philosophical analysis for internal coherence — is needed with regards to the OLF and the CLCs. First, further study needs to explore the ways and degrees in and to which these policies have permeated the consciousness of their target audience, principals and superintendents. Second, subsequent research ought to examine the distributed characteristics of leadership practice related to the implementation of the CLCs. Below, I propose a framework to achieve this based on Sun and Allison's (2005) theory of distributed leadership.

Figure 6, the “Leadership Interaction Analysis Matrix”, provides a structure to identify and map the emergence of the CLCs while accounting for the distributed characteristics of leadership enactment.

**Figure 6 - Leadership Interaction Analysis Matrix**

Leadership Distribution CLCs	Social (joint/ interdependent)	Environmental (tools, artifacts, organizational structures)	Cultural (shared norms, values, beliefs, ideas)
<b>Setting Goals</b>  <b>Aligning Resources with Priorities</b>  <b>Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures</b>  <b>Using Data</b>  <b>Engaging in Courageous Conversations</b>			

The strength of this model is in the consideration of the multiple ways in which leadership, as defined by the CLCs, can be stretched across an organization. These multiple “distributions”, social, environmental, and cultural, allow for a more precise identification of an interaction and a comprehensive description of the subject group.

The social distribution of leadership considers “objects, means, and ends shared by individuals” (Sun & Alison, 2005, p. 12). It considers the network of relations that exist between individuals occupying various roles in an organization. It assumes that the division of labour and the shared understandings of individuals will demonstrate the manner in which leadership is distributed within the organization. The authors also propose two types of social distribution: joint, and interdependent. The former refers to leadership interactions that are cooperative and/or



sequential, while the latter refers to reciprocal, but separate actions of individuals (Sun & Allison, 2005, p.13). The common theme shared by both types of social distribution is the pursuit of common goals and/or purpose (Sun & Allison, 2005, p.14). For example, identifying goals and purpose would allow for the assessment of whether they were shared and how this sharing influenced, or was influenced by, the leadership interactions within the subject group.

The environmental distribution of leadership considers “tools, artifacts, and the structural properties of an organization” (Sun & Allison, 2005, p.13). Tools and artifacts can be both tangible and symbolic:

Tools and symbols are major kinds of artifacts designed by individuals or sequentially employed by multiple actors to enable particular activities. Tools can be material artifacts (e.g. memos, meeting agendas, and computer programs for analyzing test data) or abstract artifacts (e.g. the temporal arrangement of the workday and division of labor)... Symbols are elements of language-based and other meaning attributing systems such as rhetorical strategies, vocabularies and gestures. (p.14)

Structural properties are described as “...enabling, constraining and/or informing human actions” (p.14). Taken together, tools, symbols, and the formal power arrangements inherent in organizational structures provide the context in which individuals interact. This distribution of leadership considers the interactions that participants have with the aspects of their situation and how they provide instances of leadership to the organization. For example, in the context of FFP, the resources that were made available to the group, the technological tools that were selected, and the processes that were evident in their selection and use would provide information on how leadership was distributed in the environment of FFP. This type of distribution would be particularly relevant for investigating the enactment of the CLCs, Aligning Resources with Priorities and Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures. Furthermore, accounting for the power exchange relationships that are embedded in the interactions of

individuals and groups will help address the influence of organizational hierarchies on the enactment of leadership.

The cultural distribution of leadership considers “the interactive web of social interactions embedded in specialized cultural contexts and elements” (Sun & Allison, 2005, p. 15).

Organizational leadership will be a product of the culture, reflected in dominant “norms, beliefs, and purposes that emerge through culturally framed interactions over time and become embedded in shared understandings instantiated in stories, myths and individual dispositions” (Sun & Allison, 2005, p.15). Sun and Allison (2005) refer to institutional theory and the role that leadership will have on the interactions of organizational members, specifically how formal leaders can influence a culture. “Actions of positional leaders can also transform or reinforce shared values and beliefs that can enhance or erode commitment or solidarity, and thus affect coordinated work and individual effort” (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995 quoted in Sun & Alison, 2005, p.15). Following from this, the symbolic nature of leadership appears to be subsumed by this distribution and therefore it seems reasonable that it could also accommodate Rottman’s (2007) concept of leading ideas and Burns’ (1978) opinion leaders. In other words, how formal leaders interact with the subordinate members of an organization, through their shaping of a shared culture by the ideas they advance, rather than the positional power they hold, will have an impact on the way leadership is distributed.

Sun and Allison provide a robust and effective framework for defining and evaluating the nature of the leadership interactions that can be incorporated with the CLCs. This would allow future research to account for the extent that individuals are aware of the CLCs and the distributed properties required for their enactment. It is robust in the sense that the three distributions allow for a rich description of the organization from multiple perspectives. An underlying trend

in the distributed leadership literature, and the broader educational leadership literature, is a focus on the “how” of leadership rather than the “what.” This framework allows for the description of the “how” by revealing the extent that participant interactions illustrate the CLCs and how they are distributed across an organization.

### **Final words**

Leadership is a complex and multifaceted concept that is difficult to understand. Yet, it is a common process that occurs in formal and spontaneous social contexts among individuals and between and among groups as they interact with each other and their situations. This research has demonstrated how the multidimensional nature of leadership can present a challenge to policy makers as they endeavor to lead their organizations, in this instance the publicly-funded education system of Ontario. The Ministry of Education developed the OLF and the CLCs with the clear intention of improving student outcomes; however, the impact of such policies appears to be diminished by their narrow conception of the locus and definition of leadership practice. In order to leverage Leithwood *et al's* (2004) contention that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in its effect on student outcomes, the challenge for educational policy in Ontario is to account for the interactive aspects of leadership embodied in distributed leadership theory while presenting an accessible framework for formal education leaders to mobilize the potential of all organizational members. If this is achieved, educational leadership in Ontario will be most effective by realizing its multiplicative effects across the entire system, at the moment it is most needed.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A - Futures Forum Chronology

#### Phase One - Program Initiation

<b>May 20 2009</b>	First meeting between group that conceptualized FFP
<b>June</b>	FFP Steering Committee meeting with ITS
<b>Aug – Sept</b>	Communitech Advisory Committee meetings
<b>Sept 10</b>	FFP Steering Committee meeting – “Waterloo Region Learning Futures Forum – Classroom”
<b>Sept 24</b>	FFP Steering Committee meeting – “Waterloo Region DSB Professional Learning Partnership Planning Meeting”
<b>Oct 7</b>	FFP Steering Committee meeting – “Waterloo Region Learning Futures Forum – Classroom”
<b>Nov 25 2010</b>	WRDSB & Communitech meeting – “Learning – Futures Forum”
<b>Jan 20, 2010</b>	FFP Steering Committee – “Learning – Futures Forum”
<b>Feb</b>	Budget submission for 2010-2011 school year
<b>Mar 3</b>	WRDSB & Communitech meeting – “Learning – Futures Forum”
<b>March 31</b>	WRDSB Memorandum “Grades 10 Futures Forum Project: 2010-2011” sent to principals

#### Phase Two - Planning

<b>June 15</b>	FFP Planning Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introductions, Background &amp; Overview</li><li>• Status of Participants</li><li>• Leadership – Ownership</li><li>• Project Components – Program Design, Professional Learning, PLP Component</li></ul>
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- June 22** FFP Planning Meeting
- Introductions, Background & Overview
  - Reflections and Networking I – parking lot questions
  - Effectiveness and Accountability – metrics
  - Course Design – gears powerpoint and recruitment for summer curriculum writing team
  - Reflections and Networking II – resources for next year
  - Technology and Tools – available technology
  - Professional Learning – PLP
  - Classroom Support – technology plans
  - Next Steps and Timelines
- July-Aug** Classroom set up
- Summer Curriculum Writing Team (2 Meetings)
  - FFP Teacher PD – “Skill Development – Web Tools, Tech Resources”
  - Development of Perceptual Data Instruments
- Sept 24** FFP Planning Meeting
- Updates – ITS, Data Collection, Learning Services
  - Overview of Inquiry Based Learning
  - Overview of FFP curriculum planning from Summer Curriculum Writing Team
- Oct 15** FFP Teacher PD – “Introduction to PLP environment”
- PLP Online Social Network activity begins and is ongoing until end of FFP
- Oct 29** FFP Planning Meeting
- Emphasis: Assessment, Evaluation & Reporting

- Nov 26** FFP Planning Meeting
- Emphasis: Course of Study – Program Design
- Dec 10** FFP Planning Meeting – (Westmount G.C.C.)
- Teachers and VPs meet separately during AM
  - Whole team planning in afternoon
- 2011**
- Jan 14** Final FFP Planning Meeting
- Emphasis: Course start-up
- Phase Three – Implementation**
- Feb 25** Networking Meeting
- Emphasis: Reflections, Problem Solving
- March 4** Ontario Comprehensive Assessment (OCA) Marking Meeting
- March 11** FFP Planning Meeting
- Teacher retreat
- April 1** Networking Meeting
- April 8** FFP Workshops
- Teacher only meeting
  - Feedback provided on various EEWT being used in classrooms
- May 6** Networking Meeting
- PLP Action Research Project data gathering
- May 20** PLP Wrap-up Meeting
- June 8** FFP Feedback Meeting
- FFP Cycle One and Two participants met to discuss FFP format
  - PLG facilitated question/answer session that focused on reviewing successes and failures of Cycle One
- June 21** Semester and School Year Ends
- First FFP Cycle Ends

## Appendix B - Interview Questions and Exemplar Answers

### Interview Questions Categorized by CLC:

#### Setting Goals

What is the purpose of the FFP?

- What were the goals of the FFP as you understood them?
- Probe for when, who initiated the discussions and how, how much time spent, and results.

#### Aligning resources with priorities

What resources were made available to FFP participants? How were they allocated and used?

- Were resources used to support FFP goals? If so, how?
- Probe for types of resources, who made allocation decisions and how they were linked to overall FFP goals.

#### Promoting collaborative learning cultures

Did the members of the FFP work well together?

- Why do you think that was the case?
- Probe for specifics and examples of collaboration with a collective focus on achieving FFP goals.

#### Using data

What kinds of information were considered by the FFP to make decisions?

- Where did this information come from and how was it used?
- Probe for some specific types and sources of data used to identify strengths and weaknesses to support decision making in the classroom and across the FFP

#### Engaging in courageous conversations

Were there any difficult moments or confrontations as the FFP did its work?

- How were they resolved?
- Probe for instances of conversations that led to innovation that challenged collective assumptions to improve

### Interview Question Exemplar Answers:

#### Setting Goals

Participants will:

- Identify goals that are strategic, specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound (SMART)
- Be aware of specific FFP goals:
  - Increasing student success rates in grade 10 credit accumulation specifically, for board identified target groups particularly boys.
  - Increasing central, school wide and teachers' knowledge and expertise in using technology to engage students and promote learning
  - Increasing effective and engaging use of WRDSB research-based strategies, tools and techniques for improving written communication (eg. Student exemplars, anchor charts, non-fiction writing, graphic organizers/frameworks, open-ended critical questions)
- Indicate that FFP participants had a role in setting goals

#### **Aligning resources with priorities**

Participants will:

- Make connections between specific FFP goals and the use of various resources (face to face teacher PD, online teacher PD – PLP OSN, time, electronic devices, online tools, etc.)

#### **Promoting collaborative learning cultures**

Participants will:

- Describe practices which "... [engage] the employee's capacities, increases the employee's enthusiasm and optimism, reduces frustration, transmits a sense of mission and indirectly increases performance" (Leithwood, p.26, 2004)
- Describe "...leadership practices that significantly and positively help develop people [including] offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support" (Leithwood, p.26, 2004)
- "...emphasize the importance of mutual or two-way accountability between leaders and participants in different roles and levels of an organization (Leithwood, p.31, 2004)
- Describe "...shared norms and values; a focus on student learning; deprivatized practice; reflective dialogue; and collaboration" between FFP participants (Leithwood, p. 68, 2004)
- Indicate high levels of trust between FFP participants

### **Using data**

Participants will:

- Describe specific types of data gathering activities and the use of data for decision making through the identification of patterns, trends, strengths and weaknesses in student achievement

### **Engaging in courageous conversations**

Participants will:

- Identify specific instances where conversations took place that challenged current practices and led to innovation
- Describe opportunities for and process of providing feedback to program participants
- Describe specific actions that were undertaken in response to feedback that was purposefully solicited
- Indicate that various FFP participants had a role in providing feedback

## **Appendix C - List of Reviewed Futures Forum Project Documents**

n.d. = no date indicated on document

Document - "Futures Forum Project: Review of PD sessions" (n.d.)

Document - "Timelines: Futures Forum 2010-2011" (n.d.)

Email – From: Jim Woolley To: Mark Harper Subject: Re: Futures Forum Meeting (September 14, 2009)

Meeting Agenda – "Waterloo Region Learning Futures Forum – Classroom" (September 10, 2009)

Meeting Agenda – "Waterloo Region DSB Professional Learning Partnership Planning Meeting" (September 24, 2009)

Email – From: Lori Willsted To: [SAAG Members] Subject: Futures Forum Meeting (September 28, 2009)

Meeting Agenda – "Waterloo Region Learning Futures Forum – Classroom" (October 7, 2009)

Meeting Agenda – "Learning – Futures Forum Meeting" (November 25, 2009)

"Tomorrow School" (short story written by Ken Whytock)

Meeting Agenda – "Waterloo Region Learning Futures Forum – Classroom" (November 25, 2009)

Meeting Agenda – "Learning – Futures Forum" (January 20, 2010)

Meeting Agenda – "Learning – Futures Forum" (March 3, 2010)

Proposal Document, FFP Description, Participant Application – "Futures Forum Learning Project 2010-2011" (March 2010)

Proposal Document – "Futures Forum Professional Learning Proposal" (2010-2011)

Meeting Agenda – "WRDSB Futures Forum Project Meeting: 2010-2011 Agenda" (June 15, 2010)

Meeting Agenda – "Futures Forum 2010-2011: Introductory Meeting Agenda" (June 22, 2010)

Document – "Parking Lot Questions – Futures Forum: from June 22, 2010" (n.d.)

Document – "The Metrics of the Futures Forum Project (FFP)" Draft (n.d.)

Document – "Futures Forum Project: Course Outline: Draft Version 1 – Summer 2010" (August 2010)

Meeting Agenda – "Futures Forum Steering Team Meeting

## Appendix D - Initial Survey Questions for FFP Participants

If response options are fixed, they are provided in brackets after each question.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your gender? (Male/Female)
3. What school do you teach at?
4. Identify your role within Futures Forum: (classroom teacher, vice-principal, learning services consultant, ITS staff, Senior Administrator, Other)
5. Indicate the number of years you have been employed in public education.
6. Indicate the number of years you have taught Civics.
7. Indicate the number of years you have taught Careers.
8. Indicate the number of years you have taught Gr 10 Academic English.
9. Which option best describes your reason for participating in FFP? (volunteered or assigned)

## Curriculum Vitae

<b>Name:</b>	Daniel John Ballantyne
<b>Post-secondary Education and Degrees:</b>	University of Guelph Guelph, Ontario, Canada 1996-2000 B.Comm.
	The University of New South Wales Sydney, New South Wales, Australia 2002 Grad.Dip.Ed.
<b>Related Work Experience</b>	Teacher Waterloo Region District School Board 2003-Present