LEADERSHIP FROM WITHIN: A PERSONAL JOURNEY IN SUPPORT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Dedication

To my parents – Thank you for your continued support and encouragement. I am forever grateful to have such incredible parents.

To my beautiful children – You bless me with your love and laughter every day.

To my husband – You are my rock. You see in me what I sometimes fail to see. Your endless love and support helps me to achieve my dreams. Te amo.

Abstract

The classrooms and schools of today are more diverse than ever. A cultural shift in the education system is required for sustainable change to support an inclusive education system. School leadership needs to adapt to the ever-changing demands of society as we move forward into a new era of learning. Leaders require a flexible and adaptive nature that places student learning at the forefront and establishes collaborative relationships among teachers and with the school community. Teachers require leaders and districts that build their capacity enabling them to apply successful teaching knowledge, skills, and attitudes to support the diversity of needs in classrooms. These school leaders and districts must also be willing to acknowledge and celebrate teaching strengths and leadership potential. Students require an education system that provides them with the support they need to achieve their goals of postsecondary education and workforce entry. With education reform in the province of Alberta well under way, there may be some challenging times ahead. With the right leadership development and teacher supports in place, the province stands to accomplish its goal of establishing an inclusive education system that meets the diversity of learner needs in our province.

Acknowledgements

When this journey began, I felt truly grateful to have such supportive friends and family. What I did not expect is how many more wonderful people would come into my life as a result of this master's program. To each and every one of you – you have blessed me with your gifts and talents and I thank you for sharing a part of you with me.

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Finally, to my mentor and friend, Frank Durante - throughout this journey your passion for people and your dedication to this profession inspired me to be a better person. Your wise words grounded me on more than one occasion and helped me to gain perspective on the role of leadership and its potential to positively impact learning for teachers and students. Thank you for taking the time to be my teacher. I dream of one day inspiring others as you have inspired me.

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Introduction

The purpose of all schools is to provide children with the best education possible (Thomazet, 2009). It is unlikely that you will ever meet a teacher that would argue this purpose. However, for many decades in education, the struggle has been to find the best method possible to achieve this - especially for students identified with special needs. Students with physical, cognitive, linguistic, medical, and behavioural challenges have undergone a myriad of endeavours aimed at achieving academic success, including segregated schools and classrooms. With the focus on the rights of the individual child, countries around the world have worked to create legislation in education that supports these rights, including United States education laws and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) *Salamanca Statement*, which we will examine further in this paper (Ferguson, 2008; Thomazet, 2009). The gradual shift in the last few decades towards inclusive education is finally beginning to affect the education system in Alberta. What follows is a brief examination of the history of inclusive education and a closer look at leadership and instructional practices that support an inclusive education system.

Getting Personal

Several years ago, as I was finishing my education degree I was also beginning my career, teaching summer school in an inner-city elementary school. This summer school program was specifically designed and funded under the premise that it would offer students a safe and supervised location with educational opportunity and structure. The students were mainly high needs learners including limited English language skills,

learning difficulties, and behavioral challenges, often accompanied by histories of trauma and limited parental involvement.

My colleague and I were fortunate enough to have the energy and enthusiasm that comes as new graduates ready to take on the world of education. With the guidance and support of mentor teachers, we designed a summer curriculum that was hands on, interactive, highly engaging, and still reinforced basic literacy and numeracy skills. The job was as equally exhausting as it was rewarding. Although I knew there were an exceptionally diverse set of needs within this setting, I naively assumed that regardless of where my teaching career would take me, schools and teachers would always be as supportive and diligent as they were within this school. As I gained more experience, teaching both locally and abroad, I learned this was not always the case.

Throughout the next decade of my teaching career, I developed a strong need to seek out and champion the underdogs of schools and classrooms. Whether they were struggling with emotional needs, lack of literacy skills, learning disabilities, or behavioural issues, I somehow felt they were not always getting the chance they deserved to be successful in school. I observed several factors that influenced their lack of success and were a result of the traditional structure of education. Elmore as cited in Ferguson (2008) refers to this as the "core of education practice". This core includes:

> How teachers understand the nature of knowledge and the student's role in learning, and how these ideas about knowledge and learning are manifested in teaching and classwork. The "core" also includes structural arrangements of schools, such as the physical layout of classrooms, student grouping practices, teachers' responsibilities for groups of students, and relations among teachers in

> their work with students, as well as processes for assessing student learning and communicating it to students, teachers, parents, administrators and other interested parties. (p. 113)

On an international level, educational reform was focussing on this very issue – improving education for students with special needs. I felt like a coach with a star line-up before the big game. I thought, if governments and other stakeholders in education were recognizing the need for change, then special education students were about to get the chance to establish themselves as equal opportunity learners in our education system. Would this new focus on special education also bring about support for teachers to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential to improving teaching and learning for special education students (i.e. diverse learners)? Would school leaders recognize their own need to develop qualities that support teaching and learning in an inclusive education system?

The Move towards Inclusive Education

Throughout the last 20 years, several countries around the world have re-evaluated the educational opportunities and experiences of special needs students. The release of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Salamanca Statement in 1994 called for "major reform of the ordinary school" (p. iv) that gave consideration to "fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education" (p. iii). Although inclusive education had been hinted at a decade or so earlier, the Salamanca Statement and its accompanying Framework for Action caused ripples in special education around the world. Countries that were already enduring education reform began to closely examine the policies and

strategies in place to support students with special needs and provide them equal opportunity rights in education (Ferguson, 2008). International trends show the long road that inclusive education advocates have had to travel in order to achieve not success, but progress towards inclusive education.

It is interesting to note that, in Canada, throughout the process of reform leading to inclusive education, teachers were wary to accept government directive, especially during the 1990's when tensions between government and teacher's associations were running high and budgeted funding to education was strained. Eventually, however, teachers began to accept, and even advocate for, inclusion though they still voiced concerns over funding, staffing, professional development, and workload (Winzer and Mazurek, 2011).

A Glimpse at International Education Reform Strategies

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, countries such as England and the United States began to develop strategies for change in their education systems to support increased student achievement. In 1998, the British government developed an Action Plan to improve accessibility and achievement for students with special needs (Callias, 2001). England also developed the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NLNS) to increase achievement, especially in schools that were particularly weak in these areas. Although there is some debate as to the sustainability and proficiency of this strategy, Fullan (2009) calls it a "promising initiative which gave us an opportunity to assess specific components of a whole system strategy" (p. 105).

In 2001, the United States Department of Education instituted the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Its policies address a wide range of aspects of education reform

including academic achievement, financial support, early literacy, assessment, early intervention strategies, dropout prevention initiatives, teacher training and recruitment, and accountability (United States Department of Education, 2001). Fullan (2009) criticizes the NCLB Act for its lack of widespread initiatives that support systemic change. Rather, the NCLB Act resulted in some pockets of significant change across the country and an increased awareness of the need to do more to close the achievement gap. The current American President, President Obama and his administration plan to improve on the NCLB Act and create opportunity for a higher overall success rate for students nationally.

Regardless of these, and likely many other countries, attempts at education reform to improve achievement, Leithwood (2010) states that "reducing disparities or gaps in the achievement of students from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds has proven to be largely elusive" (p. 246). Winzer and Mazurek (2011) suggest that "meaningful reform cannot be achieved without ownership by the teachers who are called upon to implement the changes and by the associations that represent their collective voice" (p. 1). However, it appears that the province of Alberta has shown continued success in leading change in education that consistently and extensively improves the academic success of all learners, perhaps in part due to a supportive collective of teachers who are willing to make changes to traditional ways in their schools. In addition, Alberta Education focuses on educational change initiatives that are province-wide or systemic. As Fullan (2002) points out, "sustained improvement of schools is not possible unless the whole system is moving forward" (p. 17).

Focusing on Alberta

Alberta's focus on the learning needs of special education students is linked to several government documents, particularly the *School Act* (2011) and the appendix *Standards for Special Education*, *amended June 2004* (Ministerial Order #015/2004). These documents define special education students as "being in need of special education programming because of their behavioural, communicational, intellectual, learning or physical characteristics or a combination of those characteristics" (Ministerial Order #015/2004, 2004, p. 5) and refer to inclusive settings as a primary consideration for placement.

In the late 1990s, the provincial government launched the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). The plan for AISI was to provide funds to school districts specifically allocated for successfully submitted proposals based on projects that were meant to improve teaching and learning (Alberta Education, n.d.a). AISI focuses on the ideas of capacity building and accountability. Data for each project is readily available to the public creating a transparency that supports accountability.

Realizing that there was still work to be done to close the achievement gap and improve education for all students in Alberta, in late 2007 the Government of Alberta launched a "comprehensive review of school jurisdictional practices with respect to students with severe disabilities" (Alberta Education, 2010b). A consultation occurred with Albertans from all stakeholder groups in education including students, parents, teachers, medical professionals, and district level staff. The review uncovered the need to equalize and improve education for all students in Alberta and resulted in three goals (curriculum, capacity, and collaboration) along with several recommendations. The

goals, along with the recommendations, were meant to impact all areas of education including improving teacher and leadership development, changing curriculum content and delivery, and working with communities and stakeholders to build support for students, families, and schools (Alberta Education, 2009). Most importantly, the initiative highlighted inclusive education.

In the fall of 2010, the Alberta Government launched the implementation of an inclusive education system and renamed *Setting the Direction* to *Action on Inclusion* to reflect the change (Alberta Education, n.d.b). The inclusive education initiative was a response to the proposed strategies of *Setting the Direction* (2009). No longer will you find the term "special education" used. Rather, wording has been changed and special education students are referred to as students with diverse learner needs or diverse learners. The initiative continues to focus on capacity building and collaboration. Capacity building in this new initiative suggests the importance of learning coaches in schools to support teachers, the change from Individualized Program Plans to an Inclusive Education Planning Tool, and a spotlight on differentiated instruction. Collaboration addresses the need for a team approach where parents and families along with local supports and services become involved in supporting student's success (Alberta Education, n.d.b).

It would appear that the Government of Alberta has created an optimal environment to launch a successful inclusive education system. After five years of working towards developing an inclusive education system, have these initiatives affected the average school in Alberta in a positive way? The government does not appear to be as transparent with their data in this instance as they are in the case of AISI. The initial

enthusiasm over these initiatives has wavered somewhat as the realities in Alberta classrooms remain mostly unchanged. However, like reform strategies such as NCLB, there are many pockets of success. Are these pockets enough to effect long term systemic change? Are we building capacity and leadership that is widespread enough to support this change?

Reality of Inclusion in Two Alberta Schools

Progress towards an inclusive education system is occurring at different rates in schools across the province. What follows is an examination of two urban schools, an elementary/junior high school and a high school, as they attempted to develop an inclusive culture and increase understanding to support diverse learners. At the time of study, both schools had recently (within the last year) undergone a change in school principal.

Holy Ghost School is comprised of approximately 400 students in kindergarten to grade nine. It is located near the city centre in a mixed economy area that includes wealthy, high income families and low income housing with a somewhat transient population. Historically, Holy Ghost School has done a good job of meeting the needs of an economically and culturally diverse population by providing many school-based supports such as opportunities for smaller groupings, one on one time, a designated area for additional academic support, and a consistent, cohesive staff.

The principal, Mr. X, was challenged when he began his position following a tumultuous change that involved several interim administrators over the course of the previous year, all without long-term ties to the success of the school. The school community expressed concern over the lack of consistent administrators and the risk of

lowered academic achievement for the students whereas the staff expressed concern over the ability to trust administrators after a year of changing demands and expectations. A defined school culture was missing and the climate among staff members was tense and fearful of more uncertain change.

Cultural Leadership

When Mr. X arrived, he was met with some initial apprehension from staff and parents. However, this quickly morphed into respect and understanding as Mr. X demonstrated a cultural leadership that almost immediately transformed the school culture. The vision and mission in this case was clear – rebuild a strong, positive, and trusting school culture. Mr. X did so by creating a school culture built on the foundation of family and maintained that idea consistently across all school activities. Parents, students, visitors, and staff were all a part of the family – breaking bread together, sharing each other's joys and sorrows, and most importantly, learning together. What occurred was not as simple as it appeared. The rebuilding of a trusting, caring, and supportive environment by Mr. X was very deliberate. The planning and forethought that went into each element of culture as it was added, was evaluated and considered from all angles.

Cultural leadership intertwined with learning-centred leadership for Mr. X. He emphasized trust and relationships, which are critical elements of successful school cultures and support school improvement (Barth, 2002; Fullan 2002). He also demonstrated open communication, sincerity, valuable knowledge, and a willingness to include his staff in the decision-making process. These actions established Mr. X as a caring and contributing member of the staff, rather than a head decision-maker simply directing staff. He was visibly present and involved in all areas of the school including

daily walk-throughs, where he would take the time to acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments of students and staff. He was also highly visible and accessible before and after school so that he could develop relationships with parents and the rest of the school community. Fullan (2002) suggests that relationships lie at the heart of successful change. Seashore Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) reinforce the idea that trust is also an essential component that is "hard to obtain and easy to break, and it requires persistence, patience, and consistency in all leadership behaviours" (p. 55). Smylie and Hart (1999) support that the development of human capital through strong relationships, shared vision, and collective responsibility creates an environment where collaboration supports improved teacher and student learning, even in times of change.

Also of critical importance to Mr. X was the development of leaders amongst the staff in the school. He acknowledged the strengths that each individual staff member held while supporting and inspiring them to take a lead role in some aspect of the school, reinforcing the sense of collective responsibility. A healthy by-product of this distributed leadership was the creation of sustainable leadership and sustainable school improvement (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves, 2009).

Inclusive Culture Development

In essence, school culture lies at the heart of successful inclusive education. Barth (2002) defines school culture as "a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization" (p. 7). Effective leadership by a school principal is essential for a positive effect on school culture leading to improved teaching and learning

and successful school improvement (Barth, 2002; Fullan, 2002; Seashore Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011).

Mr. X introduced the concept of an inclusive education system at a staff meeting where it was presented as a goal the staff would work towards making a reality. He stressed that, for this school, inclusive education would merely mean an extension of the teaching practices that were already in place to support diverse learners' successes. As an emerging leader within Holy Ghost School, I collaborated with the administrative team in developing a strategy for staff to re-evaluate how the needs of diverse learners were being met and what improvements could be made within individual classrooms and the school. Teachers were given time to discuss, ask questions, and express concerns around the challenges of inclusive education. They also collaborated to identify some possible solutions. Most of the staff felt valued at being a part of the process in working towards inclusive education in our school.

Given the changes that occurred under the leadership of Mr. X, Holy Ghost School provided an optimal environment for successful inclusive education but it also presented some challenges. When Holy Ghost School became well-known across the district for its strength in working with diverse needs within a welcoming community, a sharp increase in registrations for students with diverse learning needs occurred putting a stress on the systems in place to support these very students. At the same time, the school district recognized the effective instructional leadership and strong school community, thereby placing a district mental health program at the school as well.

Taking it One Step Further

The challenge lay in further developing the inclusive culture at Holy Ghost School by focusing on the school's specialized program (Changes), designed to support students with a mental health diagnosis. Frequently, these students also held a diagnosis for a myriad of other learning challenges including diagnosed learning disabilities and attention issues. Changes was designed to provide between five and ten students with a highly supported classroom environment within a larger junior high context. Depending upon individual student goals and health conditions, there was also the expectation that students periodically integrate into the regular classroom setting to support the goal of full re-integration into regular junior high programming. The periodic integration combined with the diverse learning needs of these students presented some unique challenges to the teachers.

My goal was to promote the inclusion of these students in Holy Ghost School. I, idealistically, thought that by simply telling the teachers how amazing these students were, and increasing the time spent in their classes, that a meaningful relationship with mutual respect and understanding would emerge. Not surprisingly, this was not so. I was very fortunate to have the support and guidance of Mr. X throughout the process of developing a plan that supported successful inclusion. I knew that I had to make small, meaningful changes within the school culture – for students and teachers. My plan eventually evolved into a three part focus – enhancing inclusive instruction with a teacher focus, improved student learning by supporting an inclusive community of learners, and personal leadership development.

My work began at the staff meetings where I collaborated with the diverse learning teachers on staff, as well as the vice-principal to present mini informational sessions based on the document *Making a Difference* (Alberta Education, 2010a), published to support teachers with differentiated instruction in an inclusive education system (Alberta Education, n.d.b). Alberta Education defines differentiated instruction as teaching "to support the learning of *all* students through strategic assessment, thoughtful planning and targeted, flexible instruction" (Alberta Education, 2010a, p. 2). I continued to support differentiated instruction by working one on one with junior high teachers to develop instruction and assessment that addressed the diversity of learning needs in their classes. Being able to collaborate with teachers within their classes allowed for several professional discussions to take place that might not have otherwise occurred. It also allowed me to connect teachers and facilitate some of their discussion to improve teaching and learning for the diverse learners in the school. Continuing with the theme of distributed leadership in our school, I was able to support and encourage teachers to share their knowledge and expertise with others on staff.

With the progress with staff well under way, I turned my attention to the student population. Many of the students in the Changes program were reporting incidences of bullying and exclusion, based on the perception of other students that they did not belong. Around this same time, it came to my attention that a new student had taken to eating her lunch in the bathroom as she was afraid of being mocked for her accent and lack of English speaking skills. With the support of the school administration team, I proposed that an organization called Dare to Care, which works to increase awareness about the effects of bullying, come in to work with the junior high students. The students learned

about the impact of bullying, peer pressure, racism, and oppression. It also gave them the tools to recognize right and wrong and to deal with bullying in our school. The impact of the program on our school community was immediately apparent and I frequently heard students referring to the learning in the program when challenged by another student's behavior.

Although this program led to an improvement in student behaviour towards students in the Changes program, they still struggled to feel a part of the community. With the help of another teacher, the Changes students and I developed a video promoting awareness about youth homelessness. It became a service project where the mental health classroom initiated a school-wide collection of items for a youth shelter. I did not anticipate the affect that this project would incur across the school. The response from the community in donating items was overwhelming and the students felt encouraged that they had something valuable to contribute to the school community and beyond. There was a shift in their social status in the school as other students began to see them in a leadership role which led to these, once reluctant, students taking a more active role in their classes.

Uncovering What Leadership Means

My personal journey in leadership was taken to greater depths than I anticipated at the onset of this project. What started as an intention to further develop an inclusive culture became a journey in understanding my role as a leader in developing a school culture that is capable of supporting inclusive education. The knowledge, guidance and support of my mentor, Mr. X were invaluable. As someone who leads by example and consistently inspires those around him to do better, he also taught me some of the

simplest and most powerful lessons in leadership. I learned to stop and look around, to listen, and to stay grounded in reality yet aware of the bigger picture in the school. Most importantly, he taught me the value of sincerity, reminding me that I need to be who I am as a person, and as a leader. During a discussion about leadership he said to me,

> The best advice I can give you is to be who you are. The person you see now is the same person meeting parents on the playground after school, attending a meeting with other principals, or sitting and speaking with a student. You need to be you, as a leader. (F. Durante, personal communication, May 8, 2012).

In order to support the inclusive culture in a school, who I am as a person, teacher, and leader must remain apparent and consistent in all that I do. Integrity and transparency are critical to establishing trust and a sense of predictability in how you will respond to given situations in your role as a leader (Macmillan, Meyer & Northfield, 2004).

A New Reality – High School

Sister Theresa High School is a smaller high school in comparison to others in this bustling urban centre. Although it only has 900 students, more than 30% are identified as diverse learners. When I began the study at Sister Theresa High School, Principal X who was previously the principal of Holy Ghost school, had just arrived on staff as the new principal. Proud of the school and its rich history of providing students a variety of educational supports and opportunities, Mr. X wanted to continue the tradition while embracing an inclusive education approach.

High School Culture and Change

Providing leadership that promotes sustainable school change and improvement in a high school setting presents unique challenges such as less trust and less teacher collaboration (Seashore Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). As with his previous school, Mr. X attempted to establish a school culture that focused on elements of family – working together, supporting each other, and the presence of social relationships – all elements that were rare in this high school setting. Mr. X was challenged to create an optimal environment for collegiality and collaboration. As Hoy and Miskel (2001) note, a strong culture in a school can present its own challenges as the "culture may be so ingrained that it prevents adaptations" (p. 180). Mr. X was well aware of the challenges knowing that one of the reasons for a rich tradition of success as an effective school (Hoy & Miskel, 2001) was, in large part, due to the presence of a strong culture. He also understood the value of relationships and collegiality as elements to support professional development and the change process (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2001; Smylie & Hart, 1999).

Rather than change the culture, Mr. X attempted to shift the culture slightly to focus on learning and achievement for diverse learners by developing school leaders, increasing collaboration between departments, removing teacher isolation, and creating a support system for students that would be consistent from one teacher to another. According to DuFour (2002), "a focus on learning affects not only the way that teachers work together but also the way that they relate to and work with each student" (p. 15). Mr. X also created a common vision amongst his staff. Together, the staff identified that one of the assets of Sister Theresa's was the diversity of students that were attracted to the school for various reasons including its smaller size, location, program and extra-

curricular offerings, and history in the school district. Capitalizing on this asset, while maintaining priorities that supported the change to inclusive education, Mr. X attempted to create an environment that focused on the needs of diverse learners.

Professional Development to Support Inclusion

Due to the success of the professional development that I had offered at Holy Ghost, Mr. X approached me about offering similar professional development to the staff at Sister Theresa's, in collaboration with my former colleague who was in a district position to support diverse learners in this school. His objective was to build capacity and awareness in the staff in order to support inclusion which is consistent with the recommendations put forth by Alberta Education (n.d.b).

After consultation with Mr. X and several school and district staff, it was determined that the professional development should be offered as mini sessions at monthly staff meetings and provide teachers with basic information about diverse learners, meant to increase and extend their current knowledge. We also hoped that teachers would feel encouraged to collaborate across departments, knowing this would challenge the traditional organization and school culture present in the high school. Nevertheless, keeping that in mind, we developed and outlined a clear learning goal for each session that focused on improving student learning, in line with recommendations made by Cicchinelli, L., Dean, C., Galvin, M., Goodwin, B. and Parsley, D.(2006), while providing teachers with direct links to school and district resources to support their needs and their learning. Built into the strategic plan was flexibility to adjust the content for meaningful and applicable learning suited to the needs of the teachers, creating sessions with information that could directly apply to their classrooms (Lee, 2010).

In our first session with the staff, we felt it was most important to establish our credibility and reinforce our desire to collaborate with staff, supporting and extending their learning. It was critical to establish a relationship with the staff, hoping this would lead to the development of trust so we could collaborate while acknowledging teacher strengths and respecting their autonomy in the classroom (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2001). We were somewhat limited to work with the staff in person between sessions. Instead, we encouraged them to contact us via email if they had any questions or suggestions for the sessions.

The first session was very well-received and the feedback was positive. We felt that we accomplished our goal and a mutual trust relationship was well on its way to being established. As the sessions continued, staff became more actively involved in asking questions and leading discussions among colleagues when provided the opportunity.

Although Chappuis, Chappuis and Stiggins (2009) might disagree with a presentation type of professional development, saying that it does not promote long-term change and learning, they would support that both my colleague and I shared the same vision as Mr. X and his staff. As well, the school-based diverse learning teacher and principal worked to further develop the learning at the school between sessions. An expectation was also placed on teachers to demonstrate in their instruction and assessment, the support for diverse learners. According to Cicchinelli et al. (2006) "it's important for school improvement efforts to strike a balance between telling teachers what to do and respecting their intelligence, professionalism, and ability to create their own solutions for improving student performance" (p. 15). Mr. X and the diverse

learning teacher were attempting to do just that, as were my colleague and I during our professional development sessions.

Mr. X took an active role as an instructional leader, supporting ongoing professional development and encouraging collaboration across the various departments by helping them to recognize that many of their goals and challenges were very similar, subject matter aside. He maintained a focus on student learning and achievement, again creating a sense of collective responsibility necessary for school improvement and to support change. Mr. X created a "balance between the interests and discretions of individual teachers and the interests and goals of the school" (Smylie & Hart, 1999, p. 437). Smylie and Hart (1999) would also acknowledge the strong social capital developed by the principal at Sister Theresa's that supports strong collegial relations within the school, while also recognizing the value of connections to external supports.

Leadership Learning

Although the mini sessions were helpful and appeared to have a positive impact on the support of diverse learners, there were also some trials that we, as facilitators, faced through this process. My colleague and I met for a debriefing after each of the sessions so that we could discuss and reflect on the process, any improvements that should be made, and to follow up to any questions or ideas that were raised by staff. Following an especially frustrating presentation, we discovered that concerns raised about inconsistent district practices within this session demonstrated the very value of presenting the topic. We learned that sometimes it is not the content that is delivered but rather the questions raised and discussion stimulated that really accounts for learning.

In the session mention above, we focused on student cumulative files, their organization, and access in the school. We realized that there was a discrepancy between some of the district expectations, teacher responsibilities, and the reality in the high school. This was a topic that had not been previously discussed and teachers quickly became defensive about the current state and lodging of files. During the session that day, we were able to inform the staff of the guidelines that were recommended by the school district and offered some suggestions. We also realized that much of the issue did not lie in the high school but was an inconsistency that pervaded across the district.

One of the biggest challenges for me, as a facilitator, was not being able to fulfill my need to go in and simply fix the situation. The solution was left in the hands of the teachers and administration. I had to step back leaving the teachers an opportunity to take ownership and find their own resolution. I knew that my self-reflection process, as well as providing teachers a reflective opportunity, could lead to long term learning (Chappuis, Chappuis, & Stiggins, 2009). I discovered that the most frustrating experiences also hold the potential to be the most enlightening in the end.

When my colleague and I first began presenting the mini sessions, it was at the start of the school year and at the teacher's first staff meeting with Mr. X. I had the unique opportunity to observe the school culture evolve over the course of the year as they adjusted to the new school administration. The shift in culture was visible in the changes in body language and camaraderie even over the first few months, as Mr. X worked diligently to establish a collegial community. Observing these changes under his leadership inspired me to reflect on my own leadership skills and the value of establishing relationships among a staff in a new school, developing a common vision for

staff, creating an environment of collaboration, and supporting inclusive education at the high school level. In line with DuFour (2002), it became obvious to me that the focus needed to remain on student learning and achievement to create a common ground for moving forward towards inclusive education, especially in a leadership role.

Integration or Inclusion: What is the Difference?

Before we go any further into the examination of teacher and leadership practices that support inclusive education, it is essential to clarify the difference between integration and inclusion and to understand that, more than mere descriptors, these words symbolize a culture of thinking that is long-embedded in education.

In education, integration is best understood by looking at its opposite – segregation. Integration implies that rather than separate an individual from their peers based on the characteristics of the learner, you assimilate that student into a classroom of their peers. The intention would be for that child to adapt their learning needs to the situation. Emanuelsson (1997) claims that "the weak persons will always have to live on conditions decided upon by the stronger ones" (p. 7).

There is a negative connotation with integration, although the intentions may be to support the student's academic success. When students in the Changes program at Holy Ghost School would integrate into regular junior high classes, they were not always a welcome sight. Some teachers struggled with accepting the idea that the child was a student first, seeing instead the disability and its effect on teaching that particular group. Students were viewed as individuals rather than a part of a group. Some teachers also expressed issues around fairness – suggesting that it was unfair to those "regular" students to have a child with such high needs potentially limiting their academic progress,

especially given that the student has a designated (i.e. segregated) space for learning at the other end of the hall. Integration became a challenge from the perspective of the teacher but from the perspective of the student in the Changes program as well. They often felt unwelcome and much like they were imposing on the group by their mere presence. That is not to say that all aspects and incidences of integration are unsuccessful but the approach definitely implies challenges that are less likely with inclusion.

In contrast to integration, inclusion implies an approach that embraces the diversity of needs in the classroom and adjusts the environment and teaching practices to best suit the learning needs of all the students. Unlike integration which expects the student to adjust their learning to the classroom, with inclusion the classroom and school adjust to the needs of the student and *all* the other students – identifying them as a group of individuals. In the *Setting the Direction Framework* (2009), Alberta Education defines inclusion as "the opportunity to be fully and meaningfully integrated into a typical learning environment. Inclusion also refers to an attitude of acceptance of, and belonging for, all students such that they feel valued as part of the school family" (p. 15).

Instruction to Support Diverse Learners

It is essential to recognize that diversity exists in our classrooms and schools. In fact, it always has. Never has a teacher walked into a classroom to find an identical group of learners, all ready and willing to learn at the exact same pace as their peers. If such a classroom existed, it would be an extreme oddity. We, as teachers and leaders, need to acknowledge the normalcy of diversity (Emanuelsson, 1997).

A paradigm shift is required in education in order for sustainable change that supports inclusive education as it is meant to occur. The Setting the Direction

Framework's (Alberta Education, 2009) definition of an inclusive education system supports this shift in thinking:

> a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a value based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice. (p. 15)

Rather than looking at the challenging needs of the individual and where they might best fit into our education system, we need to look instead at the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that teachers and leaders need to best meet the needs of all students. The key to successful inclusive education is beyond merely acknowledging the diversity, moving instead to schools with purposeful leadership, planning, and teaching that supports learning for *all* students. It is important to review the instructional practices that support the diversity of learners in an inclusive education system as these practices have the potential to positively impact learning, engagement, and overall school success.

From Professional Development to Professional Learning

Traditionally, professional development occurred as topics and/or teachers taught in isolation, without connection to each other, schools, and even daily practice. Professional development in an inclusive education system requires effective instructional leadership (which will be addressed later in this paper) and professional learning that is "intentional, ongoing, and systemic" (Guskey as cited in McEwen, 2006, p. 68).

Inclusive education in Alberta emphasizes a collective responsibility, capacity building, and collaboration (Alberta Education, n.d.b). In order to shift from professional development to professional learning, structural changes must occur that promote collaborative learning and teaching, collegiality, and an ongoing commitment at the school level to engage in professional learning activities (Chappuis, Chappuis, & Stiggins, 2009). An integral part of this structural change is a school culture with strong social relations, trust, and instructional learning-centred leadership (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2001; Smylie &Hart, 1999; Cicchinelli et al., 2006). Most importantly, professional learning should focus on achievement and learning for *all* students.

Teacher accountability. In Alberta, all teachers are expected to adhere to the *Teacher Quality Standards Applicable to the Provision of Education in Alberta* (Ministerial Order #016/97). This document outlines the responsibilities of teachers to ensure their teaching appreciates the diversity of needs, provides a variety of learning opportunities, and considers the importance of the teaching and school environment.

Ironically, this document appears to place little emphasis on professional learning, referring only to the idea that teachers should be life-long learners and that professional development should be continuous.

The *Teacher Quality Standards Applicable to the Provision of Education in Alberta* (Ministerial Order #016/97) is currently under review and I would expect a revised version will hold more emphasis on collaborative, ongoing professional learning that supports teaching and learning in an inclusive education system.

Differentiated Instruction

Imagine that you are in the hospital emergency room and require medical assistance. The hospital is well-equipped and there are trained staff members ready to help. When you receive treatment, you are provided treatment identical to the other patients in the emergency room, regardless of the fact that you have different medical needs. Now, imagine a school where students of various backgrounds and needs eagerly await instruction. Instead of teaching and learning that supports their individual needs, each student in the classroom is provided with identical expectations, instruction, and assessment. How likely are these students to engage in their learning? This example is a slight exaggeration of the current reality in our schools and one of the reasons why it is important to focus on instructional practices that support inclusive education.

Although differentiated instruction is a pedagogical practice grounded in research that was originally aimed at improving learning for diverse needs students, it is shown to have a positive impact on learning for all students (Alberta Education, 2010a; King-Sears, 2009; Lynch &Warner, 2008). Effective differentiated instruction allows students to interact and respond to their learning environments in a variety of ways. It is not a separately offered lesson in the classroom. Rather, differentiated instruction is a practice that involves "teaching the same material effectively to all students" (Westwood, 2001, p. 10). If teachers can improve learning and increase engagement, students can be confident in their success. Gunn and Hollingsworth (2010) support that differentiated instruction is one method that teachers can "help build better learners and thinkers…help in building more critical, self-regulatory thinkers and citizens" (p. 8)

The challenge lies in the reality of today's classroom and school structures. As mentioned, in order for inclusive education to be successful, it must begin with a systemic shift in school culture. Differentiated instruction is entangled in that same shift. With today's classrooms containing high numbers of students and an increase in diversity of needs, differentiated instruction, like other pedagogical practice requires support to be effective. Capacity-building for teachers is an essential element as the manipulation of traditional beliefs surrounding instruction and assessment occurs. Westwood (2001) criticizes that differentiated instruction is difficult and time consuming due to lack of teacher skills and knowledge. van Krayenoord (2007) supports these criticisms and offers that teachers and school administrators need to work together to address and resolve these issues.

Universal design for learning. Most commonly misunderstood as the integration of assistive technology into the classroom, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is, in reality, a pedagogical practice that ties in with differentiated instruction. van Kraayenoord (2007) distinguishes the differences between differentiated instruction and UDL. She states that differentiated instruction occurs as modifications to the instruction and how the curriculum is delivered to the students in consideration of the student's needs and abilities. UDL occurs at the planning stage to support instruction that is accessible for all learners and is based on the three principles – provide multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement (Alberta Education, 2010a). In essence, UDL provides a variety of methods for students to access and respond to learning and where students initiate engagement compared to traditional practices where the teacher leads learning.

Assessment

In the traditional classroom, assessment has persisted as mainly summative – focusing on reporting a specific level of achievement, at a specific point in time, and providing this information to interested parties such as parents, administrators, and government. This snapshot of learning rarely delivers a clear and accurate assessment of a child's ability or potential. With the focus turning to increasing achievement for all students and reducing the achievement gap, consideration must be given to changes in how assessment occurs in the classroom. Stiggins and Duke (2008) suggest that "assessment systems must provide a variety of decision makers with a variety of different kinds of information in different forms at different times to support or to verify student learning" (p. 287). Alberta Education (2010a) supports this view by describing the need for differentiated assessment. Essentially, assessment in the classroom needs to move away from a focus on summative assessment, executing a strategy that includes formative assessment.

Where summative assessment provides a glimpse of achievement, formative assessment (often referred to as assessment for learning) stands to offer a broader and deeper perspective of a students learning and achievement by focusing on student learning. Ideally, formative assessment should be an integral part of instruction and learning (Black & William, 2010), be individualized and continuous (Stiggins & Duke, 2008), be intentionally planned (Cauley & McMillan, 2009), and emphasize student involvement (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). Most importantly, formative assessment has, at its core, a clear expectation of learning and achievement goals that are communicated

to the student and involve student feedback and self-assessment throughout the process of working towards these goals (Cauley & McMillan, 2009; Stiggins, 2002).

Formative assessment has the probability of increasing student engagement in the learning process in a way that summative assessment has not. Most students define themselves by the grades reported on their report card. Frequently, for students with diverse learning needs, this grade reporting does very little to improve their self-perception, often reinforcing a negative image (Stiggins &Chappuis, 2005). Creating opportunities for success through formative assessment that reports accurate individualized learning and growth can invoke a change in perception, eliminating the wedge between the academic strong and weak.

> Approaches in which pupils are compared with one another, the prime purpose of which seems to them to be competition rather than personal improvement; in consequence, assessment feedback teaches low-achieving pupils that they lack "ability," causing them to come to believe that they are not able to learn. (Black & Wiliam, 2010, p. 84)

That is not to say that summative assessment should be eliminated entirely. It has a valid role in reporting student achievement. However, teachers need to use professional judgement to determine which assessments most accurately represent a student's learning (Alberta Education, 2010a). This opposes the traditional practice where one type of assessment was used and subsequently reported for all students in a classroom.

Individualized program plans and the inclusive education planning tool. These represent two tools that are undervalued and under-recognized by

teachers for their role in formative assessment. The Individualized Program Plan (IPP) was not specifically designed as an assessment tool. Rather, it was originally intended as a measure to report accountability for meeting the educational needs of students with identified special needs. It was also meant to provide teachers, parents, and students with information such as assessment data, goals, objectives, and assessment strategies (Alberta Education, 2006). However, the IPP can be a valuable part of formative assessment. IPP goals are clearly stated, continually monitored and adjusted, and (ideally) based on teacher and student feedback blended with student self-assessment. If the purpose of assessment for learning is "...to advance, not merely check on, student learning" (Stiggins, 2002, p. 761), then the role of the IPP as formative assessment should be explored further.

The IPP also has the potential to be taken one step further and used as assessment *as* learning by extending the student's self-reflection of learning. The IPP allows the student to develop skills with teacher support then slowly disengages the supports while moving the student forward in their learning. It empowers the student to take charge of their learning and leads us, as teachers, down the path towards assessment as learning. "Student- involved classroom assessment opens the assessment process and invites students in as partners, monitoring their own levels of achievement…student-involved assessment helps learners see and understand our vision of their academic success" (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005, p. 13). Unfortunately, in Alberta, the exploration of the IPP as

assessment as learning may not occur, as schools move away from the use of the IPP and towards the Inclusive Education Planning Tool (IEPT).

The IEPT is intended to better meet the diversity of classroom needs by providing a framework in which teachers can identify the teaching and learning needs of each individual student and then plan accordingly (Alberta Education, n.d.b). The IEPT includes a variety of forms and resources meant to support teacher knowledge and awareness for academic, behavioural, social, and medical needs and then support those needs at the level required. As the IEPT is currently in the piloting stages in Alberta, there is limited data on its usage and effectiveness to support inclusive education.

Regardless of the whether the IPP or the IEPT are used as part of assessment in the classroom, it is essential for teachers and leaders to understand the valuable role that assessment can play in increasing student learning and achievement – especially if both formative and summative types of assessment are practiced. Teacher and leadership development specific to assessment, especially to support increased and ongoing understanding of the ever-changing teaching learning paradigm, must remain focused on student involvement in the assessment process and the connection to increased student achievement.

School leadership has a responsibility to be knowledgeable and current about assessment practices that support increased student achievement. They must also be willing and capable of supporting teachers through professional development, resources, and time. The *Alberta School Leadership Framework: Building Leadership Capacity in Alberta's Education System* (Government of Alberta, 2012) notes the need for leadership that demonstrates consistency to support teachers in appropriate teaching and assessment

strategies that are research-based, focused on student achievement, in line with the school vision, and acknowledge the diversity of needs in the classroom. Creating an educational culture that shifts the value away from standardized tests and towards individual student achievement is just the beginning. Ongoing teacher support to translate the principles of formative assessment into practice will require an investment of time and commitment for sustainable change and the development of assessment practices that support inclusive education.

Beyond Teachers and Students

Stakeholders in education exist beyond the principal, teachers, and students. Parents, community supports, non-teaching school-based staff, and district staff also have an impact on the success of diverse learners in an inclusive education system. Alberta considers stakeholders an integral part of the inclusive education system with a significant role in learner success that highlights collaboration (Alberta Education, 2012b). Alberta Education (n.d.b) identified 11 principles that support student success in the collaborative process. These principles include the need for schools, families, and communities to work together as a team with a shared responsibility for students with shared leadership among the team members. It also includes the development of supports that focus on individual family needs while recognizing the existence of different strengths and values.

As a part of the school's cultural shift towards inclusive education, society must also consider a shift towards accepting the role of supporting children and youth beyond the academic and into social and emotional aspects. Inclusive education emphasizing collaboration creates a sense of collective responsibility in generating children that

become contributing members of society. Black and Williams (2010) recognize that students who are at-risk learners, typically those with an identified diverse learning need and struggling with achievement, tend to be the students who are reluctant to attend school and, over time, become truant. Eventually, these students may demonstrate behaviours that cause social and legal problems in their communities. To engage a collaborative team to support student learning could possibly have long-term positive effects for these students, their families, and their communities.

Leadership Qualities Form a Strong Foundation

In Alberta, school leadership is defined by the professional practice competencies present in *The Alberta School Leadership Framework: Building Leadership Capacity in Alberta's Education System* (Alberta Education, 2012). This document outlines the seven competencies that school leaders should engage in to support successful student learning experiences and achievements and to provide effective leadership as it relates to learning, teaching, school resources and operations, society's ever-changing demands and needs, and the development of future leaders. The framework aims to create a consistent vision for leadership in Alberta, especially as change sweeps across the province bringing a focus on capacity building and collaboration with a move to inclusive education. School leaders hold the responsibility to model effective response to change that supports the improvement of education for all students.

Growing as a leader. My personal leadership growth is rooted in an improved understanding of the competencies in *The Alberta School Leadership Framework* (Alberta Education, 2012). Through my experiences working with Mr. X, I witnessed the leadership competencies in action. He is a school leader that demonstrates daily what it

means to lead effectively. His alacrity for shared leadership enabled me the opportunity to participate in a variety of leadership experiences and develop my own sense of who I am as a school leader.

Based on my experiences and improved understanding, I created a list of learning that I feel is important to keep in the forefront of my mind. I expect that these points will support me to effectively lead a school, especially during times of change.

Establish relationships. One of the most valuable lessons I learned through my leadership experiences so far is that, first and foremost, it is critical to form relationships with the staff, students, and other members of the school community, especially when attempting to create a foundation for collaboration. *The Alberta School Leadership Framework* (Alberta Education, 2012) lists "fostering effective relationships" (p.8) as the first competency for effective school leaders. Fullan (2001) identifies that "the role of the leader is to ensure that the organization develops relationships that help produce desirable results" (p. 68). A key aspect of this, according to Fullan (2001), is emotional intelligence. Branson (2010) agrees that leadership should be based on relationships and that leaders should be "able to build strong interdependent relationships so that they know their self, know their reality, and know every other person so that they can make good choices for their own sake and the sake of these others" (p. 93). With the aim of growing and developing into something sustainable and long-term, relationships must be sincere and based on integrity and mutual trust.

Build capacity in others. Focusing on the strengths of the people around me and then building upon these strengths facilitates the creation of a staff that is capable of flourishing, even during times of change. Developing competency in the staff means

building on the relationships that have already been established and taking them further - into the realm of leadership. Also identified in *The Alberta School Leadership Framework* (Alberta Education, 2012) is the importance of recognizing potential leaders among the staff and supporting this leadership development. Shared leadership is also an element of collaboration to support student success (Alberta Education, n.d.b). Branson (2010) acknowledges the interconnectedness of establishing collaborative relationships and developing capacity in each other. Smylie and Hart (1999) reiterate the value and interconnectedness of collaborative relationships and the development of "human capital" (p. 424), recognizing the role that leadership plays in establishing the structure for collaborative relationships to occur. Glanz (2006) also emphasizes that leadership is a group activity where staff work collaboratively with a common vision in mind. Most important, are the effects on improved student learning which occurs as a result of improvements in teaching (MacKinnon & Pynch-Worthylake, 2001) reinforcing that teacher collaboration, professional learning, and leadership development are relevant aspects of effective school leadership.

Be present and be visible. Another interconnected aspect to relationships is the school leader that is present and visible in the school. Meaning that the principal is not locked up in an office, the door closed in anticipation of staff looking for support. It is just the opposite. When a school leader is present and visible, they are actively involved in the day to day activities of the school. This could include daily walk-throughs, spending time greeting parents at the beginning and end of the day, conversing with staff over lunch in the staffroom, and making an effort to get to know the students in the school. Not only that, but doing so with sincerity and enthusiasm.

When a school leader is present and visible, it creates opportunities for relationships to be established and deepened. These purposeful interactions can deepen trust and loyalty that teachers feel towards the school leader (Smylie & Hart, 1999) and exemplifies a commitment and interest to the well-being of the staff, students, and school community. The end result is an increase in staff and student engagement and, ultimately, student achievement.

Stay true to yourself (and remember everyone else too). *The Alberta School Leadership Framework* (Alberta Education, 2012) competencies discuss the importance of self-reflection in a leader, consideration of multiple perspectives, and maintaining an awareness of the needs of the community. It is a challenge in leadership to be true to what you believe and what you know is the right path and not be swept away in the excitement of a new innovation or project. However, consideration of others perspectives and opinions can often lead to new solutions for existing problems.

There is also a need to establish balance between the individual and the group. Respecting teacher autonomy while still moving the group forward to a common goal or vision is a delicate situation that requires leadership with well-established relationships and a clear vision. A school leader must be secure in their direction for the school, engaging the school community towards a shared vision.

It is alright to make mistakes. Creating a collaborative environment with trust based relationships as the foundation allows for support when someone makes a mistake. Supporting teachers to try new teaching strategies and improve student learning means that, as a leader, you should also be willing to accept that mistakes will happen. Good

leadership supports teacher growth and development knowing that often the hardest lessons are the ones where we learn the most.

Admitting our own mistakes as leaders is equally important. Trust and credibility can easily be destroyed if a school leader is unable to admit their own errors in judgement or practice. Seashore Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) confirm that "teachers' trust in their principal provides the firm foundation for learning" (p. 55). It is vital to be able to learn and grow from these mistakes, not repeating them in the future. Making and admitting to mistakes links with *The Alberta School Leadership Framework* (Alberta Education, 2012) competency focused on relationship building which is built on respect, communication, and ethics.

Celebrate. All too often, we get so caught up in the daily "to do" list that we forget to take the time to appreciate all the accomplishments of the students and teachers around us. A school community lends itself to celebrations and acknowledgements of growth in individuals and the school organization. Sharing these accomplishments is identified in *The Alberta School Leadership Framework* (Alberta Education, 2012) competency "Embodying Visionary Leadership". Sharing and celebrating also increases a feeling of belonging by reinforcing the positive, valuable accomplishments that all learners experience. Celebrations also turn the focus to an "ethic of caring" (Glanz, 2006, p. 25) which reinforces a culture that promotes a leader who values people above all else.

Although my leadership learning thus far may not encompass all that is necessary for effective leadership, I believe that the points described above will assist me in building the foundations for effective leadership. I expect that as I grow and change as a leader, I will be able to reflect on these points and adapt them further.

Leadership for Stability in Times of Change

Leadership is a role that requires flexibility and the ability to adapt leadership dependent upon the context (Bush, 2011). Various leadership styles and theories provide a framework and a sense of direction for leaders, especially during educational change. I have examined the efficacy of three leadership models to support the move to inclusive education, keeping in mind that these are not the only models for effective educational leadership. Although each leader brings their own qualities and personality to a school, these models are blueprint for all school leaders. Perhaps what is most interesting about the following models is that they have overlapping qualities and can be used almost simultaneously.

Transformational Leadership

In an era where schools are moving away from hierarchical structures and creating change at all levels of the organization, transformational leadership provides a structure for leaders to support organizational change (Retna & Ng, 2009). Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) submit that transformational leadership is built upon three main strategies: building capacity in staff, developing a common vision, and creating a culture that is open to organizational change. Transformational leadership supports systemic change as we move to an inclusive education system. It creates conditions in schools where teachers are engaged in the teaching and learning process and in moving their school forward to support all learners. Transformational leadership acknowledges diversity in the classroom and the need for teacher professional development based on collaboration, improved teaching practices focused on inquiry, and increased student involvement (Retna & Ng, 2009). The school leader must also facilitate shared

leadership. Essentially, transformational leadership stands to strengthen the school organization from the inside out, creating flexibility and adaptability in a school environment that remains focused at all levels on improving student learning.

Learning-Centred Leadership

According to Southworth (2009), the role of an effective school leader is to initiate change through others using a variety of different strategies. Learning-centred leadership focuses on three strategies (model, monitor, dialogue) and functions under the premise of distributed leadership, which will be described further in this paper, and the definitive goal of improving student learning.

Model. Southworth (2009) emphasizes that school leaders must remain actively involved in teacher development and the learning process by modelling behaviour that leads to improved pedagogical practices. The school leader must show interest, enthusiasm, and actively demonstrate the connections between teaching and learning. This includes principals that engage in ongoing learning as well as collaborative relationships with district staff and participating in school-based professional learning communities (Leithwood, 2010) to exemplify for teachers the value of growth and collaboration.

Monitor. In learning-centred leadership, monitoring reinforces the value of individual teacher strengths and the importance of interconnectedness to improve student learning. School leaders can facilitate this process by responding to data regarding student achievement (Southworth, 2009) and helping teachers to make connections to teaching and learning. Monitoring also includes being aware of the teaching practices occurring in the school and providing consistent feedback to improve these practices and

providing professional learning opportunities to strengthen and support areas for teacher growth (Leithwood, 2010).

Dialogue. The school leader must engage in conversations about improving pedagogical practice and increasing student achievement at the school and district level, creating opportunities for teachers to be involved in generating a culture of inquiry for teachers and students. Fullan (2002) states that "organizations must foster knowledge giving as well as knowledge seeking" (p. 18) and it is the role of the school leader to model this and find the conditions for teachers to practice.

Southworth (2009) implies that all three strategies are interconnected and influence one another in a continuous process. School leaders are responsible for building the capacity in staff and establishing a school culture that supports and deepens the engagement and enthusiasm for improved student achievement.

Distributed Leadership

Leadership that is shared or, distributed, is essential to establish schools with long-term sustainability in times of change. *The Alberta School Leadership Framework* (Alberta Education, 2012) emphasizes the need to develop leadership in schools and Fullan (2002) echoes this noting that "crucial to sustained improvement is the effective succession of leaders" (p. 20). Schools with distributed leadership are also more adept at handling the demands of change from external sources including society, government, and even the school district itself.

We have repeatedly heard throughout this paper the critical value in establishing a school culture where capacity building and collaboration are key elements of successful schools and effective school leadership. Distributed leadership backs this notion and

aims at establishing wide-spread access to support access to learning support for teachers and students.

Embarking on the change to inclusive education means that there are likely challenging times ahead as schools and districts work to meet the needs of all students and increase achievement amongst the diversity of learners. The stronger the school organization, the more capable it will be of facing these challenges head on and coming out on top. Barth (2002) suggests that we have a responsibility to "create and provide a culture hospitable to human learning and to make it likely that students and educators will become and remain lifelong learners" (p. 11). The leadership models examined above should provide the foundation to create this culture.

Leadership: It's Not Meant to be Lonely

As a child I dreamed of becoming a teacher. I wanted to share my love of learning with anyone who was willing. When I became a teacher, I was inexplicably drawn to the role of leadership. Along my leadership journey, several colleagues have questioned and commented on this pull towards leadership. Rarely did I find that other teachers had anything positive to say about working on leadership. They described it as too far removed from the kids, too much paperwork, and, most surprisingly, lonely. As noted earlier, Fullan (2002) emphasizes the development of leadership in order to create a succession of effective school leadership. I cannot help but wonder how many more teachers, beyond my colleagues, misunderstand school leadership.

Management versus Leadership

I felt it was important to address the differences between management and leadership in schools. Both are elements of school leadership and for many, the

challenge lies in finding the balance between them in order to remain effective. When you picture a manager, the quintessential image is typically of a tie-wearing gentleman buried behind a desk filled with paperwork. In schools, management is an integral part of the school operation. Branson (2010) refers to management as the "ever-expanding and all-consuming formal accountability procedures" (p. 117), supporting the image above. However, *The Alberta School Leadership Framework* (Alberta Education, 2012) has dedicated a competency to guide school leaders in their professional practice of managing schools, tying the school operations to effective teaching and learning.

So where does that leave leadership? MacKinnon and Pynch-Worthylake (2001) suggest that leadership focuses on pedagogical growth supporting Southworth's (2009) notion that leadership is about progress in schools and Branson's (2010) belief that leadership is about "creating understanding and meaning" (p. 118). Simply put, manage is what you do in times of stress, a leader is who you are during those same times of stress.

A Personal Note

Throughout my journey in leadership, I am learning to define who I am as a leader. Branson (2010) reinforces the advice that Mr. X gave about being a leader stating that "it is about the leader knowing, understanding, and managing their true self as a person and as a leader" (p. 116). I have learned to constantly reflect on my actions and the actions of those around me, questioning if they help me stay true to who I am while also supporting student and teacher learning. Through this reflective process, I developed a list of five "rules" for effective leadership that will help me to retain my integrity and sincerity. These rules are:

1. Have patience and take time to listen. Remember that time does not have to be the enemy.
2. I am human. As I continue to learn, I will also make mistakes. What I learn from those mistakes is what really counts.
3. Do the research. Talk to people, read the books, and listen to advice *before* taking action.
4. Maintain a support system. I should surround myself with colleagues and mentors who will provide advice, perspective, and guidance.
5. Leadership is action, not a title. Don't "talk the talk" if I am not willing to "walk the walk".

Conclusion

As Alberta moves forward with inclusive education, I also move forward in my leadership journey. Seeking out the best leadership qualities and teacher knowledge, skills, and attitudes will remain an ongoing quest and part of my own learning process. On the horizon are changes that have the potential to significantly impact teaching and, most especially, learning for all.

The cultural shift in education is beginning to occur as the province re-assesses the effectiveness of the leadership and teacher standards in our province and their compatibility with provincial goals. Districts are working to further encourage and develop leadership while acknowledging the challenges of this role. School leaders are striving to improve teaching conditions with the re-organization of schools, targeted professional learning, and ongoing support for teacher growth.

Amongst all this change, there still lies one constant – students. Teachers and school leaders have a responsibility to craft an education system that does not just meet the diversity of needs, but encourages all students to seek out challenges and fulfill their dreams. John Quincy Adams (Edberg, 2012) once said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." As I move forward on my leadership journey, I intend to dedicate myself to inspire change in myself and in others.

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