

DISTRICT LEADERS AS MEMBERS OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY:
CHANGING APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

by

Carol Ann Telford

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Carol Ann Telford (2014)

**DISTRICT LEADERS AS MEMBERS OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY:
CHANGING APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES**

Doctor of Education (2014)

Carol Ann Telford

**Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Toronto**

Abstract

The term *professional learning community* is generally defined as a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an “ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way and operating as a collective enterprise” (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006, p. 223). The professional learning community is increasingly being used as an explicit change strategy for generating, sharing and managing knowledge in educational organizations. Improving the performance of a district requires district supervisory officers to build their capacity for learning how to improve leadership practices.

In this retrospective qualitative study, I investigate to what extent leadership practices change for a group of district supervisory officers, that is, the senior leaders responsible for the district leadership functions, while they responded to provincial reform mandates between 2000 and 2006. I also examine whether this group of supervisory officers in one Ontario English Public School District, renamed Green Ridge District School Board (GRDSB) for anonymity, functions as a professional learning community.

Data sources used in this investigation were developed through a university partnership between GRDSB and an Ontario Institute for Studies in Education field center known as the Midwestern Centre. Data were gathered from six research reports, written annually between 2001 and 2006; interviews from seven supervisory officers conducted in 2006; and interviews from 12 school administrator interviews held in 2005.

One limitation of the study is that participants were selected from school sites that chose to become involved with the district change strategies and therefore tended to take a positive orientation when responding to semi-structured questions. The data gathered did not reflect the views of those who chose not to be actively involved in the district change strategies.

This investigation’s findings inform leadership theory and practice with respect to the descriptions of evolving leadership practices of a group of supervisory officers as they worked to re-culture the GRDSB. Findings provide empirical support for the contention that a socially constructed environment, such as a

professional learning community, provides a context for supporting changes to leadership practices through collective professional learning, problem solving, knowledge creation and knowledge sharing (Anderson, 2006; Honig, 2008; Louis, 2008).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Lynne Hannay for providing me with an opportunity to become involved in the doctoral research process and to Dr. Carol Rolheiser, Dr. Clare Brett and Dr. Blair Mascal for guiding me to completion.

DEDICATIONS

This work is dedicated to my parents, Murray Telford and Jean Telford, for their belief in my ability to achieve my goals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISTRICT LEADERS AS MEMBERS OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY:

CHANGING APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES	i
Abstract.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
DEDICATIONS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
The District Leadership Challenge	1
Statement of Purpose	2
The Research Questions.....	2
Background of the Study.....	2
University Partnership	3
Researcher Background	3
Methodology	4
Data Analysis.....	4
The Significance of the Study.....	4
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Provincial Large-Scale, Standards-Based Educational Reform.....	6
District Change Strategies	7
District Leadership Practices	8
Professional Learning Community	8
Engaging Educators in Large-Scale Reform.....	9
Role of Knowledge in the Learning Society.....	11
The Importance of Schools to the Learning Society.....	12
The Change Process	12
Professional Learning in Practice.....	14
Cultures to Support Learning in Practice	15

Adaptive Organizations	15
Professional Learning Communities.....	16
Connecting Educators with Purpose and Vision.....	17
Learning Processes	17
Reflective Professional Inquiry	18
Building Trust to Support Learning.....	18
Leading for Learning	19
Leadership Practices	20
Ontario’s Public Supervisory Officials’ Association.....	21
Ontario Leadership Framework	21
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	23
Rationale for the Study’s Qualitative Approach	23
Methodology for Pre-Existing Data.....	23
Research Reports	24
School Administrator Interview Transcripts.....	25
Supervisory Officer Interview Transcripts	25
Sample Sources, Sample Size and Data Collection of the Existing Data Sources.....	25
Research Report 2001a.....	25
Research Report 2001b.....	26
Research Report 2002.....	26
Research Report 2003.....	26
Research Report 2004.....	26
Research Report 2005.....	27
School Administrator Transcribed Interviews, 2005	27
Supervisory Officer Transcribed Interviews, 2006.....	27
Analysis of the Pre-Existing Data Sources for the Current Study	27
Suitability of the Pre-Existing Data for the Current Study	28
Methodology for Current Investigation.....	29

Purpose of the Current Investigation	29
Research Questions.....	29
Research Design	29
Sample Selection.....	30
Data Collection	31
Data Analysis.....	31
First Level of Analysis.....	32
Research Reports	32
Administrator Transcribed Interviews	32
Second Level of Analysis.....	33
Ensuring Trustworthiness.....	33
Prolonged Engagement	33
Member Checking	34
Negative Case Analysis	34
Summary	34
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	35
The Context of the Study	35
Initiation of the District Strategic Plan	35
Implementation of the District Strategic Plan.....	36
University Partnership	37
Findings from the Current Investigation	38
First Strategic Action: Building a Shared Vision	38
The District Response to Strategic Action: Building a Shared Vision.....	42
Developing a Shared Purpose	42
Developing a System Dynamic Through a Shared Sense of Purpose.....	43
Developing Trust Through Professional Dialogue	45
Second Strategic Action: Professional Learning Opportunities	47
The District Response to Strategic Action: Professional Learning Opportunities.....	50

Developing Relationships for Learning	51
Collaboration for Learning	52
Collaboration for Learning Between Schools	53
Third Strategic Action: Data Use for School Improvement.....	54
The District Response to Strategic Action: Data Use for School Improvement.....	57
Reflective Professional Inquiry	58
A Results Orientation	59
Culture of Continuous Improvement	60
Fourth Strategic Action: Processes to Support Learning for School Improvement	62
The District Response to Strategic Action: Processes to Support Learning for School Improvement	65
Facilitative Leadership.....	67
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	71
Discussion of Findings: Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community	71
Shared Vision	71
Shared Values	72
Collaboration for Learning	73
Reflective Professional Inquiry	74
Mutual Trust, Respect and Support	75
Individual and Collective Professional Learning	77
Openness and Networks.....	79
Discussion of Findings: Leadership Practices.....	80
Building a Shared Vision and Setting Direction	80
Building Relationships and Developing People.....	81
Developing the Organization	81
Leading the Instructional Program.....	82
A Continuous Improvement Dynamic	83
Provincial Large-Scale, Standards-Based Educational Reforms	84
District Change Strategies	85

District Leadership Practices	86
Professional Learning Community	87
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS	88
Summary of the Investigation.....	88
Research Questions and Conclusions	88
Significance of the Study	89
Limitations to this Study	90
Implications for Further Research	91
REFERENCES	94

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Midwestern Centre Research Reports List from 2001 to 2006	24
Table 2. Data Sources and Sample Sizes for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Midwestern Centre Research Studies	28
Table 3. Data Sources for the Current Investigation	30
Table 4. Characteristics Demonstrated by Effective Professional Learning Communities	31

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Changing leadership practices of district leaders..... 6
Figure 2. Conceptual framework: A continuous improvement dynamic for district leaders.....84

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to provide insights into the evolutionary changes to leadership practice for a group of supervisory officers in GRDSB. Supervisory officers in Ontario are commonly known as superintendents and directors. The director and superintendents work together as a senior leadership team and are responsible for providing educational, organizational and fiscal leadership for their district school board. Supervisory officers perform a range of leadership functions, including “directing educational program planning, delivery and evaluation; administering special education program and delivery; ensuring appropriate levels of staff development and all corporate operations” (Ontario Public Supervisory Officials’ Association [OPSOA], 2005, p. 1). In this study, supervisory officers may also be referred to as the district leadership team.

This empirical investigation examines the work of a group of supervisory officers as they responded to Ontario educational reform mandates over a six-year period. Specifically, this study investigated whether the strategic actions and leadership practices enacted by a group of supervisory officers were congruent with those behaviours demonstrated by members of a professional learning community.

The District Leadership Challenge

Across North America and beyond, educational leaders have been challenged to transform existing schools and districts to meet the heightened demand for school improvement. State and national governments have mandated new reform policies that have had “sweeping effects” on educational organizations (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 83). In order to understand the impact of these complex policy shifts, researchers have identified the importance of examining the role of the school district in leading effective district-wide reform and improvement. Investigations of the connections between district policies, strategic actions and student achievement have provided convincing evidence that districts do matter to the school reform process and that “some districts matter in powerfully positive ways for student performance” (Anderson, 2006, p. 5; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Further study of the district’s role in facilitating improved student learning will be necessary to learn what effective reform-oriented districts do in order to achieve positive district change and to support improved student achievement.

Traditionally, supervisory officers have had limited involvement in teaching and learning matters and more often enacted bureaucratic notions of hierarchy involving command-and-control relationships with schools (Honig, 2008; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Studies have demonstrated that some districts have experienced successful reform efforts and developed their capacity through a vision process that involves aligning instructional programs to support teaching and learning improvements (Cronin & Genovese, 2012; Corcoran, Fuhrman, & Belcher, 2001; Honig, 2003). The shift from a traditional managerial approach to one of active leadership for teaching and learning signifies important changes for the role of supervisory officer.

Empirical studies have tended not to examine the daily work of supervisory officers as they endeavour to foster high quality teaching and learning in district schools (Honig, 2008). Further

investigation of changes to leadership practices as supervisory officers facilitate reform initiatives will contribute to the leadership knowledge base (Honig, 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). Reform policies have necessitated the development of support relationships between supervisory officers and school personnel to build capacity for improved teaching and learning within the classroom (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Further, some researchers have called for supervisory officers to learn how to function as a learning community (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003) or learning organization (Honig, 2008) to more effectively provide the relational support needed for capacity development. Emerging evidence suggests supervisory officers of effective reforming districts have advanced organizational conditions, such as professional learning communities, to support collective professional learning, knowledge-creation and knowledge-sharing processes (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003).

In situations of rapid change, flexible, adaptive and productive organizations are expected to excel. In this study, the learning organization is defined as an organization

“where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together”. (Senge, 1990, p. 3)

Statement of Purpose

This qualitative retrospective study was undertaken to provide insights into the evolutionary changes to leadership practice for supervisory officers in GRDSB. The investigation examined the impact of district strategic actions taken in response to the demands of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s school improvement mandates on the work of the supervisory officers during a six-year period. Specifically, this study investigated whether the strategic actions and leadership practices enacted by a group of supervisory officers were congruent with characteristics of a professional learning community as discerned from the literature (DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Stoll et al., 2006).

The Research Questions

The current investigation sought findings in response to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do leadership practices change for this group of district supervisory officers between 2000 and 2006?
2. Do the strategic actions and approaches to leadership practices enacted by this group of supervisory officers between 2000 and 2006 reflect the characteristics of a professional learning community as defined in the literature?

Background of the Study

In 1997, the newly elected Ontario government established a large-scale, standards-based educational reform agenda that brought a period of intensive and extensive educational change. New legislation known as Bill 160, *The Education Quality Improvement Act*, enabled funding and power to move from local boards to the government, as well as staffing formula adjustments, reduction and amalgamation of school boards and standardization of curriculum (Fullan, 2009; Majhonovich, 2002;

Rezai-Rashti, 2003). The rapidity of changes required over the next few years brought dramatic restructuring to the Ontario education system (Levin, 2008).

Large-scale, standards-based educational reform required local provincial boards to deliver results-based curriculum that clearly stipulated what students should be able to do upon completion of a program. In Ontario, this approach necessitated the production of standard subject-oriented curricula based on measurable items as well as the administration of externally developed standardized tests (Fullan, 2009; Majhonovich, 2002). All curriculum documents for elementary and secondary programs were rewritten based on a uniform template, as were the learning assessment systems. Once the provincial curriculum documents were approved by appointed bodies, the course outline, assessment, and exemplar development projects were tendered out for each required course. At the same time, the Ontario Ministry of Education produced a mandatory standard provincial report card for grades one to twelve. The perceived inflexible nature of the new programs and assessment systems was not easily accepted by Ontario teachers (Majhonovich, 2002), leaving supervisory officers to facilitate large-scale education reform initiatives at the local level.

Throughout the province of Ontario, the entire governance system was altered, and the number of local school districts was reduced from 140 to 71 (Levin, 2008). Many smaller school boards were amalgamated to form larger regional school districts, which simultaneously reduced the authority of the locally elected school boards. Specific to this study, four school districts were legislated into one large English Public School District in 1998. Consequently, the district leadership team members were forced to balance the GRDSB amalgamation process along with additional multiple legislated mandates that were rapidly downloaded to all provincial districts from the Ontario Ministry of Education.

University Partnership

The senior leadership team for the newly amalgamated GRDSB facilitated the implementation of a re-culturing strategy to support the amalgamation process while simultaneously implementing multiple large-scale, provincial reform initiatives. At the same time, this school board entered into an education research partnership with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) Midwestern Centre. The OISE Midwestern Centre operated as one of three field centres across Ontario. The faculty and staff provided continuing education and distance education to area educators and conducted field research within existing research partnerships.

Under the direction of the Midwestern Centre's lead investigator, the research team gathered data from teachers and administrators and prepared at least one research report for the GRDSB in each school year between 2000 and 2006. The district leadership team received the annual reports from the OISE Midwestern Centre and examined the findings to ascertain progress for the district's student learning and achievement goals and to assist with setting direction for each upcoming school year.

Researcher Background

The present investigator served as a research officer for the OISE Midwestern Centre between 2000 and 2004. As a member of the Midwestern Centre research team, I was assigned to the empirical

investigations associated with the GRDSB. Prior to each annual data collection phase, I conducted a review of the literature and prepared a literature review summary to inform the work of the research team. I also attended research partnership meetings held at the GRDSB central office on a regular basis and attended presentations of research findings to the district leadership team. Over time, I became more knowledgeable about the emerging culture of this newly amalgamated district and more adept when working with the numerous data sets.

As the research officer assigned to these investigations from 2000 to 2004, I conducted numerous interviews of teachers, administrators and central office staff and carried out the analysis of the resulting data sets. While engaged in data collection in the early years of the research partnership, I became aware of the theme of collaborative decision making and changing professional practices associated with the district leadership team. This theme was not directly connected to the research focus for the partnership at that time; however, it continued to represent an area of research interest for me.

Methodology

This current retrospective qualitative study is designed to investigate changes to the practices of a group of supervisory officers as they facilitated a large-scale reform initiative within the GRDSB from 2000 to 2006. I was granted access to the data gathered by the OISE Midwestern Centre research team each year from 2000 to 2006. The data sources used in this current investigation are unanalyzed interviews from seven supervisory officers in 2006, unanalyzed interviews from 12 principals from 2005, and data gathered from six research reports prepared from 2000 to 2006.

Data Analysis

The GRDSB's district leadership team implemented strategic actions that were consistently present in the data throughout six years of documented organizational reform in this school district. These actions were identified in the first level of analysis and represented this current study's first data set. The remaining data were analyzed to identify the GRDSB supervisory officers' responses to the challenges emerging from strategic action implementation and represented a second data set.

The first data set of identified district strategic actions was analyzed using NVivo software that supports qualitative research. The strongest themes were determined, and the data were then moved into condensed electronic data displays and organized by year. The second data set of identified leadership responses to challenges arising from strategic action implementation was analyzed through the lens of professional learning community characteristics using NVivo software. The strongest themes were determined, and the data were then moved into multiple electronic data displays organized by theme and year.

The Significance of the Study

In the literature review conducted for this study, there is a reference to the strong promise that professional learning communities may bring to the leadership work of district efforts and to the improvement of instruction and learning in schools. To date, there remains a lack of substantial empirical evidence to support the notion that professional learning communities improve learning for students

(Leithwood, 2008). Nevertheless, some researchers contend that socially constructed environments, such as professional learning communities, may support changes to leadership practice through collective professional learning, problem solving, knowledge creation and knowledge sharing (Anderson, 2006; Honig, 2008; Louis, 2008). This current study's findings inform leadership theory and practice with respect to the changing leadership practices of a group of supervisory officers as they worked to re-culture the GRDSB. Additionally, this investigation contributes knowledge to further inform the systematic "unpacking of the professional learning community concept" in the theory-building process (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005, p. viii).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

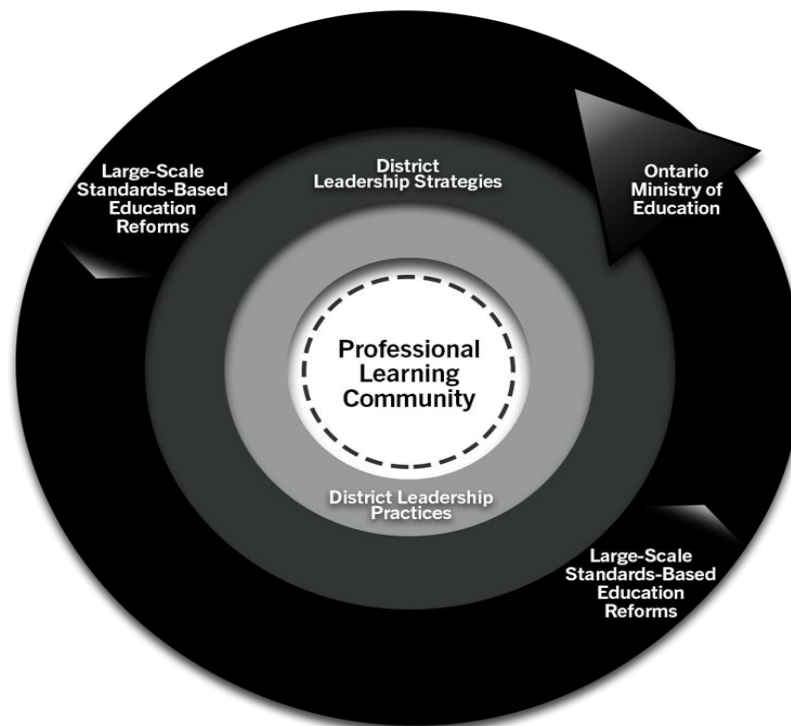
Conceptual Framework

Within the province of Ontario, the Ministry of Education directs reform activity through district leadership teams. District leadership teams then develop change strategies for their district contexts and enact these actions through the application of their leadership practices. These actions represent the first three components shown in *Figure 1*. Conceptual framework: Changing leadership practices of district leaders. These components were chosen for the conceptual framework because they represent the leadership dynamic that exists for district leadership team members in the Ontario educational context. The professional learning community component is shown with an interrupted boundary. The current investigation will examine whether the GRDSB leadership team members functioned as a professional learning community within the leadership dynamic that evolved among them between 2000 and 2006.

Provincial Large-Scale, Standards-Based Educational Reform

The election of the Progressive Conservative political party in Ontario in 1996 set into motion a series of large-scale standards-based educational reforms that altered the provincial educational system (Levin, 2008). As was the case in other areas of the province, district leaders of the GRDSB balanced work

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Changing leadership practices of district leaders



connected to the amalgamation of four local boards under new governance structures, the harmonization of teacher and staff contracts with restricted terms, the adjustments made necessary by funding cuts, the incorporation of rigid results-based curriculum and assessments, the expectations connected to standardized provincial testing, and the establishment of school councils. The rapid download of such far-reaching educational reforms required supervisory officers to take action on multiple initiatives simultaneously. This unprecedented compilation of reform mandates exerted systemic pressures for massive educational change at the district level.

The Ontario government's blend of policies and associated reform mandates shaped a dominant and forceful direction for school districts and their leaders. The newly defined policy context required significant accountability from school district supervisory officers. Supervisory officers were mandated to respond to all provincial restructuring initiatives. In this study, this component is named "Provincial large-scale, standards-based educational reforms" and is represented by one of three circles in Figure 1 Conceptual Framework: Changing Leadership Practices of District Leaders.

District Change Strategies

A renewed interest in the school district's capacity to improve student achievement emerged in the late 1990's, with the advent of standards-based educational reform at the state and provincial levels. The research evidence suggests that successful school districts employ a number of actions or district strategies to attain district-wide success in student achievement (Anderson, 2006). As well, analysts report that successful districts tend to implement multiple strategies in a coordinated way rather than each in isolation. For the purposes of this investigation, the term "district change strategy" will be defined as "policy, strategy or a named specific course of action" taken by a district (Anderson, 2006, p. 17).

The case study literature provides some clarity regarding the actions or district strategies most often selected by academically successful school districts. These districts focus on student achievement and quality instruction, believe in the capacity of the school system personnel to achieve high standards of learning for all students through attention to explicit goals and targets, commit to state-mandated standards for curriculum content and student performance, align local curriculum with state curriculum policies, and align local assessments of student performance with state performance standards (Anderson, 2006). Successful districts use data to inform practice and provide accountability; they also target district improvement phases, support instructional leadership development, provide a focus for job-embedded professional development for teachers, and promote teamwork and professional community as cornerstones to continuous improvement (Fullan, Bertani & Quinn, 2004; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003).

In this study, district strategic actions are represented by the second circle in *Figure 1*. Conceptual framework: Changing leadership practices of district leaders. The first and second circles are nested to show the impact of the provincially mandated reforms on the organizational strategic actions developed and initiated by the district in response to the pressures of provincial reform mandates.

District Leadership Practices

In Ontario, leadership practice has been defined as a “bundle of activities” enacted by a person or group of persons that “reflect the circumstances in which they find themselves and with some shared outcomes in mind” (Leithwood, 2012b, p. 5). Theorizing leadership as a set of practices recognizes the adaptive and expert problem-solving processes that are integral to the work of leaders. These core leadership practices are those that have been found to have the greatest impact on student learning outcomes. As leaders “help improve the performance of employees,” they draw on four sets of leadership qualities and practices: building vision and setting direction, understanding and developing people, refining and aligning the organization, and improving the teaching and learning program (Leithwood, 2012a; Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, & Yashkira, 2007, p. 7). Within the Ontario Leadership Framework 2012, successful district-level leadership incorporates practices organized under the following headings: improving core processes, creating and aligning supporting conditions, refining approaches to leadership development, and building productive relationships.

As improvement is a process of individual and organizational learning, the work related to increasing the effectiveness of a school district requires supervisory officers to build their capacity for learning how to improve leadership practices. Improving the performance of a school system suggests that senior leaders must learn more about new or untried change strategies and incorporate new knowledge into their current practice in addition to making use of existing leadership knowledge and skills (Elmore, 2005; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012).

The supervisory officers in this study developed district change strategies in response to the pressure of multiple and rapidly downloaded reform mandates exerted by the Ontario government. Changes to leadership practices for this group of supervisory officers were examined as they worked together and responded to GRDSB challenges and provincial reform initiatives. In this study, district leadership practices are represented by the third inner circle nested inside the second circle in Figure 1 Conceptual Framework: Changing Leadership Practices of District Leaders.

Professional Learning Community

The professional learning community structure has been credited with providing the social fabric or infrastructure that is needed to support learning and capacity building in educational organizations (Cormier & Olivier, 2009; DuFour et al., 2006; Fullan, 2007; Wenger, 1998). Proponents of these informal social structures known as professional learning communities also recognize how difficult it is to create and sustain them (Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves, 2003; Kruse, 2001; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999; Wenger, 1998). Researchers continue to contribute empirical evidence as to the characteristics and situational conditions necessary for the creation, development and sustainability of professional learning communities (Cormier & Olivier, 2009; Bolam et al., 2005; Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008; Horton & Martin, 2013; Vecchiarino & Rolheiser, 2009; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

The research literature suggests that the professional learning community model is one promising approach for supervisory officers who wish to improve their leadership practice and develop new ways to

function within the district leadership team. Learning together about how to increase capacity in carrying out their essential leadership functions and perhaps adapt or enhance their leadership practices seems achievable within such a collaborative learning environment.

The professional learning community component is indicated in Figure 1 Conceptual Framework: Changing Leadership Practices of District Leaders by an interrupted boundary. The current investigation will examine whether GRDSB leadership team members functioned as a professional learning community within the leadership dynamic that evolved for these supervisory officers between 2000 and 2006.

This literature review informs the inquiry process for the current investigation as shown in Figure 1 Conceptual Framework: Changing Leadership Practices of District Leaders and addresses the following eight themes: engaging educators in large-scale reform, the role of knowledge in the learning society, the importance of schools to the learning society, the change process, professional learning in practice, cultures to support learning in practice, professional learning communities, and leading for learning.

For the purposes of this investigation, the learning society can be thought of as a “continuing process” that will be improved upon as members of society work to enhance the “effectiveness of learning networks.” Such a society requires infrastructure to support “collaborative learning, the capacity to learn and produce collaboratively, and to maintain and expand effective learning organizations and networks” in public and private sectors (Keating, 1993, p. 249).

Engaging Educators in Large-Scale Reform

Political bodies mandate most large-scale educational reforms, yet the success of the prescribed mandates most often depends upon the engagement of educators in districts and schools. In *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, Fullan argues that the most “powerful lever” for continuous large-scale school reform and for changing the context of the present schooling experience is the moral purpose of public schools (2003, p. 28; 2006). Fullan describes it this way:

Moral purpose of the highest order is having a system where all students learn, the gap between high and low performance becomes greatly reduced, and what people learn enables them to be successful citizens and workers in a morally based knowledge society. (2003, p. 28)

The importance of a strong and sustainable public school system is highlighted in Fullan’s book, as is the critical need to engage and sustain educators in the work of transforming schools and systems to better prepare students for life and employment in the “learning society.”

Fullan asserts that moral purpose should be the impetus for school improvement and that all other district and school processes should be positioned to support moral purpose (2003; 2006; 2007; 2009). Leithwood, Jantzi and Mascall (2002) agree that moral purpose could function as a powerful lever when students and educators see alignment between personal and professional benefits. When goals become desirable, action can be energized toward the implementation of government policies (Fullan, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004). The educational literature affirms that the most frequently cited motivators for educators are helping all students learn and seeing them achieve (Datnow & Costellano, 2000; Fullan et al., 2004; Goodland, 2002). In addition, district supervisory officers may find that the lever of moral purpose

can significantly enhance the possibilities for successful enactment of system improvement initiatives and sustain the improvement cycle.

Enacting district improvement initiatives and sustaining a continuous improvement cycle appears to require both a top-down policy approach and adherence to energized teacher involvement generated from the bottom up. Quite clearly, those who study educational change support the notion that the educational context cannot be improved using only a top-down policy approach (DuFour, 2007; Fullan, 2002; Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994; Levin, 1995). Supervisory officers must engage stakeholder groups by helping individuals see opportunities in the new reform mandates (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

Administrators can certainly assist educators to connect with emotionally charged ideas that may alter teacher practice, thereby creating change activity from the bottom up (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Kotter and Cohen (2002) have found that individuals rarely change through a rational process of analyze-think-change, which would more likely be the product of a top-down policy approach. Educators are more likely to “change in a see-feel-change sequence” (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 11), and advocates of the continuous improvement approach assert that change experiences are motivating when linked to moral purpose (Elmore, 2005; Fullan, 2005). Also, people in general tend to change their behaviours before their beliefs (DuFour et al., 2006; Fullan, 2005). Creating change activity from the teacher level in the organization requires, as a first step, educators testing new practices in their classrooms. This organizational strategy is likely to require more time and resources than what is required to implement an isolated top-down strategy promoted by the district or governmental leadership.

Finally, schools and school systems are also social contexts. In addition to the impact of moral purpose on change initiatives, researchers suggest that shared purpose and norms of collegiality (Fullan, 2002) or joint work (Little, 1990) promise to positively influence the culture of the school and school district. A shared purpose or vision and a sense of ownership can provide the kind of new possibilities that energize educators to engage collectively with the challenge of improving student learning. However, Hargreaves (1997) warns that collaboration for its own sake without consideration of context or purpose is not an acceptable situation. Attention to cultural, social and political differences matters, as the contexts in which new interventions work are not easily replicated (Harris, 2011). The district leadership team must provide a new vision of system action situated within a context of greater capacity building and accountability (Cronin & Genovese, 2012; Elmore, 2005; Horton & Martin, 2013; Vescio et al., 2008; Watson, Fullan, & Kilcher, 2000). A new vision of system action may be more easily developed when district administrators are able to see greater possibilities for schools in these reforms that have been mandated by governing bodies.

In summary, the educational literature suggests there are at least three compelling reasons for educators to become engaged in the large-scale educational reform movement. They include focusing on the moral purpose of public schools, helping educators see new possibilities in reform mandates, and working collegially within educational contexts to achieve a shared purpose.

Role of Knowledge in the Learning Society

As is true for most sectors of the present-day economy, engaging teachers in the activities connected to continuous reform requires the infusion of new knowledge about teaching and learning in schools. When educators are able to apply existing knowledge about their practice to a newly introduced teaching method, for example, they may develop a novel process or practice that can be shared with others (Drucker, 1993). Described another way, newly created knowledge in the form of a program, resource or teaching practice to support teachers may be described as the product of knowledge application by educators within the social context of schools or a school district. In the learning society, this process is understood as that of knowledge creation. The knowledge creation process provides energy and value for the learning organization and the knowledge economy (Drucker, 1993). For schools and school districts, instructional products and processes developed collaboratively by teachers through the knowledge creation process may also move teachers more easily to the knowledge sharing level.

Leaders in the business community began to write in the early 1990s about the changing nature of knowledge and the importance of this resource to the new economy (Drucker, 1993; Reich, 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Drucker (1993) argues that knowledge has become the key resource in the learning society economy, with a value far exceeding that of traditional resources such as labour or land. Further, the success of the modern organization is reliant on its intellectual and service capabilities rather than tangible assets such as equipment, buildings and capital. An innovative knowledge-based product may be the ultimate result when individuals work collaboratively to apply existing professional knowledge to new information. Drucker claims it is the development of knowledge-based products such as innovative designs, programs and services that generates economic value for organizations in the modern learning society. Administrators who understand how to support the development of new workable ideas, programs, techniques and practices as products of employee collaboration may approach the work of transforming traditional organizations into learning organizations in a facilitative manner. Engaging educators in reform efforts so they may work and learn collaboratively on mutually interesting practices is critical to organizational change.

Within the learning society and its associated organizations, the knowledge worker has emerged as the single greatest asset. One of the most liberating notions connected to the learning society context suggests that the location of the new economy (Webber, 1993) is not in the technology, but in the human mind. These increased expectations for employees in organizations to reform schools and school districts may impact individuals in a variety of ways. Personal and professional disorientation can result from top-down reform initiatives that are introduced at a rapid rate. Individuals may experience discontinuity as their daily lives change in response to new social and economic expectations (Hargreaves, 1994). To make responsible decisions and find meaning in their lives and work, employees who struggle with change can receive some assistance from a values orientation. For educational contexts, a focus on the moral purpose of schools provides such a values orientation for individuals at all levels of the organization.

Devising strategies for educational organizations to become learning organizations will be necessary in order to provide ongoing and continuous learning opportunities for educators and students alike. School leaders are encouraged to develop the type of learning culture that enables educators to grow professionally and apply themselves to the task of continuously improving professional knowledge and practices. Teachers and administrators alike will need to continuously improve upon organizational structures, processes and products to support improved teaching and student achievement now and in the future (Hargreaves, 2003).

The Importance of Schools to the Learning Society

There is a growing recognition that learning organizations (Hargreaves, 2003; Keating, 1998) are essential to the future well being of the learning society. In Keating's view (1998), the learning society can be described in the following way:

It has become commonplace to speak of learning organizations capable of effective institutional memory, collaborative goal seeking, and continuous improvement, all of which occur in a real sense at the group rather than the individual level. A learning society can be usefully regarded as a generalization of the learning organization. (p. 694)

Within learning organizations, all types of knowledge are described as social and cultural products. On a larger scale, the learning society that is able to apply and make use of the social nature of knowledge may also be more effective in building knowledge-based economies (Keating, 1998). However, educational scholars have identified the tension that may exist within a knowledge economy that can stimulate growth and prosperity while simultaneously pursuing profit and self-interest at the expense of the social fabric (Hargreaves, 2003). Such scholars conclude that ultimately, the knowledge economy must primarily serve the common societal good and strengthen the social fabric of the larger community (Keating, 1998; Hargreaves, 2003).

Hargreaves (2003) asserts that the moral purpose of the public school system requires that its student graduates be able to function as effective citizens and workers in the learning society as a matter of "fairness and inclusion" and to maintain their own prosperity as well as the prosperity of the larger community (p. 70). While many educators understand that academic achievement and personal and social development are the core purposes of the public school system, they may be less informed about the impact of the fast-changing knowledge-based economy. Understanding this concept is important because the learning society and economy will continue to influence the educational context in a powerful way.

The Change Process

Serious investigation of the change process in schools began in the late 1980s and has continued through the 1990s to the present. During this period there has been a move away from studying change as a phenomenon and toward applying the acquired understandings to the process of educational change within education organizations (Hopkins, 2001). Fullan (1992) describes change as a process whereby individuals are required to alter their ways of thinking and doing. He identifies that newly initiated changes within the school organization are often more difficult to sustain beyond early implementation as such changes to practice are difficult to maintain over time. Fullan refers to this experience as the "implementation dip"

(2005, p. 56). Similarly, other researchers of change also suggest that the change process, sometimes named continuous improvement, is not a linear process but is more developmental in nature (Elmore, 2005; Honig, 2008).

In the learning society, true learning organizations provide opportunities for employees to develop ingenuity and invention by pursuing continuous professional learning; promoting problem solving, risk taking and trust in the collaborative process; and supporting employees as they learn to alter their ways of thinking and doing (Hargreaves, 2003). This process of modifying actions based on professional judgement represents a core process for individuals, teams and organizations that can promote improvement within organizations (Carter & Halsall, 1998; Hargreaves, 2003). Fullan (2007; Horton & Martin, 2013) acknowledges that change theory or change knowledge can impact significantly on education reform decisions but charges supervisory officers in the educational sector to make their tested change theories explicit so that successful strategies may be shared more readily within educator and administrator groups.

Within the context of educational change, Elmore (2005) considers the change process to be developmental and describes continuous improvement as individual and organizational learning. As such, Elmore encourages educators to “learn to do new things” to improve student learning and school system performance through the assimilation of new knowledge into their practice (2005, p.138). Continuing to do the same things in a better way is an insufficient approach to achieving increased student learning, as continuous improvement calls for educators to incorporate new knowledge into their professional practice.

In a study of organizational learning, Argyris and Schon (1974) argue that people possess individual mental maps that guide action in specific situations and provide direction as to how they plan, implement and review their actions. More importantly, few people are aware they are using their mental maps, sometimes called their theories of action. Implicitly held theories of action can make it possible for new knowledge or insights to be incorporated into professional practice (Senge, 1990). As it is also possible for theories of action to impede the integration of new knowledge into practice, it is essential that organizational leaders take responsibility for enabling individuals or groups to redesign their mental maps.

Further, Argyris and Schon (1974) contend that practitioners generally subscribe to two theories of action known as espoused theories and theories-in-use. Espoused theories of action are viewed as explicit and are described as “what we would like others to think we do” and “what we say we do” (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. 30). Theories-in-use are implicit and are often difficult to speak of, although they govern actual practitioner behaviours. Argyris (1980) makes the case that professional competence results from developing congruence between theories-in-use and espoused theories. It is the gap between the two types of theories that creates the dynamic for reflection, dialogue and learning in the practitioner’s experience. As practitioners exercise greater agency and control over their practice, mental maps may be adjusted through reflective dialogue for the purposes of improving the quality of instructional practice and student performance over time (Elmore, 2005). This process builds the internal capacity of a group of educators to work together and share common views about teaching promises to improve the quality of instructional practice (Elmore, 2005).

Professional Learning in Practice

The ability to apply new knowledge to practice in schools and school districts may propel educational practitioners into a working mode that encourages inventiveness, analysis and progressive problem-solving activity. The evidence indicates that instructional practice is improved when educators learn together and are able to share good practice (Little, 1990). Indeed, Harris (2004) found empirical evidence to suggest that successful leaders understand relationships and recognize the importance of shared learning processes that lead to achieving shared purposes in schools.

As well, supporting re-culturing of schools and the potential improvement of instructional practices falls into the domain of district leadership practice, and some direction can be taken from the well-known work of Schon and Argyris, which originated the understanding of the reflection-on-practice processes (Senge, 1990; Smith, 2001). Both researchers view the reflective practitioner as being a generator of theories-in-action and positioned the role of reflection as a process to facilitate the elaboration of specific theories-in-action (Smith, 2001). In a Canadian study, Earl and Lee (2000) found that teachers in over 20 Manitoba secondary schools reported that ongoing inquiry and reflection were important elements in building schools' capacity to change. Successful school improvement may depend heavily on sustained critical reflection (Frost, Durrant, Head, & Holden, 2000) both for an individual and for groups who engage in collaborative work. Providing organizational conditions that support a focus on reflection and interactive reflective activity about new knowledge and practice is deemed a necessary condition to sustain the change culture in schools and districts (Harris, 2004).

In addition, it has been suggested that learning about change-in-practice within an organization can be viewed and understood as single- and double-loop learning. Argyris and Schon (1974), Senge (1990), and Smith (2001) advise that there are two learning responses to mismatches between the intention of an action-in-teaching practice and its actual outcome. The first response, single-loop learning, occurs in an organizational context when something goes wrong and an error is detected, prompting the search for an alternative strategy in order to correct the error (Schon, 1983). The second response, double-loop learning, occurs when the alternative response to the error involves questioning the action's governing variables, such as goals and values that frame the situation in question. Altering the governing variables makes it necessary to reframe the situation altogether. Reflection in this case may mean questioning the policies or assumptions behind the ideas and makes double-loop learning a riskier activity (Schon, 1983). Single-loop learning is more likely to be supported in traditional organizations where teachers and students are situated in formal hierarchies, and where teaching takes the form of standards-based instruction and accountability is measured by standardized tests.

Schon (1983) maintains that double-loop learning provides practitioners with a way of naming a problem and a possible way of learning their way out of the problem. Argyris and Schon (1974) introduce the term theory-in-action, more often known as learning by doing (Elmore, 2005; Fullan, 2007), and argue that learning may occur through the process of reflecting on one's thinking while acting (Senge, 1990). In other words, the theory-in-action may be adjusted conceptually through double-loop learning, and thus the

practitioner may not have to go through the entire experiential learning cycle again. In present-day education settings, practitioners are under considerable pressure to develop their instructional knowledge to improve learning for students. However, development of the ability to engage in reflective practice requires opportunities to collectively reflect on real instructional problems as well as ongoing issues in schools and classrooms (Hannay, 1994). Increasing the capacity of teachers and administrators to collaboratively reflect, inquire and theorize about professional practice provides educators with a greater capacity to improve instructional practice in schools.

Schon (1983) also found the process of reflecting, inquiring and theorizing to be embedded in the work of the best practitioners in many professions. These expert practitioners engage in continuous questioning and continuous striving to understand their lived experience. As well, findings demonstrate that experts from a variety of work contexts are distinguished from non-experts by the extent and depth of their knowledge, not necessarily by their mental abilities (Bereiter & Scardemalia, 1998). The motivation and intention to learn more about their practice appears to be associated with expert practitioners in a variety of professions or fields.

In the Deweyan tradition, Schon (1983, p. 37) supports the notion that communities of practitioners are constantly engaged in “world making” through acts of attention, boundary setting and control. This is done in an effort to match their worlds to their professional knowledge and practice. Some school improvement advocates argue that learning is a process of negotiation among practitioners in an educational context that also supports and encourages double-loop learning (Cronin & Genovese, 2012; Honig, 2008). Organizations pursuing improvement need to consider the value of developing cultures that support this type of professional learning and promise to thrive in the new society.

Cultures to Support Learning in Practice

Students of organizational change understand that continuous improvement is about creating cultures that support personal and collective learning of the participants (Fullan, 2006a). Two promising models designed to support organizational learning are the “adaptive organization” (Garmston & Wellman, 1998) and the professional learning community (Fullan, 2006a). Both constructions provide operational activities that support the work of the participants, such as educators, and also provide an environment that encourages reflective dialogue and collaboration focused on improving teaching and learning in schools and school districts. Each of these models will be discussed in the following sections.

Adaptive Organizations

Adaptive organizations operate by decentralizing decision-making processes, restructuring the work day to create time for collegial interaction, providing a clear organizational purpose and setting outcomes and standards for action (Garmston & Wellman, 1998). Hargreaves (1994) provides further clarification as to the attributes of adaptive organizations. Those attributes include flexibility, creativity, opportunism, collaboration, a capacity to engage in the continuous improvement process, a positive orientation towards problem solving and a commitment to maximizing organizational capacity to learn about the external and internal environment. Leaders of adaptive organizations in the learning society have

the responsibility of ensuring that the key function of an organization is to ensure the integration of specialized knowledge into common tasks in a continuous manner (Elmore, 1996). More specifically, educators apply newly acquired knowledge to projects, tool improvement, redesign of instructional or administrative processes, or the professional practice itself. Organizational change of this nature requires leaders to pursue the implementation of professional learning through the reform of the system's overall learning culture (Fullan, 2006b).

In order for educators to integrate new knowledge and skills into their instructional or administrative practices, they need to work within the tension between their need for stability and the organization's need to destabilize for change. To support such a learning process for educational practitioners, the district must be organized for the cultural condition of constant change (Drucker, 1995; Hargreaves, 2003). Therefore, the organizational challenge for the district leadership team is to support the capacity of groups and cultures so that learning becomes easier and faster (Hargreaves, 2003). Developing adaptive schools and adaptive school districts requires the acquisition of alternative district leadership practices and strategies in order to support this new scale of organizational and cultural change.

Although Stoll and Fink (1996) propose that educators need to develop an image of themselves as knowledge workers in the new society, the current educational cultures and structures found in many school districts may not have the capacity to support this type of change. More traditional organizations with established and formal hierarchies, where teaching is focused on standards-based instruction and associated tests to measure accountability, may generate cultures that are challenged to support educators who attempt to approach work with continuous improvement in mind. Learning and working as knowledge workers requires educators in schools to engage in the process of examining and modifying practices, based on professional judgement that is informed by evidence emerging through the inquiry process. Like Stoll and Fink (1996), Hargreaves (2003) has cautioned that traditional school structures and standardized systems that restrict educators' discretion for decision-making and self initiated change do not tend to support educators as knowledge workers. Hargreaves (2003), in fact, promotes consideration of the value that more informal work structures may contribute to the enhancement of the education context and to supporting the work and learning of educators.

Professional Learning Communities

An alternative option to the adaptive organization model is the professional learning community as it possesses the capacity to bring together the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers in a given school or district to promote shared learning and improvement (Hargreaves, 2003). Professional learning communities can also provide a social process for turning information into knowledge for teaching practice and have clear links to improving learning for students (Fullan, 2006a; 2007; Hargreaves, 2003; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; 2001). This particular knowledge-building function appears to connect professional learning communities directly with the work of school and school leaders as they strive to enable the improvement of instructional practice and student achievement. While researchers pursue the concept of professional learning community as a means of promoting school- and district-wide capacity building for

student learning, they also recognize that professional learning communities are not a quick fix and fostering the development of these informal structures is difficult work (DuFour et al., 2006; Fullan, 2006a; Horton & Martin, 2013; Stoll et al., 2006). Still, there appears to be a growing interest in encouraging the emergence of professional learning communities within schools so they may assist with enabling and sustaining improved student learning (Bolam et al., 2005; Harris, 2011; Hipp et al., 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2011; Vescio et al., 2008).

Following a comprehensive review of the educational literature, Stoll et al. found broad international consensus for this definition of professional learning community:

A professional learning community suggests a group of people sharing critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth promoting way and operating as a collective enterprise. (2006, p. 223)

In addition, Stoll et al. identify key characteristics associated with effective professional learning communities: shared values and vision; collective responsibility for pupils' learning; collaboration focused on learning; individual and collective professional learning; reflective professional inquiry; openness, networks and partnerships; inclusive membership; and mutual trust, respect and support (Bolam et al., 2005; DuFour et al., 2006; Fullan, 2006a). That definition of professional learning communities put forth by Stoll et al. (2006) will serve as a working definition for this empirical study. As well, there is broad international consensus for the key characteristics of effective professional learning communities, and these characteristics will serve as working descriptions of a functioning professional learning community for this current investigation. Selected characteristics of effective professional learning communities will be further explored in this chapter in a theme format. They are: connecting educators with purpose and vision, learning processes, reflective professional inquiry, and building trust to support learning. These characteristics align directly with the working definition of professional learning community chosen for this investigation (Stoll et al., 2006).

Connecting Educators with Purpose and Vision

In a comprehensive review of the educational literature, Stoll et al. (2006) confirm that a shared vision and sense of purpose are essential elements of a professional learning community. As well, a synthesis of empirical findings supports the claim that the action of building vision and setting direction is a core leadership practice (Leithwood et al., 2007). Researchers also recognize that translating a vision into practice for schools remains challenging for leaders due to conflicting reform goals (Ylimaki, 2006) and that this is very much a continuous process (Levin, 2000). Despite the challenges that accompany this particular leadership practice, Fullan (2008) and Honig (2008) claim that leaders who are able to connect their employees with purpose and vision will more likely be able to create an organizational environment that supports cohesion and focus.

Learning Processes

The current educational literature confirms that a concentrated focus on learning processes in schools is necessary to increase the collective effectiveness of a group of educators to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning (Bolam et al., 2005; Fullan, 2007; Stoll et al., 2006). As professional

learning is a condition of school improvement, leaders are required to coordinate professional learning activities to motivate educators and provide access to new knowledge, competencies and resources (Fullan, 2007; Stoll et al., 2006). This is often considered to be a challenging leadership practice, but it is essential for the improvement of teaching practice and student learning.

Professional learning for individuals and groups is also a process central to the development of a professional learning community (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011; Stoll et al., 2006). The social aspect of professional learning suggests that individuals may be supported more practically by engaging with a group of people who share and critically interrogate their practice in a collegial and growth-promoting way (Stoll et al., 2006). Elmore (2005) claims that teachers do not have many opportunities during the school day to engage in continuous learning about their practice. It has been suggested that creating conditions for growth in teachers' professional knowledge and practice is best accomplished by embedding professional development in day-to-day activities and practices (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; as cited by Stoll et al., 2006).

Reflective Professional Inquiry

This dimension incorporates analysis of achievement and examination data, ongoing conversations about educational issues, frequent examining of practice with colleagues, mutual observation, and joint planning and curriculum development. The reflective professional inquiry dimension identified in the Bolam et al. (2005) report was designated as integral to the work of the professional learning community by the research team. There is general agreement among researchers as to the importance of the inquiry process in an effective professional learning community (Horde, 1997; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; Stoll et al., 2006). However, Earl and Lee (1998) claim the development of inquiry mindedness in relation to analysis and use of student achievement evidence appears to take some time to learn and incorporate into practice. Educators require opportunities to develop the capacity to engage in reflective professional inquiry.

DuFour et al. (2006) advocate for the professional learning community to examine tangible results to assess the impact of efforts and decisions. DuFour and his colleagues also claim that a focus on results will undoubtedly lead teachers and administrators to address the need for solutions when students fail to learn key concepts (2004). Schmoker (2006) supports DuFour et al. in the call for a results orientation to the work of educators and advises the district leadership team to establish their own short-term goals, develop plans to achieve them, act on those plans and make frequent adjustments on their analysis of student achievement data (as cited in DuFour et al., 2006; Fullan, 2006b).

Building Trust to Support Learning

Stoll et al. (2006) describe capacity as a complex blend of motivation, skill, positive learning, organizational culture and infrastructure of support. Building a culture that supports continuous professional learning must also provide individuals, groups of teachers, schools and districts with the opportunities to learn and practice new teaching methodologies (Fullan et al., 2004; Vecchiarino & Rolheiser, 2009). The current research literature suggests that building the capacity to sustain professional

learning and support the continuous learning of practitioners may be positively influenced by the development of professional learning communities (Bolam et al., 2005; Fullan, 2006a; Stoll et al., 2006).

Of late, the importance of trust in the development of working relationships and the possible connection to changing school culture as well as school improvement has become a research focus. Initially, Louis (2007) defines two types of trust: institutional trust being the expectation of appropriate behaviour in organized settings based on institutional norms, and relational trust being the result of repeated interactions with others in modern organizations. Of those two types of trust, relational trust between administrators and teachers was found to be an important component in implementing improvement plans within schools. In one investigation, conducted in both elementary and secondary schools, findings suggested that trust might serve as a “core resource for improvement” in schools (Hipp et al., 2008; Louis, 2007, p. 17). These findings support a similar conclusion reached by Bryk and Schneider (2002; 2003), although their research was primarily conducted in elementary schools. Simply put, getting to know people within the context of shared work is important in developing relational trust and also contributes to building the level of respect needed in order for effective professional collaboration to occur in school settings (Slater, 2004).

Trust can also be defined as confidence in the veracity of another person or group (Louis, 2007) and incorporates the dimensions of respect, competence, personal regard for others and integrity (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; 2003). In a study of teachers’ willingness to work with administrators to implement continuous improvement practices in their school and classrooms, Louis (2007) found that “relational trust” was a significant factor associated with the effective response of schools to demands for greater quality and accountability. Social or relational trust was found to be enhanced by the presence of three variables: perceived influence over how decisions are made, a sense that decision makers take stakeholder interests into account, and an agreed-upon and objective measure of the effects of implemented decisions. In short, process integrity emerged as a key underpinning for trust development during the initiation and early implementation of reform strategies. Certainly, Louis’s study emphasizes to district and school leaders the importance of taking sufficient time to carefully plan, implement and evaluate large-scale initiatives. Louis also clarifies that low-trust school environments may not support school improvement initiatives and recommends leaders work first on the “issues contributing to the distrust” (Louis, 2007, p. 20).

Leading for Learning

Since the early 1990’s, educational institutions have undergone extensive public examination and have often been perceived as falling short of societal and political expectations. In response, some international governments have launched large-scale and high-stakes reforms of their schooling systems. Leading researchers in education (Elmore, 1996, 2002, 2005; Fullan, 1992, 2002, 2003; Hargreaves, 1994, 2003; Levin, 1995, 2005) recognize this reality and are urging education stakeholders to consider that problems with the educational systems are not necessarily due to a decline in education but to changes in the world around schools (Levin, 1995). As leaders in the field of education, they charge school districts to develop organizational environments that support a climate of experimentation and learning in order to

respond to the scale of the challenge (Levin, 1995) currently facing schools. At the same time, the empirical evidence indicates that the key to successful improvement begins with paying more attention to the factors that influence student learning (Elmore, 1996; Harris, 2003, 2004; Harris & Jones, 2010; Levin, 2005; Spillane, 2004; Watson et al., 2000). Simultaneously selected top-down and bottom-up re-culturing strategies are required for positive change to occur within educational organizations and to support improved student achievement (Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon have characterized successful educational organizations as those sustaining improvement to learning outcomes for all students over time (as cited by Harris, 2004). To date, empirical research indicates a lack of evidence directly connecting district leader reform efforts with improved student learning within the district (Anderson, 2006; Honig, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2007; Louis, 2008). However, the research literature does confirm the significant impact of leadership on the ability of educational organizations to improve and on the ultimate achievement of their students (Anderson & Louis, 2012; Hipp et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2007; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2002; Wallace, 2000). Leadership that provides a path to forward-looking and productive organizations possesses the capacity to combine the energy and creativity of bottom-up change at the school site with enabling and supportive structures at the top levels of the educational system (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). As re-culturing must occur at all levels of the system, the role of leadership is to “unleash the potential capacities that already exist within the organization” (Leithwood et al., 2007, p. 5).

Leadership Practices

The role of supervisory officers is essential when determining what districts must change to effectively support the improvement of instruction and student achievement (Fullan, 2006b; Lambert, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004). The research literature indicates that leaders of successful school districts use a large repertoire of strategies or actions to support improvement in student learning (Anderson, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Also, effective districts tend to work simultaneously on multiple dimensions of reform, such as new curriculum implementation, special education review of program and delivery, and district fiscal review (Anderson, 2006). The possible connections between selected leadership strategies and the improvement of instruction and student achievement will continue to be illuminated through research investigations. Of particular interest is the district response to system challenges that emerge as numerous reform strategies are implemented, in addition to those challenges that mark the beginning of the change initiatives (Anderson, 2006; Corcoran et al., 2001).

Within some comprehensive reviews of the education literature related to effective leadership, Leithwood et al. identify four sets of leadership practices employed by almost all successful leaders (Leithwood et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004). These four sets of leadership practices are defined as: building vision and setting directions; understanding and developing people; redesigning the organization; and managing the teaching and learning program. Interestingly, the Leithwood et al. research team examined leadership practices in both North America and the United Kingdom and found that the ways in

which leaders apply the leadership practices demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the educational contexts in which they work (Leithwood et al., 2007). These findings support Elmore's (2005) claim that there appears to be no indication that changing the context leads to changes in practice for administrators. In fact, successful leaders demonstrate sensitivity to each school or district context. The literature suggests that the application of contextually sensitive combinations of basic leadership practices by administrators provides schools and districts with needed adaptations to support the improvement process (Leithwood et al., 2007).

Ontario's Public Supervisory Officials' Association

In a 2002 report, the province of Ontario's Public Supervisory Officials' Association (OPSOA) identified that allocating time for leadership at the macro level remains a challenge for supervisory officers because management duties at the micro level consume an inordinate amount of time. Recognizing the ongoing need of Ontario school boards to select supervisory officers who can develop strong educational organizations, OPSOA consulted with association members to review current leadership practices, studied current research on leadership and developed a conceptual framework for supervisory officer leadership. The resulting leadership framework highlighted nine essential qualities that can be divided into three basic categories: learning, character and relationships. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, OPSOA (2005) further released a position paper that describes the supervisory officer role within the Ontario education context. In this publication, the director and supervisory officers are described as the senior leadership team for their organizations. This team accepts the responsibility for educational, organizational and fiscal leadership within the organization (OPSOA, 2005). Further, as leaders in public education, supervisory officers also influence public educational direction at the school, district and provincial levels (OPSOA, 2005).

Ontario Leadership Framework

The Ontario Ministry of Education has recognized there is a growing body of research that demonstrates a direct link between good leadership and improved student achievement. The Leadership Framework (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012) was developed to provide a leadership guide that outlines key practices and competencies as skills, knowledge and attitudes of effective principals, vice principals and supervisory officers. These are the core leadership practices that have been found to have the greatest impact on student learning outcomes.

In the *Ontario Leadership Framework*, competencies and practices for system-level leadership are organized into four domains: core processes, such as setting directions and accomplishing goals; supporting conditions, such as networking and aligning; leadership development by supporting system leaders and elected leaders; and relationships established with system leaders. There is also recognition that leaders draw upon personal leadership resources— including cognitive, social and psychological resources—to effectively enact leadership practices. These competencies, practices and personal leadership resources represent the fundamental repertoire of skills drawn upon by successful leaders in the field of education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012).

For educators, setting direction through the introduction of policy to schools (Andero, 2000; Petersen, 2002) and leading policy transition appears to involve the “unmaking of past policy while simultaneously remaking new policies” (Goldring, Crowson, Laird, & Berk, 2003). Elmore (2005) claims that improvement in the educational context, is a process of learning for individuals, groups, and the organization. It is no longer sufficient to simply make better use of existing knowledge and skills. To support effective learning, educators must have ready access to new knowledge to integrate selected information into their professional practice. Findings also suggest that improvement outcomes can be compromised if the balance between enabling professional growth through professional development opportunities and the provision of sufficient professional autonomy in daily work is not present for the educators. Sullivan and Shulman (2005) found that the district director’s control of choice for educators impacted significantly on improvement outcomes for new district policies.

Current study findings demonstrate that transitional work such as constructing and reconstructing knowledge for the purposes of changing practice are supported by professional development (Hannay, Mahoney, Telford, & Bray, 2004) and require a reliance on social fabric and a sense of community (Goldring et al., 2003). In this present context of continuous educational change, some leading researchers are proposing that the development of communities of learners in educational organizations may provide a needed informal, socially oriented structure to facilitate the learning process (Elmore, 2003; Hargreaves, 2003; Lambert, 2003). Through this informal structure, leaders may be better able to create and share professional knowledge, to inform their leadership practices and to contribute to the task of securing a longer-term sustainable improvement in schools and districts (Hargreaves, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2000; Wenger, 1998).

In summary, schools are required to operate more as learning organizations in the learning society to support improved instruction and improved student learning. If these challenges are to be met, there must be significant changes ahead for the professional practice of educators and for educational organisations. As facilitators of change, supervisory officers will quite likely need to adopt new forms of leadership practice.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study sought to provide insights into the evolutionary changes to leadership practice for a group of supervisory officers in GRDSB. The investigation examined the work of a group of supervisory officers as they responded to school district challenges and provincial reform mandates over a six-year period. Specifically, this study investigated whether the strategic actions and leadership practices enacted by a group of supervisory officers were congruent with those behaviours demonstrated by members of a professional learning community as defined by the characteristics emerging from the research literature. This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology used in this study.

A retrospective qualitative methodology was employed in this study. Such an approach facilitated the collection of rich data regarding the evolutionary changes to leadership practice for a group of supervisory officers.

Rationale for the Study's Qualitative Approach

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explain that most qualitative researchers reflect a phenomenological perspective in a general sense. This approach requires the researcher to gain an understanding of study subjects from the participant point of view and seek to understand the meaning of the participants' "lived experience" of events and interactions (Geertz, 1973; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 22). Reality for qualitative investigators is seen as words or "text," and they most often work with interview transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 8; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The research literature describes qualitative data as "rich"; these data are thought to possess a "potential for revealing complexity" because of the "thick description" that may be garnered through the collection and analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10; Richards & Morris, 2007, p. 174).

Within the qualitative research community, interest has grown in the possibility of reusing data from qualitative studies. As an emerging methodology, secondary analysis has been described as a research strategy which "makes use of pre-existing qualitative research data for the purposes of investigating new questions" (Heaton, 2004, p.2). Heaton (1998) argues that the secondary analysis of the whole or part of a data set can provide a new perspective or a new conceptual focus. Thorne concurs and adds that in a retrospective interpretation, researchers examine new questions that were raised but not addressed in the context of the primary study (Thorne, 1994; 1998, p. 548). For this current investigation, pre-existing data from the research studies conducted by the OISE Midwestern Centre were used to investigate new questions. These new questions focused on the evolutionary changes to leadership practices for one group of supervisory officers, as they responded to large-scale educational mandates in Ontario.

Each study's methodology will be delineated in the following way. First, a description of the sampling and analysis procedures will be provided for each data set produced by the OISE Midwestern Centre study series. Second, the methodology will then be summarized for the current study.

Methodology for Pre-Existing Data

From 2000 to 2006, the GRDSB under investigation entered into an educational research partnership with the OISE Midwestern Centre. As a research partner, the OISE Midwestern Centre studied

the actions taken by supervisory officers as they facilitated a large-scale district improvement initiative during the identified time period. Initially, the GRDSB established three areas of focus for organizational change: leadership, learning and school improvement. Each year, the Midwestern Centre collected data from approximately two teachers and one administrator from at least ten schools within the district. On selected occasions, some or all of the supervisory officers were interviewed for data collection purposes, using focus group interviews or individual semi-structured interviews by the research team.

All interviews and focus group proceedings were transcribed and analyzed for themes, using the NVivo software tools. Findings from each empirical investigation were substantiated with qualitative data and incorporated into six consecutive research reports by the Midwestern Centre research team. The district leadership team received the annual reports from the Midwestern Centre and examined the findings to ascertain progress for the district's student learning and achievement goals.

Research Reports

The OISE Midwestern Centre investigations were undertaken to learn from school-level participants, their “understanding of the actions of district leaders” as they facilitated a large-scale school improvement initiative (Hannay & Earl, 2006, p. 6). Guided by the approved OISE (University of Toronto) ethical protocols, purposeful samples were designed for each study undertaken by the research team. System leaders, school sites, school administrators and teachers were selected as interview participants to ensure equity and to represent the diversity of the school board elementary and secondary schools within the GRDSB. Given that data could not be collected from all individuals in all parts of the district, the sample was based on the data needed in a specific year between 2000 and 2006.

Each of the Midwestern Centre research reports is listed in the following table.

Table 1. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Midwestern Centre Research Reports List from 2001 to 2006

Authors	Year	Report title	Funding source	Publisher
Hannay, L. Telford, C.	2001a	<i>Attainment of our vision, [School District Name] (Focus Group Report).</i>	University Partnership	OISE Midwestern Centre
Hannay, L. Telford, C.	2001b	<i>Attainment of our vision, [School District Name] (Individual Interviews Report).</i>	University Partnership	OISE Midwestern Centre
Hannay, L. Ross, J.	2002	<i>Aligning school-district actions to promote school improvement and accountability.</i>	Ministry of Education, Ontario, Transfer Grant	OISE Midwestern Centre
Hannay, L. Mahoney, M.	2003	<i>Leaders, leading and learning, 2003.</i>	Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada	OISE Midwestern Centre
Hannay, L. Telford, C. Mahoney, M. Bray, C.	2004	<i>The role of a school district in school improvement, [School District Name], year three.</i>	Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada	OISE Midwestern Centre
Hannay, L. Mahoney, M.	2005	<i>The role of a school district in school improvement, [School District Name], year four.</i>	Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada	OISE Midwestern Centre

School Administrator Interview Transcripts

Similarly, in 2005 the OISE Midwestern Centre research team selected participants for school administrator interviews as outlined in the associated University of Toronto ethical protocol. The Midwestern Centre research team employed purposeful sampling in order to identify schools, school administrators and teachers who participated in the interviews. All GRDSB supervisory officers were invited to recommend schools in their associated Family of Schools (a clustering of schools for which they had direct responsibility) that were representative of the level of school involvement in each Family of Schools (Hannay & Mahoney, 2005, p. 2). Initially, school administrators and their staff members were not required to participate in the vision initiative and were not included in the sample. The research team's sampling procedures made certain the selection of school sites represented the diversity of the district by including rural and urban sites as well as small, medium and large secondary and elementary schools within identified geographical areas.

Data were collected annually from a minimum of 10 school administrators as well as 20 teachers. Each individual interview was taped and transcribed in preparation for analysis.

Supervisory Officer Interview Transcripts

In 2006, the OISE Midwestern Centre research team selected participants for supervisory officer interviews as outlined in the associated University of Toronto ethical protocol. To better understand the supervisory officer perspectives, the study sample was purposive in nature and based on portfolio responsibilities within the supervisory officer group as well as the specific geographic areas within the recently amalgamated district. Data were collected from seven supervisory officers of 13 potential candidates by the Midwestern Centre research team. In addition to the mix of leadership portfolio responsibilities, the participants were self-selected representatives of the specific geographic regions within the amalgamated district. Each interview was taped and transcribed in preparation for analysis. At the time of the ethical review process for the current study, the data collected from the supervisory officers in 2006 had not been analyzed for the original study purpose.

Sample Sources, Sample Size and Data Collection of the Existing Data Sources

The sample sizes for each Midwestern Centre study undertaken from 2000 to 2006 were determined by the requirements of the associated ethical protocols. All sample sources, sample sizes and data collection techniques are outlined according to research report year and specific study intention by year in the following sections.

Research Report 2001a

The data sources for the *Attainment of Our Vision, 2001a* research report were three focus groups: teachers, administrators and system personnel. The focus groups were constructed to allow for as many different perspectives as possible. One focus group included teachers from schools that had been involved in the visioning process within the GRDSB. The second focus group consisted of administrators in schools newly introduced to the system vision process. The third focus group involved system personnel with some

actual involvement in the vision process. Each focus group session was audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim.

Research Report 2001b

The data sources for the *Attainment of Our Vision, 2001b* research report were from individual interviews of 40 teachers from 10 elementary schools. The schools were selected to reflect all areas of the board, and all of the schools had been involved in the *Attainment of Our Vision* work to varying degrees. For each school, the sample included a school administrator, a federation shop steward and two teachers. All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim.

Research Report 2002

The data sources for the *Aligning School District Actions to Promote School Improvement and Accountability, 2002* research report were from the individual interviews of 36 principals and teachers from 23 elementary and secondary sites of a pool of 184 schools. Supervisory officers were asked to recommend schools that were representative of all school sites participating in the vision strategy, within their Family of Schools. Schools were also selected based on geographical proximity to decrease the amount of travel time required between schools for interviewers. Individual semi-structured interviews were open-ended and were approximately 90 minutes in length. They were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim.

Data were also collected from two focus groups using open-ended questions. One group included approximately 10 trained vision process facilitators, and the additional group included the same number of system personnel. The role of the vision process facilitator was to work with school staff to develop student learning goals and become actively involved with the district vision strategy. System personnel were representative of each department within the central office. The focus group interviews were audiotaped without individual participant identification and later transcribed verbatim.

Research Report 2003

The data sources for the *Leaders, Leading and Learning, 2003* research report were from six participants, representing each geographical area and Family of Schools within the GRDSB. The individual interviews were approximately 90 minutes in length, audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim.

As well, data were collected from a group of 12 in a focus group format. The questions asked were open-ended and took approximately 90 minutes to answer. The focus group was audiotaped without individual participant identification and later transcribed verbatim.

Research Report 2004

The data sources for *The Role of the School District in School Improvement, Year Three, 2004*, were from individual interviews of 12 principals and 24 teachers representing all of the GRDSB's geographical areas. Supervisory officers were asked to recommend schools in their Family of Schools that were representative of the current level of involvement in the vision strategy and also represented a balance between elementary and secondary schools from urban and rural areas. From the list of schools generated, the Midwestern Centre research team chose three schools for each Family of Schools to maintain the balance between elementary and secondary schools from urban and rural areas. The interview sample at

each school site included the principal and two teachers, for a total of 36 individual interviews. All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim.

Research Report 2005

Data sources for *The Role of the School District in School Improvement, Year Four, 2005* research report were from 12 principals and 24 teachers, representing every Family of Schools as well as elementary and secondary schools. Supervisory officers were invited to recommend schools in their Family of Schools that were representative of the current level of involvement in the vision strategy and also represented a balance between elementary and secondary schools from urban and rural areas. From the list of schools generated, the research team chose three schools for each Family of Schools. The interview sample at each school site included the principal and two teachers, for a total of 36 individual interviews. All interviews were audiotaped and were later transcribed verbatim.

School Administrator Transcribed Interviews, 2005

Data were gathered from 12 principals representing each Family of Schools as well as elementary and secondary schools. Supervisory officers were invited to recommend school administrators in their Family of Schools that were representative of the current level of involvement in the vision strategy and also represented a balance between elementary and secondary schools from urban and rural areas. All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim.

Supervisory Officer Transcribed Interviews, 2006

Data were gathered from seven supervisory officers of a possible 13 candidates and representative of each geographical area and Family of Schools within the district. The supervisory officers were interviewed individually for approximately 90 minutes. Each interview was audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim.

Analysis of the Pre-Existing Data Sources for the Current Study

The data analysis process was inductive and ongoing for each of the investigations in the OISE Midwestern Centre study series. All transcribed interviews were read with the purpose of identifying patterns in the data that represented the participant accounts of the district change process. Initially, coding systems were developed collaboratively by three research team members using the literature review as a guide. As the research officer assigned to this investigation, I applied the coding to the data using the qualitative analysis NVivo software and continued to conduct the analysis on a day-to-day basis. The research team members met with me at critical points in the data analysis process to review the node coding report and detailed data summary together, to discuss emerging themes, and to recommend next steps for data analysis.

Table 2. Data Sources and Sample Sizes for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Midwestern Centre Research Studies

Year	Research focus	Report	Site	Data sources
2000-2001	To study the process as district leaders facilitate a large-scale reform agenda and simultaneously amalgamate four predecessor boards into one school district	<i>Attainment of our vision, 2001a.</i>	[School District Name] elementary schools and central office	3 focus groups of 10 principals, teachers and central office personnel
		<i>Attainment of the vision, 2001b.</i>	[School District Name] 10 elementary schools	40 individual interviews of teachers
2001-2002	To study the district's role in facilitating systemic school improvement	<i>Aligning school district actions to promote school improvement and accountability, 2002.</i>	[School District Name] 23 elementary and secondary schools	36 individual interviews of principals and teachers 2 focus groups of 20 central office roles
2002-2005	To study the district's role in facilitating large-scale school improvement and capture and portray the change process	<i>Leaders, leading and learning, 2003.</i>	[School District Name] central office	6 individual interviews of supervisory officers 1 focus group of 13 supervisory officers
		<i>The role of the school district in school improvement, year three, 2004</i>	[School District Name] central office elementary and secondary schools	6 individual interviews of supervisory officers 12 individual interviews of principals 24 individual interviews of teachers
		<i>The role of the school district in school improvement, year four, 2005.</i>	[School District Name] elementary and secondary schools	12 individual interviews of principals 24 individual interviews of teachers

Suitability of the Pre-Existing Data for the Current Study

Qualitative researchers with expertise in the area of secondary analysis recommend assessing the accessibility, quality and suitability of the needed data when determining the data sources for an investigation (Heaton, 2004; Thorne, 1994). With respect to this current study, access to the data collected in the GRDSB was granted to the present investigator by the Head of the OISE Midwestern Centre. As well, the technical reports and administrator interviews were available to me in electronic format. The aim of the current study is to investigate specific questions that arose from the primary analysis of the pre-existing data sets. Given the longitudinal nature of the OISE Midwestern Centre investigation, there were sufficient and various data available for the current study.

The data collected from supervisory officers in particular provided an overview of the actions taken by the leaders. They had committed to facilitating the improvement of instruction and student learning (Hannay et al., 2004) for their district. As study participants, the supervisory officers provided “cultural expertise” (Bernard, 2000, p. 345), as they were found to be “highly articulate” and had proven themselves to be “very reflective in their observations of their own practice and work” (Hannay et al., 2004). Their experiences provided the “insider view” of changes to leadership practice and a window into the processes used to make changes to practice, while they facilitated a large-scale school reform initiative (Bernard, 2000, p. 347).

Methodology for Current Investigation

Purpose of the Current Investigation

Educational researchers have proposed that the development of professional learning communities in educational organizations may provide a needed informal, socially oriented structure to facilitate the learning processes necessary for continuous change to professional practice. Through this informal structure, educators and administrators may be better able to create and share professional knowledge, to inform their leadership practice and to contribute to the task of securing long-term sustainable improvement in schools and districts (Wenger, 1998; Sergiovanni, 2000; Hargreaves, 2003). Yet, proponents of professional learning communities also recognize the difficulty of creating and sustaining these structures. Part of that difficulty lies in the lack of empirical examination of professional learning communities in educational settings.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of district strategic actions taken in response to the demands of Ontario’s school improvement mandates on the leadership practices and work of the supervisory officers. The district leadership team responses were examined using identified characteristics and processes of a professional learning community.

Research Questions

The current investigation sought findings in response to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do leadership practices change for this group of district supervisory officers between 2000 and 2006?
2. Do the strategic actions and approaches to leadership practices enacted by this group of supervisory officers between 2000 and 2006 reflect the characteristics of a professional learning community as defined in the literature?

The rationale and the research questions for this qualitative study provided the support for the development of the following research design.

Research Design

The current research study was designed as a retrospective qualitative investigation to examine the changes in leadership practices of a group of supervisory officers as they facilitated a large-scale school improvement initiative. In particular, this study was undertaken to ascertain whether this group of district senior leaders functioned as a professional learning community.

The existing data from Hannay et al.'s longitudinal study were collected from technical reports, school administrator interview transcripts and supervisory officer interview transcripts. Evidence collected from the technical reports included the data quotes contained in the findings chapter of each report. Selected OISE Midwestern Centre research report conclusions were incorporated as citations in the findings chapter for this current investigation. The citations were used to identify incremental changes to the strategic actions taken by the GRDSB's supervisory officers from 2000 to 2006. The analyses provided by the OISE Midwestern Centre research team in each of six research reports were not employed in the data collection for this current empirical investigation.

Sample Selection

In advance, the University of Toronto provided approval for this current investigation through the ethical review process. The current investigator was granted access to the data previously collected by the OISE Midwestern Centre research team within the district under study, from 2000 to 2006. As indicated in the required ethical protocol, the following data sources were used in this current investigation, as shown in the following table.

Table 3. Data Sources for the Current Investigation

Year	Data Source	Sample Size
2006	Individual transcribed interviews	7 supervisory officers
2005	Individual transcribed interviews	12 principals
2000–2006	Interview quotes	6 empirically based research reports

The existing data that have been made available for this current investigation belong to the OISE Midwestern Centre. The sample sizes for each Midwestern Centre study undertaken from 2000 to 2006 were determined by the requirements of the associated ethical review protocols. Documents that are most often used as data sources can be categorized as personal documents, official documents, popular culture documents or photographs (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In this study, the technical reports are categorized as official documents.

The present investigator was granted access to the data contained within six OISE Midwestern Centre reports and two additional sets of unanalyzed data. It is important to note that the school data collection sites for the primary data collections were selected by the associated Family of Schools. Respondents from the recommended sites were self-identified supporters of the vision initiative and had worked with a trained system facilitator to develop school success plans guided by the vision framework. Interviewees therefore took a more positive orientation when commenting about their work with GRDSB initiatives.

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers collect data from local actors with the intention of developing descriptions of the social processes under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These data are often acquired from a variety of sources, such as interviews, observations and records (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As indicated previously, the data for the current investigation were gleaned from technical reports and semi-structured interviews. The interviews provided the participants with an opportunity to describe their account of the actions taken by the supervisory officers. The published technical reports provided this current investigation with a rich and stable source of description grounded in the district context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The reports provided comprehensive reviews of the actions taken by the GRDSB as the reform agenda was implemented across the system. Each report incorporated some combination of views from teachers and principals, and some also included district employees such as the supervisory officers.

The analyses provided by the OISE Midwestern Centre research team in each of six research reports were not used in the data collection for this current empirical study.

Data Analysis

Heaton (2004) notes that the approaches used in the analytic phase of some secondary analysis studies often “mirrored those the researchers used in the primary qualitative studies” (p. 97). This was true for the analysis of the existing data provided by the OISE Midwestern Centre for the current research investigation. As I was a member of the OISE Midwestern Centre research team for the first four research reports, it was important to “bracket” or “set aside” the conceptual framework used in the data analysis for the 2000 to 2004 OISE Midwestern Centre research studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The current study was designed to investigate the impact of supervisory officers’ actions taken in response to Ontario reform mandates on the leadership practices of a group of supervisory officers. As the GRDSB reform initiatives unfolded, changes to work practices were studied as the district leadership team responded to system challenges. This was accomplished by examining their evolving work practices using Bolam et al.’s (2005) empirically developed characteristics and conditions of a professional learning community. The following table provides information that will assist with the discussion of learning community characteristics that guided data analysis for this study.

Table 4. Characteristics Demonstrated by Effective Professional Learning Communities

Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning Communities
Shared values and vision
Collective responsibility
Reflective professional inquiry
Collaboration
Individual and group learning
Mutual trust, respect and support
Inclusive membership
Openness, networks and partnerships
Learning by doing action orientation with a focus on behavior rather than attitude
Commitment to continuous improvement
Focus on results using goals and data

Qualitative data collected from each of the six Midwestern Centre research reports as well as the data gleaned from 19 additional unanalyzed administrator interview transcripts, gathered by the Midwestern Centre research team in 2005 and 2006 provided the data sources for this current empirical investigation.

First Level of Analysis

This current investigation undertook to identify the GRDSB strategic action themes that were consistently present in the data collected throughout six years of documented organizational reform. This study focus required analysis of both the district strategic actions and the supervisory officers' responses to the challenges arising from the implementation of reform-based strategic actions. All data quotes from each report and interview transcript were coded and analyzed to determine emergent themes for the first level of data analysis of district strategic actions. The development of analytic codes used for this first level of analysis was guided by the research questions, conceptual framework and literature review. This was done to develop a method for tracking and comparing themes and developments from 2000 to 2006.

Given my past experience analyzing much of the data from 2000 to 2004 for the OISE Midwestern Centre, it was important to set aside the research focus for the primary research and be consistently mindful of the research questions and conceptual framework used for the current investigation.

Research Reports

Each interview quote contained in the findings chapters of all six research reports was identified by a previously assigned code indicating the school district, the source of data, the year of data collection, the school, the individual and their role. This system was maintained as outlined in the associated OISE ethical protocol and served to assist with the organization of the data for the current investigation.

At the first level of analysis, the interview quotes found in the research reports were analyzed to identify district strategic actions taken by senior leaders. Specific codes, developed for the district strategic action themes, were applied to each interview quote. This group of coded quotes collected from six technical reports represented the first set of data to be analyzed for this study.

Administrator Transcribed Interviews

The 12 principal interviews and seven supervisory officer interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. They were unanalyzed when this current study was undertaken. Each interview quote was then identified by a code indicating the school district, the source of data, the year of data collection, the school, the individual and their role. The original coding identification system was applied to each interview transcript as outlined in the associated OISE ethical protocol and served to assist with the organization of data for this current investigation.

At the first level of analysis for this current study, the interview quotes in the interview transcripts were analyzed to identify themes in the district strategic actions taken by supervisory officers. As with the preceding research reports, specific codes developed for district strategic actions were applied to each individual interview transcript quote. This group of coded interview transcript quotes combined with those collected from the technical reports represented the first set of data analyzed for this report.

Second Level of Analysis

The remaining interview quotes found in the findings chapters of the six technical reports were analyzed to identify the supervisory officers' responses to the district challenges that emerged as strategic actions were implemented within a context of reform. Analytic codes were developed for the characteristics of a professional learning community, as found in the research literature, and applied to these data. That analysis resulted in the design of a method for tracking and comparing themes and developments from 2000 to 2006.

The quotes found in the administrator interview transcripts were analyzed to identify the GRDSB leaders' responses to the district challenges that emerged as strategic actions were implemented within a context of reform. As with the preceding research reports, specific codes developed for themes found in the professional learning community literature were applied to these data. This group of coded administrator transcript quotes combined with those collected from the technical reports represented the second set of data analyzed for this report.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

In keeping with the traditions of the qualitative research perspective, the criterion of trustworthiness was used to ensure the quality of the current study's findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was accomplished through the establishment of credibility or confidence in the "truth" of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The techniques used to conduct an investigation that achieved credibility included prolonged engagement, member checking and negative case analysis.

Prolonged Engagement

Thorne cautions against undertaking qualitative secondary analysis in an independent capacity (1994, as cited by Heaton, 1998). This method is considered to be more acceptable as an approach to data analysis if the researcher was a member of the original research team (Heaton, 2004; Heaton, 1998). The present investigator of this current retrospective study was a member of the primary research team and served as a research officer for the OISE Midwestern Centre between 2000 and 2004.

As a member of the Midwestern Centre research team, I was assigned to the empirical investigations associated with the research partners. Prior to each annual data collection phase, I conducted a review of the literature and prepared a literature review summary to inform the work of the research team. I also attended research partnership meetings held at the GRDSB central office on a regular basis, as well as presentations of research findings to the district leadership team. I became more knowledgeable about the emerging culture of this newly amalgamated district and more adept when working with the numerous data sets.

As the research officer assigned to the primary investigations from 2000 to 2004, I conducted numerous interviews of teachers, administrators, and supervisory officers and completed the analyses of the resulting data sets. During that time, I also visited of schools and the GRDSB central office, made observations and built a working rapport with teachers and administrators. I developed an informed

appreciation for the complex district culture and an understanding of the context (Schwartz & Ogilvy, 1979).

Member Checking

Participant checking was undertaken in a formal manner to establish credibility for the findings of the current investigation. Interpretations and conclusions were tested with a sampling of central office staff from whom the data were obtained in the OISE Midwestern Centre studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that this is a crucial technique for the establishment of credibility. However, researchers are aware that the technique provides both strengths and problems. Member checking can provide respondents with the opportunity to confirm or challenge the results and the data. Members and researchers may have quite different interpretations of the data or conflicting views of the interpretations (Angen, 2000). In the case of the current investigation, member consultation provided responses that provided for further refinement of the study themes (Heaton, 2004).

Negative Case Analysis

The present study methodology required searching out the negative cases, or examples of experiences that did not support the findings (Richards & Morse, 2007). Tensions typically associated with the implementation of a professional learning community were found to be more prevalent in the data collected in the early years as compared to data collected from the later years of the study.

In the primary investigation, research sites and data sources were selected for data collection purposes precisely because each school's staff and principal had declared the desire to engage with the GRDSB's Vision Initiative. Supervisory officers chose data collection sites from an array of self-selected school staff groups who intended to approach this initiative with a positive perspective. Nevertheless, negative cases were found within data excerpts as participants describe mandated top-down experiences during the early implementation of the district change strategies. Initially, district leadership team members expected a particular response to be evident within schools and classrooms. This leadership approach is most often associated with a command-and-control relationship with schools rather than actively facilitating a change process to improve teaching and learning across the district.

Summary

This study sought to provide insights into the evolutionary changes to leadership practice for a group of supervisory officers in the GRDSB. The actions of a group of supervisory officers were examined as they responded to school district challenges and Ontario educational reform mandates over a six-year period. Using a qualitative methodology, this study investigated whether the district strategic actions and leadership practices enacted by a group of supervisory officers were congruent with those behaviours demonstrated by members of a professional learning community.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter summarizes the research findings for this retrospective qualitative investigation. The first part of this chapter offers a description of the study context and a brief history of one of the 34 English Public School Districts of a total of 71 districts in the province of Ontario. This district's history is aligned with significant and far-reaching reforms that have taken place in Ontario's educational organizations since 1997.

The Context of the Study

By 1997, the newly elected Ontario government had established a large-scale, standards-based educational reform agenda that brought a period of intensive and extensive educational change. During this time, money moved from the public sector to the private sector as education, health and welfare came under criticism (Fullan, 2009; Majhonovich, 2002, p. 19). Educational funding was restructured, district autonomy for making locally based decisions was very much restricted, and government grants to school districts were reduced in size. In the interests of efficiency, the Ontario government amalgamated many smaller school boards into larger regional school districts and simultaneously reduced the authority of the locally elected school boards. In 1998, four school districts were legislated into the GRDSB. Consequently, supervisory officers were forced to balance the school board amalgamation process with multiple legislated mandates rapidly downloaded to all provincial boards from the Ontario Ministry of Education

Initiation of the District Strategic Plan

In order to respond to provincial mandates and create a unified school system in a reasonable time frame, the GRDSB began a process of harmonization that would bring all of the predecessor boards together. This district included 154 elementary schools and 30 secondary schools to serve approximately 80,000 students in rural and urban areas. As a first step in the amalgamation process, three areas of focus were established for the district: leadership, learning, and school improvement. Learning and school improvement became the responsibilities for two of three senior supervisory officers. As a member of the district leadership team, the director of the GRDSB took responsibility for the leadership focus, assigned a team to research the leadership literature, and developed a method for building a common organizational culture across the GRDSB. The leadership development team began the process of writing the Caring, Learning Community foundations document. This document reflected the foundational values and beliefs identified by all of the predecessor districts, the characteristics of leaders as evidenced in the research literature, and the integration of the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession and Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession in Ontario.

The *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession (2006)* provides a framework of principles that describes the knowledge, skills and values inherent in Ontario's teaching profession. These standards articulate the goals and aspirations of the profession and convey a collective vision of professionalism that guides the daily practices of members of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). The *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession (2006)* represent a vision of professional practice for educators in their positions of trust. Members of the OCT hold a commitment to students and their learning, and they demonstrate

responsibility in their relationships with students, parents, guardians, colleagues, educational partners, other professionals, the environment and the public.

In 1998, the *Caring, Learning Community* foundations document was piloted in three GRDSB schools. As well, the director assigned the leadership development team the task of consulting with employee groups about the foundations document. The feedback collected from approximately 1000 individuals indicated that integrity and the building of trust were the largest issues for employees in the amalgamation process. The vast majority of those consulted believed that the leadership characteristics identified in the *Caring, Learning Community* foundations document should be a standard for all employees in the district. This feedback was incorporated into the foundations document, and the leadership team then developed an in-service strategy that introduced the *Caring, Learning Community* foundations document to the system in 1999.

In the summer of 2002, the GRDSB released a discussion paper that began a district review of the development and initiation phases of the *Caring, Learning Community* and *Attainment of Our Vision* strategies. The review recognised the creation of *The Foundations Framework* and *Vision In-Service* to support school improvement and site-based improvement initiatives during the first year. As well, leaders for the school improvement focus were recognized for production of the *Quality Learning in a Caring Learning Community* document. This document provided descriptions of teaching practices that are often present in quality classroom environments and these descriptions were aligned with the behaviours provided in *The Foundations Framework* and *Vision In-Service* documents. At the same time, the supervisory officer with responsibility for the professional learning focus had implemented a professional development document titled *Professional Learning Communities*. This document focused on building a collaborative culture to support the initiation of school improvement efforts, and it was also recognized in the discussion paper designed for the district review process.

A comprehensive review of the *Caring, Learning Community* implementation was conducted by the GRDSB during the 2002 to 2003 school year. Representatives from each of the district's stakeholder groups were consulted, and the findings indicated strong support for this vision. In 2003, a Vision Advisory Committee comprising representatives from all employee groups, school councils, home and school associations and trustees reviewed the input collected from employees. The advisory committee recommended the Mission statement be revised to read "Improving Student Learning." The district's Belief Statements, which began with "Students Come First," remained unchanged, and a Goals section was added to provide specific direction to each school, staff and department. Finally, a new graphic representation of the Vision, Mission and Foundation Principles was approved at the same time.

Implementation of the District Strategic Plan

The completion of the 2002 to 2003 district-wide consultation process and the inclusion of refinements following community and employee input in 2004 signalled the conclusion of the initiation phase of *A Caring, Learning Community* and the *Attainment of Our Vision*. The GRDSB moved to a focus on the implementation of the *Attainment of Our Vision*. The implementation phase was designed to ensure

that the vision, mission and values became embedded as part of the GRDSB's culture, promoted system alignment and led to the improvement of student learning. Recommendations from the consultation process report of 2003 provided the strategic direction for the district's implementation phase.

From 2003 to 2006, the GRDSB continued to focus on improving student learning through attention to school growth plans and encouraged schools to emphasize school improvement, professional learning communities and increased "instructional intelligence." The theory of instructional intelligence may be defined as the ability of the teacher to utilize content knowledge, instructional methods, and assessment literacy that impact positively on student learning in the classroom, based on research into how students learn (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001). Changing teacher practice to improve student learning was supported through the *Increasing Instructional Intelligence Project* to assist schools with the instructional intelligence aspect of the strategy. Teacher and administrator representatives from all schools within the district were required to participate in a structured in-service program designed to increase their instructional intelligence in support of student learning. From 2003 to 2006, an associate professor at OISE instructed selected staff groups from every GRDSB school in cooperative learning and classroom management. The *Increasing Instructional Intelligence Project* represented one of many strategic actions contained in the implementation phase of the district's comprehensive strategic plan.

University Partnership

This newly created school GRDSB began a re-culturing process with very few district models to inform the development of their organization. Initially, district efforts were focused on the initiation of the vision strategy known as the *Attainment of Our Vision*, in addition to a reform agenda centred on learning and school improvement. Simultaneously, GRDSB leaders entered into an education research partnership with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Midwestern Centre. Together they intended to study the school improvement processes employed by the district as the supervisory officers facilitated large-scale school improvement initiatives. At the time, the OISE had established Midwestern Centres across the province of Ontario, where Midwestern Centre faculty engaged in a variety of research projects with area school districts. Throughout the GRDSB and OISE Midwestern Centre program of research, the actions taken by the district were investigated on an annual basis from 2000 to 2006.

In order to study GRDSB change, data were collected annually from supervisory officers, school leaders, teachers and other personnel. The initiation of the *Attainment of Our Vision* became the focus of the research work in the first year of the partnership. From 2000, the research program developed into one that examined the role of the district in facilitating and leading systemic school improvement for student learning. In the later years, the research focus encompassed an examination of the processes that supported knowledge creation, as the district leadership team endeavoured to enhance teaching practice to improve student learning. Following each data collection, a research report was prepared and presented to the district's supervisory officers and trustees by the head of the OISE Midwestern Centre.

Findings from the Current Investigation

The findings presented in this chapter represent one view of the GRDSB supervisory officer responses to rapidly downloaded provincial reform mandates from 2000 to 2006. The district change strategies initiated by district were analyzed first, to establish those strategies most strongly evidenced in data over a six-year period. Next, district actions, taken in response to the system challenges that emerged from the initiation of selected change strategies, were examined to ascertain the impact on the leadership practices of system leaders. Senior leaders' work practices were examined using the lens of Bolam et al.'s (2005) empirically developed characteristics and conditions of a professional learning community. The chapter is therefore organized to present each of four identified district change strategies followed by the corresponding findings that represented the GRDSB leaders' responses to the emerging systemic challenges and tensions.

First Strategic Action: Building a Shared Vision

The process of building a shared vision within the GRDSB began with the introduction of the *Attainment of Our Vision* document in 1999. Following a district-wide consultation in 2003, the most current version of the district vision statement was *A Caring Learning Community*. The mission of improving student learning was intended to support the vision. Additionally, the foundation principles or values included in the vision document support the mission and include integrity, communication, problem solving, teamwork, continuous improvement, mentoring, job-specific skills and quality learning. The *Attainment of Our Vision* represents the evolution of this strategic action and parallels the GRDSB's organizational development since the establishment of this amalgamated district in 1998.

The vision provided participants and school staffs with a vehicle to address both district amalgamation and school changes. The *Attainment of Our Vision* framework included three areas of emphasis: leadership, learning and school improvement. As well, it provided a set of values and skills for all employees of the district to consider when working together. Initially, however, the vision was thought to be a top-down initiative that belonged to the "Board." As one teacher described it:

We are a huge board. We have amalgamated four different areas [boards]. We have a lot of teachers, a lot of students. We are all over the place. How the devil could you ever bring this together? You know, if you'd started with a question and asked staffs to sit down and do a brainstorm, how could you possibly make this work? And then say, okay, this is what you're saying. But there was none of that. It was "here's the vision, here's the overhead". Well I think right from the beginning it felt it's coming down from above. . . .
[FG01: T]

Throughout the complex amalgamation process, supervisory officers were committed to reforming the district into a unique culture while minimizing the impact of structural changes on schools. Initially, the majority of the work took place in the board offices and at leadership meetings. One superintendent explained the position of the senior leadership group:

Because in the first two years, our intent was to make the amalgamation a non-event for schools so that they would not see that there was anything as a result of that amalgamation that affected them. And for the most part we did that. It was all central

office stuff, policies and procedures, bringing it all together. It wasn't much of a change at the school level, other than trying to create a culture in the last two years. [02BF1]

As a group of leaders, supervisory officers were focused on assisting educators and support staff through the creation of a sense of identity, using the vision as a focus for action. A district leader described the top-down approach in this way:

I think it had to be an initial, central motivation that we're going to do something together. I don't think it comes from the grassroots. . . . We have to create that buzz. We have to create that focus and say, "This is what we're about. This is what we profoundly believe." [SInt02: SO1]

As leaders, supervisory officers worked with all GRDSB employee groups to develop shared understandings about the vision. Self-selected schools were given opportunities to work with a trained district facilitator to develop a school success plan guided by the vision framework. One principal noted the active involvement of supervisory officers in setting organizational direction at this stage:

They [supervisory officers] provided a structure within which we could design our own site. They've modelled what they'd like us to do and they've given us direction. So unless you're sitting under a bushel basket somewhere, it's pretty clear to me what they want us to do and how they want us to do it. Thank goodness they've given us that direction. For once I feel I know where they'd like us to go. [SInt02: YP]

Supervisory officers understood that the vision strategy was evolving with district personnel and encouraged discussion and reflection about the document on a regular basis. Some educators continued to question whether the emphasis should be on the district culture or the students. As one superintendent described it:

Even three years ago I think there was some debate about, were we about creating a culture and a climate or were we about improving student learning, and I think we've gradually got to the point where we know the culture and climate's important, but it's important in order to improve student learning, not just to create a nice place to come to work or come to school every day. . . . [SInt02: SB6]

Consultation opportunities were made widely available to district employee groups as the system questioned the meaning and intent of the vision document. One supervisory officer described the nature of discussions with individual educators as the vision work evolved:

Through supervisory officers we've developed a draft model for a slightly new look at the vision. The vision implementation was '99 and 2003. We could have said it's going to be April 2003. "Oh, I've done that. . ." but we continue to be a learning organization, and so the vision will not be static. It will have little tweaks, little twists, little improvements. That it is a living and growing concept. So we're getting a lot of feedback now and the feedback has ranged from one principal saying, "No superintendent has ever mentioned the vision to me ever," and suggesting that the discussion is only so one person can put his mark on the vision. So we've got that extreme, to people that have embraced the discussion paper and embraced the thrust of moving learning to the centre [of the graphic]. [SInt02: SB3]

As mentioned in this chapter's "Context of the Study" section, supervisory officers proposed a re-conceptualized version of the *Attainment of Our Vision* initiative, following a district-wide review process in the 2002 to 2003 school year. Improving student learning was positioned as the central focus of the

vision initiative graphic. Additionally, the portrayal of the school culture changed to that of one where improvement in learning is made possible through the creation of an enabling environment (caring), attention to pedagogical innovation (learning) and support by the collaboration of staff and community (community).

Hannay, Bray and Telford (2003) noted the GRDSB vision initiative became better understood and more accepted once the emphasis shifted from *A Caring, Learning Community* to a focus on improving student learning. A supervisory officer explained the far-reaching effects of the shift as follows:

I think we made a big step forward this year when we took the Vision diagram and put improved student learning at the centre of it. I think that was a subtle, but critical difference, because it then reinforced a lot of what we talked about with data analysis. It reinforced the idea of changing teacher practice through the critical analysis of student learning. [SInt02: SO1]

A focus group member identified the action orientation that resulted and described it this way:

I think that they've [school district] tried to establish a blueprint for action, develop a common voice, a common vocabulary so that as people interact no matter where they are, when certain terms are used, they all have a meeting point. Like identifying a kindred spirit in some sense and from there you can establish the baseline of where you want to go. What you want to do with the tools that you have. [SInt02: FG7]

As well, the data collected in 2003 suggested that the vision served as the link between the GRDSB office and the schools. Research findings indicated that principals and teachers in schools were impacted by the vision and the reform initiatives (Hannay et al., 2004, p. 121). A principal observed:

I think its [Vision] provided focus for a system as large as ours. It's provided supervisory officers with direction in terms of what we do as principals at principals' meetings. In a system as large as ours, its tried to, and I think succeeded in putting everybody on the same sort of page, in terms of what we're about. And sort of unified the culture and philosophy of the Board across the system. [SInt03 TP]

Further, throughout the data collected in 2004, the collective vision of improving student learning was credited with encouraging individuals to work together within and between schools (Hannay & Mahoney, 2005). By all accounts, the vision was referred to less often and in a less specific way throughout the participant interviews. Yet, the shift to identifying the need for professional learning opportunities as a way to improve student learning was clearly evident in the data. Another principal verified the emphasis on learning:

I think there's a tremendous focus on learning. I really do. I think that we are committed to personal learning and learning as a life-long process. And that isn't just work-play. I think people really do believe in that and really pursue their own learning. I think that it's a value that people have felt really important. . . . [SInt05: PPP]

However, a recurring concern about the perceived purpose of the vision and the ability to impact student learning was described by a classroom teacher this way:

I think the Vision is something that they spent a lot of time preparing as an image for the public. I don't think it necessarily impacts what actually happens in the school, whether you change it from a Caring Learning Community to a success-for-all-students or whatever it is. It is probably not critical to what happens in the classroom. [SInt04: CCT1]

The district leadership team persisted in their efforts to share the work of vision development. One principal described the commitment demonstrated by the supervisory officers to refining and continuously adapting the vision with teacher and administrator input:

I would say that they have in the sense with the vision, how they've worked on refining that. How they worked on sharing it with all employees. And knowing that's what they believe in and it's what they're about and what we're about. And we communicate that at our school council meetings and with staff. And so we're one big team. So I think they're constantly striving to see, you know, I don't see the board as ever wanting to be stagnant. And they don't see themselves as that they're there. You know, they can always be working toward or refining or improving. And they're always asking for input.... [SInt05: UUP]

Not all school administrators could validate the capacity of the vision strategy to bring the GRDSB together and provide direction for classroom teachers over a number of years. One principal explained:

It's still here. But it's dying a slow death. And I think they put a lot of money into the vision statement. And a lot of money into all of that stuff. And training every school in the vision and that. And people didn't see the result in the classroom. They just did not see that. I think that was a huge, huge outlay of money for things that didn't affect the kids directly. Now maybe it had some underlying [omitted]. But the teachers were really resistant to it. [SInt05: XXP]

The value of the vision strategic action continued to remain a central focus for the system leadership activities. A supervisory officer affirmed the importance of providing a critical foundational framework for the district through the development, initiation and implementation of the vision:

I think the vision, there are some who believed that it was just a laid on, kind of arbitrary kind of piece that was necessary because we have to have something to focus upon. We have to have the common set of values and the language to say this is what everything needs. To give it the context. And once you have the context, you can bounce everything off of it. If it doesn't fit within this context, then it is not good for us. [SInt06: SA9]

The *Attainment of Our Vision* is one strategic action that began as a top-down initiative and was perceived as belonging to the supervisory officers. As the newly formed GRDSB worked through amalgamation challenges, the vision provided a vehicle for district personnel to develop a shared sense of identity, purpose and direction. Although "A Caring, Learning Community" was officially designated as the vision statement for the district, the mission of "Improving Student Learning" resonated more fully with school administrators and their staffs. The evidence supports the concept that improving student learning served to energize administrators and teachers to seek ways to enact the GRDSB mission. Additional opportunities were created for stronger connections between schools and the district through the newly incorporated mission. The vision strategy was adapted once again to better reflect the changing nature of the district context, and it remains integral to the evolving culture.

It is the supervisory officers' response to dilemmas connected to key actions taken by the same district leadership team that is the focus of this current research investigation. The next segment reviews the senior leader response to the challenges that surfaced as newly adapted work when the *Attainment of Our Vision* was initiated within the system.

The District Response to Strategic Action: Building a Shared Vision

From 2000, the supervisory officers of this newly formed district demonstrated a commitment to building a vision and direction. They developed the concept in a methodical manner and repeatedly requested input from all employee groups. The analysis of district senior leadership responses to the challenges and tensions that emerged during the development, initiation and implementation of the *Attainment of Our Vision* strategic action are summarized under the following three headings: developing a shared purpose, developing a system dynamic through a shared sense of purpose; and developing trust through professional dialogue.

Developing a Shared Purpose

Evidence gleaned from this current retrospective study indicated that a group of supervisory officers developed and committed to shared values, mission and a vision for GRDSB. Participants did not often differentiate between each element of the vision strategy and tended to refer to the entire initiative as the vision. A senior leader identified what the *Attainment of Our Vision* represented to him/her:

It [The Vision] just sets the framework for basically how we should work with each other. The values, the beliefs are all entrenched in that [Vision]. [FG00S]

Early in the vision initiation process, a principal commented on the influence that supervisory officers have had on the GRDSB and the province because of the way they worked together:

I think that possibly they've [senior administration] learned that the positive influences they've had from the director to the executive and the ...working together, and involving the community every step of the way, and doing the annual reports on the Vision and things like that... I think it shows that this board can be instrumental in the development of education, not only for this board, but for the province. I think that they're taking a leadership role, as I would in the building, as the director would for the board. I think that collectively, they've taken the leadership role for other boards with this model. [01I3]

As the vision was initiated, supervisory officers were seen more often in schools and demonstrated an interest in helping school administrators and teachers learn more about and engage with the *Attainment of Our Vision*. School growth plans, focused on the improvement of student learning, provided a method for bringing the vision to life during discussions with teachers and administrators. One superintendent described it this way:

And that's where we need the superintendents to be -- when they go into the school to talk about improving learning, to having that discussion, the context of the whole school growth [growth plans] and vision. And so we're continuing to push that. . . so the vision will not be static. It will have little tweaks, little twists, little improvements. That it is a living and growing concept. . . [SInt02: SB3]

The supervisory officers committed over the long term to promote the vision through relationship building with school administrators and staff. They developed goals together as a senior administration team and were accountable to one another in achieving the identified goals. Another supervisory officer noted:

Persistence. The ability for people to remain persistent, because there's no external motivation, so the motivation has to come from within or from the team, so if we don't constantly talk about it the individual becomes isolated and we'll eventually lose

motivation. Same thing at the school level. If the superintendent doesn't constantly talk about it with the principal, the principal will lose motivation on it. So, the talking about it, which is built into our department goal, creates an accountability factor, but it also creates motivation. [SInt02: SB4]

Initially, the supervisory officers took a top-down approach to the initiation of the *Attainment of Our Vision* strategic action and accepted it as leadership responsibility. They modelled the way to work together as a group of supervisory officers. They were also aware that a bottom up effort was required for the strategy to become an energized action plan for schools. A supervisory officer described the need for the emergence of a system dynamic in the form of energy, motivation, and discussion:

[W]e have to have a thermal inversion of commitment, because then it does have to generate, but we have to create that buzz so to speak. We have to create that focus and say, "This is what we're about. This is what we profoundly believe. . . . [SInt02: SB1]

In the 2003 data collection, principals expressed support for reform changes advocated by the supervisory officers. School administrators claimed alignment was occurring between the vision and school improvement work in schools. For instance, one principal suggested:

I think the Superintendents are living it. They're bringing in good speakers to give us the theory and some practical suggestions. Then that's going to take them into the next step, and that is changing classroom practice. That's what everything has to build on as far I'm concerned. That's why we're here. As I tell our students, that's our reason for being here, to learn and nothing else. I think that whole reform thing is definitely going in the right direction. [SInt03: SP]

The senior leadership group collectively engaged in building a vision and setting a direction for employee groups, students and parents within the GRDSB. Supervisory officers modelled the impact of the vision on their work as district leaders and shared their values and plans for the district in a transparent manner. The district leadership team brought the vision into the daily work of administrators and teachers through conversations, development of school growth plans, and demonstration of the values identified in the vision in their working relationships with each other and within their Family of Schools. By 2003, the GRDSB employees had participated in a district-wide consultation and review of the vision initiative. All employee groups contributed input that led to the re-conceptualization of the vision initiative and the graphic representation of it.

Developing a System Dynamic Through a Shared Sense of Purpose

The supervisory officers demonstrated a commitment to building consensus about the vision and persistently pursued connections with principals and teachers to support improved student learning. They continued to apply pressure systemically through the initiation of the vision strategic action and anticipated some energized actions from principals and teachers. A supervisory officer outlined the newly emerging role of the supervisory officer that relied on face-to-face interaction with educators in schools:

They [principals and teachers] hear from us regularly. We visit their schools regularly. We talk about quality learning and accountability. There's a meaning to our visits and it all focuses in on improving student learning. [SInt02: SO2]

A superintendent described the critical nature of engaging educators in the process to elicit commitment and generate much needed “bottom-up” energy from the schools. He/She suggested the following:

I believe that it’s essential to engage, meaningfully engage all of the players and that each and every one of those players has something to contribute, and if you get people engaged, I believe you then get commitment...[SInt02: SB3]

Once student learning was moved to the centre of the district vision graphic, there were noted adjustments to the nature of educator interactions in schools and classrooms. One principal described the energized changes that he/she observed in some schools as educators worked with the adapted version of the vision:

Before amalgamation, there was a level of complacency, and that’s not there now. What you find now are schools and teachers looking for ways to improve student learning and going out and seeking that. [SInt03:ZP]

Educators within some schools reported more of a group effort on the part of teachers once the vision was understood by the staff. A teacher participant described what a focused collaborative effort, guided by the vision, meant to school staff:

We all have the same direction. We are all wanting the same goal in the end. That we put things aside so that it is a group effort instead of one department versus another. We realize that we can work together to make a positive experience being in high school. [SInt04: CCT2]

Another principal explained the positive aspects of a collaborative approach among educators engaged in bringing to life specific improvements to student learning at the school level:

It is leaking out. It is. Teachers that we thought, oh you know, I don’t know if they’ll get on that wagon right away. But, yeah, you know, they just hear it, they’re catching the bug, and they’re trying it, and it’s neat. And so at staff meetings, when we have our PD at staff meetings, the people on the cohort are sharing what they are doing. Teaching, having a training moment for staff. And then next staff meeting some are coming back, oh, I tried that. And oh, this is how it went.... I think time. And that they see the value. And that it’s valued at the school level. [SInt05:UUP]

The evidence suggested that the “thermal inversion of commitment” [SInt02: SB1] anticipated by one supervisory officer had occurred within some schools in the district. Principals and teachers reported energized, action-oriented responses to the introduction of new approaches to student learning being tried in schools (Hannay & Ross, 2002; Hannay et al., 2004). As school personnel began to integrate the vision and directed changes into their daily work practices, they were motivated to continue conversations, to continue learning as educators and to improve student learning within their schools and within their family of schools.

However, system gaps and challenges associated with the vision strategic action were also identified at the school level and the board office. As one principal stated:

And either the vision is so embedded we’ve kind of stopped talking about it, which I think is the case for many people. But the problem is we have so many new people every year that there does need to still be something done around that for people new to our

system. And in some ways, I think our schools are our best example of caring, learning communities. And in a lot of ways, I don't see that reflected in some actions at the board. [SInt05: WWP]

Similarly, a supervisory officer expressed concerns about the current challenges that existed in some district classrooms, despite the work that had taken place around the vision strategic action:

We were talking before about making sure that what's happening at a school is actually happening. I still believe that if you go into too many classrooms you will not see much of a change of direction. Not just in terms of our vision but in terms of Ministry direction. It would be all too common to go in and see somebody teaching the way I would have taught in the '70s in that they know what to say. They know the language. They have a poster on the board. They may even wear the button. But they are not actually practicing differently. And that's my biggest concern. We have been really good at having the banner and the flag and we are all very good at waving it. But what actually happens when the rubber hits the road? What actually happens at the classroom level? [SInt06:SA9]

GRDSB supervisory officers recognized that not all schools were engaged with the vision strategy. At the same time, senior leaders identified that the energy generated in the newly formed district through the vision strategy spread to selected district schools and continued to create the organizational energy needed for system-level changes.

Developing Trust Through Professional Dialogue

The GRDSB supervisory officers demonstrated their respect and support for principals and teachers in a wide variety of ways. For instance, they recognized the time needed by teachers to move from solitary work to collaborative work. One supervisory officer explained it simply:

Teachers tend to be fairly isolated and we're asking them to not be isolated, to work together, and anytime you want to introduce change it doesn't happen overnight. [SInt02: SB2]

Supervisory officers engaged principals and teachers in ongoing discussions about teaching and student learning in schools and at planned meetings. The positive effects of these professional conversations were noted by one principal participant:

I think professional talk is the key to rekindle some of the teachers who feel they're burned out. I mean, they came into teaching because they wanted to teach and they want to see kids learn. When people start talking about "This really worked, and this didn't," and you get that kind of talk, the energy starts flowing back again. I think professional talk is what will keep teachers in teaching. I think professional talk is what brings teachers to teaching, and I think it revitalizes. [SInt02: YP]

The vision provided the language and focus for discussions. Employing common language and meaning in conversation allowed the supervisory officers to develop positive and supportive working relationships with teachers and principals in their family of schools. One principal described this interaction as "a consistency of response across the district" [SInt03: NP].

As well, principals were encouraged to enter discussions and contribute to the decision making process needed to support plans for ongoing professional learning:

I feel like I'm being listened to. I feel that my point of view is being heard.... I think they [Superintendents] really want us to learn. I get that sense from the meetings and things. They are allowing us to go there and learn. [SInt03: RP]

Teachers recognized that supervisory officers were listening to the principals. One positive result of this focus on improving student learning was a shared sense of purpose, which meant teachers were also included in the decision-making process in a similar fashion. For example, teachers and school administrators worked together to develop school growth plans. Also, supervisory officers developed new ways to bring employee groups together to assist with specific tasks or decisions. As one teacher put it:

[The Superintendents] listen to the principals; they have struck [Family of School] committees. For example, I sit on the literacy committee, which was started by [Superintendent name] for our group of seven schools, and then continued on by [another Superintendent name]. So basically, the people on that committee who consist of teachers, learning support people, administration, they gather information about what is needed from your school. They take that to the committee and we discuss it as a group. Then they're [Superintendents] very flexible about saying, "Okay. Well, on this early dismissal day if we need to have a focus on writing, what strategies do we need to focus on?" [SInt03: MT1]

The decision to take the needed time to build a respectful positive and collegial work environment within each of the GRDSB schools was noted by some participants. A principal participant explained the work required to make dialogue possible as a staff:

I'm afraid, right now, the staff is only beginning to enter into that two-way dialogue. That, at first there was a disconnection between what admin, and that includes the principals' group, was doing and how focussed we were on that, and the language, the vocabulary that we had to talk about it. . . . [SInt05: VVP]

One superintendent described the collegial and learning-oriented culture that existed within many district schools, this way:

I think that [understanding system issues] has to do with the professional development that is provided for them and for their staffs. And I think it has to do with their willingness to discuss with colleagues. They are much less an island onto themselves. . . . They don't see it as a weakness to call somebody and say, this is a head scratcher. What do you think? Whereas, the climate of 'I had better not show my weaknesses to anybody'. Or, 'if this is a bit shaky no one had better know about it'. That's fallen by the wayside. [SInt06: SA].

The district leadership team established a working environment that supported schools wherever they were located on the continuum of school improvement efforts. Each school was encouraged to move toward established GRDSB goals, but supervisory officers also recognized that not all schools would be similar in their growth and development. A principal explained:

We all know where we're headed, but we're not all at the same spot. Some of us are just beginning and some are a little further along, so they [supervisory officers] accept where you are as long as you are moving forward, you know, but they want to know, what are [your] steps? What is your goal? What are you trying to get staff to learn here? [SInt05: RRP]

Evidence gathered in this current retrospective study suggests the supervisory officers collaboratively demonstrated their willingness to learn together, dialogued about complex issues and worked with school personnel. In turn, they were able to build trust with principals, teachers and other stakeholder groups to support overall improvement efforts. Additionally, there is evidence to demonstrate that the vision strategic action shifted from a top-down add-on to a shared and applied vision within the district schools. By “creating a buzz” about the vision [SInt02: SB1], the supervisory officers were able to generate energized professional conversations across all stakeholder groups and enough goodwill to move the GRDSB toward a focus on improved student learning as well as ongoing professional learning.

Second Strategic Action: Professional Learning Opportunities

As the GRDSB began to amalgamate four predecessor boards and implement their large-scale school reform initiatives, supervisory officers recognized the increased need for professional learning opportunities for district employees in all roles (Hannay & Telford, 2001). By 2002, the research data indicated the supervisory officers were “deliberately connecting” professional learning to the district reform agenda (Hannay & Ross, 2002, p. 62). Significant resources were committed to schools for professional development, resources and time as staff members became more involved with the *Attainment of Our Vision* initiative.

As mentioned in the context segment of this chapter, principals and teachers determined whether they were ready to engage with the vision process. Once a self-selected school completed the vision process in-service activities with a trained vision facilitator, a school growth plan was then developed by the administrator and staff. Typically, schools requested professional development supports they deemed essential to their learning. Such support and level of school-based autonomy was positively received by school administrators and teachers. Clearly, the evidence collected for this current investigation indicated that administrators and teachers considered the provision of this level of professional learning to be a unique experience. A respondent described the difference in the learning opportunities offered:

Many of the teachers who have been around this board for many, many years said to me, and I concurred, that this was the first initiative that we saw that the board was really doing for our development . . . for us as people. Not labelled as teachers, as people. Maybe they understood that if we developed our personal skills . . . our people skills from within that, there would be the connection to increasing learning, student achievement and whatever else. I think it underlies maybe humanistic approaches to learning. [01B4]

Educators indicated that the wide variety of available professional development opportunities were a sign of support from the district rather than being perceived as another layer of work and consequently provided teachers with a source of motivation. School administrators were provided with teacher coverage once the need was identified in their school growth plans, making it possible for teachers to plan to become involved with a learning focus on consecutive occasions. Teacher teams from individual schools were encouraged to attend professional development opportunities together and become school-based partners in the learning focus once the formal learning sessions had concluded. As a teacher explained it:

One of the issues is the whole issue of staff morale--burnout, the energy to enthusiastically adopt a Vision. More, younger teachers coming on will help because they

tend to have more energy just by virtue of their youth. But I think feeling supported at the board level is really important for staff to feel. [SInt02: PT1]

One teacher described the importance of the supervisory officers' continuous support for needed professional development opportunities:

We have absolutely wonderful, wonderful support here at the school and the teachers are feeling trained. I think that's how you change instruction. You get them away from their themes. You make them feel confident, and I feel that they're given lots of in-service. . . . I think quite often people are afraid to do things if they don't have the confidence to do it, whereas if you show them, and direct them, then it's so much easier. I feel that our Board is doing that. [SInt03: LT2]

However, the professional learning strategic action was critiqued regularly. A school administrator verbalized the situation that faced principals in their efforts to create focused school-based plans that supported teachers when there appeared to be so much fragmentation:

There seems to be an awful lot of different things going on in various ways to try to increase and improve the potential and the capacity. If there was one criticism I would say it's still kind of fragmented, because it's a work in progress and getting the pieces to fit together is sometimes difficult, but you see evidence of that work going on all the time. [SInt03:JP]

Useful professional learning opportunities were provided for administrators as well as the teachers. A principal noted that it was expected all administrators would participate. One learning method incorporated those administrators who did not respond positively to the initial learning expectations:

We were given a book and told to read it. The next week we had to come back, discuss it and they held us to it. Once we got doing it, those of us who really enjoyed it, of course, were already on board. Those who didn't care for it, were pulled in. Sort of like a whirlpool effect. [SInt02: YP]

School administrators and their staff members were asked to learn how to continuously change their professional practices in order to provide students with the most effective classroom learning experiences. This required principals and teachers to develop the ability to engage in ongoing reflective dialogue and practice. One principal described the perceived new direction for the work of educators this way:

We have been working to try to have them [teachers] become reflective practitioners. To think about what it is they do, to see if it's effective, to somehow have a measure as to whether they are really supporting their kids, what is the best practice. That trip to the apple orchard, is that really the best thing for kids? How does that really blend into student achievement? The idea of professional learning communities or professional learners, I think is different than what we practised in the past. [SInt02: VP]

Another principal captured the intent of the district professional learning strategy in this description:

What you're going to do is make them discover what they [teachers] can do to improve their own practice and a hard sell direct approach will not work. [SInt03: TP]

Yet, teacher feedback about constant learning without a chance to engage in follow-up activities encouraged leaders to take a practical and long-term approach to the professional learning strategy. One teacher explained:

More books, more money. It's fine to implement something, but if there isn't the follow-up, the continued follow-up then people tend to let it slide again. They have to become comfortable using these new techniques, so I really think that professional development's an important facility for everyone. [SInt03:RT]

Both administrators and teachers gradually became aware of the level of difficulty associated with attempts to transfer new professional learning into professional practice (Hannay et al., 2004, p. 68). A teacher described what it takes to begin to incorporate change into professional practice:

People need to get out, see other schools, do other things, go to conferences, talk to people. It's the interchange of ideas. You need to free up classroom teachers, and I'm not suggesting department heads, but classroom teachers to go out and be interested in the exchange. If all you do is isolate teachers in their classrooms then nothing changes, nothing happens. [SInt03:KT1]

Hannay et al. (2004) reported that educators recognized this change process was much more complicated than "merely arranging for a professional development session" (p. 70). A teacher explained why professional learning opportunities are essential for teachers who struggle with the task of changing their professional practice:

They're [other teachers] not changing classroom practice yet, but I think they will. It's going to be a process of education. . . . I think you're going to find a lot of resistance, because what we really need is for teachers to be spending more time in professional development. . . . I think most teachers see that as irrelevant. I think that most teachers tend to teach from a very comfortable style that they've taught in for most of their career, particularly if they haven't switched schools. This has been the only school that they've taught at. [SInt03: ZT1]

By 2005, the research data strongly indicated that the GRDSB had evolved into an organization that was clearly focused on learning for teachers and administrators, as well as students (Hannay & Mahoney, 2005). Improved student learning through the teachers' use of instructional intelligence (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001) became the outgrowth of the vision in action. The focus on professional learning for teachers and administrators continued within the district as well as an expectation for the increased ability to apply instructional intelligence knowledge to instruction within classroom settings. One supervisory officer outlined how the district wanted teachers to use the new knowledge about teaching practices:

Mostly, I think, it has been really a good shot in the arm for people to think about their practice and what kids like to do in a classroom and to move away from some of the things that we don't think works with kids. I think a lot of people are moving into using cooperative learning. What we are really trying to say now is we've done a lot of research. We've done the work training you on instructional intelligence strategies. We have looked at cooperative learning. We have worked on classroom management, which has been very positive. What we want you to do now, though, is really think about when is the best time in your classroom. And how do you embed it in what you are doing. . . . [SInt06: SA8].

In the 2005 research report, Hannay and Mahoney indicated that the GRDSB had taken deliberate and purposeful actions to “engage educators in their own professional learning” which focused on “improving practice to improve student learning” (2005, p. 49). Specialists were invited to present and work with district administrators and teachers on improving student learning, teaching practices and leadership. Teachers were asked to test and practice the application of promising instructional techniques. A supervisory officer explained the intended outcomes of the continuous learning opportunities and also suggested a focus for future district learning:

The first three years has been really easy with instructional intelligence because it has been the ‘what’. Give our teachers and our principals as many strategies as we possibly can to add to their bag of tricks. I just keep filling up the bag of tricks. Go and play with Academic Controversy. Go and play with 4 Corners. Go and play with Deono sync pads. Go risk. Now we have our job cut out for us. Because now what we have to do is we have to make sure that principals and teachers know what to use, when to use it and how to use it to be most productive and get the most bang for your buck with the kids or teachers. . . . But I truly believe the instructional intelligence is the ‘how’. [SInt06: SA6]

Hannay and Mahoney (2005) provided evidence gathered from teachers and school administrators and identified that continuous professional development opportunities had become very much part of organizational life. GRDSB leaders continued to encourage administrators and teachers to build their professional capacity to promote student learning within the district reform context. Supervisory officers also searched for ways to provide continuous professional learning for teachers and administrators and to provide individuals and groups of teachers with the opportunities to learn new skills and practice the application of their new learning in classrooms.

The second strategic action implemented by the supervisory officers provided school administrators and teaching staff with professional development opportunities that were aligned with the *Attainment of Our Vision* initiative. Organizational resources were focused on the provision of professional learning for GRDSB personnel. The incorporation of a district-wide professional learning program on instructional intelligence (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001) provided school administrators and teachers with “tool kits” of strategies designed to assist teachers to improve the quality of their teaching practice. Continuous professional learning was one of the cornerstones of the district strategic plan.

It is the GRDSB supervisory officers’ response to strategic actions taken by the district that is the focus of this current investigation. The next segment reviews the senior leadership team’s response to the challenges that surfaced as they implemented the *Attainment of Our Vision* and a professional development program for administrators and teachers.

The District Response to Strategic Action: Professional Learning Opportunities

Early in the implementation of the vision initiative, district leaders modelled the practical applications of the vision in their daily work with one another and within the GRDSB. As a values-driven model, the vision challenged individuals and groups to work with others from a position of integrity. Findings from this current investigation are connected to the senior leadership response to the provision of professional development opportunities district-wide. The findings are presented under the following

themes that emerged from the data analysis: developing relationships for learning, collaboration for learning and collaboration for learning between schools.

Developing Relationships for Learning

Clearly, supervisory officers in this district found ways to connect with administrators and teachers on a continuous basis and to build positive working relationships. The district leadership team intended to create a new educational context that supported change in schools. One superintendent described the importance of the “pressure and support” dynamic when working on relationship development with principals and teachers:

Just this morning when I’m talking with a principal, she was talking with [supervisory officer] and I about that whole business about you can’t invite change and you can’t invite collaboration, you have to make it happen. You have to structure it so it will happen, and here’s what I’ve done to structure change, structure collaboration. That’s the pressure part.

At the same time there’s the support part, and I don’t just mean financially. I don’t just mean providing resources, but I mean finding creative ways to find time and to create the time for people . . . I mean support in validating what people are doing and celebrating what people are doing, and telling them what is good about it and supporting them in a reflective exercise so that they can reflect on what’s working and what’s not and where they need help. [SInt02: SB6]

Teachers in the GRDSB considered the external resources such as time, money and materials as demonstrations of support provided by supervisory officers. One teacher described how their superintendent had responded to school needs:

We have tremendous support from our Superintendent. We’ve got financial support, extra financial support, materials for teachers, materials for students, money put into our library. We have a half-time school support worker and a full-time literacy teacher. S/he’s bought for our staffing complement. S/he’s allowed us to have lower numbers in our kindergarten classes to better serve the needs of the students that we have. S/he always prioritizes with us. S/he comes in all the time to visit within the school. S/he’s active here. S/he’s met with parents here, our PTA here [SInt03: VT1].

A principal clarified why the relationship development between supervisory officers and their associated Family of Schools was important:

The better they [Superintendents] get to know you or the better they understand, because all of us are different. Just like every teacher [is different], the better I think they understand how each of us works, it’s easier for them to support us. [SInt03: RP]

The principals felt connected to their supervisory officers, and they worked collaboratively to achieve the improvement of student learning. A principal explained it this way:

[Superintendents are] out in the schools and . . . are providing as much support as possible. When I need release time or the extra dollar for some kind of a school learning initiative, they’re, yup, if they don’t have it, well they’ll find where they could get it. So, very supportive. I have no problems picking up the phone to call the superintendent and say this is what I’m looking for, this is what. [SInt05: UUP]

The district supervisory officers intentionally acted to improve their working relationships in their Families of Schools. One supervisory officer explained the practices that GRDSB leaders incorporated into

their professional role to facilitate an inquiry mindset into the professional practice of administrators and teachers:

In the old days as a principal I saw my SO sporadically. Usually for an extremely limited time and only for an evaluative type of process. It wasn't a collegial relationship between me as a principal and them as an SO. And that's a dramatic change. Now when I go into a school as an SO, I spend the majority of my time talking about instruction of kids, improvement of instruction by teachers and personal and professional growth of my administrators. So that's the focus of my visit. There is a portion of that where it's managerial. Where we talk about the budgets. We talk about discipline issues and all that kind of stuff. But it's more now a process of how do we help you help your teachers get better at what they are doing. That really is the focus. How do we start to take a look or how do we help you improve professionally as an administrator? [SInt06: SA9]

The supervisory officers were able to change selected professional practices as they implemented the vision for improved student achievement. The changes that were demonstrated in schools involved designing their working days in order to increase the amount of time spent in schools, to allocate specific resources to individuals or schools to support planned learning activities, and to engage in ongoing discussions about teaching and learning with teachers and administrators. Teachers and principals responded positively to the more direct involvement of supervisory officers in their daily work with students and student achievement.

Collaboration for Learning

The supervisory officers demonstrated a collaborative approach to their work together by 2002 (Hannay & Ross, 2002). Their collective commitment to the vision initiative and the improvement of student learning was reflected in the daily leadership work with principals and teachers. As well, the supervisory officers' abilities to develop techniques that opened their professional practice to encourage sharing, reflecting and risk taking within the supervisory officer group was also evidenced in the data. One superintendent explained:

I think us talking, reflecting, sharing and being on the same wave length as to what we are trying to achieve. I may do it differently from my partners and my colleagues, but at least what I'm trying to get to by the end of June is the same thing that they're trying to get to. We are trying to get to very clear, concise school growth plans that speak to student learning, have a measurable goal and that we do have data there that is driving instructional practice. And I think that's common and consistent among all of us.

I think what we have done as supervisory officers without losing the individuality of it, because you don't ever want to do that, we've taken some of the field experiences, the best practices in the field and we have tried to make some of that consistent among all of us as we're in schools.

We have done things like a minimum of 50 percent of our time will be in schools and we log it . . . and the expectation is, regardless of your system responsibilities, that if you are a full-time SO of schools you will be in those schools 50 percent of time. [SInt02: SB6]

Supervisory officers made a commitment to learning together about improving student achievement. A supervisory officer described the commitment to learning that existed within the group:

We've made a commitment to growth, actually, ourselves. We get a lot of text selection where we read and tried to enhance our own learning. We came up with our own mission

of, you know, excellent schools, excellent superintendents, you know, and those kinds of things. [SInt02: SB5]

The data also suggested that supervisory officers had developed a culture of collaboration for learning, decision-making and developing professional practices that allowed the group to work together in new ways. Principal interviewees clearly articulated similar changes experienced in schools. One principal explained the cultural shift in schools this way:

It's a group of people having enough trust and faith in each other and acting with enough integrity that they will let some of the barriers down that I think are so common in schools. Allow other people to become involved in what they're doing and how they are doing it. Right from students and parents to administrators to colleagues, which I think is often the hardest barrier to cross. [SInt04: EEP]

Principals understood that the supervisory officers expected school administrators to be instructional leaders within their schools and collaborate with teachers on achieving school goals or learning initiatives. Another school leader described the process of collaborating and sharing for learning:

It's to sharing best practice and saying, hey maybe I can learn from this. Or maybe that idea is going to work a little more effectively for me. So I don't think it's un-learning. I think it's a refinement of the learning they already have and maybe a revisiting of that, saying, well, maybe that wasn't the best way and so we can move forward. But I think that comes when they're in smaller groups or pairs and they're working in a trusting relationship which takes a while to build up. The extension of that is when they want to go out and learn more...learning as opposed to PD. [SInt05: PPP]

Supervisory officer interviewees continued to comment on the collaborative nature of the shared work within the 13-member district leader group. Discussion, dialogue, decision-making and learning in a collaborative environment characterized the way that supervisory officers worked together. One superintendent summarized it this way:

Within our own group, our own SOs it's far more collegial. We tend to make decisions in a collaborative fashion. Rarely is there an overriding voice. We all have our specialties and our areas. We also know they can push back on that and it's going to be tempered on by what others are thinking and what other things are happening. So we are not as siloed within our own portfolios anymore. There is far more of a blending. Part of that was [the director] taking us out of pure portfolios. . . . So our roles have changed dramatically that way. [SInt06: SA9]

The supervisory officers demonstrated a commitment to the development of collaboration as a group of learners and a group of leaders. As senior leaders, they endeavoured to build working relationships on a daily basis with teachers and administrators in schools.

Collaboration for Learning Between Schools

The changes to administrator and teacher practices called for by the superintendent group required new learning for everyone. In an effort to initiate connections between those in a Family of Schools, a supervisory officer described one way that collaboration for learning was promoted among principals:

Sharing some thoughts that I have and learning from them [principals]. It's just been fabulous for me individually. I'm able to take that new knowledge and share it with other

principals. When I see new ideas at one school and say to another principal, “Here’s what’s going on at this school. Why don’t you give that principal a call?” [SInt02: SO2]

Increased opportunities to participate in team teaching and to practice new teaching techniques within the school were considered by principals to be effective learning options for teachers. One principal explained:

We’re seeing change and we’re increasing teacher capacity here because people are buying into it themselves. They’re coming in and watching someone’s class. They’re hearing someone talk about it or they’re sharing data sets, or something. They’re saying well that really works for him. Maybe I’ll do it. So I find that it’s more effective that way. We’re probably increasing teacher capacity to a far greater level than we would the other way. In fact, I believe we’ve got a culture in the school of respect. [SInt04: FFP]

Opportunities for teachers to work and learn together were orchestrated between Family of School members. A principal described one long-term strategy to energize teachers for change:

Our Superintendent provided a release day. S/he’s got a little group of staff members who are meeting on a regular basis to talk about planning and unit planning, because this is key when we are trying to change curriculum and motivate people and be the most effective that we can. I think they may be meeting monthly, a staff member from each of the schools in our family of schools, who are questioners, who are strong teachers, who question things, and are influential teachers. They were all released for, I think it must have been a half day a month ago, and did some strategic planning as to where we wanted to go next. We need to have collaborative planning on those essential skills and big ideas, those understandings so that things are very much -- it’s alignment again. [SInt03: YTP]

Teachers were expected to take knowledge gained from professional learning opportunities, apply the knowledge to instructional practice, test it and then share the results with those teachers who experienced the professional learning together. A teacher described the process:

It’s presented to you. You take it back. . . . And discuss what you’ve learned from your practice in the classroom with a big general meeting again. Then it’s giving you little homework assignments to go back and try it again in your classroom. Then time to reflect and discuss it with peers. [SInt04: EET1]

GRDSB learning processes were designed to encourage the same type of collaborative learning among teachers and administrators in schools as was demonstrated among the supervisory officers. Supervisory officers intended to provide ongoing professional learning opportunities to teachers and administrators as identified by district goals within an increasingly collaborative district environment. Providing sustainable processes to support a continuous learning approach in schools became a focus in the work of the district leadership team.

Third Strategic Action: Data Use for School Improvement

The third strategic action was initiated in the early years of the GRDSB amalgamation. All components of this strategy were included in the *Quality Learning in a Caring Learning Community* document that underwent a district-wide review in 2003 and was adapted to incorporate administrator and teacher input. School growth plans, analysis of student achievement data to guide instructional change and

a commitment to continuous improvement are the essential components of the school improvement strategic action.

In the early years of the GRDSB amalgamation and reform, the Ontario testing requirements mandated by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) represented the predominant type of data to be used to assess student achievement (Hannay & Telford, 2001a). EQAO data were referenced most often in the school interviews that were conducted in 2001 by the Midwestern Centre research team. However, principal and teacher participant responses also indicated that additional student achievement data such as report cards were being graphed and shared with fellow staff members. One principal described the role of the EQAO scores and the report card data for assessing student learning in this way:

Our SO has taken a great interest and has taken a fairly assertive stand on what the expectations are. We, as a Family of Schools, are expected to show an increase in our EQAO scores. We are expected to review and understand what our report card data means and looking at ways of improving student learning. Actually I'm quite pleased because I've taken a stronger view with that as well over the past couple of years. [SInt02: CP]

At the same time, supervisory officers spoke often about the organizational focus they expected district schools to adopt when making decisions about student achievement in schools. One supervisory officer explained the overall shift in emphasis needed across the GRDSB so the vision for student learning could be achieved:

I would like to see us move the lower end of performance up. I'd like to see the gap between our higher end and our lower end narrow. I don't mean by lowering the upper end. [SInt02: SO3]

Supervisory officers spoke openly with teachers and administrators about their expectations for the role that student and school achievement data would play in the development of improved learning opportunities for students. One supervisory officer described the potential impact of analyzing student achievement data collected in the classroom as a way of determining actions to further improve individual student learning and achievement:

I'd like each classroom teacher to have a thorough analysis of each child in the classroom and then change teaching practice so that each child can achieve their greatest potential, and then that could be around the school improvement plan. . . . That's what I'd like to see. [SInt02: SO4]

The 2002 research findings demonstrated that administrators and teachers held an increased understanding and acceptance of student and school achievement data as a means to improve student achievement (Hannay & Ross, 2002). By 2003, the research evidence suggested that the district had achieved a measure of organizational alignment through the linking of school goals generated by teachers and the school district goals (Hannay & Mahoney, 2003). District and school administrators deliberately pursued the use of a common goal in schools, and teachers were encouraged by principals to collect their own classroom data for school staff use (Hannay et al., 2004). Teaching practices were being questioned by staff in some schools as part of developing dialogue around what worked best for student learning. Staff

findings were often discussed with colleagues in other school locations. One principal shared his/her experience:

The whole use of data and accountability, being accountable for results, not just at the school level, but at the system level. Now I see schools working together to try and bring everybody's scores up. Sharing strategies and talking about what kind of assessment that will work and principals working at it together. [SInt03: YTP]

Indications in the 2003 district review confirmed that principals and teachers perceived school or student achievement data as large scale and controlled by external forces. However, the use of school-based student achievement data to make classroom decisions for learning was also noted by the Midwestern Centre research team as a new observation. A teacher shared his/her understanding of the role of achievement data:

So measurable data is important, but increasing the measurement won't improve the school. You have to really take a hard look at what you're measuring and decide whether or not that's actually contributing to school improvement or whether it's just becoming another meaningless statistic. But I would say DuFour's model, the idea that's continuous improvement, that you have to constantly revisit it, that you always have to make sure that the end result is the one that you're going for, which is, do students learn better, and what are you doing when they don't learn. [SInt03:ZT1]

School leaders were generally supportive of the increased use of school or student achievement data to provide evidence for decision making in their schools. However, there appeared to be a gap in the knowledge and skills related to the use of data in schools (Hannay et al., 2004). One principal expressed a genuine desire to receive more learning opportunities devoted to the use of data in decision making in schools:

One area I think that almost every principal would agree is lacking--where we lack, is how to use the data. . . . You've got all this data. Helping principals to really pick out what's important and to put it together so that you have a sense of what's missing. [Understanding] what you need to do next. [SInt03: LP]

A teacher explained how important it was to take advantage of the knowledge that could be gleaned from other educators who were working on the same challenges and who may be connected to any number of Family of Schools communities. A whole-system approach to learning was recommended:

We need more time to work with the people who teach the same grades that we teach. There's been a lot of effort put into building this community of our Family of Schools. We've come up with some great stuff, but I bet if it's happening in our community, it's happening in these other communities too. I don't know what they're doing. . . . It just seems to me, if you're going to put all this money into inservicing people and putting them together to learn from each other and working hard to improve classroom practice, you don't just want to improve it in [location] and you don't just want to improve it out in [location]. You want to do it as a whole system. [SInt03: MT1]

By the time the 2004 data were collected from teachers and school administrators, the topic of data-based decision making was found to be included in the learning processes adopted by the teachers and administrators. Using student achievement data at the classroom level appeared to be integrated into the reflective practice of teachers and mentioned less often as a separate activity. Hannay and Mahoney (2005)

found that educators were using GRDSB and school goals as a guide and were focused on examining and adjusting teacher practice to improve student learning. One teacher explained how s/he had incorporated the process of assessing instructional practices for student learning:

I think the major change is my knowledge base as far as the different learning strategies to use in the classroom and there are so many. . . . Now I can totally analyse and evaluate what works well here and what doesn't. [SInt04: AAT1]

In the 2005 data collection, Hannay and Mahoney found that participants clearly demonstrated that data were being gathered by teachers and administrators and used across the district to change practice. Decisions about classroom teaching practices were adjusted in response to the knowledge gained from the analysis of student achievement data collected within schools. However, one principal expressed his/her concerns about the learning required to extract maximum meaning from school data as a classroom teacher or as an administrator:

Around data collection, I mean they've done a good job collecting the data. Results do come back. But often the format in which they come back is not easy to understand for teachers. I often find that I take the data and re-graph it my own way to share with staff to make it a little more meaningful. And the sometimes the labels or the categories in which data is delivered is not relevant to teacher practice. You know, if it comes back comprehension scores, that's something teachers can understand. If it comes back like DRA results, that they're independent or growing toward independence, these categories are confusing for my staff. So I think that there needs to be some work around the delivery of the data to our staff by our board so that it's more meaningful for them...save me reinterpreting for staff. [SInt05: WWP]

Employing student achievement data for school improvement was a strategic action that was introduced to the system through the *Quality Learning in a Caring, Learning Community* document in the early years of the GRDSB amalgamation. School administrators and teachers moved from thinking of the EQAO scores as the single most important source of student achievement data to incorporating school-generated achievement data into their plans for students. Principals and teachers applied their growing expertise in using meaningful achievement data to make decisions about incorporating teaching methods that best supported student learning. Administrators and teachers recognized improved student learning as an important focus for the classroom. However, school leaders and staff also understood that increased professional development and opportunities for practice were required to increase the capacity of educators to do more about using student achievement data to improve learning.

The supervisory officer response to dilemmas connected to key actions taken by the same district leadership team is the focus of the current research investigation. The next segment reviews the supervisory officers' response to the challenges that surfaced as schools within the GRDSB were encouraged to use student achievement data for school improvement.

The District Response to Strategic Action: Data Use for School Improvement

Goal-driven change was introduced to the district through the initiation and implementation of the *Quality Learning in a Caring, Learning Community* document in the early years of amalgamation and reform. Principals were directed to match their school goals with the GRDSB's goals, and teachers were

required to link their professional goals with those identified for their schools. The district schools were required to engage in the processes of reflective inquiry and practice as staff members analyzed student data to improve student learning. This was modelled first by the district supervisory officers as they practiced their own reflective inquiry and practice processes as a district leadership team. For this current investigation, findings from this section are presented under the following themes that emerged from the analysis of the data: reflective professional inquiry, a results orientation and a culture of continuous improvement.

Reflective Professional Inquiry

As senior leaders, the supervisory officers demonstrated a keen interest in applying the reflective professional inquiry process to assess GRDSB improvement initiatives. One supervisory officer described the reflective questioning practices that took place among peers when examining the perceived lack of expected change in schools:

How effective we [district] are? Asking, “Are these the right indicators?” How do we know? We think these are the right things, and then why isn’t the practice changing? Why is change not occurring as we thought it might be? Why is morale still not where we would like to see it? [SInt02: SO5]

Early in the implementation of the GRDSB school improvement initiative, evidence gathered by the Midwestern Centre research team indicated supervisory officers were openly engaged in the work of questioning their own professional practice. Another supervisory officer described how questions about what was working in schools were used to fuel discussions and assist the district leadership team to help schools connect with the initiative:

What are the initiatives that have been accepted and followed through on by the staff, and why have they been willing to follow through? So those are the why’s for me. You try to take it from one individual case [school] so that then you can replicate that and you can use that knowledge with the next school. You help find similar ways of improving. [SFG02: SO1]

Supervisory officers indicated their intent to incorporate the use of data into all schools through the school growth planning process and encouraged analysis of student achievement data. A supervisory officer explained how questions began the reflective inquiry process among those working in schools:

So, you know, I think those are questions we still need to ask. So I think to answer, “How do we know?” I think it’s the improvement of school growth planning, the quality of it, the focus of it and the understanding of data, improved EQAO scores, incremental steady growth, and I think the reflection in the classroom now of an understanding of data analysis relating to the school growth plan. And I’m starting to see that more and more, so, yeah, I feel very encouraged and, you know, I think really we can point to some very clear indicators that there is progress. [SInt02: SB1]

The supervisory officers fostered the connection of GRDSB goals with school goals through the school growth plans. As well, the district leadership team worked with principals and teachers to model and instill the habit of asking questions about teaching practices in classrooms. One principal described the role of questions and reflection in work practices for school administrators and teachers this way:

Everything that we're doing, everything that's presented, everything that's come from the board level has been directed at improving student learning. . . . So I think people are certainly hearing it all the time and starting to bring it into everything that we do with staff in service . . . asking the questions when we do things. Does this apply? Does it really make a difference in improving student learning? If it does, fine. Go ahead. If it doesn't, stop. [SInt04: EEP]

GRDSB supervisory officers engaged in reflective dialogue and inquiry about the kinds of leadership practices that would best distribute the reflective inquiry process. School growth plans were considered to be a focus for building the capacity among principals and teachers to become reflective practitioners, employ student data achievement and increase student achievement in their schools. School administrators and staff members engaged in inquiry-based discussions with their supervisory officer during school visits. A consistent focus on student learning and student improvement was the centre of the discussions based on student and school achievement data.

A Results Orientation

As evidenced in most of the Midwestern Centre research reports, goal setting through the school growth plan was most often the method employed by the district leadership team to involve educators in the assessment of school efforts and decisions for teaching and student learning. A supervisory officer explained how tangible results were observed in some schools and how they assisted supervisory officer with the task of GRDSB goal assessment:

I've been seeing more dialogue in the schools, I've been seeing more sharing among teachers, I've been seeing more collaboration in the design and the presentation of their classroom practice, and -- where our reading regularly to review the results of their students' work to see if there is improvement. I'm not talking test scores. I'm talking bringing actual samples together and sitting down to see how the children have or have not improved within their class. I've seen the principal being part of that process, not just facilitating it, but actually being part of that dialogue that's going among the teachers, and part of the catalysts within that school. [SInt02: SBF1]

The district decision to focus educator attention on one common assessment was seen to be a catalyst for developing the district's capacity to assist teachers in setting their own goals and assessing their student or school data and to clarify what needed an adjustment for the future. Another district leader explained it this way:

That's only just beginning. Only just beginning. The whole idea of having a data analysis drive practice, we are only at the beginning stages of making that happen. If we had left it at that, we would not be as far ahead as we are now. Instead of just leaving it at, "You will analyze data in order to change instructional practice," we would have been all over the map. But having one common assessment at the primary level and saying, "Okay. Let that assessment drive some practice," once again, you've narrowed it in and you've given them something very concrete to work with. [SInt02: SB6]

The district leadership team demonstrated the ability to assist schools to engage in the goal setting for the short term and also set realistic GRDSB goals for the future. Another superintendent identified the district's next step this way:

The big next step for us, I think, is a district, and that is effecting teacher practice through data analysis, and I think we're starting to see that. Because I'm saying, "What does this data mean to you, classroom teacher, in organizing the learning for your children, and therefore, your teacher practice?" That two years ago, I think, even was just far too far a leap. And even as a school say, "Well, it means we didn't work hard on reading." [SInt02: SB1]

School administrators understood they had responsibilities for improving student learning and were expected to foster school change through reflective practice processes, examination of student achievement data and professional learning opportunities. A principal explained:

I sense a real change in being more accountable for specifics. It used to be enough to say, yeah, we're going in the right direction. . . . There has been a real push to say, okay, how do you know that? Why do you know that? Why do you think that's important? How can you prove it? I don't mean in a contentious or confrontational way. But what is [it about] the data that's important? How are you analyzing your data? Why are you using it? How are you going to use it? What has that told you about what you're doing? Is it worthwhile data? Are the things you're doing worthwhile? Have they made a difference? Why have they made a difference? All of those questions that I think we did innately to some extent that never had to actually put forward. I think we're being asked to do that a lot more. I think that's a worthwhile very good accountability thing for my self as well as for what's going on in the school. [SInt04:EEP]

Still, as one school administrator noted, some teachers required intensive learning support, as their knowledge of data analysis and recommended teaching methodologies was not current as compared to the standards set across the GRDSB. S/he described the situation this way:

When my staff go to PD, the feedback I'm getting from them is well, I was sitting next to someone from another school and they didn't even know about the 3 Rs in reading – retell, relate, reflect. And they were struggling with their DRA because they had to prompt the children at every step of the way on the retell. And she said, well, haven't you worked within your school and within your staff on retell, relate, reflect? And the other person had never heard of it. So, I don't know if our board really understands really how far apart individual schools are. I think my own superintendent understands that my school is quite advanced. [SInt05: WWP]

The supervisory officers continued to engage in reflective professional inquiry together. They used tangible data such as EQAO scores, as well as locally developed student and school achievement data, to assess GRDSB progress. The district leadership team exhibited a continuous and relentless pursuit of student achievement results in district schools.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

The district leadership team began their GRDSB reform initiatives first by practicing the steps necessary to engage in a continuous improvement process of their own. One member of the leadership group outlined their experience this way:

But I would hope that they would be exciting types of things. Like I said to you before, you know, that we went away and we learned -- we came back and we discussed what we had learned and we talked about how we could apply it and we changed our practice because of it and these results of demonstrated. It's worked. [SInt02: SB5]

Supervisory officers worked with principals to foster the same practices in their schools. Another teacher described the ability of the principals to provide the questions to promote reflective practice and think about student learning with intention:

[School administrators] make the staff accountable for [student learning]. So what have you been doing? What have you been working on? That has been the key. There is no slacking off to a certain extent because they want to know what you are doing. It keeps you on your toes. More than anything, it makes you want to share what you are doing. [SInt04: LLT2]

The district leadership team provided time for teachers to learn and then practice new teaching methods in their classrooms and schools. One principal articulated an effective aspect of the change process that he/she observed at the school level:

When I think of what works, I think the biggest thing is, again, when they give the time and when the teachers have the time to come back and to actually try what they've learned. But that's key, too, where administration in the building has to be on board to be able to provide, if they can, that extra release time or planning time or working time. I think time would be the big one for the success of any of their initiatives. And again, so teachers don't feel it's an add-on, that they see the relevance in it. And there too, when they can bring it back to the school and we share, whether it be with the division, if it's only division specific, or with the school. So the school buys into it. [SInt05: UUP]

The process summarized by this principal is similar to the aspects described by a member of the senior leadership group. Each respondent explained how the study participants experienced change in their professional practice. The data suggested that GRDSB leaders were able to incorporate the same action-oriented approach to learning they experienced together into the work of teachers and principals in district schools.

One supervisory officer explained the practices that the district leadership team incorporated into their professional role to facilitate an inquiry mindset into the professional practice of administrators and teachers:

I think we are Fullan's pressure and support people. I truly do. We apply the pressure by making our expectations very clear, by talking about our expectations all the time, by adopting the language, by asking all the right questions, by meeting with the right people. Going into a school and asking to meet with the grade 3 teachers and the principal to discuss EQAO scores this year and what they are doing over the next year differently. That's demonstrated evidence, that's pressure, to get those people together. But it is also support when you are in that room around the table as 1 of 4 or 5 or 6 people talking about it. So I think we have clearly been Fullan's epitome of apply the pressure, give the support. And it's not just give support and money at all. I think it's time. And that's where we have developed as a supervisory officers group over the 8 years, unbelievably. And it's in the time we give to schools. . . . But 5 years ago we made a commitment to spend 50% of our school allotted time in schools. And that was a huge commitment. Huge commitment. And we are accountable for that through our monthly logs to our supervisor. . . . [SInt06: SA6]

Another superintendent described the complexity of the supervisory officer role as they promoted continuous improvement in schools:

I don't know if it's a continuum. We are moving towards refining our practice and our focus in terms of student learning. I don't think we are all there just yet. But there are so many elements that work towards that. I think we are getting better at that. The conversations in schools, the in-service, the work that teachers are collaborating on, is focused on that student learning. The instructional intelligence initiative is huge in that regard. People are now looking at what the linkages are. How does Tribes (I work with building culture in schools), how does that link with instructional intelligence and how we go about managing our classrooms? Or, what's it look like in a school? So all of those things. We keep narrowing. Not narrowing the pathway but we are actually just sharpening the lens, right, in terms of getting that focus more to student learning. And that's what we are about. We used to be about teaching kids and now it is about learning. And I honestly believe that from when I first started 30 years ago there has definitely been that evolution. And this Board by setting that vision and with the heart of it being improved student learning. I think all of our work goes towards that and we just have to keep manipulating it or adjusting it so that it does work towards that end. [SInt06: SA7]

Although the GRDSB commitment to a continuous improvement orientation to change was the preferred method of "learning how to do things better," the district's supervisory officers expressed their frustration about the district EQAO scores. One district leader assessed the situation with expected long-term goals and short-term view in mind:

Well, I guess when I look at where we were and where I would like to go, we are probably on a scale of 0 to 10, we are probably at a 4 or 5 at this moment. But I think our road map is a lot clearer of how to get to the 8, 9 or 10 than it might ever have been. So I am heartened by that. We are still collectively very disappointed that all of our efforts haven't resulted in better EQAO scores. Frustrated to no end. I mean all the things that the Ministry suggests we are doing. We are doing this. We are doing this. We did have some fairly strong internal resistance to trying to really work on EQAO projects initially. I'm not sure that everybody thought that was the best way to spend our energy. There was some resistance when we suggested as an initiative, JK/SK literacy initiative. There was a bit of a siloing within this building of one department versus another and we had resistance to reading recovery from one department. We had soldiered on but at a slower pace. [SInt06:SA3]

The senior leaders connected GRDSB goals with school goals through the implementation of the school growth plans and fostered the development of inquiry minded habits in the work of teachers and principals. The findings in this section suggested the supervisory officers engaged in reflective professional inquiry process as a group of leaders and were also able to integrate such processes into the work of teachers and school administrators. Principals and teachers learned to use reflective practice processes to continuously monitor student achievement results and adjust teaching practices to improve student learning.

Fourth Strategic Action: Processes to Support Learning for School Improvement

In the early years of the reform initiative, the district leadership team were intentional in their endeavours to facilitate teamwork across the GRDSB and to begin the process of aligning the efforts of all employee groups into a cohesive whole (Hannay & Telford, 2001a). Supervisory officers held the conviction that professional discussions between administrators and teachers were possible through the development of common language. This belief was central to the successful implementation of the vision, as the 2001 data indicated that shared language assisted educators and support staff in developing commonly held understandings (Hannay & Telford, 2001b). Additionally, the research revealed that shared

meanings provided for the development of strengthened connections between the district and schools (Hannay & Telford, 2001b).

Following the 2001 data collections, the Midwestern Centre research team recommended to the supervisory officers that increased opportunities for educator connections were needed to support employee group contributions to the vision (Hannay & Telford, 2001b). In fact, teachers considered opportunities to get together in groups as the preferred method for sharing new knowledge about teaching and learning (Hannay & Telford, 2001b). By 2002, the research data verified that Family of Schools meetings and other gatherings were being adapted to include professional development options (Hannay & Ross, 2002). One principal listed the multiple opportunities initiated by the GRDSB and available for school administrators to discuss and learn more about the district school improvement initiative:

They've [supervisory officers] started with professional development through all those Community of Schools' meetings--professional development with retreats, administrative retreats, certainly in the secondary panel both vice-principals and principals. They have offered workshops, speakers, conferences all of which are based on the concept of school improvement. [SInt02HP]

Meetings for the GRDSB's employee groups were designed to provide professional development and to encourage participants to engage in discussions, share concerns and question teaching practice (Hannay & Ross, 2002). Reflective questions were encouraged in meetings and employed as a guide for professional conversations. Following the 2002 data collection, the Midwestern Centre research team reported that the teacher participants found the collaborative dialogue to be exciting and energizing and to provide a reason for becoming engaged in the school improvement initiative (Hannay & Ross, 2002). This theme was also strongly represented in the 2003 research report. One teacher described the benefits of a common language of instruction to enhance professional discussions about teaching and learning:

Starting with vocabulary, how we talk is very focussed around student improvement in learning. We're using common words in terms of enduring understandings and performance tasks and culminating tasks, and I think that translates. The kids are seeing a common vocabulary shared in their classrooms. When we refer to the categories that we evaluate on, I think, again, you're seeing the connection being made from one class to the next, and I think that allows us to transfer the best practices of what we're each doing and the kids benefit in the end. [SInt03: KT2]

In 2003 administrators and teachers reported that the process of setting school goals became more authentic. Developing a school growth plan was no longer just a paper exercise, but a method for aligning school activities with district goals and for having discussions that assisted teachers in planning for the improvement of student learning and achievement (Hannay et al., 2004). The GRDSB leaders continued to make decisions about important professional development experiences and to align them with district goals and the vision. As one principal explained it:

It's affected us through the kinds of PD that's been offered. I think all the PD has totally aligned with the kinds of schools that they're [school district] trying to create. So by bringing in DuFour or Schmoker or Fullan, there are so many that I have missed a few. I would say that PD was the biggie in terms of getting all the principals in line with what they see as effective schools. [SInt03: LP]

Another principal explained the role of dialogue and reflective conversation for professional development meeting components experienced by school administrators:

It was very clear that when [Superintendents] brought in these folks and we've had inservice at every single Community of Schools. At every Family of Schools then there's been follow-up. There's been preparation for the principals before these speakers came, and then there has been follow-up after the speakers have arrived. There's certainly an expectation that the principals will be there. The follow-up is always, "What are you doing in your school?" after this has occurred. [SInt03: QP]

By 2005, the Midwestern Centre research team reported that the culture of the GRDSB was changing to expect that continuous learning be deeply embedded into the procedures and goals of school and district practices. As well, the Midwestern Centre research report identified that sustained district-driven actions that focused on goal setting, professional development and reflective discussions about teaching and learning were conducive to change in schools (Hannay & Mahony, 2005). In particular, the Family of Schools meetings were becoming a vehicle to support learning necessary for successful implementation of district goals. Although goal setting for school growth plans and professional development was seen to be representative of the supervisory officers' top-down leadership practice, principals often commented on the lateral nature of learning and sharing taking place at the Family of School meetings. A principal described his/her experience with administrator meetings:

Another way that they've made an attempt to not be so top-down is in our principals' meetings, which I can talk more from experience being part of that. Instead of the superintendent standing there and imparting their knowledge and it all being top-down from superintendent to principal, every community of schools has a PD committee, which is made up, or a planning committee made up of principals. So at our meetings, the information is coming laterally from principal to principal. [SInt04: HHP]

Teachers also continued to report their need to interact with other educators within and between school staffs in order to pursue their interests and improve their skills, knowledge and teaching practices (Hannay & Mahony, 2005). School growth plans and teacher growth plans provided school personnel with a process for determining professional learning choices. One teacher explained it this way:

Everybody is doing those annual learning plans and there is a lot of teacher talk. I think that is what has changed a lot and the ability to have meetings and seminars and workshops. Whereas before it was just reading and individual [with] the Internet and videos. Now it's big group seminars, big group meetings. Still book, still videos but we are allowed time to talk about it after we read it, not to just read it. [SInt04: AAT1]

Supervisory officers intentionally acted to involve an OISE associate professor in the GRDSB professional learning strategy focused on instructional intelligence (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001). Teachers and school administrators were supported in this district initiative through the provision of practical learning experiences designed to improve instructional practice (Hannay & Mahony, 2005). In addition, educators were provided with the support of a mentorship program during their change journey (Hannay & Mahony, 2005). The Midwestern Centre research team reported that individuals felt increasingly comfortable as they experimented with their practice. Teachers described exploring the effects of actions taken with their colleagues through professional dialogue and reflective practice (Hannay & Mahony,

2005). One principal described the effects of sharing these experiences with teacher peers and mentors this way:

I think the ability for people to go into other schools and other classrooms and see what's going on. And share with colleagues in other locations. Or even in their own school. But I think it really helps that they do have the ability to go to different schools. There's a big focus on mentoring in our board. That has been a tremendous help to the staff here. And highly regarded by the staff here. I have staff who are asking me how do I get, I mean experienced staff, who are asking about getting mentors. And part of the mentorship program is going visiting elsewhere. So I think that they are looking for that. 'Cause I think that they recognize that each school is different and that people have things to offer in other buildings that they would benefit from. But, by the nature of their workday, they can't get over there and see that. So I think that's been a really positive thing the board's done. [SInt05: PPP]

The Midwestern Centre research team discovered that the impact of the decision to integrate the theme of instructional intelligence (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001) into the achievement of GRDSB goals had been profound. The team maintained that this theme should be recognized as an outgrowth of the vision initiative (2005). Supervisory officers emphasized the importance of a school growth plan developed collaboratively by each school staff. They argued that this process ensured an effective professional learning strategy focused on improving teaching and learning within the school and district. One supervisory officer described it this way:

Number 1, and I believe it all flows from, is the school growth plan. I believe that the schools are now putting that together and not the principals devising it and handing a piece of paper to the staff. I believe that they are using data more to figure out what their school goals need to be. I saw that this year more than anything else. The critical factor that made a difference is that we made, and I mean we mandated, every school to do an item by item analysis of their EQAO. And there were so many 'ah, ah' moments out there when they did that because that meant they could really pinpoint in on a discreet skill. And once they pinpointed on the discreet skill, now they are in a better position this year to formulate their goal for next year. That's a big change. [SInt06: SA6]

Supervisory officers provided a number of reasons for the work that had been achieved with schools but tended not to provide a description of the structures employed to support and sustain the professional development plans and experiences available to administrators and teachers.

It is the supervisory officer response to strategic actions taken by the district that is the focus of this current investigation. The next segment reviews the senior leaders' response to the challenges that surfaced as they developed infrastructure to support professional learning for administrators and teachers and concurrently implemented multiple strategic actions district-wide.

The District Response to Strategic Action: Processes to Support Learning for School Improvement

In traditional education organizations, administrators make decisions about teaching and learning and then direct teachers to implement them. Conversely, leaders who intend to develop collaborative district and school cultures may learn to foster change through shared decision making with principals and teachers. This approach to leadership could possibly promote the capacity for teachers to take responsibility for identifying student-learning gaps, search for ways to improve student achievement and accept responsibility for achieving their school or classroom goals.

As the amalgamation plans progressed and the *Attainment of Our Vision* was implemented, the district leadership team displayed an open interest in learning more about student learning and achievement. They deliberately found ways to spend more time in schools and provide a more hands-on and active approach to their leadership duties (Hannay et al., 2004). Supervisory officers also found ways to engage collaboratively with school principals and teachers in their Families of Schools, which meant changing the way they used to provide leadership within the GRDSB.

Changes to leadership practices for the supervisory officers required new learning, reflective discussions and opportunities to test new ways of working with principals and teachers in schools. Fostering changes of this nature district-wide required the installation of structures to support ongoing learning for the educators and administrators. For this current investigation, findings from this section are presented under the following themes: meaningful conversations and facilitative leadership.

Meaningful Conversations

Principals in the GRDSB worked with teachers to facilitate the development of school goals, participate in joint inquiry and take advantage of professional learning opportunities. The evidence gathered in this current investigation suggests that teachers were also being supported by the learning structures developed and used by supervisory officers and school administrators. As noted by one principal, reflective dialogue provided the connections within and between groups of teachers:

One thing that has just struck me more so this year than any other time, and that is the dialogue that happens in the halls. The professional dialogue is just amazing. It's not just talking about such and such a kid who really gave you a hard time. It's "I was doing this lesson and I don't know why these kids aren't getting this." They're standing there at the doorway and you can hear this dialogues or they'll stop me and say, "this isn't working very well," or -- "it's really amazing". [SInt03: LP]

Principals and teachers involved themselves in focused and reflective discussions on a regular basis. A school administrator presented an example of such a discussion:

One of the best discussions we ever had, we were talking about understanding. What is understanding? I said there's no point in talking about assessment until you know what is understanding. How do you know somebody understands something? What does it mean to understand something? It was an unbelievable discussion that we had on that whole concept of understanding. It was an excellent conversation and I think, probably, more valuable in starting to change assessment practices, which is what we're working at right now. I really think if I can get them to really re-think how they assess and what they're assessing, we're going to start seeing even better stuff happening in the classrooms. [SInt03: LP]

School administrators understood clearly that learning to learn through reflective conversations was essential in the development of a culture that supported continuous learning for teachers and students. He/she described the importance of dialogue to the learning process for educators:

It's up to your school how you do. And some schools have just let the teachers go back in and do their stuff and try the new ways. And they're [administrators] counting on the dialogue. That the teacher goes into the staff room and says, we just had the neatest class today. We did this and this. And did it ever work well. And the kids were so engaged and they were so enthusiastic. And another teacher hears about that and thinks, oh, I could use

that in my class. So that dialogue, that sharing, that collaborativeness. . . . [SInt05: MMP].

In the early years following amalgamation, the district leadership team committed to a substantial and continuous professional development program. The importance of learning new administrative and instructional practices within schools required the ability to examine past practice critically and learn new practices within a collaborative learning culture. One superintendent described how more educators were working together to change their instructional practices:

I think you are seeing people working more together in terms of learning teams, sharing and focusing on the instructional strategies, you know, our practice. We are no longer talking about our practice. We're examining our practice. And those were the questions that we were asking to - our principals are looking at. It's not surface anymore. It's more in terms of what are we really doing? And those doors are open in that regard. In fact, I now have teachers inviting me in. I can't go to as many classes now in terms of looking at instructional focus in my visit now. I want to see demonstrations of those. But I have people volunteering all the time to come in and look at this. I'm doing it with place mats here and I want you to see that. It's good that way. [SInt06: SA7]

When asked to speak about the structures used to support professional learning for employee groups, one district leader described the configuration in terms of a culture that supported learning and change:

I think it is fairly subtle, I guess I would say, in that we probably don't have as much of a structure. And I think some people would disagree with me on that. But I think most of it is by nature of the cultural shift, the willingness to dialogue, the openness to change, that I think that's how it's being imparted as opposed to having sort of a formal structure. [SInt06: SA1]

The supervisory officers relied heavily on reflective dialogue within the district leadership team to learn about new leadership practices and test them in schools. School administrators and teachers used focused reflective discussions to develop connections within and between groups of teachers. Learning to learn through reflective conversations was important to the development of a culture of support for continuous learning in the GRDSB.

Facilitative Leadership

District supervisory officers adopted a facilitative leadership style that supported the development of a learning culture. As a group of leaders, they collaboratively set the GRDSB direction on an annual basis and demonstrated a collective commitment to achieving the identified district goals. One senior leader described how school district direction was determined for the upcoming school year:

I think setting the system direction I think really, clearly, that's, you know, right from the top. Like, from our director through, you know, we try to have a consistency. You know a lot of the times when we get together in the summer, it's often in the summer we try to refine and then set the goals and directions for the next year. Lots of interesting discussions, but ultimately we try to come out with a recognizable, understandable, hopefully obtainable set of goals that will be clearly articulated to the administrators, and then through the administrators to the teaching and non-teaching staff. I think that's critical. [SInt02: SB1]

To support the achievement of the district, the leadership team developed a professional learning plan for their own supervisory officer group, modelled their commitment to learning and shared their learning with school administrators in the Family of Schools meetings. Another supervisory officer shared a professional development plan and described how s/he planned to share it with school administrators:

Starting with the Supervisory officers, last year we put a very comprehensive PD plan together for us. We said at the beginning of August, “This is going to be our professional development throughout the year.” Five different topics with two Supervisory officers in charge of every topic, and each topic was linked to school improvement. We would present that as a workshop to Supervisory officers and we would make suggestions for how it was to be presented to Family of Schools. We would take material then to our PD steering committees for our Family of Schools, decide how we were going to then deliver it to our principals. [SInt02: SO6]

Supervisory officers intentionally aligned the vision with GRDSB school improvement plans and considered the integration of both as a catalyst for learning focused discussions in Supervisory Council meetings. A member of the supervisory officer group explained the importance of the alignment and the creation of structure to support discussion within the group:

We bring the discussion of the Vision, of the research of what we’re doing with the Vision into a format that can be more closely aligned and integrated with the school improvement. I think that the two have been not seen as complementing each other. I think the power comes from the synergy of having them aligned and together. We have tried to create the structure, the infrastructure that creates the environment in which all learning discussions occur at Supervisory Council. That is doesn’t happen in other forums. It happens when all of us are present. [SInt02: SO3]

The evidence collected in this current investigation identified the importance of reflective dialogue and inquiry as a component of the learning infrastructure being developed through the senior leadership group. As early as 2002, supervisory officers referred to professional discussions that generated new ideas about their joint work. A participant described it this way:

The dialogue in that Ops Councils group is fabulous. Is absolutely fabulous. . . . We put our PD first, so we make sure we’re fresh and we’ve got time for it and if it’s two hours, it’s two hours. If it’s an hour and a half, it’s an hour and a half, and we don’t get caught at the end. So we changed that his year and we put it at the beginning.

I think us talking, reflecting, sharing and being on the same wavelength as to what we are trying to achieve. I may do it differently from my partners and my colleagues, but at least what I’m trying to get to by the end of June is the same thing that they’re trying to get to. We are trying to get to very clear, concise school growth plans that speak to student learning, have a measurable goal and that we do have data there that is driving instructional practice. I think that’s common and consistent among all of us. [SInt02: SO6]

The evidence collected for the current research study suggested that individual and collective learning was promoted in the school administrators’ meetings using similar structures developed in the Supervisory Council meetings. A principal reported:

The superintendents are doing the same with all the principals. PD’s a large part of our meetings. It’s usually two hours out of three hours now, so obviously, the Board really values it too. They bring in lots of speakers for us now in the last couple of years and give us the training. [SInt03: VP]

School administrators reported a sense of engagement in the collaborative culture developing within the principal group in much the same way as the supervisory officers. A school administrator described the collegial experience as similar to that of a professional learning community:

It's been very exciting. I think what it's done for me is really reinforced the importance of collegiality, of collaborative planning with other principals and other administrators within the system. I find that the concept of a professional learning community starts with that group of individuals, my growth in that area has been phenomenal. [SInt03: NP]

Another principal captured the fluid nature of facilitative leadership when working with school staff:

You move forward. You move back. You work with the people. If you are going to build a professional learning community, you have to listen. It might not go the way you want it to go to. But if it's the way they want to go, you go that way. But you merge it into how you saw your vision. Because you have to have credibility with your staff and how you are working. [SInt04: LLP]

Modelling a facilitative leadership style as a group of supervisory officers in a consistent manner from one year to the next was an intentional plan of action that stemmed from the need to create a collaborative district culture. Learning to change from an organizational-based control function to a more collegial facilitative function required a collaborative learning approach. The learning culture that developed within the supervisory officer group was then successfully shared and developed in the school principal group. Principals within the GRDSB learned and integrated the knowledge, skills and practices and demonstrated a facilitative leadership style. A district leader reported:

Principals are much more facilitating now. They used to be more directional. Right? We used to tell people what they were doing or what they needed to do. And that sort of thing. Whereas now we're trying to create that knowledge that people see the value in something and then you facilitate its implementation so that it gets into the classrooms. Lots of time it's, not juggling those, but I found in one of my schools I couldn't get to all my teams, right, that were working that early dismissal day, right. But I knew what they were doing because they had a declared purpose there and there was a product from it. So I knew what went on between. Had to have been because you couldn't get from there to there beforehand. So, I think, they are doing much more facilitation and much more in terms of how they can support the work of their teams and their people. [SInt06: SA7]

Evidence gathered in the current investigation suggests that senior leaders learned how to become more facilitative in their leadership practices, together. The evidence also indicates that the intentional changes to leadership practices for senior leaders within the organization in turn made the task of sharing their learning with school administrators an easier undertaking. In effect, the findings suggest that changes to leadership structures for supervisory officers and school leaders provided some of the infrastructure to support the further development of a culture of learning within the district.

Learning for students and for all employees was the central focus of the GRDSB. The Midwestern Centre research reports documented the actions taken by the district to embed professional development into normally scheduled meetings such as the Supervisory Council district leader meetings, Family of Schools administrator meetings and school-based staff meetings. As a group of leaders, supervisory officers

persisted in their attainment of the GRDSB goal of improving instruction for improved student learning. Findings suggest that professional learning was supported and enabled through two main structural arrangements. The specific structural arrangements or infrastructure include meaningful dialogue between practitioners who wish to solve practical instructional problems within their work contexts, as well as a shift in supervisory officers' leadership practice, from controlling to facilitative and reflective.

This chapter summarizes the research findings for this retrospective qualitative investigation. Four enduring strategic actions taken by the GRDSB's supervisory officers were identified in the data analysis. They included the *Attainment of Our Vision* initiative, professional learning opportunities as support, student achievement data for school improvement, and district structures to support learning.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

A discussion of study findings follows and is organized into three sections. The first section provides a discussion of the extent to which the GRDSB were demonstrating the characteristics of a professional learning community. The second section provides a discussion as to whether the leadership practices of this group of supervisory officers changed in nature over a six-year period. The third section examines the revised conceptual framework and integrates the themes discussed in segments one and two of this chapter.

The data collection phase of the investigation was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do leadership practices change for this group of district supervisory officers between 2000 and 2006?
2. Do the strategic actions and approaches to leadership practices enacted by this group of supervisory officers between 2000 and 2006 reflect the characteristics of a professional learning community as defined in the literature?

The GRDSB change strategies initiated by district officers were analyzed first, to establish those strategies most strongly evidenced in data over a six-year period. Next, district actions, taken in response to the district challenges that emerged from the initiation of selected change strategies, were examined to ascertain the impact on the leadership practices of the senior leaders. Senior leaders' work practices were then examined using the lens of Stoll et al.'s (2006) characteristics of a professional learning community and guided by their working definition of a professional learning community.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Changing leadership practices of district leaders provides a model that connects the key aspects of this retrospective inquiry. Links to the educational literature are organized through the conceptual framework as well as the research purpose and questions. The conceptual framework has informed the research design; provided reference points for discussion of literature, methodology, data analysis and development of findings, contributed to the trustworthiness of the study methodology

Discussion of Findings: Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community

This first section provides a discussion of the extent to which the GRDSB were demonstrating the characteristics of a professional learning community as a group of supervisory officers. The discussion is organized using the following characteristics of a professional learning community: shared vision; shared values; collaboration on learning; reflective professional inquiry; mutual trust, respect and support; individual and collective professional learning; and openness and networks (Stoll et al., 2006; Bolam et al., 2005).

Shared Vision

The *Attainment of Our Vision* strategy provided a vehicle for bringing together Ministry of Education reform initiatives, amalgamation of four boards into one board with a sense of identity, and a clear organizational direction. As Levin (2000) notes, "building a shared commitment to a shared vision for the future" is a continuous process (p. 105). Findings in this current study indicate the supervisory officer

group energetically pursued this process. These supervisory officers persisted in this endeavour for the time period under study and were credited by principals and teachers for their ability to bring the vision to life for educators and students. Once the district leadership team had incorporated the concept of improved student learning as the district mission, the vision served to unite educators and provide common language to support discussions about the improvement of student learning and instruction.

The *Attainment of Our Vision* strategy provided the district senior leaders with a focus for discussion with members of all district employee groups. Through consistent use the language used in the vision document and accompanying graphic representations became familiar to and understood collectively by school personnel. As observed by principals and teachers, supervisory officers were noted for their continuous conversations and questions posed about the vision as they visited schools or lead meetings. The findings indicated that the supervisory officers took time to listen to responses from principals and teachers and, in doing so, demonstrated commitment to building common understandings about GRDSB goals through discussion. Care was taken to increase the number of conversations with educators by increasing the number of school visits made during the school year. The supervisory officers took time to extend the conversations with staff and administrators in each location and successfully developed more enriched working relationships at specific sites. Using a personal, practical and persistent approach involving conversation and discussion with individuals and groups, they assisted district personnel in understanding and adapting the vision.

Supervisory officers brought the vision into the daily work of administrators through conversations about school growth plans, student learning and student achievement. Principals were expected to become involved in the vision work. They were encouraged to engage teachers in discussions with a focus on student achievement, effective instructional practices and the development of school growth plans. The supervisory officer group provided resources to enable principals to meet with their teachers to work on identified student learning challenges or refine newly emerging instructional methods. Research findings indicated that once principals and teachers could see the alignment between the Ministry of Education reform initiatives and the district direction, they were able to collaboratively develop improved school growth plans and extend discussions to include instructional practice and student achievement.

Shared Values

The senior leadership team endeavoured to demonstrate the values of the vision as they worked with each other and when interacting with GRDSB personnel. As the *Attainment of Our Vision* initiative was introduced, there were dissenting voices within the newly formed district. Some employees believed the focus of the vision should be the development of GRDSB culture rather than student learning. Others viewed the vision as an exercise for the public's benefit and thus raised concerns about its ability to impact student learning. Still others perceived gaps in the professional learning activities offered to educators from the newly integrated districts, expressed doubt in the ability of central-office personnel to demonstrate the caring and learning approach to practices espoused in the vision, or believed that not all schools or

classroom teachers were involved in the improvement of instructional practices. Supervisory officers remained open to challenges focused on the vision initiative. The collective response from the senior leader group most often entailed the design of fresh opportunities for further discussion and consultation at the school or district level.

The evidence garnered for the current study confirms that the senior leaders connected the work of the district to ministry reforms through the *Attainment of Our Vision*. They worked collaboratively as a group of supervisory officers to instill an understanding of the vision initiative across the GRDSB and to demonstrate the application of the values promoted in the strategy. A common understanding of district goals and shared purpose was generated through conversation, dialogue, discussion and questioning of the vision initiative. The supervisory officers heeded the call from principals and teachers to maintain the same district goals and focus over a number of years. They were able to focus the GRDSB's attention on the improvement of instructional practice to enhance student learning and achievement. The supervisory officers continued to sustain this focus through the *Attainment of Our Vision* change strategy.

Collaboration for Learning

The supervisory officer group regarded challenges to the *Attainment of Our Vision* strategy as an opportunity to learn. Findings from this study indicated this group was seen to be working together in new ways. For example, in their scheduled supervisory officer meetings, individual members took responsibility for bringing learning opportunities to the group. They took turns presenting research findings and newly released book summaries on leadership and learning themes. Questions were posed and discussions generated as the district leadership team examined their own work in schools and reflected on their own practice in combination with research and professional literature.

Supervisory officers described their willingness to open their practice to encourage sharing, reflecting, and risk taking within their group. They generated interest in their collective work in support of student learning and continued to search for answers to questions that could be tested and shared with each other. Senior leaders worked together to collaborate on their learning as the district leadership team. Trying to assess their progress in those areas provided the needed impetus for conducting an internal check with those who were involved in the work of instruction and teaching.

In turn, supervisory officers expected system principals to become instructional leaders in their schools and considered this shift to be a GRDSB priority. While managerial tasks were viewed as necessary, senior leaders clarified that instructional leadership tasks required new learning and practice for administrators as well as teachers. Family of Schools meetings were used to discuss what appeared to be working in schools, share methods for bringing new ideas to their teachers and enhance learning for each member in a collegial manner. The learning themes employed at the Family of Schools meetings paralleled those examined by the supervisory officer group during their weekly meetings. These themes were then presented to teachers by principals in designated school-based learning sessions.

Findings from this current study indicated that study participants had expanded their views on learning to include the belief that teachers and administrators must also continue to learn for improved

student learning and achievement to occur. A collaborative learning orientation to their leadership work was adopted by this supervisory officer group and also integrated and then this approach was also integrated into the leadership development work with principals. Additionally, a collaborative learning orientation to building capacity for instructional practices guided the professional learning opportunities for school staff members.

Reflective Professional Inquiry

Together, the supervisory officer group selected a district direction that provided a student achievement focus for all schools. The organization's focus on student learning generated a need for the integration of student achievement data into district decision-making processes. As a group, the supervisory officers improved their ability to use GRDSB data to assess district direction and to identify which schools required additional resources to support student learning goals. Data became a tool of choice in decisions about district direction, resource allocation and district focus.

The supervisory officers took a results orientation to their work with each other as well as their work with principals and teachers. They combined a reflective inquiry process and their use of dialogue in schools to generate the next possible course of action needed to improve student learning for schools and the GRDSB.

The supervisory officer group became adept at using the reflective professional inquiry process as individuals and as a group of senior leaders. In the early years of the *Attainment of Our Vision* initiation and implementation, they chose to keep their inquiry work positioned within their own group. They recognized their internal problem solving and decision making as a reflective professional inquiry process and could see the value in sharing this process with the system principals. They modeled the habit of asking questions about leadership practices and student learning with principals. Student achievement data provided the district leadership team with assessment and evaluation information that could also be shared and discussed with principals.

Supervisory officers worked in their Family of Schools groups to instill interest among the principal group in the use of data for making decisions about student learning. School growth plans informed by student achievement data served as a focus for professional inquiry and discussion between supervisory officers and their principals. Findings indicated that principals developed their capacity to reflect individually and together about student achievement data and to determine next steps for implementation of the plan.

Supervisory officers and principals extended discussions related to the use of data and decision making about school-based decisions about student learning to classroom teachers. Questions related to student and school data were incorporated into ongoing conversations during supervisory officer visits to school classrooms. Principals and teachers were learning to share accountability for student learning and achievement through the assessment of data and adjustments to the school growth plan.

The findings also indicated a level of discontent remaining among administrators regarding the use of data in the development of their school success plans. Selected principals expressed their dissatisfaction

with the district's in-service provision for newly appointed administrators and for those who required additional support in the use of data for school goal-setting purposes.

Mutual Trust, Respect and Support

The supervisory officers held regular discussions with each other whenever a problem related to implementation of their GRDSB plans became known by the group. During these discussions, their own work was most often examined, as well as the work of principals and teachers. District challenges that were presented and examined by the supervisory officers were considered worthy of their time and attention, as each issue was often related to other challenges. Possible solutions were generated for both the short term and the longer term.

Study findings indicated this group of supervisory officers was able to consider alternative perspectives about what individual members observed during visits to their Family of Schools sites. They were open to each other's ideas more readily as they learned to view GRDSB challenges as more acceptable and doable when approached collectively. "Push back" on suggestions made within the group became important to the quality of their decision-making ability. Trust levels grew as they developed the ability to collaborate with one another to solve system-level problems.

An increased belief in the ability of the group to fully discuss and challenge one another within the confines of their meeting room developed as well. Their collective confidence grew with their capacity to address the challenges and involve themselves in a cycle of examination of the challenge, the associated available data and a learning orientation to the situation. Solution options became the outcome of their discussions as well as associated action plans. As their collaborative problem-solving process became more clearly defined, they began to discuss the experiences in practical terms with principals in their Family of Schools.

Research findings indicated that the supervisory officers demonstrated a genuine willingness to work together, dialogued as a group about complex district issues and demonstrated a sincere willingness to learn together in a collaborative manner.

The supervisory officer group resolved to purposefully stimulate the development of respectful, helpful and collegial work environments within schools. They also recognized that the rate of progress would vary between schools.

Supervisory officers found a variety of ways to connect with administrators and teachers on a continuous basis and to develop supportive working relationships within their associated schools. They modeled this manner of discussion as school-based challenges were initiated and implemented during school visitations, Family of Schools meetings, informal gatherings and formally constructed in-service sessions. The ease with which the sharing of learning experiences evolved increased the ability of administrators to discuss their own questions, challenges and difficulties encountered in pursuit of school improvement and student learning. Principals noted how important it was to have someone listen and respond as if their observations and insights mattered to the work of student learning and achievement.

More importantly, the principal group reported a “consistency of response” to the numerous issues arising in schools, providing additional evidence that they were working as a like-minded group.

Findings suggested that trust developed over time, initially among the Family of Schools principal group, as well as with their Family of Schools superintendent. Respondents indicated an eagerness to share their latest thinking about an emerging challenge in their schools. Participants also indicated a willingness to share their current thinking about a change in their perspective regarding a professional learning need or about a practical application of a new instructional strategy in their school. Principal participants indicated district leadership team members were “really listening” when questions were posed or ideas put forward for the supervisory officers’ consideration. The *Attainment of Our Vision* provided the language for professional conversations and in turn generated focused, meaningful discussions between principals and supervisory officers. Principals came to understand, through recurring and often stimulating discussions, that their respective supervisory officer was supportive of their leadership work within their schools. Conversations of this nature were reported as occurring more easily and more often between principals and their supervisory officers, and this type of “professional talk” was perceived by principals to be a “support” to them.

The supervisory officer group encouraged principals to engage their teaching staff members in the same type of professional discussions. Each school supervisory officer modeled professional conversations with teachers in the classroom as well as working with principals through the Family of Schools meetings. As relationships between the supervisory officers and principals developed through conversations about student learning and instruction, more challenging discussions became possible. Student learning and quality instructional practice in classrooms became the focus for ongoing professional discussions and for change.

As with the principal group, teacher respondents observed that the supervisory officers were listening to their school principals and providing teacher supports such as teaching resources, additional time to meet, and professional learning opportunities to address school-based needs. For example, principals and teachers realized they needed additional time during the school day to discuss, consider, reflect, test new instructional techniques, reflect on results and share their findings with other teachers. School administrators found creative ways to make time available for teachers to carry out such deep learning and to change practices in classrooms and schools.

Teachers reported being consulted by their principals on topics related to the implementation of their school growth plans and decisions connected to improved student learning and achievement. Such ongoing professional conversations were described by one teacher respondent as a means to “rekindle some teachers” because talk of school or classroom accomplishments can generate energy and have a revitalizing effect. Discussions about teaching and learning were welcomed by teachers and viewed as demonstrations of support for the work that teachers do in classrooms on a daily basis.

The district leadership team listened to principal and teacher requests for additional resources. They demonstrated their respect and support for principals and teachers through the provision of time to

work together on tasks, additional teaching resources, and professional learning opportunities. This show of support by the supervisory officers also indicated to principals and teachers that the senior leader group understood that the shift from individual work to collective work was quite complex and that participants required more time to work together for changes to occur in teaching practice. Current study findings suggest the ‘ demonstration of integrity, respect and support for principals and teachers as well as a persistent commitment to student learning and achievement generated enough “good will” among school personnel to solidify their resolve across the GRDSB resolve to pursue the district mission and goals.

Evidence gathered in the current research study indicates that the vision strategic action shifted from being perceived by principals and teachers as a top-down initiative to being a shared, lived image through the energized professional conversations intentionally initiated by the supervisory officer group. Recurring discussions about teaching, learning and leading provided supervisory officers with a vehicle for developing working relationships with principals and teachers in their Family of Schools and for engaging both employee groups in problem solving and goal sharing (Lambert, 2003). The evidence substantiates that the supervisory officers “created a buzz about the vision” and were able to generate confidence among employee groups in the newly amalgamated board in order to move the district student learning and achievement agenda forward [SInt02: SB1].

Individual and Collective Professional Learning

The supervisory officers made a commitment to work together once the predecessor boards amalgamated to become one large school district. Each supervisory officer experienced similar challenges at the same time as all other district supervisory officers, and this provided the group with shared experiences and understandings. There were a multitude of district-level challenges that emerged simultaneously and necessitated a shared approach to problem-solving. For example, the vision development initiative needed to incorporate contributions from each predecessor board into a document that honoured the four previous boards and also provided organizational direction for the GRDSB.

Effective communication strategies were developed within the district supervisory officer group to manage the growing number of organizational changes. Commonly shared leadership experiences such as the development of the *Attainment of Our Vision* strategy served to support a shift away from district leadership that maintained a traditional “siloe method” to a more collective or collaborative approach. Learning how to work together within the boundaries set by the *Attainment of Our Vision* document was viewed as a complex learning task.

The *Attainment of Our Vision* document contained descriptions of professional and personal qualities shared by employee groups within the newly formed GRDSB. As well, the commitment to the implementation of the incorporated qualities within the *Attainment of Our Vision* document served to honour the contributions of all four boards to the shaping of the newly formed district. Assisting the district in learning about the *Attainment of Our Vision* and incorporating its key principles into the work of school personnel was of significant importance to all.

The supervisory officer group made great progress in their determined effort to share the understanding of the *Attainment of Our Vision* with principals and teachers. It was equally important to the group of supervisory officers to demonstrate the professional and personal qualities contained within the vision document as they implemented it. Within the group of supervisory officers, much discussion ensued as to how to most effectively build understanding about the vision across the GRDSB. Supervisory officers reported that their collective discussions focused their attention on sharing information within schools and classrooms. There was recognition that the ability of each superintendent to communicate a consistent message as shared within the supervisory officer group was critical to their success. Much progress was made in building acceptance of the *Attainment of Our Vision* following the 2003 GRDSB consultation process. The addition of student learning into the centre of the vision graphic was widely supported across the district.

It is important to note that although a number of additional challenges arose at the same time, the supervisory officers maintained their commitment to building an understanding of the *Attainment of Our Vision* as the key strategic priority.

As complex issues emerged, the supervisory officers took aim at those challenges that did not have ready solutions and generated answers of value to the district. Supervisory officers spoke of turning GRDSB challenges into learning projects, and individuals took responsibility for preparing learning themes for the supervisory officer group. They developed methods for learning at a faster rate together.

In turn, supervisory officers designed learning experiences for principals at the Family of Schools meetings. Principals were then encouraged to employ selected activities during school staff meetings. The vision, district goals, school growth plans and data such as student assessment results provided the boundaries for their work within schools. The consistency of messages shared across the system through this structured approach to learning and the development of opportunities for reflective dialogue within principal and teacher groups allowed for the continuous examination of teaching and leadership practices. Principals and teachers were structurally integrated into the learning-focused district strategy. Supervisory officers encouraged regular examination of instructional and leadership practices and demonstrated this reflective activity in their work with principals and teachers.

As a further extension of the vision initiative, GRDSB leaders determined that instructional intelligence (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001) would become a system focus for study and practice for approximately three years. Principals worked with their staff members on the selected district themes and topics. Teachers requested opportunities to work together with colleagues experiencing the same instructional challenges by grade level or subject area. Those educators found that reflective conversations with fellow teachers involved in the same work with students at the same level were essential to the instructional change process. Supervisory officers, principals and teachers learned over time that changing instructional practice is a complex process that requires time, the application of resources and the opportunity to practice the newly acquired. Once the GRDSB identified the instructional intelligence

learning project as a system focus, system leaders communicated the need for all schools to participate fully to all principals and their staff members.

Openness and Networks

The GRDSB response to provincial mandates and the creation of a unified school system involved instituting a harmonization process that would bring the four predecessor districts together. In order to meet these challenges, three areas of focus were established for the district: leadership, learning and school improvement. Initially, a leadership development team was assigned the task of developing a method for building a common organizational culture. The GRDSB developed a guiding document for the district employees titled *A Caring, Learning Community*. The document incorporated the foundational values and beliefs identified by the predecessor boards' representatives, descriptions of leadership characteristics found in the research literature, and *The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* and *The Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* in Ontario.

A Caring, Learning Community represented the GRDSB response to ministry reform initiatives and challenges arising from the amalgamation of four predecessor boards. Once this foundational document received the support of the district leadership team, individual supervisory officers began to openly connect with principals and teachers to discuss district vision and goals. Discussions took place in schools, classrooms and Family of Schools meetings and were very often face-to-face. Self-selected schools were afforded the opportunity to identify an interest in making a formal commitment to the vision initiative and to experience in-service sessions facilitated by district personnel. As early adopters of the GRDSB vision initiative, this initial network of schools served to underpin the needed commitment to district goals.

Working relationships developed in a network-like manner as supervisory officers continued to increase the number of school and classroom visits and face-to-face discussions between principals and teachers. These visits and discussions provided opportunities for reflective conversations about the improvement of student learning and achievement. Family of Schools meetings became important for principal-to-principal interaction, discussion, problem solving and learning about new ways to operate as leaders within schools. Supervisory officers required their Family of Schools principals to participate in reflective conversations about newly emerging leadership work and to practice new ways of providing leadership in schools using the *Attainment of Our Vision* as a guide.

Supervisory officers required principals to connect with their teachers to learn more about the vision initiative and GRDSB goals. In particular, there was an expectation the conversations would focus on improving student learning and achievement. Participation in the school growth plan's development and implementation provided a way for principals and teachers to work together to further system goals.

While structured meetings were available to principals and teachers as opportunities to further their work to support district goals, informal networks began to form as well. Findings indicate that supervisory officers were meeting informally to work on instructional challenges of interest or student learning challenges specific to selected schools. Targeted resource allocations made it possible for teachers from one site to request opportunities to meet together with teachers from other sites and further similar

school success plans. Supervisory officers and principals encouraged those more informal, open ways of working together toward GRDSB goals and within the vision initiative boundaries.

Discussion of Findings: Leadership Practices

The second section of this chapter provides a discussion of the extent to which changes in leadership practices were demonstrated by the GRDSB supervisory officers. The discussion is organized using the core leadership practices identified by Leithwood et al. (2007): building a shared vision and setting direction, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization and leading the instructional program.

Building a Shared Vision and Setting Direction

The supervisory officers used the *Attainment of Our Vision* strategy to bring together the four predecessor boards of education and reform the GRDSB into one unique culture. In the early years of inception, they worked with all employee groups to develop shared understandings about the district vision. Key components of the vision were first initiated across the district and used as a focus for action. The *Attainment of Our Vision* document was reviewed by the district two years after the initiation phase. Parents, trustees, students and representatives from all employee groups provided suggestions for changes to the document. Improving student learning became the Vision's mission statement, and this shift in focus resonated well with administrators and teachers. The revised vision document served as a blueprint for action and provided a common voice and common language for the district.

The *Attainment of Our Vision* graphic developed by the district leadership team depicted the emphasis placed on skills, values and processes by the supervisory officers. The vision, mission and values provided the supervisory officers with the parameters for a consistent approach to problem solving and decision-making. They demonstrated their willingness to learn together, dialogue about complex issues and work with school personnel to generate next steps for the GRDSB. This approach to learning and working together was informally shared with school administrators and provided principals with a method for working with their staff members.

The supervisory officers believed the vision provided a framework describing how individuals in the board should work together. As a group of senior leaders, they committed to modeling this "way of working together" [SInt06: SA7]. They promoted the evolution of the vision through face-to-face conversation and discussion. GRDSB leaders persistently pursued connections with principals and teachers in their Family of Schools sites through conversation and discussion. The vision's common language and goals provided supervisory officers, site administrators and teachers with a focus for ongoing discussions about student learning and achievement.

The supervisory officers served, initially, as facilitators of ongoing discussions defined by the parameters outlined in the *Attainment of Our Vision* document. As a group of supervisory officers, they demonstrated their willingness to listen to principals and teachers while in discussion and to take their input into account, whether garnered through discussion or survey. They demonstrated their evolving leadership

approach while cultivating positive working relationships that contributed to the emergence of a positive and collegial district environment.

Building Relationships and Developing People

School administrators were aware of the district leadership team's efforts to bring closure to the amalgamation concerns expressed by administrators and teachers from all four boards. Concerns raised by teachers were managed with care by administrators. District leader responses to amalgamation concerns were delivered to members of employee groups in such a way as to demonstrate the values outlined in the *Attainment of Our Vision* initiative. The GRDSB supervisory officers chose to view responses to challenging issues as opportunities to bring the vision forward and to assist administrators and teachers in understanding how the vision could be used to bring alignment and coherence to the work of leaders, teachers and members of other employee groups. The GRDSB district leaders' actions were focused on bringing the vision forward as a blueprint for action in schools and directing employee attention toward improving learning for students.

Relationships among the supervisory officers, administrators and teachers developed as the vision was initiated within the GRDSB. The implementation of the vision provided senior leaders and school administrators with a reason to maintain ongoing professional conversations about student achievement. Over time, discussions about student learning and teaching became more reflective in nature and were more easily extended over time.

The supervisory officer team persistently relied on a face-to-face communication approach when conveying key concepts to district administrators and teachers as well as members of other employee groups. Maintaining the momentum for the development of working relationships from one year to the next tended to rest with the supervisory officer group in the early years of the change initiatives. However, the findings of this study indicate that the commitment of school administrators to the vision also increased within the time frame of the current investigation. Those teachers who participated in the district change strategies demonstrated a commitment to the work of improving student learning as well.

Developing the Organization

The supervisory officers encouraged and supported the proliferation of professional conversations and reflective discussions that often crossed perceived boundaries that may have been present due to positional leadership roles within the organization. Professional conversations served as a basis for developing working relationships and helping supervisory officers to focus attention on the improvement of student learning when interacting with school administrators and teachers. The GRDSB district leaders set professional learning goals as a group and for their work within Families of Schools. Members of the supervisory officer group developed techniques that opened their professional practice as leaders to encourage sharing, reflecting and risk taking in a collaborative manner. Using the inquiry process, they endeavoured to establish measurable goals for the system that were informed by student achievement data. The supervisory officer group also worked to share this approach to improvement within their assigned Families of Schools.

Student achievement data were used to assist school leaders and staff members in developing school growth plans. Student achievement data were also used to determine professional learning needs for the GRDSB as well as for Families of Schools and individual school sites. District resources were then aligned to provide professional learning supports for teachers and school administrators.

The supervisory officers asked principals and teachers to learn how to continuously change their instructional practices to provide the most effective learning experiences for students. They expected school administrators and their teachers to improve the performance of students who were struggling academically. Teachers were expected to assess achievement data for each student in their classrooms and develop an instructional plan to support their learning needs.

Findings from this study revealed that in the early years of the change initiative some tensions emerged for teachers and principals. For example, district leadership team members were still requiring a particular response from schools in the area of data use for student achievement rather than a focus on facilitating a process that demonstrated active leadership for teaching and learning. The capacity to facilitate a change process for the district continued to grow and evolve for this group of supervisory officers

Leading the Instructional Program

The supervisory officers worked to develop a GRDSB culture to support learning, discussion, reflection and opportunities to challenge and assess the work that was underway. The vision provided a common language, and once it was understood by administrators and teachers, discussions about instructional practice and student learning became more meaningful. Over time, the focus of discussions noted by interviewees changed from talking about teaching practice to examining teaching practice in more collaborative ways, such as in small groups or larger forums that involved staff from more than one school.

The structure to support learning within the district culture was described by one superintendent as “subtle in nature” [SInt06: SA1]. This supervisory officer also described the newly emerging infrastructure as a cultural shift. Educators were more willing to dialogue and were more open to change. The district supervisory officers intended to promote this reflective inquiry approach and to increase the number of reflective discussions in their own meetings, with administrators in their Family of Schools meetings and during their school site visits. Student learning, student achievement and professional practice were the focus themes for these discussions. Senior leaders also intended to develop a GRDSB culture that supported putting newly acquired instructional practices to the test in classrooms.

The district leadership team members openly discussed their collaborative approach to learning and changing their own professional practices. They opened up their individual professional practices to examination within the supervisory officer group. This approach encouraged sharing new knowledge and insights, reflecting together on questions raised, taking risks and pushing back on concepts or plans in an effort to reach consensus about GRDSB goals and action plans. Student achievement data and other data sources were used to inform decisions. All members of the group endeavoured to attain a common and consistent approach to changes that would impact the district.

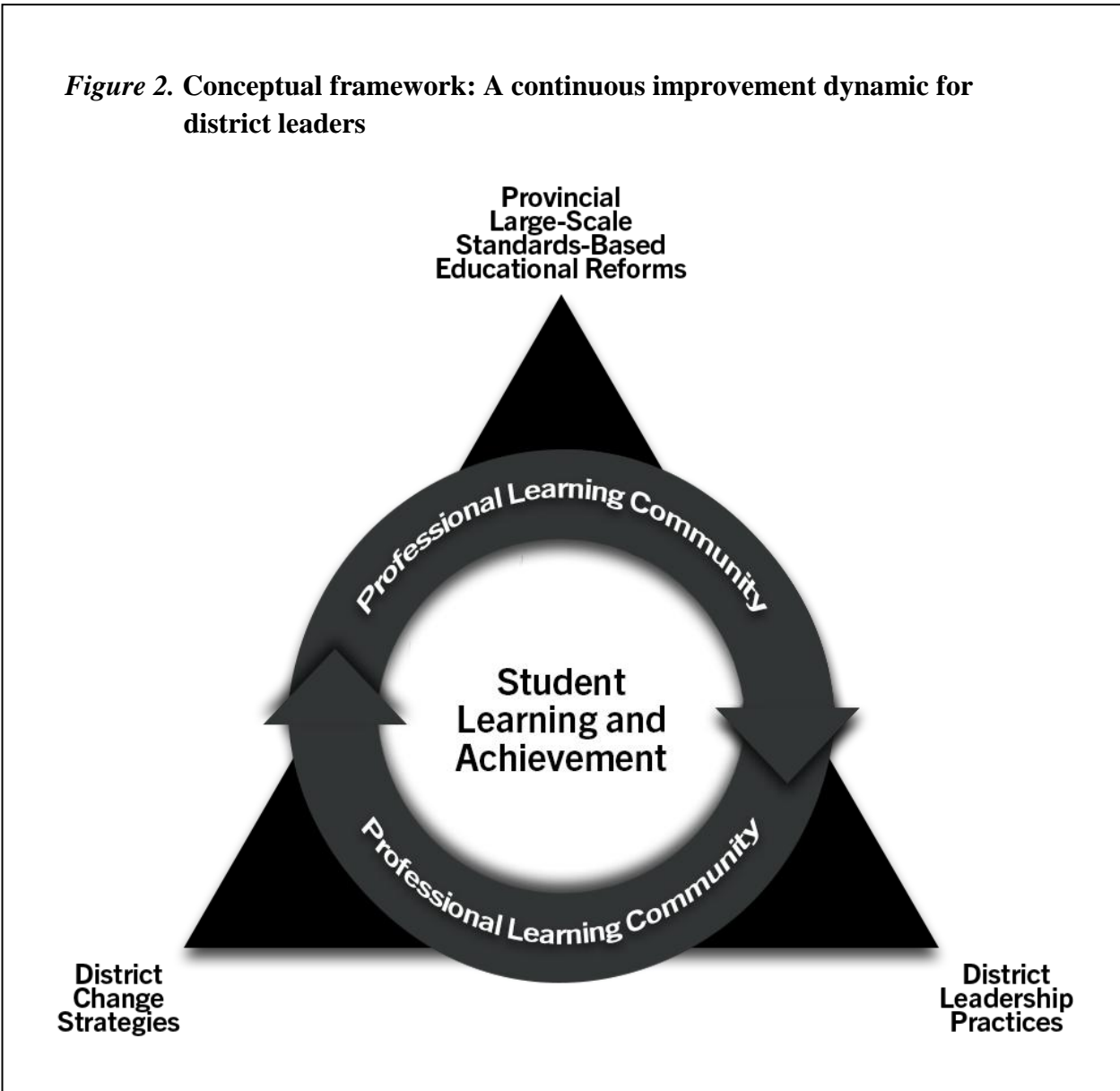
Within the time frame of this investigation, the findings indicate the supervisory officers demonstrated the ability to “reflect on their thinking while acting,” as described by Argyris and Schon (1974) as “double loop learning theory in action”. Argyris and Schon contend that actions or practices may be adjusted conceptually using such a process rather than completing the entire experiential learning cycle. They also suggested that expert practitioners are more likely to develop this ability, and that it requires continuous reflecting, inquiring, theorizing and questioning professional practices to achieve clarity about “lived experiences.” Learning to learn through a reflective inquiry process was important in the development of a GRDSB culture that supported continuous learning for students, administrators, teachers and staff.

The supervisory officers worked to foster a district environment that supported a “learning by doing” approach to the improvement of student learning and achievement. More specifically, senior leaders advanced Elmore’s notion that educators must now “learn to do the right thing” (2000, p. 25). The vision served as a catalyst for generating reflective discussions that focused on improving student learning and achievement and improving instructional practice among educators in the district. As well, this group of supervisory officers adopted a more facilitative style of leadership that encouraged professional conversations and supported a shared leadership approach to GRDSB initiatives. Reflective dialogue and inquiry were important components of the district- learning infrastructure. The district leadership team members modeled shared learning with administrators in their Families of Schools. They believed it was important for a district leader to listen to administrator and teacher input and merge those ideas into an evolving theory of action.

A Continuous Improvement Dynamic

The third section of this chapter provides the revised conceptual framework that more accurately describes the relationship between large-scale, standards-based reform mandates; district change strategies; district leadership practices; and professional learning community, as demonstrated by a group of supervisory officers. *Figure 2. Conceptual framework: A continuous improvement dynamic for district leaders depicts the integration of the four components used for this investigation and reveals the dynamic nature of the interaction.*

Figure 2. Conceptual framework: A continuous improvement dynamic for district leaders



Provincial Large-Scale, Standards-Based Educational Reforms

As portrayed in Figure 1 Conceptual Framework: Changing Leadership Practices of District Leaders, the provincial large-scale, standards-based educational reforms exerted systemic pressures for significant educational changes within the GRDSB. As was the case in other areas of the province, the district leadership team balanced work connected to amalgamation of four local boards under new governance structures, harmonization of teacher and staff contracts with restricted terms, adjustments to the realities of funding reductions, incorporation of rigid results-based curriculum and assessment, standardized provincial testing expectations and the establishment of school councils. Provincial educational reforms required the supervisory officers to take action on multiple initiatives simultaneously. The newly defined educational policy context required significant accountability from school district supervisory officers. In Figure 2

Conceptual Framework: A Continuous Improvement Dynamic for District Leaders of the revised conceptual framework, the pressure exerted by provincial mandates is named “provincial large-scale, standards-based educational reforms” and is positioned at the apex of the triangle. This component represents the Ontario Ministry of Education mandated reforms that continuously impact the work of district leadership teams across the province, and specifically the group of supervisory officers under investigation for this study.

District Change Strategies

The strategic actions taken by the district supervisory officers were developed and initiated in response to the pressures of provincial reform mandates. As evidenced in the findings chapter of this study, the *Attainment of Our Vision* is one strategic action that was initially perceived by educators and other staff as belonging to the supervisory officers. As the newly formed GRDSB worked through amalgamation challenges, the vision provided a vehicle for employees to develop a shared sense of identity, purpose, and direction. Although “A Caring, Learning Community” was officially designated as the vision statement for the district, the mission of “Improving Student Learning” resonated more fully with school administrators and their staff members. The mission served to energize administrators and teachers to seek ways to enact the GRDSB mission.

The second strategic action implemented by the supervisory officers provided school administrators and teaching staff with professional development opportunities that were aligned with the *Attainment of Our Vision* initiative. Organizational resources were focused on the provision of professional learning for district personnel. The incorporation of a district-wide professional learning program focused on enhancing instructional intelligence (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001) provided school administrators and teachers with “tool kits” designed to assist teachers to improve the quality of their teaching practice. Continuous professional learning was one of the cornerstones of the district strategic plan.

Employing student achievement data for school improvement was the third strategic action introduced to the GRDSB in the early years of the district amalgamation. School administrators and teachers moved from thinking of the EQAO scores as the single most important source of student achievement data to incorporating school-generated achievement data into their plans for students. Principals and teachers demonstrated the application of growing expertise by using meaningful student achievement data to make decisions about incorporating teaching methods that best support student learning. Administrators and teachers recognized improved student learning as an important focus for the classroom. However, school leaders and staff also understood that increased professional development and opportunities for applying new learning to practice were needed to improve student learning and achievement.

The fourth strategic action implemented by the supervisory officers provided school administrators and teaching staff with the infrastructure necessary to sustain professional growth while working with students to improve learning and achievement. The infrastructure provided processes to support learning for improvement and was initiated when educators better understood the language

associated with the work of the vision. A common language served to assist the district leadership team in the process of aligning the efforts of the employee groups as well as engaging in professional conversations and reflective discussions about student learning, instructional practice and instructional intelligence (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001). Family of Schools meetings, school site meetings, classroom visitations and discussions served to support the implementation of collaboratively developed school growth plans and ultimately focus staff attention on the work of improving student achievement.

These four change strategies were initiated and then adapted for the next school year using data gathered from district educators and other staff, student achievement reports, and annual university research reports. The change strategies enacted by the district supervisory officers align with those district change strategies associated with academically successful school districts (Anderson, 2006). In *Figure 2. Conceptual framework: A continuous improvement dynamic for district leaders* the district change strategies are found on the left side of the triangle base.

District Leadership Practices

The GRDSB supervisory officers demonstrated evolving changes to their individual and collective approach to leadership. This approach to leadership practice was more facilitative in nature and enabled supervisory officers to focus on developing processes to support learning and change for educators as well as students.. They demonstrated their commitment to improving their leadership capacity and were more accountable to each other as to what actions were taken.

The supervisory officers worked to foster a GRDSB environment that supported a “learning by doing” approach to the improvement of student learning and achievement. More specifically, senior leaders advanced Elmore’s (2000) notion that educators must now “learn to do the right thing” (p. 25). The vision served as a catalyst for generating reflective discussions that focused on improving student learning and achievement and improving instructional practice among educators in the district. As well, this group of supervisory officers adopted a more facilitative approach to leadership that encouraged professional conversations and supported a shared leadership approach to GRDSB initiatives. Reflective dialogue and inquiry were important components of the district learning infrastructure. The district leadership team members modeled a shared learning approach with principals in their Families of Schools. They believed it was important for a district leader to listen to administrator and teacher input and merge those ideas into an evolving theory of action.

Within the time frame of this investigation, the findings indicate the supervisory officers demonstrated the ability to “reflect on their thinking while acting” as described by Argyris and Schon (1974). This ability requires continuous questioning, reflecting, inquiring, theorizing and questioning professional practices to achieve clarity about “lived experiences”. Learning to learn through a reflective inquiry process was important in the development of the GRDSB culture that supported continuous learning for students, administrators, teachers and staff.

Professional Learning Community

As district leaders, the supervisory officers enacted systemic change strategies in response to pressures exerted by large-scale, standards-based educational reforms. Simultaneously, this group of supervisory officers adopted a facilitative approach to their leadership practices in response to school and GRDSB challenges that emerged over a six-year period. In *Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Changing leadership practices of district leaders*, the professional learning community component is shown at the centre of the graphic. The interrupted lines indicate that this component of the conceptual framework was under investigation and suggest the possible development of a professional learning community as individual members of the supervisor officer group worked together over time.

Findings from this investigation confirm that the supervisory officers did indeed demonstrate the characteristics of and functioned as a professional learning community. Within the “social fabric” of their professional learning community, supervisory officers exhibited the capacity to share information, engage in reflective discussions and critically interrogate their practice. They used new knowledge to develop action plans to apply to their own leadership practices.

Findings also confirm that the supervisory officers fostered the development of these informal structures within their associated Family of Schools groups. As a group of supervisory officers, they modeled the characteristics of the professional learning community for school administrators and staff. The data did reveal that school administrators also modeled this approach to learning and work within their schools. Teachers exhibited similar characteristics as they engaged in professional inquiry and applied new knowledge to their instructional practice.

Study findings indicate that the professional learning community developed in the early years of amalgamation and provided the supervisory officers with a foundation to work together. The evidence indicates that the professional learning community structure offered the district leadership team with a method for adapting educational reform mandates, district change strategies and their individual and collective approach to leadership practices, on a continuous basis. The supervisory officers learned how to incorporate new knowledge into their individual professional leadership practice and collaboratively redesign their individual and collective theories of action.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Investigation

This retrospective qualitative study sought to provide insights into the evolutionary changes to approaches to leadership practice for a group of supervisory officers in one of 34 English Public School Districts in Ontario. The investigation examined the work of a group of supervisory officers as they responded to provincial reform mandates and district challenges over a six-year period. Specifically, this study investigated whether the strategic actions and approaches to leadership practices enacted by a group of supervisory officers were congruent with those behaviours demonstrated by members of a professional learning community.

During the early years of the six-year period of investigation, the district leadership team took a strong top-down approach to their leadership work with the GRDSB schools. Consultation with principals and teachers became a reality only after the supervisory officers had established their newly developed district improvement strategies. The four-board amalgamation process required some significant adjustments for the group of directors. One of the four candidates became the director for the newly amalgamated board, while the three remaining directors became executive supervisory officers. Each of the three executive supervisory officers was assigned a key portfolio connected to the vision strategy, creating silos of work within the newly amalgamated district. The current investigation was not designed to take this aspect of the early district dynamic into account, and consequently this phase of senior leadership team development is not present in the findings. It is quite possible this development phase would have provided more negative data for the study.

The conceptual framework for this study incorporates four components as shown in *Figure 1* (p. 7): provincial large-scale, standards-based reform mandates; district change strategies; district leadership practices; and professional learning communities. The GRDSB supervisory officers enacted district change strategies in response to pressures exerted by large-scale, standards-based educational reforms. Simultaneously, this group of supervisory officers applied their leadership practices in response to school and district challenges that emerged over a six-year period. As suggested by the relationship of the four identified components, the professional learning community developed as the supervisory officers provided leadership for the GRDSB.

Research Questions and Conclusions

Evidence gleaned from this empirical investigation substantiates the district leadership team under study demonstrated evolving changes to their individual and collective approaches to leadership. The GRDSB leadership team members learned to demonstrate “double-loop learning theory in action” (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. 18). They learned to adjust their actions conceptually using their collaborative learning process, rather than completing the entire experiential learning cycle. The GRDSB supervisory officers adopted a more facilitative leadership approach, encouraged ongoing professional reflective dialogue and supported a shared leadership approach to district initiatives.

Initially, the supervisory officers took a top-down approach to the implementation of district change strategies and were viewed by principals and teachers as owning these strategies. The GRDSB leadership team initiated their vision strategy in the first years of amalgamation and used this strategic action to begin developing positive and collegial working relationships with principals and teachers. They intentionally modeled the change they wanted to see in schools by initiating more face-to-face conversations with principals and teachers, purposefully listening to staff members and cultivating professional conversations. The evidence also indicates the conversations became more reflective in nature and were focused on improving student learning and achievement.

In relation to the study's first research question, "To what extent do leadership practices change for this group of supervisory officers between 2000 and 2006?" the evidence indicates that the supervisory officers exhibited the ability to adapt their individual and collective approaches to leadership practices, using a continuous improvement process. Furthermore, the evidence reveals the continuous improvement process developed by this group of supervisory officers was inextricably connected to the way in which the members of this group worked together.

Evidence from this empirical investigation also confirms the GRDSB leadership team functioned successfully as a professional learning community. As outlined in *Figure 2. Conceptual framework: A continuous improvement dynamic for district leaders*, the professional learning community component was inextricably integrated into the work of the district leadership team. Within the "social fabric" of their professional learning community, the district leadership team members exhibited the capacity to share information, engage in reflective discussions and critically interrogate their practice. These supervisory officers learned how to integrate new professional knowledge, adapt their leadership approaches and to redesign their individual and collective theories of action, using a continuous improvement process.

In relation to the study's second research question, "Do the strategic actions and approaches to leadership practices enacted by this group of supervisory officers between 2000 and 2006 reflect the characteristics of a professional learning community as defined by the literature?", evidence from this retrospective qualitative study indicates that the district supervisory officers evolved from individuals operating autonomously to a group operating as a professional learning community, as defined by the research (Stoll et al., 2006). The findings also indicate that the continuous improvement process developed by the supervisory officer group was an outgrowth of their work within the professional learning community.

Significance of the Study

In the literature review, there are references to the strong promise that professional learning communities may bring to district leadership team efforts and to the improvement of instruction and learning in schools. To date, there remains a lack of substantial empirical evidence to support the notion that professional learning communities improve learning for students (Leithwood, 2008). The findings of this current investigation contribute empirical support for the contention that socially constructed environments, such as the professional learning community, provide a context to support changes to

leadership approaches focused on the improvement of student learning through collective professional learning, problem solving, knowledge creation and knowledge sharing (Anderson, 2006; Honig, 2008; Louis, 2008). Details provided in the discussion of the current study findings contribute rich descriptions as to how a professional learning community may function for a group of supervisory officers. These details extend our understanding of the phenomenon.

This current investigation contributes empirical evidence to further inform the systematic “unpacking of the professional community concept” (Bolam et al., 2005) in the theory-building process. Findings from this current investigation confirm this group of supervisory officers demonstrated the key characteristics associated with effective professional learning communities, as identified by a number of research leaders (Bolam et al., 2005; DuFour et al., 2006; Stoll et al., 2006; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). These findings lend additional depth to the understanding of effective professional learning communities.

This current study’s findings inform leadership theory and practice with respect to the changing leadership approaches of a group of supervisory officers as they re-cultured the GRDSB. This investigation suggests that the informal environment provided by the professional learning community supported members as they adapted their leadership approaches in response to emerging district challenges. The professional learning community is a promising approach for district leadership teams who are looking for ways to improve their leadership capacity and adapt their leadership approaches using collaborative learning and inquiry. Functioning in a new way as a leadership team may also provide an important model for others in the system, including principals and teachers. Learning from the GRDSB senior leaders who participated in the professional learning community associated with this study, it is important to clearly define the focus of the collaborative learning and what leadership capacities are being enhanced.

Limitations to this Study

Data were gathered from district participants each year from 2000 to 2006. Some negative data emerged for the primary research investigation and for the current investigation. In each consecutive year, the supervisory officers were asked to select research sites for data collection that best represented the level of involvement in the vision strategy for schools in each Family of Schools. Sites were selected to equitably represent rural and urban areas within the new board as well as an equitable representation of elementary or secondary schools within each Family of Schools. The data gathered did not reflect the views of those who chose not to be actively involved in the district strategic plans. Thus, the issues and problems experienced by the school sites that did not become as involved in the vision strategy and that were consequently not selected for data collection represent limits to the conclusions that can be reached from the study, particularly concerning the issue of how a vision strategy may scale up. Opportunities to understand the discussions and decisions associated with those sites remaining outside of the work of the GRDSB’s vision strategy were not available for this study, given the design of the original data collection. This was an unavoidable limitation of the current investigation’s research design.

The research design limited the scope of the current investigation and thus did not provide options to explore additional and emerging themes of research interest during the data collection and data analysis

phases. Within the retrospective methodology, selected data sources provided rich descriptions of actions taken by the GRDSB supervisory officers over a six-year period. However, at least one in-depth case study might have been pursued during the data collection and data analysis phases of the research process if the methodology had provided for this type of exploration.

A third limitation of this current study concerns the sampling techniques employed for the primary research data sources. The purposive sampling methods used by the primary research team for each empirically based investigation conducted were described within each report; however, further details would have been helpful for the current study. Explicit descriptions of precisely how participants were selected for the interview process were not fully available within the primary research reports.

Implications for Further Research

The research on district-level professional learning communities is limited at this time. Certainly, investigation of teacher professional communities can serve to guide research development for supervisory officers. It will be important to study the similarities and differences between teacher professional learning communities and district-level professional learning communities and to learn more about how the two might interact within a district. Studies that investigate both successful and unsuccessful instances of such communities' development and sustainability would be very important to assessing the ultimate robustness of such an approach. Understanding how to begin, develop and sustain a community for district administrators to improve leadership capacity will further inform the leadership literature knowledge base.

There is potential for future research to build on findings from this investigation. The key characteristics that researchers have identified as representative of effective professional learning communities may serve as a collective lens through which the actions taken by supervisory officers may be studied. Once a team of district leaders evolves into a professional learning community as outlined in the literature, it will be possible to study whether the supervisory officers evolve into a group of leaders who become engaged in their own continuous improvement dynamic and importantly, how this dynamic also potentially influences the learning of others in the system (e.g., principals, teachers) as they focus on enhancing student learning. There may be interest to district teams in replicating some of the approaches used in this study by GRDSB senior leaders, while researchers may find it helpful to study such approaches or consider replicating some of the methodological approaches used in the study (e.g., retrospective qualitative approach) in examining the actions of leaders within other districts.

Evidence garnered from the analyzed data suggests the GRDSB supervisory officers made progress in moving the professional learning community concept into their Families of Schools. This is an area of considerable interest for those researchers who question the usefulness of this way of working, especially if the concept of professional learning communities cannot be developed across the entire system or district in other ways. This current study did not focus on whether the professional learning community concept could be initiated by the district leadership team and then shared within their associated Families of Schools and within individual school sites. It is certainly an area of focus that warrants further investigation and may provide a roadmap for other districts.

Although the GRDSB initiated a top-down approach to their chosen district strategies, the supervisory officers understood that teachers and principals must engage in the process of re-culturing the district. As a district leadership team, they elected to make an effort to demonstrate the type of change they wanted to see taking place within the GRDSB. Within the professional learning community, they learned how to continuously change their leadership approaches in a collaborative way. Further study of this particular process, the steps involved and the specifics related to changes to leadership approaches would contribute significantly to the leadership development knowledge base.

Findings in this empirical study indicated that the GRDSB leadership team had fostered the development of the informal learning structures within their Families of Schools. As a group of supervisory officers, they modeled the characteristics of the professional learning community and spoke openly of their “way of working together” as a district leadership team. The data revealed that some school administrators and teachers also modeled this approach to learning and working within schools. The data also verified that staff members from a variety of schools were able to work together on a selected instructional method or practice. Further research on the concept of networked learning communities for supervisory officers, school administrators and classroom teachers as a capacity-building and learning support structure is warranted, given the promising evidence emerging from this qualitative study.

Implications for Practice

This current investigation suggests the professional learning community model is a promising approach to working as a district leadership team for those supervisory officers who wish to improve their leadership capacity. The development of a collaborative culture within a district leadership team provides an opportunity for supervisory officer engagement in collective inquiry, collaborative learning and problem solving as they determine what methodologies will be of most benefit to students. Within this model, members of the district leadership team collectively identify their improvement priorities, set shared and measurable targets for progress and take collective responsibility for district performance. This community of learning approach provides a vehicle for learning how to continuously improve leadership approaches through reflection in action.

Evidence from this study also suggests that the development of a professional learning community takes time. The model is not a quick fix for a district or a school. The professional learning community structure provides a way for the district leadership team learning and improvement process to become transparent for school administrators and teachers. Findings from this study support this particular way of working together as a district level initiative. Taking collective responsibility for student learning and achievement serves an essential and shared focus for potential professional learning community members. Evidence from this investigation indicates that the establishment of professional networks of peers within this district, using the professional learning community model, provided these networks with an effective way to work together to improve student learning and achievement. The potential for future use of such a model within school districts and other systems is promising.

From a practical point of view, there were specific actions taken by this group of supervisory officers that seemed to make a difference within the context of the district change process. Clearly the district leadership team members demonstrated the characteristics of a professional learning community as they conducted their daily work. Each supervisory officer endeavoured to spend half of each working day in schools and classrooms. While attending a school site supervisory officers initiated professional conversations with the principal and the teachers. They demonstrated respect for another educator's opinion by asking questions about teaching and learning and then listening to the response given. Educator responses provided the opportunities for ongoing professional discussions between the supervisory officer and the teacher or the principal. Professional relationships developed through these ongoing conversations. Supervisory officers encouraged the use of learning conversations as a way of working together and building relational trust to support learning. They considered the learning conversation as the core of the district learning infrastructure.

The district leadership team members were able to demonstrate the characteristics of a professional learning community within their Families of Schools, because they learned to function together as a professional learning community as a first step. Data gathered while visiting schools and classrooms and engaging in meaningful professional discussions with educators and administrators provided the district leadership team with evidence for their own collaborative inquiry process. As a team they took a learning-by-doing action orientation and adopted collective responsibility for achieving their shared goals and following the agreed upon processes. This leadership approach was more facilitative in nature and resonated well with teachers and school administrators.

REFERENCES

- Andero, A. (2000). The changing role of the superintendent with regard to curriculum policy and decision making. *Education Chula Vista, 121*(2), 276–286.
- Anderson, S. E. (2006). The school district role in educational change. *International Journal of Educational Reform, 15*(1), 13–37.
- Anderson, S. E., & Louis, K. S. (2012). The “district difference”: A new perspective on the local challenges for improvement. In K. Leithwood & K. S. Louis (Eds.), *Linking leadership to student learning* (pp. 181–202). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Angen, M. J. (2000). Evaluating interpretive inquiry: Reviewing the validity debate and opening the dialogue. *Quality Health Research, 10*(3), 378–395.
- Argyris, C. (1980). *Inner contradictions of rigours research*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bennett, B., & Rolheiser, C. (2001). *Beyond monet: The artful science of instructional integration*. Toronto, ON: Bookation.
- Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1998). Beyond Bloom’s taxonomy: Rethinking knowledge for the knowledge age. In A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan, & D. Hopkins (Eds.), *International handbook of educational change* (pp. 675-692). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer.
- Bernard, H. R. (2000). *Social research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., & Wallace, M. (2005). *Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities*. Bristol, United Kingdom: National College for School Leadership.
- Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York, NY: Sage Foundation.
- Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership, 60*(6), 40–44.
- Carter, K., & Halsall, R. (1998). Teacher research for school improvement. In R. Halsall (Ed.), *Teacher research and school improvement* (pp. 71-90). Suffolk, United Kingdom: St Edmundsbury Press.
- Corcoran, T., Fuhrman, S. H., & Belcher, C. L. (2001). The district role in instructional improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(1), 62–66.
- Cormier, R., & Olivier, D. F. (2009). *Professional learning committees: Characteristics, principals, and teachers*. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Education Research Association, Lafayette, LA.
- Cronin, T., & Genovese, M. (2012). *Leadership matters*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Datnow, A., & Castello, M. (2000). Teachers’ response to success for all: How beliefs, experiences, and

- adaptations shape implementation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(3), 775–799.
- Drucker, P. (1993). *Post-capitalist society*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Drucker, P. (1995). *Managing in a time of great change*. New York, NY: Truman Talley Books.
- DuFour, R. (2004). What is a “professional learning community”? *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6–11.
- DuFour, R. (2007). Professional learning communities: A bandwagon, an idea worth considering, or our best hope for high levels of learning? *Middle School Journal*, 39, 4–8.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2006). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- Earl, L., & Lee, L. (1998). *The evaluation of the Manitoba School Improvement Program*. Toronto, Canada: Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation.
- Earl, L., & Lee, L. (2000). Learning, for a change. *Improving Schools*, 3(1), 30–38.
- Elmore, R. (1996). Getting to scale with educational practice. *Harvard Education Review*, 66(1), 287–309.
- Elmore, R. (2002). Local school districts and instructional improvement. In W. D. Hawley (Ed.), *The keys to effective schools: Educational reform as continuous improvement* (pp. 111–121). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Elmore, R. F. (2005). Accountable leadership. *The Educational Forum*, 69(2), 134–142.
- Frost, D., Durrant, J., Head, M., & Holden, G. (2000). *Teacher-led school improvement*. New York, NY: Routledge-Falmer.
- Fullan, M. (1992). *Successful school improvement*. Buckingham, United Kingdom: Open University Press.
- Fullan, M. (2002). The change leader. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 16–20.
- Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Fullan, M. (2006a). Leading professional learning. *School Administrator*, 63(10), 10–14.
- Fullan, M. (2006b). The future of educational change: System thinkers in action. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7, 113–122.
- Fullan, M. (2008). *The six secrets of change: What the best leaders do to help their organizations survive and thrive*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2009). Large-scale reform comes of age. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2009(10), 101–113.
- Fullan, M., Bertani, A., & Quinn, J. (2004). New lessons for district wide reform. *Educational Leadership*, 61(7), 42–46.
- Fullan, M. (2005). Turnaround leadership. *The Educational Forum*, 69(2), 174–181.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *New meaning of educational change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Garmston, R., & Wellman, B. (1998). Teacher talk that makes a difference. *Educational Leadership*, 55(7), 30–34.

- Geertz, Z. C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Goldring, E., Crowson, R., Laird, D., & Berk, R. (2003). Transition leadership in a shifting policy environment. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 25(4), 473–488.
- Goodland, J. (2002). Kudzu, rabbit and school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84(1), 473–488.
- Grogan, M., & Andrews, R. (2002). Defining preparation and professional development for the future. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38(2), 233–256.
- Hannay, L., Bray, C., & Telford, C. (2003). *Orchestrating professional learning: The role of the school district*. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.
- Hannay, L., & Earl, L. (2006). *From fragmentation to coherence and alignment*. Presented at the Asia-Pacific Education Research Association Conference, Hong Kong.
- Hannay, L. M. (1994). *Department heads in transition*. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Hannay, L., & Mahoney, M. (2003). *Leaders, leading and learning*. Kitchener, Canada: Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- Hannay, L., & Mahoney, M. (2005). *The role of the school district in school improvement, [School District Name], Year Four (2003-2004)*. Kitchener, Canada: Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- Hannay, L. M., Telford, C., Mahony, M., & Bray, C. (2004). *The role of the school district in school improvement, Year Three (Funded by Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada with support from [School District Name])*. Kitchener, Canada: OISE/UT.
- Hannay, L. M., & Ross, J. A. (2002). *Aligning school-district actions to promote school improvement and accountability (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, Transfer Grant)*. Kitchener, Canada: OISE/UT.
- Hannay, L., & Telford, C. (2001a). *Attainment of our vision, [School District Name] (Focus Group Rep.)*. Kitchener, Canada: OISE/UT Midwestern Centre.
- Hannay, L., & Telford, C. (2001b). *Attainment of the vision, [School District Name] (Tech Rep.)*. Kitchener, Canada: OISE/UT Midwestern Centre.
- Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (2003). *Teaching in the knowledge society: Education in the age of unreason*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, D. H. (1997). School culture, school effectiveness and school improvement. In A. Harris, N. Bennett, & M. Preedy (Eds.), *Organizational effectiveness and improvement in education* (pp. 239-251). Buckingham, United Kingdom: Open University Press.
- Harris, A. (2003). Behind the classroom door: The challenge of organizational and pedagogical change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 4, 369–382.
- Harris, A. (2004). Distributed leadership and school improvement. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 32(1), 11–24.

- Harris, A. (2011). Reforming systems; Realizing the fourth way. *Journal of Educational Change*, 12, 159–171.
- Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2010). Professional learning communities and system improvement. *Improving Schools*, 13(2), 172–181.
- Heaton, J. (1998). Secondary analysis of qualitative data. *Social Research Update*, 22, 1–7.
- Heaton, J. (2004). *Reworking qualitative data*. London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- Hipp, K. K., Huffman, J. B., Pankake, A. M., & Olivier, D. F. (2008). Sustaining professional learning communities: Case studies. *Journal of Educational Change*, 9(2), 173–195.
- Honig, M. I. (2003). Building policy from practice: District central office administrators' roles and capacity for implementing collaborative education policy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 292–338.
- Honig, M. I. (2008). District central offices as learning organizations: How sociocultural and organizational learning theories elaborate district central office administrators' participation in teaching and learning improvement efforts. *American Journal of Education*, 114(August 2008), 627–664.
- Hopkins, D. (2001). *School improvement for real*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge-Falmer.
- Hopkins, D., Ainscow, M., & West, M. (1994). *School improvement in an era of change*. London, United Kingdom: Cassell.
- Hord, S. M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Horton, J., & Martin, B. N. (2013). The role of the district administration within professional learning communities. *International Journal of Education*, 16(1), 55–70.
- Keating, D. (Ed.). (1998). *A framework for educational change: Human development in the learning society*. London, United Kingdom: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Kotter, J., & Cohen, D. (2002). *The heart of change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kruse, S. D. (2001). Creating communities of reform: Continuous improvement planning teams. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 39(4), 359–383.
- Kruse, S. D., Louis, K. S., & Bryk, A. S. (1995). An emerging framework for analyzing school-based professional community. In K. S. Louis & S. D. Kruse (Eds.), *Professionalism and Community: Perspectives on reforming urban schools* (pp. 23-42). Long Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Lambert, L. (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Leiberman, A., & Miller, L. (2011). Learning communities: The starting point for professional learning is in schools and classrooms. *Journal of Staff Development*, 32(4), 16–20.
- Leithwood, K, Jantzi, D., & Mascal, B. (2002). A framework for research on large-scale reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 3, 7–33.
- Leithwood, K, Mascal, B., Strauss, T., Sacks, R., Memon, N., & Yashkina, A. (2007). Distributing leadership to make schools smarter: Taking the ego out of the system. *Leadership and Policy in*

- Schools*, 6(1), 37–67.
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning: A review of the research for the Learning from Leadership Project*. New York, NY: Wallace Foundation.
- Leithwood, K. (2008). Should educational leadership focus on best practices or next practices? *Journal of Educational Change*, 9, 71–75. doi:10.1007/s10833-0079045-7
- Leithwood, K. (2012a). Core practices. In K. Leithwood & K. S. Louis (Eds.), *Linking leadership to student learning* (pp. 57–67). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Leithwood, K. (2012b). *The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 with a discussion of the research foundations*. Toronto, Canada: Institute for Education Leadership.
- Levin, B. (1995). Reforming secondary education. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 1, 1–8.
- Levin, B. (2000). Putting students at the centre of education reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 1, 155–172.
- Levin, B. (2005). *Governing education*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Levin, B. (2008). *How to change 5000 schools. A practical and positive approach for leading change at every level*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications.
- Little, J. W. (1990). The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers' professional relations. *Teachers College Record*, 91(4), 509–536.
- Louis, K. S. (2007). Trust and improvement in schools. *Journal of Educational Change*, 6(1), 1–24.
- Louis, K. S. (2008). Learning to support school improvement: Next steps for research on district practice. *American Journal of Education*, 114, 681–690.
- Majhanovich, S. (2002). Conflicting visions, competing expectations: Control and de-skilling of education — a perspective from Ontario. *McGill Journal of Education*, 37(2), 159–176.
- McLaughlin, M., & Talbert, J. (2003). *Reforming districts: How districts support school reform*. Seattle, WA: Centre for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded source book*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mitchell, C., & Sackney, L. (2000). *Profound improvement: Building capacity for a learning community*. Lisse, Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Mitchell, C., & Sackney, L. (2001). Building capacity for a learning community. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 19, 1–11.
- Mitchell, C., & Sackney, L. (2009). *Sustainable improvement: Building learning communities that endure*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Mitchell, C. & Sackney, L. (2011). *Profound improvement (2nd ed.): Building learning community capacity on living system principles*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The knowledge-creating company: How Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Ontario College of Teachers. (2006a). *The standards of practice for the teaching profession*. Toronto, Canada: Author.
- Ontario College of Teachers. (2006b). *The ethical standards for the teaching profession*. Toronto, Canada: Author.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2012). *Ontario leadership framework (OLF)*. Toronto, Canada: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association. (2002). *A framework for leadership in education: Learning, character, relationships*. Retrieved from <http://www.opsoa.org>
- Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association. (2005). *Supervisory officers: Leading and influencing public education*. Oakville, Canada: OPSOA. Retrieved from <http://www.opsoa.org>
- Peterson, G. J. (2002). Singing the same tune: Principals' and school board members' perceptions of the superintendent's role as instructional leader. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40(2/3), 158–171.
- Reich, R. (1991). *The work of nations: Preparing ourselves for 21st century capitalism*. New York, NY: Vintage Press.
- Rezai-Rashti, G. (2003). Educational restructuring and teachers' work in Ontario: Regulation, intensification and limits of professional autonomy. *International Journal of Learning*, 10, 1267–1280.
- Richards, L., & Morse, J. M. (2007). *User's guide for qualitative methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Schmoker, M. J. (2006). *Results now: How we can achieve unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Schwartz, P., & Ogilvy, J. (1979). *The emergent paradigm: Changing patterns of thought and belief* (No. 7). Menlo Park, CA: Values and Lifestyles Program.
- Scribner, J. P., Cockrell, K. S., Cockrell, D. H., & Valentine, W. (1999). Creating professional communities in schools through organizational learning: An evaluation of a school improvement process. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35(1), 130–160.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Doubleday/Currency.
- Sergiovanni, T. (2000). *The life world of leadership: Creating culture, community, and personal meaning in schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Slater, L. (2004). Collaboration: A framework for school improvement. *IEJLL: International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 8. Retrieved from <http://iejll.synergiesprairies.ca/iejll/index.php/ijll/article/view/698/358>

- Smith, M. K. (2001). *David A. Kolb on experiential learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-schon.htm>
- Spillane, J. P. (2004). Educational leadership. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(2), 169–173.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7, 221–258.
- Stoll, L., & Fink, D. (1996). *Changing our schools*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications.
- Sullivan, S., & Shulman, V. (2005). Managing change: The superintendent as line director of instruction. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 8(2), 123–143.
- Thorne, S. E. (1994). Secondary analysis in qualitative research: Issues and implications. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research* (pp. 263–279). London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications.
- Thorne, S. E. (1998). Ethical and representational issues in qualitative secondary analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 8(4), 547–555.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Marion, R., & McKelvey, B. (2007). Complexity leadership theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. *Leadership Quarterly*, 18(2007), 298–318.
- Vecchiarino, M., & Rolheiser, C. (2009). Learning teams as agents of change and knowledge building. *KMPro Journal*, 6(1), 6–12.
- Vescio, V., Ross, A., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), 80–91.
- Wallace, M. (2000). Integrating cultural and political theoretical perspectives: The case of school restructuring in England. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36(4), 608–632.
- Waters, J. T., & Marzano, R. J. (2006). *School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement*. Denver, CO: Mid-Continent Regional Educational Lab. Retrieved from <http://www.mcrel.org>
- Watson, N., Fullan, M., & Kilcher, A. (2000). *The role of the district: Professional learning and district reform*. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Webber, A. M. (1993). What's so new about the new economy? *Harvard Business Review*, 71(1), 24.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Ylimaki, R. M. (2006). Toward a new conceptualization of vision in the work of educational leaders: Cases of the visionary archetype. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42(4), 620–651.