

We lead who we are: A collaborative inquiry to inform educational leadership praxis

by

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M.A., University of Phoenix, 2006

B.Ed., University of Regina, 1993

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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University of Victoria

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Educational leaders are immersed in and arguably responsible for the construction of the delicate yet complex world of education. As such, Van der Mescht (2004) poignantly observes, “to develop a clearer picture of what it is that some leaders possess (or do, or *are*) that makes their leadership effective has perhaps never been more urgent” (p. 3). This research is a response to Van der Mescht’s observation. The purpose of this study is to engage prospective educational leaders in a deep interrogation of their personal, philosophical and pedagogical beliefs around leadership and its application in contexts representative of Canadian diversity and the complexity of the learning environments using collaborative inquiry (Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000) as a methodology. The study is based on leadership as a practice where educational leaders enable, empower and support the diverse and complex learning community and where the application of leader extends beyond title and position to qualities and actions understood through collaborative reflection and dialogue.

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Dedication

To my father and my daughters for providing the metaphoric compass that guides me.

We lead who we are: A collaborative inquiry to inform educational leadership praxis

Chapter One: Introduction

If students and subjects accounted for all the complexities of teaching, our standard ways of coping would do—keep up with our fields as best we can, and learn enough techniques to stay ahead of the student psyche. But there is another reason for these complexities: *we teach who we are*. Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. (Palmer, 1997, para. 4-5)

I open with Palmer's quote for several reasons. First, 'we teach who we are' is a phrase that resonates with my philosophical and pedagogical approach to teaching; I have and will always consider myself a teacher. I have now added educator~teacher~researcher but being a teacher remains central. I have talked to groups of pre-service teachers and stressed that who they are as a person *is* who they are as a teacher. As much as we like the idea that we wear different hats in different situation, those hats are just accessories that we use to decorate. What we value, what we believe in remains at our core and guides the choices we make regardless of the outfits we wear. In the pursuit of becoming a teacher, Palmer (1997) discusses the interweaving of three domains: intellectual, emotional and spiritual. The intellectual refers to how we think about teaching and learning; these are the spaces that we frequently provide for pre-service teachers to develop their skills and abilities. This intellectual structure provides the thinking space but it alone is not enough to ground us in the complex act of teaching. When I completed my teacher education program, I felt competent and ready to enter into the classroom, mostly because I knew the intellectual formula for what I thought was good

teaching, lesson planning, unit planning and assessment. I had been taught the formula and could follow it. It wasn't until several years into my teaching career that I started to recognize that there were some inconsistencies in my formula. $A + B$ did not equal C , in fact A and B didn't really exist. Now, I shrink from my early approach to teaching because there was little recognition of the individual child, their strengths, their approaches to learning and even less attention to who they were as people let alone the complexity that underpinned schools. The technical aspects of teaching like lesson planning, unit planning, testing were second nature to me because I had practiced them so many times and been rewarded in my teacher preparation classes for doing them well. I could put together a three pages lesson plan - introduction, learning outcomes and objectives, instructional activities, timing, equipment needed, safety considerations – in my sleep. In a ten class basketball unit, I spent two classes on shooting, one class on dribbling, two classes on passing, one class on individual defense, one class on team defense, one class to play games and two classes to do skill testing. This was the formula that I had been taught, that I saw my colleagues model and in my mind constituted proper teaching. I was a good technical teacher because that is what I was taught to be. About five years into my career, I started to feel like I was missing something; I wasn't convinced that much of what I was teaching was making any difference at all in the lives of students or in my life. I distinctly remember a moment when all of the students in my physical education class were lined up at the free throw line, waiting to be tested on their free throws. We had spent one of the classes specifically learning the technique for free throws – balance, eyes, elbow, and follow-through. I provided students with opportunities to practice the technique, giving them feedback as they practiced individually shooting against the wall. They moved to practice at the hoop. We played

'21', a free throw game where students play one on one against each other. On testing day, I was standing beside a group of students as they waited, one at a time to be tested. I watched them consistently miss the basket, sometimes entirely. Over and over again, I recorded scores like zero out of ten or maybe on a good effort, two out of ten. Their technique was disastrous, even though they could recite to me the balance, eyes, elbow, follow-through mantra that I had taught them. It was more like a carnival game, the ones where the player has little or no chance of winning. I am embarrassed to admit that I had approached my teaching like this for the first few years of my career. It was only in that moment, standing beside these students, that I realized what I was doing had almost nothing to do with learning, anything relevant to the majority of their lives or any skill that might benefit them in the future. If teaching was a calling, I wasn't getting message nor were the students I was working with. Thinking back, the students in my classes were very much like those batched out on the assembly line that Robinson (2010) refers to in the RSA Animates video of his talk, *Changing Educational Paradigms*, and I was the one dropping the lever at prescribed intervals, just like I was taught to. The emotional and spiritual dimensions of teaching that Palmer (1997) talks about were not part of my equation.

In 2001 I moved from my comfortable, secure and predictable life in Canada to teach in Karachi, Pakistan at the Karachi American School. I spent the next seven years teaching in international schools. During that time, I stumbled into the emotional and spiritual domains of teaching that Parker refers to. I say stumble because there was little conscious intention to my shift. I did not set out to become a more emotionally or spiritually driven teacher. I had never heard of Parker Palmer, nor had I or any of my peers talked about anything emotional or spiritual in relation to teaching. Palmer (1997) characterizes the emotional as "the way we and

our students feel as we teach and learn feelings that can either enlarge or diminish the exchange between us” (p. 16) and the spiritual as “the diverse ways we answer the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching” (p. 16). My interest and motivation came from some sense that there had to be more to teaching and learning than I had previously thought. Education had to be more than the act of teaching. Maybe it was because I had thrust myself into such a radically different experience of living and teaching that sparked my attention. I know that from where I stand now, my approach to and understanding of education and schools looks very different than it did in 1993 when I started. Now, I very much *teach who I am*.

Once I started paying attention to how students felt about their learning and what really mattered to them, a new world opened up for me. I began looking more closely at decisions being made in the name of student learning and found that many of the decisions happening at the local level and, in the schools I was working in, lacked commitment to truly making decisions and taking action based on the needs and best interests of students. There were very few feelings involved. In fact, many of the decisions that were being made didn't make much sense to me on a cognitive level either. Consistently, decisions were made by administrators; teachers were informed then charged with the enactment of any newly implemented policies or curriculum initiatives. In one school, we were told that we would be changing the school's curriculum to adopt the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme. In and of itself, the change was not problematic, the process, however was more so because it was a decision made by the administrators but the responsibility of teachers who had no say in the value of the change and how that change would influence students. Other similar examples required

teachers to make curricular changes to incorporate a greater focus on literacy and numeracy, not because such changes were required to benefit our students in that school but because provincial literacy and numeracy scores had slipped from previously held standards. Instead of a consultative or collaborative process, changes were mandated. There was little transparency in how decisions were reached and even less invitation to be involved in the process. On the occasions when teachers were invited into the process, their insights may have been listened to but were rarely heard and even less frequently acted upon in any meaningful way. These observations made me question what it meant to lead. The Cambridge Dictionary Online defines the verb *lead* as “to manage or control a group of people; to be the person who makes decisions that other people choose to follow or obey” (lead, 2014). The same dictionary defines *leader* as “a person who manages or controls other people, esp. because of his or her ability or position” (leader, 2014). Embedded in both definitions is a hierarchy where the leader is clearly ranked at the top of the structure and with that ranking comes power and control. I understand these definitions not simply because of the language but because I witnessed them in action in the schools where I worked. I say with certainty that in all five schools where I worked as a full time teacher over fifteen years, the hierarchy of leadership was unquestioningly top down. Some of the individuals occupying those top positions were likable and even inclined to work with teachers, but the structure never changed.

In all of those schools, numerous teachers came and went; their experiences were similar to mine in that the principals, vice principals and administrative officers were the recognized leaders who maintained power and control. At the time, I thought I understood the necessity of the power dynamic in that structure, someone had to make decisions, but how

those decisions were made never sat well with me. I was willing to critique the leaders and the process, to grumble about it in the staff room, to nod in agreement with other teachers who were equally disgruntled but that didn't change anything. The more I tried to make sense of how leadership seemed to work in schools, the more frustrated I became. Eight years into my career, I decided to complete my master's degree in leadership so that I could change the structure of leadership from within. I wasn't going to be one of those administrators that told people what to do, I was going to involve people in the decision making process, be responsive, and listen to people. I was going to change the dynamics but the more I studied the less interested I became in playing the role of administrator. The structure seemed too impenetrable for one person to change even from within and I feared that by joining the group, I would end up perpetuating the very structured that frustrated me. Yet, my curiosity, my desire to understand and even my motivation to change the system remained, and in fact began to grow. What shaped and informed leadership, why people chose to lead, what made people make the decisions they did, and what values they held that informed their leadership garnered my attention and became the impetus for my doctoral research. I set out to understand how, if we teach who we are as Palmer (1997) so eloquently states, how then do we lead who we are?

Engaging in Research

Research is a personal venture which, quite aside from its social benefits, is worth doing for its direct contribution to one's own self-realization. It can be taken away as a way of meeting life with the maximum of stops open to get out of experience its most poignant significance, its most full-throated song. (Mooney, 1965 as cited in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 13)

What Mooney said some forty plus years ago is an appropriate starting point as I begin to share this dissertation research. I have come to know and accept that creating / fostering / engaging in a deeper understanding of leadership in schools is a personal calling that I find equally fascinating and frustrating. If I trace my interest back over time, my journey began in 1977 when I began playing softball with my father as a coach. Through my own ongoing autoethnographic exploration of leadership and identity, I have come to understand that our sometimes tumultuous relationship as father-daughter, player-coach was the beginning of my interest in leadership. To this day, I remember wondering why my father made the decisions he did. I share the following anecdote about a particular interaction between my father and me to contextualize my early experiences with leadership.

Being a leader

When I was sixteen, I mustered the courage to tell my parents that I did not want to go camping with them for the summer. I say my parents, but it was really my dad that I knew I had to convince. I had reached my limit of being trapped in a box on wheels where there was no space to escape anyone. It took forever to work up the courage to tell them, first because I tried to avoid talking to them most times, and two, because I was pretty sure they would tell me I had to go. When I worked up the courage and pleaded my case, of course they wanted to know why. I tried to explain that I was mature and responsible enough to stay home alone, which honestly was true. I don't think I was capable of getting into trouble but they didn't see that, or at least they couldn't acknowledge it. They relented with a few conditions, no parties, be home by 10:00 and I wasn't allowed to use the car. I agreed without hesitation. Freedom! While they were gone, I did stay out late a few times but for the most part enjoyed every minute of being alone in the house without having to circumvent his conditions.

While they were gone, I got a phone call for a job interview. My dad had been on me for a while to get a job and I had applied to Bonanza, a local buffet restaurant. Bonanza wasn't exactly walking distance and we didn't have bus service out there so I was pretty sure I would have to break the rule and use the car but, as I told myself, the situation justified it. It's not like I was going out 'joyriding' (my dad called it that) and I would only need to use it to go there and back. I was pretty sure they would

understand but then again, I also imagined what that conversation may be like when he berated me for breaking the rules, for not listening to him, for not adhering to his authority. I talked with my friend Penny. We responsibly weighed the pros and cons and I was ready to take the car. I had rationalized and the decision seemed clear but when Penny told me her parents had said I could use their car, I thought, better safe than sorry, so I borrowed her car, went to the interview and I got the job.

When my parents returned I proudly told them I had gotten a job thinking they would be suitably impressed. My dad didn't say much other than to tell me he didn't know I had been looking. He immediately asked me if I had used the car. Whatever, of course he knew and no, I didn't using the f&^ing car. Later, when I was helping take the camping stuff into the garage, I told my mom that I borrowed Penny's car. My mother then told me that I wouldn't have been able to use the car anyway because my dad had disconnected the battery so it wouldn't start. As soon as she said it, I think she realized that she probably shouldn't have because I looked stunned... I was stunned. He had so little trust and faith in me that he took the decision out of my hands.*

My dad had been teetering on his pedestal for a while at that point. Adolescence can do that to the father daughter relationship. But in that moment, he toppled from that pedestal and shattered into a million pieces on the floor of our garage.

That interaction was a pivotal touchstone moment for me not only in the relationship with my father but in how I viewed authority and in turn leadership. If I am being fair, from that moment forward, I challenged him more than his arguments. Understanding my experiences with my father carries me down a personal path that has generated some of the self-realization Mooney refers to. Those interactions between my father and I were the seed for this research because they were my first interactions with and disillusionments of leadership. While my evolving understanding of those personal interactions is part of the history of my current research work, I set that aside to be shared in another time and place.

I welcome you here to a much later point where that seed germinates, roots are growing and leaves sprouting to form this research. I share key personal anecdotes from my past teaching experiences that frame my interest in educational leadership. These anecdotes,

as van Manen (1989) suggests tell something, my experiences, while addressing something more general, in this case leadership. These anecdotes offer insight into my experience from which readers may relate to which in turn serves to further their own understanding of how leadership is being conceptualized and understood in this dissertation. My use of personal anecdotes is deliberate as they are brief insights into my story. As Sparkes and Smith (2006) so aptly state, “the stories that people tell and hear from others form the warp and weft of who they are and what they do.... stories shape identity, guide action, and constitute our mode of being” (pp. 169-170). By sharing my personal anecdotes about my father and some of the leaders with whom I have worked, I offer insight into the “warp and weft” (p. 169) that Sparkes and Smith (2006) refer to in the attempt to show how my understandings of leadership over time have provided the foundation for this dissertation. By sharing these anecdotes, I am also engaging in a reflexive practice intended to generate further understanding for myself and others. As a result, I am sharing my voice and my story, the purpose of which is to create meaning and community through a social process of finding the words, speaking for oneself, and being heard by others (Britzman, 2003).

Throughout our discussions, the co-inquirers also shared anecdotes which I share in some cases verbatim and in other cases paraphrased. These anecdotes are glimpses into our individual stories; those stories may well be part of a larger narrative of leadership. Smith and Sparkes (2009) suggest that a narrative contains “thematic content, a structure underpinning the story, or a performative dimension” (p. 2). While the work contained in this dissertation has elements of narrative work, these are more coincidental than intentional. I acknowledge the inclusion of what some may categorize as stories where story is understood as “an actual big or

small (Bamberg, 2006; Freeman, 2006) tale an individual or group tells and performs” (p. 2) the purpose of which is to transmit a message. Again, while each of us engaged in telling our stories by sharing various anecdotes, this was less an intentional act of storytelling and more a means for make sense contextually and reflexively of leadership using story as a way to connect to each other and the ideas of leadership that were brought forward.

The purpose/passion of research (anecdote one).

I became a certified secondary school teacher in 1993. I, like most, was eager to begin my career as a teacher, something I had been quite certain of since I was eight years old. I began as a Teacher on Call (TOC) in School District 38 (Richmond) and continued teaching as a full time teacher in Richmond until 2001 when I took the leap to begin teaching overseas. I stayed teaching in international schools until 2008 and it was during that time, my awareness of education grew exponentially; having become confident with the technical aspects of teaching, I began to see the complexity of education and its shortcomings. I found myself being consistently drawn towards how schools were run and who ran them because in that place that gives birth to gut instinct or intuitive knowing, I was dissatisfied, disenchanted and even disillusioned. Over the course of my fourteen year secondary teaching career, I encountered a few school principals and vice-principals who were inspiring, empowering leaders, like those characterized by Sergiovanni’s (2000) vision of authentic leadership:

School effectiveness requires authentic leadership, leadership that is sensitive to the unique values beliefs, needs and wishes of local professionals and citizens who best know the conditions needed for a particular group of students in a particular context.

No ‘one size fits all’ will do. Leaders with character ground their practice in purposes and

ideas that define the schools they serve as special places and then act with courage and conviction to advance and defend these ideas (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. viii)

Yet those *leaders with character* seemed few and far between. The following narrative is one example of my experience that is intended to provide the reader with insight into that sense of disillusionment where this research was born.

The purpose/passion of research

In this particular year, the Holy Month of Ramadan fell during the girls' soccer season and for a team that normally struggled just to get twelve girls, the timing put additional strain on the girls physically and mentally. Imagine a two-hour soccer practice at the end of a day in 30 plus degree heat when you have not had anything to drink or eat since before dawn.

A few weeks into the season, the soccer coach, who had been working at the school for several years and whose daughter also played on the team asked me to attend a meeting with a parent of one of his players. The coach told me that the father was unhappy because he thought the coach was treating his daughter unfairly but that they had had run-ins in the past. I think he even referred to the parent as a blow-hard or trouble-maker. Having coached for many years, I recognized this as a common scenario and one where the parent usually just wants an opportunity to be heard as an advocate for their child, pretty run of the mill stuff at this level of play. I thought that I was attending the meeting because of my position as Athletic Director representing the school; I knew from experience as a teacher that having a third party present is always a wise idea in situations where tension exists between a parent and teacher or coach.

When the parent arrived he was obviously angry - jaw set, unsmilingly, purposeful stride - kind of expected given the description provided by the coach. The distaste that the two men had for one another was palpable. The coach did not stand to welcome the man; their initial greeting was abrupt and centered upon my introduction; neither would make eye contact nor was either keen to open the conversation which made the awkwardness of the opening even more pronounced and uncomfortable. The soccer coach finally opened by asking why Mr. Riaz had requested a meeting.

"You sir cannot tell my daughter she is not allowed to fast. You insult me and you insult ISLAM!"

If someone had walked by the room, I know the look on my face would have been utter disbelief, eyes wide, mouth open sheer disbelief. In the split second I had to process the parent's demand, I assumed that the soccer coach would explain that there had been a misunderstanding. Without even raising his head from the papers in front of him, conveying a message of total disinterest, the coach said,

"It is not healthy for your daughter to fast and play soccer so she must stop fasting until soccer is over". Full stop.

The floodgates opened and Mr. Riaz went into a heated rant, spit flying, face reddening, about the importance of Islam in his family and in Pakistani culture and his rights as a parent, all of which was quite well stated even given his obvious anger. I sat in stunned silence; listening intently in part because of the passion from which he spoke, in part out of a need to focus on something as I was feeling completely ambushed by the soccer coach. When I was able to draw my attention away from the parent, I looked over at the soccer coach who was quite literally smirking at the parent's anger. SMIRKING! I can still picture the look on his face as clearly as if it happened minutes ago, head slightly down, looking at some useless papers in front of him, lips turned up in a smirk, like one of the students themselves reacting to a condescending lecture from a teacher. If I had been that parent, I think I would have reached across the table to strangle the man. In fact, I did want to reach across and smack him. The soccer coach then looked up at me and with no attempt to hide this gesture from the parent, rolled his eyes. I was completely, utterly speechless and overwhelmingly embarrassed.

In the end, the parent stormed out in disgust but not before unequivocally stating that his daughter would NOT be playing soccer. (Fair enough). After the parent was out of earshot, the soccer coach simply said, "She was no good anyway".

I could not respond, I could barely speak. I honestly had no idea what to say to the blatant insensitivity and disrespect I had just witnessed and sadly been party to. Within the week, four girls quit playing soccer, each Pakistani, leaving only eight players, not enough to field a team, meaning not only would the girls not be allowed to play, according to the conference rules, the team would lose its spot in future tournaments as well. I think back on that incident and I still find the coach's behaviour physically unsettling; it makes me shift in my seat.

The soccer coach was the high school principal, the face of the school and its American education as well as the backbone of its policies, procedures, rules and regulations; in essence the lynchpin. He had control over not just how the school ran but how the school felt. His role as the principal made the altercation with the parent even more distasteful. First he should have known better as someone familiar with

the culture (he had lived in Pakistan for six years, as a teacher and principal and his daughter dated a Pakistani boy) and second, as the leader of the school he showed little moral or ethical grounding from any recognizable perspective, social, cultural or religious.

I wish I could say with confidence that this was an isolated event, an anomaly. While this context may be unique to my experience, the absence of quality and effectiveness of the leadership demonstrated was not. This was the first of many encounters when I questioned the leadership of a school. So many decisions made by leaders nagged at me as being out of place, out of step or out of time with the situation, yet those individuals had the power; they were the lynchpins. Those lynchpins held the system together, controlled the opening and closing of doors, yet despite the strength of the lynchpin, its positioning seemed artificial to me.

In addition to the story I just shared, I have included the drawing in Figure 1. The image captures the features of the second narrative in that the sharpness, the binaries and the imagery is intended to model a style of leadership built on power and control that is intended to keep others at a distance. Similar to my rationale for using narratives, I share images such as the one in Figure 1 and later in Figure 9 as a social means for communicating the richness the stories as well as the complexity of the situations represented in ways that words cannot express.

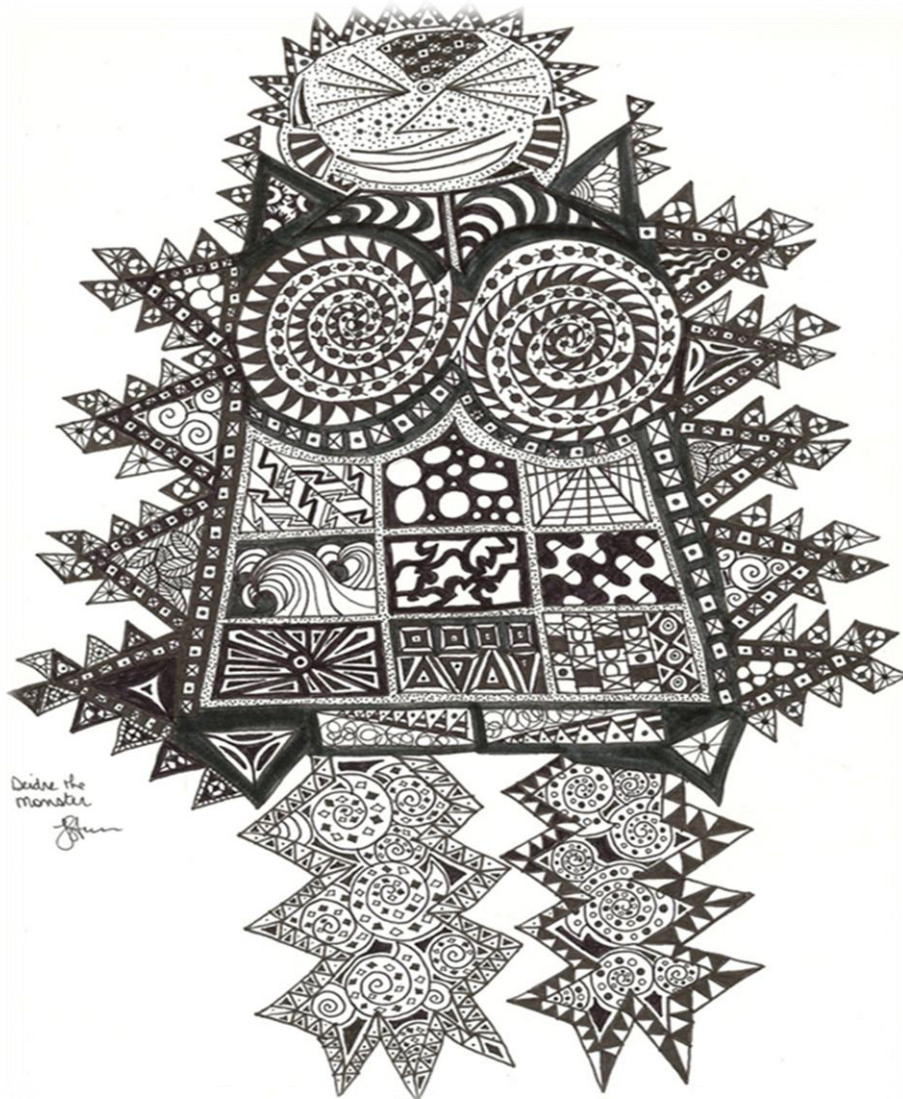


Figure 1 The *Mongolian Monster* is a drawing to depict power and control as modelled by one school superintendent.

The Mongolian Monster (anecdote two)

The frustration and disbelief that I shared in the preceding story is echoed and perhaps amplified in the drawing in Figure 1. In my final year of high school teaching, I worked at an international school in Mongolia. On paper, the school seemed to be everything that I hoped a good international school to be; it had a diverse student population of children from local families, parents working in industry and non-governmental organizations as well as children

from diplomatic families. The school was an authorized International Baccalaureate (IB) world school that offered all three levels of the IB program so it was well-regarded. The teachers employed at the school were Mongolian, Canadian, American, Australian, British, and Indian. The superintendent who interviewed me was a strong woman who had worked in several other international schools; she said she valued my experience and was keen to have me join the staff. Within days of arriving at the school and getting settled into my new home, I could sense that something wasn't quite right. The atmosphere around the school was quiet almost hushed. People talked to each other and socialized but I could tell that they were censoring some of what they said particularly when conversations about the school took place. Initially I dismissed this as them not knowing me well enough yet to trust me as a colleague but in the coming weeks it became apparent that their reluctance had little to do with me. In the previous year, she had occupied both the secondary school principal and school superintendent positions. Given the workload involved in holding both positions, she sought to have the two positions separated, which resulted in the hiring of my husband as the secondary school principal. His job naturally situated him in line with the superintendent. The distance that I felt from other staff members was couched in their distrust of my default connection to the superintendent. In the coming weeks, I learned that to label the superintendent a micromanager was a grand understatement. She situated me in an office at the back of the staff room out of reach of students instead of me being located in the counseling office. When I questioned this decision because it hampered student's access to me as their college counselor, I anticipated a common sense solution that would enable me to connect with students. She told me quite bluntly that it was her decision and that I would remain where she put me. This is a simple example that

cannot fully demonstrate the depth and degree to which power, control, oversight and management blinded her not just to the actual people around her but to the best interest of the people in her care.

She and I could not have been more diametrically opposed in our approach to the world or leadership. Her entire leadership existence was built on the immense need to control each and every situation. She denied a pregnant couple health benefits once the child was born because they had not notified her of the pregnancy immediately upon conception. A colleague had to mail a time-sensitive document on behalf of the school but could not because he had to file a formal request with the business office that required the superintendent's signature before he could obtain a single stamp. Locally hired teachers whose children went to the school would hide them under their desks in the classrooms after school because she did not allow children in the building after 3:00. She referred to some staff members as lazy and even stupid but she only did so to the other administrators because, in my belief she genuinely seemed to see herself and them in a class above others. She had a less than veiled contempt for some of the 'foreign' members of our community. I could share many examples but I don't have the literary skill to communicate the emotional contempt, mistrust and profound disrespect that lie beneath all those examples. The degree of control and power to which she approached leadership defies any words that I have. Later in this dissertation I will share examples and discussion of relationality where connections and people are paramount to successful leadership. At this point, I can best describe this woman's style and approach to leadership as decidedly anti-relational. The climate of mistrust, polarization, disconnect and fear that she fostered is one that I can feel in my gut because recalling them still makes me

uncomfortable. Over the course of my 15 year teaching career I had worked for and with many administrators whose affinity towards power and control put them in a category similar to the superintendent described her, but the depth of her stronghold, dictatorial style is better expressed in sharp edges that form her skin, the juxtaposition of black on white, and the compartmentalization of anything organic in the drawing.

As an introspective thinker, I spent considerable time and mental energy trying to figure her out, trying to understand that situation, arguably the most hostile work environment I have ever been part of. At the time, I could not recall a colleague or another adult speaking with so little thought or regard for the situation or the individual. But the more I thought about it, the more I recognized that, while she was exceptional, other administrators that I had worked with behaved similarly. Did they lead who they were?

I share the preceding insights into my professional history with the confidence that I am not alone in either my discontent or the justification of these personal experiences as a catalyst for a research journey. As Maslow (1966) so simply stated, "there is no substitute for experience, none at all" (p. 45). As I mentioned earlier, Palmer's idea that we teach who we are reflects my pedagogical and philosophical approach to teaching and in turn leading. I cannot definitively say that those whose leadership styles fail to resonate with mine do or do not lead who they are. Nor can I fairly judge them as good or bad leaders because that dichotomy is far too simple. This research is an effort to share the collective understanding that four leaders co-constructed as they examined their own experiences with and of leadership. Researchers, who begin their study within the personal, endeavour into the humanity of understanding. Through

“reflecting, intuiting and thinking” (Finlay, 2002a, p. 213), an impassioned, in this case burning spark, calls out to the researcher revealing that which is meant to be investigated and ultimately shared. I move forward here to describe in greater detail how I intend to fan the flames of this spark.

Research Context

The environment in which human beings live, act, and inquire is not simply physical. It is cultural as well. Problems which induce inquiry grow out of the relations of fellow beings to one another, and the organs for dealing with these relations are not only the eye and ear, but the meanings which have developed in the course of living, together with the ways of forming and transmitting culture with all its constituents of tools, arts, institutions, traditions, and customary beliefs. (Dewey, 1938, 1966 as cited in Phillips, 2006, p. 5)

The context for this research is public education in Canada where educational administrators are immersed in and arguably responsible for the construction of the delicate yet complex world of education (Slater, 2008). In the hierarchy of schools, the educational leader is often placed in a position of control and power. Despite newer theoretical understandings of leadership such as authentic, transformative, inclusive or relational leadership, today’s school leader is often subject to a specific and dubious characterization as “strong, charismatic, dedicated, dynamic, disciplined individual capable of problem solving, guiding schools through rapid systemic change, and maintaining order and stability through an even-handed application of justice” (Rottman, 2007, p. 13). When I read Rottman’s description, I envision the cartoon version of a strong muscular male, wearing a pinstriped power suit open at the chest to reveal superman-like ‘P’ under his crisp white dress shirt and a cape draped over his shoulders to emphasize his stature as a super-hero. This version of a leader is fictionalized, and unrealistic as well as “individualistic, gendered and sexualized” (Rottman, 2007, p. 13). As

long as visions however unrealistic they may seem exist, leadership will remain a construct where mere mortals can rarely succeed.

Rottman's (2007) elucidation depicts the pressure placed upon administrators to be all things to all people. In her review of contemporary literature, Beatty (2009) asserts that despite the philosophical shift away from authoritarian leadership, the current climate of performativity and standards draw school leaders back towards hierarchical management, in part because the behaviour associated with the leader as being in charge has for so long been viewed as important. The "school leader has traditionally meant someone particularly proficient at command-and-control tactics, the all-powerful, all knowing, larger than life heroic commander-in-chief. These qualities have been well-respected and rewarded in days gone by" (Beatty, 2009, p. 153). Responding to the needs of an intellectually, behaviourally, emotionally and mentally diverse student body requires school leaders to create collaborative, empowering, and transparent environments that make space for difference, yet what is sometimes desired of the authentic *leader* is at odds with what is expected from an effective *manager*. To be a leader is to create space to address and respond to the needs of diverse learners while being a manager tends to advance the ethnocentric Anglo-American status quo. The conflict is that in reality, the principal must be both. This is a problem that feeds into itself. As long as we narrowly equate with administrator, a hierarchy of leadership will remain. Teachers whose firsthand knowledge of and expertise with their students becomes increasingly more valued, may have much greater opportunity to lead as opposed to manage as new responsibilities and roles emerge (Slater, 2008). However, I believe it is fundamental to look at leadership as an ontological dilemma rather than a positional one.

Before continuing, I wish to clarify my use of the term *leader*. In schools, the role of leader is often positional and synonymous with titles like administrator, administrative officer, assistant principal, principal, or vice principal. Teachers sometimes hold positions of leadership that are also titled like grade level leader, team leader, or committee chairperson. My intent is to view leadership and those who lead more broadly. Though reluctant to pin this research to a set definition, I subscribe to Ciulla (2004) suggestion that “leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good” (p. xv). I did not intentionally seek to include or exclude any individual who held or did not hold a particular leadership position. This research does not categorize or advance leaders as those holding a position or title; instead I situate leadership as a mindset, or from an ontological perspective, a way of being in the world. Erhard, Jensen and Granger (2013) describe how such an ontological stance influences how a leader positions one’s self in the world; “who one is *being* in a leadership situation shapes and colors one’s perceptions, emotions, creative imagination, thinking, planning, and one’s actions in the exercise of leadership.” (p. 3). In my experience, relying on or defining leadership by title or position strengthens the hegemonic structures and hierarchies in schools that act as barriers to positive change and genuine learning. In this research, I have chosen instead to recognize leadership “wherever it occurs” (Hunt & Dodge, 2000, p. 448). Further, leadership functions as a dynamic system beyond the constraints of linear relationships (Hunt & Dodge, 2000). Also, I did not seek to advance certain characterizations of leadership such as transformational leader, authentic leader, transactional leader, servant leader as being superior to others though as I will discuss the influence of such a characterization later in the literature review.

The primary site of my research is kindergarten to grade 12 public education, specifically on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Though the co-inquirers primarily come from middle school and high school teaching experience, not every school district distinguishes middle school from elementary school nor is leadership exclusive to a set age grouping in schools. I did not intentionally exclude any individuals involved in private sector education; none volunteered to be part of this study though two of the four had at least some teaching experience in international schools outside of Canada. At the outset of this research, I sought prospective participants that were engaged in teaching/learning environments where diversity was represented in the student body, teaching staff, and/or community. In order to justify the label, *diversity*, I share the following understanding. Multiple definitions, conceptions and beliefs are found throughout in the field of education. Lumby and Coleman (2007) assert that diversity is “the range of characteristics which not only result in perceptions of difference between humans, but which can also meet a response in others which may advantage or disadvantage the individual in question” (p. 1). Rayner (2009) offers an equally broad description of educational diversity as a “range of individual differences, comprising a set of social and personal factors, which form a key aspect in any and every educational setting” (p. 433). More specific definitions attempt to list criteria such as age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, values, ethnic culture, national origin, education, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance, social class and economic status (Norton & Fox, 1997). In a school context, conceptions of diversity describe “a myriad of shared actions, behaviours, beliefs, norms, and understandings held by the collective of students, parents and staff of that particular school community” (Billot, Goddard & Cranston, 2007, p. 4). It was not my intention to provide participants with an

exhaustive list of what constitutes diversity. I shared the context as I represented it here. The participants agreed that the above representations were appropriate. We did not identify or define complexity in the same terms, yet Trombly (2014) offers a description that summarizes how we viewed complexity.

By the nature of how they are organized, of the work in which they are engaged, and the fact that they are populated by, and exist to serve, human beings, schools – like the overall system of education of which they are a part – are complex systems. (p. 43)

Statement of Purpose

For this research, *who* leaders are is of great concern. The space between the self and other as well as the intersections between them in the construction of leadership identity is particularly relevant in the diverse and complex worlds that exist in schools. The call to move beyond hierarchical, transactional forms of leadership that hold fast in schools is not uncommon but how this happens is less certain. This research attempts to contribute to a broader understanding of leadership from those experiencing it that may serve to inform how we can move beyond the hierarchies in meaningful ways that promote relationality over individuality, understanding over informing and intuitive knowing over traditional knowing. In this sense, the purpose of this dissertation draws on a phenomenological perspective where our study of leadership, as we the co-inquirers, have and do experience it, is in line with Creswell's (2007) description of phenomenology as "the meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or phenomena" (p. 57). Rehorick and Malhotra Bentz (2008) offer a broad explanation of phenomenology that is also relevant here.

The aim of the study of phenomena (objects of consciousness) is to bring about awareness and understanding of direct experience. [...] Phenomenology seeks to portray the essential, or necessary structures of phenomena, and to uncover the meaning of *lived experience* within the *everyday lifeworld*. (p. 3, italics in original)

Rehorick and Malhotra Bentz's (2008) description of phenomenology is noteworthy for two reasons. The first is that through sharing and questioning our leadership experiences and those that we have witnessed we, the co-inquirers, developed awareness and understanding of our experience with and of leadership that was previously absent in part because no opportunity had been provided. However, we did not seek to distill leadership into specific structures that could be applied universally. In this sense, the purpose of this dissertation is "illuminative rather than definitive" (Smith and Sparkes, 2006, p. 171). The second reason that Rehorick and Malhotra Bentz's (2008) quote is important here, is that it serves, however briefly, to validate the claim that this research is not exclusively a phenomenological inquiry because it does not seek to determine the *essential* features of leadership. While this dissertation is influenced and informed by phenomenology as I will elaborate in chapter three, both the process and product of this research is more strongly reflective of and aligned with collaborative inquiry, the methodology for this research. I will explain this in greater detail in coming chapters including chapter five which focuses specifically on methodology.

In keeping with a postmodern perspective where power relations are challenged (Constas, 1998), this dissertation also explores the educational phenomena of leadership with the underlying intention of disrupting the traditionally patriarchal and hegemonic practice of

leadership in schools. Further, I hope to invoke a Freirian (2000) conscientisation that brings about some form of personal transformation for co-inquirers (Freire, 2000). In doing so my intention is not to have this transformation have a beginning and end that coincide with my timeline. The process of transformation is just that, a process; it is up to the individual when and if that process comes to an end. To clarify what the terms conscientisation or transformation imply, I offer the following interpretation. As Freire (2000) notes the term conscientisation refers to an awakening of consciousness based on a cycle or cycles of reflection and action. More specifically, conscientisation occurs when individuals realize a greater awareness of the socio-cultural world that influences their lives and their potential influencing or impacting that world. Transforming this reality may lead to “cross-cultural understanding and social change” (Glowacki-Dudka, Treff, & Usman, 2005, p. 3). By taking a reflexive stance in examining past and present experiences with leadership, it is my hope that co-inquirers will, through dialogue and a process of co-created understanding, develop a degree of critical awareness of their own hegemonic assumptions and in doing so will be able to expand “assumptions to a more discriminating and integrative perspective” (Holland Wade, 1998, p. 714). I refer to this as a hope rather than a prediction because there is no way for me to measure transformation or conscientisation; only the individual experiencing it can make that judgment.

There are some noteworthy examples of individuals sharing their experiences of transformation or conscientisation that serve to confirm the possibility of both or either being a realistic possibility. Pepper and Hamilton Thomas’ (2002) provide an examination of leadership style and its impact on the school climate that serves as an example of what conscientisation or

transformation might look like. Pepper characterized herself as an administrator who modelled a more authoritarian style of leadership that did not always contribute to a needed sense of community or empowerment amongst her staff. Through autoethnographic reflection, Pepper was able to recognize not only the negative impact of her authoritarian style on others but also how it was out of step with her personal identity. After consideration, Pepper began to shift her leadership approach towards a more transformational style of leadership. The results had a positive impact on her ability to lead but also in creating a more positive and caring school environment where a climate of collaboration including a cycle support and feedback was instrumental in establishing realistic, attainable school goals that stakeholders were willing to invest in. In a second example of conscientisation or transformation, Glowacki-Dudka et al. (2005) explain one of the author's experiences with a cultural awakening through autoethnography focussing on her experience as an American working in post-secondary education in Saudi Arabia. She examined cultural norms and assumptions in her interactions with friends and colleagues; the resulting analysis helped her to navigate a set of cultural norms in Saudi Arabian culture as well as the expectations and assumptions her friends and colleagues about working in the same culture.

Given my reference to transformation and the difficulty measuring such a process, I offer a broad description of a postmodern perspective to ground my stance. A postmodern perspective like that advocated by Richardson (2003) where "a multitude of approaches to knowing and telling exist side by side" (p. 507) and that "partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing" (p. 508). Further, the postmodern perspective allows for doubt and a degree of skepticism that "any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty" (p. 507) can be

considered universal or authoritative. Such a perspective honours the researcher and participant contributions to the creation of meaning and knowledge without advancing one or the other as paramount. I draw on Lather (1991) to further add that the binaries that have so strongly informed the Western mindset, no longer serve us in understanding the complexities that exist in a world of limitless interactions and interconnections. From a leadership perspective, Blackmore (1999) suggests that postmodern leadership recognizes difference as representative of the “multiple voices” that lead in schools.

Given the acknowledgement of the complexity of education and a hope for enacting a process of conscientisation, the purpose of this study is to engage prospective educational leaders in a deep interrogation of their personal, philosophical and pedagogical beliefs around leadership and its application in contexts representative of Canadian diversity and the complexity of the learning environments using collaborative inquiry (Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000) as a methodology. The study is based on leadership as a practice where educational leaders enable, empower and support the diverse and complex learning community and where the application of leader extends beyond title and position to qualities and actions understood through collaborative reflection and dialogue.

Research Questions

As I began this research, I formed three research questions that serve as a starting point. These questions emerged as a result of discussions with peers, colleagues and mentors as I grappled with my intent for this research. I carefully considered the context in which this research would dwell. Given that I subscribe to the idea that knowledge is rarely fixed but rather evolving and contextual, I deliberately situated the research in a postmodern paradigm

to allow for knowledge to be fluid and emergent. Since leadership is an act familiar to most in some way, I also considered it important to not only understand how the co-inquirers individually and collectively experienced leadership but what was distinctively featured in those experiences as actions or qualities. From these ideas, the following research questions emerged:

Question 1. What is the meaning of educational leadership in this diverse postmodern world?

Question 2. What are the enabling qualities and practices that inclusionary educational leaders espouse?

Question 3. How do the life experiences of educational leaders inform practice and philosophy?

I wish to note that at the outset of this research, these questions were constructed without the initial input of the co-inquirers. However, in phase one of this collaborative inquiry, the co-inquirers adjusted the questions to be more reflective of the understandings that were emerging.

The intention of addressing the research questions I have chosen over other possibilities is to investigate the meaning of leadership as well as its practice in contemporary schooling and education. More specifically, to better understand how individuals come to understand and practice leadership while grounding it in the complexity of schools and education. Such complexity is infrequently acknowledged yet as someone who has immersed herself in

education, I share Trombly's (2014) view that education is multifaceted, intricate and must be understood as such if we are to generate authentic understanding of any phenomena within education, particularly leadership.

In a reflexive design and in keeping with the collective ownership of collaborative inquiry, I draw on Lutrell's (2010) Reflexive Model of Research Design. In this design the research questions must be subject to change based on what emerges in the data and how the inquiry is driven by the participants or co-inquirers. Essential to this process is the co-inquirers' ability to explore the research questions through their own experience and that every member of the inquiry has equal footing amongst members of the group including the ability to address the question(s) (Bray et al., 2000). As the *initiator* of this inquiry and the individual responsible for it as a dissertation, I formed the initial research questions based on discussions with colleagues, my experiences in schools, understandings of leadership and general questions that informed my desire to study leadership in the context of this dissertation. Based on the discussions of the collaborative inquiry group for this study and what emerged throughout our inquiry meetings, the questions changed to more accurately reflect the nature of our inquiry. From the perspective of an inquiry group of middle school/secondary school teachers (who had held leadership positions other than formal administrative positions), the research questions were revised as follows:

Question 1. What is the meaning of educational leadership in *a* diverse **and complex** postmodern world?

Question 2. What are the enabling qualities and practices that **inclusionary** educational leaders espouse?

Question 3. How do the life experiences of educational leaders inform practice and philosophy?

The impetus for the questions comes in part from a common requirement of practicing leadership in schools. In most cases, to become a school administrator, the most commonly recognized leadership position in schools, one must have a master's degree in education; the most common focus of these degrees is leadership studies. In British Columbia, job postings for administrative positions such as principals consistently state that a requirement for application to principal positions is the possession of a Master's degree, ideally in educational leadership or education administration. (Make a Future, 2014). The aims of the programs are similar to the following description of the purpose for leadership studies: "to broaden understandings of contemporary theories and practices of leadership, education, learning, and issues that affect schools, communities, and society" (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, 2014, para. 1). Such programs require individuals to take courses with the intention that by doing so they will be qualified to assume formal or informal leadership roles in schools. Each administrator I worked with had such a graduate degree as do I, yet I continue to be struck by how little such a degree seems to prepare individuals to lead. I wonder and at times struggle with why few leaders seem to be so good while many others so bad despite having relatively equal qualifications and training. I think about how I have come to define what *good* and *bad*

mean. As a result of these wonderings, I have turned toward generating understanding of how individuals experience leadership as opposed to how they have been educated to lead.

Chapter Two: Methods and Procedures

Research Design

Based on the reflexive nature of this research, see Luttrell's (2010) Reflexive Model of Research Design depicted in Figure 2, the frame for the writing of this research is a compass. In travel, the North Star serves as "nature's compass" (Luttrell, 2010, p. 160); for the purpose of my research that North Star construct guides this inquiry because of the connectedness of the theories, frameworks, experiences and subsequent importance of that connectedness. The spikes or points of the star in Figure 2 represent five of the six components of the research design: *research questions, knowledge frameworks, inquiry frameworks and methods, validity and goals*. Within each of these are sensitizing concepts, paradigms and ideas that provide depth to the star construct making it not only three-dimensional but also creating refractions where ideas taken up by co-inquirers may intersect or be understood differently by others depending on the lens of experience with which they view the star. The sixth component, seen at the heart of the star, is *research relationships*. The importance of relationships, and thus their location at the center, is inherent to collaborative inquiry but also in the complex relational nature of education and leadership. My vision of the star is one that possesses both fixed and fluid properties akin to Richardson's (2000) description of crystals in reference to validity.

Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities *and* refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose. (p. 934)

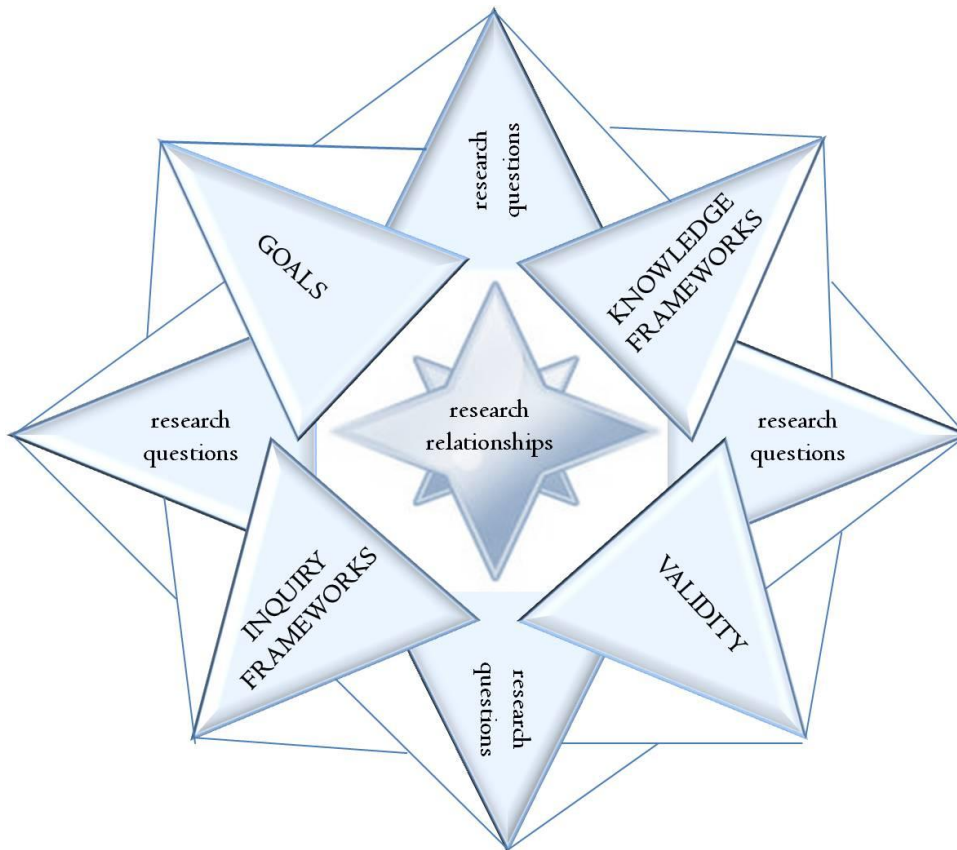


Figure 2 Lutrell's (2010) Reflexive Model for Research Design depicts a model of research design that situates the goals, knowledge frameworks, inquiry frameworks and validity as equal points on the star.

Much like the crystal that reveals different patterns of light depending on how it is viewed, this research design encourages and honours changes in perspectives and understanding based on what emerges during the course of the research and how the ideas that emerge influence the formation of knowledge, understanding, meaning and relationships. Note that *research questions* appear at several points in the model. In keeping with the postmodern sense of multiple realities, perspectives, and rhizomatic validity where what lies underneath is a tangle of unanticipated complexity as well as the interrelational nature of collaborative inquiry, one can expect that depending on the angle of repose, the research question may indeed refract

meaning in different ways. As those understandings evolve, so to must the research questions. As the researcher, I am in the privileged position of seeing the research unfold, evolve and refract from its inception to the natural conclusion of my involvement. I bring with me biases, questions, knowledge and wonderings from my own experiences in education and through discussion and my sharing with co-inquirers, those same biases, questions, knowledge and wonderings with co-inquirers will form and reform with each interaction as well as in my quiet moments of reflection. Heron and Reason (2001) describe the process as a fine-tuning discrimination of perception and action as well as “bracketing off and reframing launching concepts; and emotional competence, including the ability to manage effectively anxiety stirred up by the inquiry process” (p. 3). In keeping with the nature of collaborative inquiry, my observations and interpretations exist alongside and in connection to the ideas and understandings brought forward by my co-inquirers. I acknowledge that I cannot control, nor would I want to, the entry points of others as they create meaning.

In chapters six and seven, there is an evolving understanding of leadership as we build on the ideas of each other and use those same ideas to inform and alter our own thinking.

My intention is using Luttrell’s (2010) Reflexive Model of Research Design and its categorizations such as knowledge and inquiry frameworks is not to disrupt any more common forms of how dissertation research is represented nor is it to deliberately challenge the reader to understand the structure of how this research is put together. Instead, my intention to draw on a model, similar to a Moravian star shown in Figure 3 that has multiple vantage points more accurately representing the variety of epistemological, ontological and axiological contexts

informing the research. Depending on the angle to which one views the star, the viewer sees the points from a distinct perspective based on the viewer's positioning when viewing the star. Similarly, the information represented by each point informs the experience and positioning of



Figure 3 A Moravian Star. This figure depicts multiple vantage points more accurately representing the variety of epistemological, ontological and axiological contexts informing the research.

the person considering the information in ways unique to the individual. Over the course of our discussions, each co-inquirer was positioned differently when considering leadership. The ideas and beliefs held by each were unique to their own experiences yet when shared, influenced the understanding of leadership of the other co-inquirers.

In Luttrell's (2010) Reflexive Model of Research

Design, knowledge frameworks, inquiry frameworks, goals and validity are clearly delineated points on the star, research relationships are at the center of the star while

research questions are repeated points in the star. The intention of the design to represent the value of knowledge frameworks, inquiry frameworks, goals and validity as being equally important and equally informative in generating meaning and understanding. For this research, the goals are represented in the statement of purpose section. The tenets of collaborative inquiry as well as the importance of the relational process in which co-inquirers interrogate and generate understanding of their leadership experiences supports Luttrell's positioning of research relationships at the center of the star. Because research questions are continually revisited and revised by the co-inquirers in collaborative inquiry, the positioning of research

questions at numerous points on the star supports the importance of the co-inquirers' ownership of the research and knowledge.

My choice of a reflexive model is intentional. Reflexivity is a critical tenet of collaborative inquiry as well a practice strongly advocated in teaching and leading. Though I include explanations of the knowledge frameworks and sensitizing concepts that inform this research in later chapters, I will explain in greater detail the importance of reflexivity to this research here because it is foundational to this inquiry. Schwandt (2001) characterized reflexivity as "the process of critical self reflection on one's biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences" (p. 224), and acknowledged that "the inquirer is part of the setting, context, and social phenomenon he or she seeks to understand" (p. 224) and a means for critically inspecting the entire research process" (p. 224). Reflexivity is a stance critical in inquiry because it fosters the possibility that the "knowledge that is experientially derived, seldom articulated, but constantly and consistently acted upon" (St. Germain & Quinn, 2005, p. 79) can inform our practice. Olivares, Peterson, and Hess (2007) suggest that what is missing from understanding leadership is deeper exploration of how leadership is experienced which necessitates a reflexive stance. Savin-Baden (2014) offers a more personal interpretation of reflexivity specific to collaborative inquiry, "for me reflexivity is about disclosing my value-base to those who participate in research. It is about working with people, doing research that is collaborative and sharing perspectives in the process of doing research" (p. 366). This personal definition is perhaps the most important of those offered because it is by its very nature, not just about reflexivity, it is in itself reflexive.

Research Relationships

According to Luttrell (2010), “negotiating and representing research relationships – what and how we learn with and about others and ourselves – is at the heart of the research journey” (p. 160). Education is an experience founded on complex interconnected relationships between students and teachers, parents and children, teachers and leaders and others.

Education is primarily a human enterprise, social, relational, creative and diverse (representative of the diversity of human experiences). Educational reforms, adopted by most western societies, dilute the social and relational (via heightened competition among students, teachers, schools, districts, regions and countries), ignore creativity (via, among other things, “teacher-proofed state –mandated curricula” (McLaren, 1989, p. 162) or “best” practices), and downplay (if not ignore) the diverse (via increased standardization of curricula and teaching). (Bodone, 2005, p. 235)

Schools, and arguably education more generally, are communities where learning occurs in varied ways and means. The relationships forged in those communities of practice are occupied by individuals committed to a common goal of learning. Given that relationships are central to our understanding of education, it stands to reason that leadership, an embedded practice in education, can and should also be viewed relationally. Ideologically, relationality requires individuals to become weavers of a fabric “fashioned by transforming divisive incompatibilities into creative tensions” (Allan & Evans, 2006, p. 9). This is particularly true given the hierarchical tendencies of leadership where one person or a select few people are seen as those controlling the look, style and colour of an educational tapestry. Though not an explicit outcome of this research, I hope that by examining leadership less by position and more by disposition, I can

contribute to the disruption of that hierarchy to more equally develop the leadership capacity in those communities of practice. Pedagogically, we must learn to see from multiple, simultaneous perspectives, develop empathy that leads to action not sympathy, and foster collaboration more than competition (Allan & Evans, 2006). If we expect individuals to be able to transform these ideals into practice then we must offer an alternative that not only gives them time to practice but also to think, consider and arguably, feel what this means as they put theory into practice and inform theory with practice. Through engagement in this collaborative inquiry, co-inquirers were able to interrogate critical experiences and relationships that contributed to their understanding of the form and function of leadership and the impact of the relationships that predate their engagement in leadership education as well as forecast how those relationships may impact praxis. More specifically, research relationships also account for the role of the researcher, the connection between the researcher and the role of the participants.

Role of the researcher.

In keeping with the reflexive nature of this research, I must first acknowledge my personal stance (Salmon, 1989). As the author of this work, I am integral, as the writer and communicator, yet not essential as the meaning maker given that the meaning is co-constructed. To be essential implies that constructing of knowledge, generating understanding or initiating transformation cannot take place without me whereas being integral more accurately reflects my position as member within the greater whole. As teachers, we intentionally and unintentionally communicate “what we know, understand and have experienced” (Brockbank & McGill, 2007, p. 79). Despite my primary role in this research being

more academic researcher than classroom teacher, my teacher/leader identity is very much present and subsequently influences what I say and do as well as how I interpret the data. What is key in acknowledging this is that I, along with my co-inquirers, recognize that understanding and in turn learning will be an active, contextual process that occurs as we construct knowledge with each other. My role is also a relational one; when I bring my recollections, ideas and understandings, they will be altered by the new meaning created during the inquiry conversations.

Fundamental to my analysis is a phenomenological perspective because I am attempting to understand as well as promote understanding of how our experiences create meaning in the practice of leadership and how that meaning translates into action. I interpret information from a frame of reference created by my own experience and understanding of leadership just as each of the participants does. In collaborative inquiry, the traditional role of researcher and participants does not exist. Initially, as the collaborative inquiry group establishes itself, I took on the role of initiator, primarily in an organizational capacity. After the collaborative inquiry group established expectations for procedures, my role shifted to co-inquirer. Once we concluded our discussions, because of the requirements of this research as a dissertation, my role shifted to author, interpreter and reporter.

In building this research, the ends I seek to achieve are both pragmatic and catalytic. The pragmatic completion of the dissertation requires that I demonstrate the pedagogical and methodological skills required of an academic researcher. In my initial beliefs about the value of this research, I consider the potentially transformative value of the study though admittedly, transformation is an active process that has no fixed or measurable end point. I hope that this

research reveals deeper meaning of leadership that will subsequently reveal ways to help potential educational leaders to be more grounded and authentic in their practice as leaders. While I discuss the implications of this in greater detail in the final chapter, I proudly acknowledge that the process of this research has already influenced my practice and understanding of leadership in meaningful ways. I cannot speak for my co-inquirers other than to express the hope that their participation had an equally profound effect.

As a novice researcher and graduate student, I have intermittently received advice not to consider the dissertation to be my grand opus and I do not consider this research as such. What is arguably more important than my role as researcher and certainly more catalytic, is the potential of the research to positively impact the practice of those shaping our schools which in turn leads to an improved educational experience for the students who live and breathe in our schools. The emphasis on understanding how educational leaders exist in the world opens an important window in understanding the interplay between the act and understanding of leadership and a context rich in complexity and diversity.

Role of the co-inquirers.

In Luttrell's (2010) Reflexive Model of Research Design, she refers to individuals participating in the study in traditional terms by labelling them participants. However, in collaborative inquiry, participants ideally function as *co-inquirers* or *co-subjects* where the traditional line between researcher and subject is nullified in favour of a relationship where there is greater parity amongst co-inquirers with regards to the design, conduct, and communication of the inquiry (Bray et al., 2000). Justification for such a position rests on the belief that "when researchers engage in the experience under investigation, the result is a more

valid understanding of the experience” (p. 7). In an ideal setting, this research would be carried forward by each of the co-inquirers. While I believe them to be co-owners of this research, I cannot deny that my stake may have stronger roots because of its purpose as a dissertation.

To initiate this research, I invited eight individuals to participate in this research using *purposeful* sampling where participation was based on familiarity with research problem and contextual phenomena (Creswell, 2007). Invitations to participate were sent by email to former students of the Certificate of School Management and Leadership (CSML) cohort at the University of Victoria and targeted individuals who had previously expressed interest in exploring the meaning of leadership. These two groups were selected on the advice of my committee members and recommended because of the potential for educators/leaders connected to these two groups to commit to what was to become *our* inquiry. I also sent invitations to four other individuals who had recently completed a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction. Again, members of my committee recommended these individuals. Of those eight individuals, six initially committed to the inquiry. I assigned pseudonyms to each participant to protect their identities and will share a brief description of each co-inquirer in no intentional order. Since I have shared more of my history in earlier sections, I have not included my profile in this section, nor did I assign myself a pseudonym in reporting. I wish to note that throughout the writing of this dissertation, I included several personal anecdotes and stories specific to my leadership experience. My intention in doing so is not to privilege my stories over those of my co-inquirers. Instead, I offer these stories and anecdotes as a means for the readers to contextualize, identify with and make further sense of the beliefs and ideas brought forward by our collaborative inquiry group.

The first co-inquirer, Chelsea, is a middle school teacher/team leader who at the time of data collection was on leave from a school district in Alberta where she had been employed for her entire teaching career. In her capacity as a team leader for the grade seven teachers, she was responsible for liaising with the school administration regarding any concerns or issues regarding curriculum, students and teachers. She also works with the other members of her team to plan learning that is both relevant and incorporates learning innovations where possible. Following her teacher education at a university in Alberta, she began teaching at the middle school level. At the time of this study, Chelsea was actively taking courses towards the completion of a master's degree in educational leadership.

The second co-inquirer, Alexandra, is a current middle school teacher in a French Immersion program with 10-15 years of experience as a full time teacher. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she is the literacy coordinator at her school. In this role, one of her chief responsibilities is to help teachers develop and improve literacy achievement among students. This requires her to meet with teachers one-on-one to offer support and suggestions on how to address improvements to literacy practices and learning. Prior to taking on this role in an official capacity (she receives one day a week release time from her school district to fulfill her responsibilities as literacy coordinator), Alexandra described herself as the unofficial literacy coordinator at her previous school. Alexandra had recently completed a master's degree in curriculum and instruction.

The third co-inquirer, Andrew, is currently a vice principal at a middle school in the same school district as Alexandra. At our second inquiry meeting, he shared his success in being

recently informed that he would be taking on the role of vice-principal and was due to change schools for the upcoming school year. He had also recently completed a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. When this research began, Andrew was a middle school teacher with 10-15 years of teaching experience primarily in social studies and English at the same school. He had taken on many informal leadership roles, both recognized (i.e. head teacher) and unrecognized (i.e. his approach to teaching and learning). Prior to the beginning of the research, with some self-professed reluctance, Andrew had put his name in the pool of teachers interested in moving into administration. I note his reluctance because it situated him differently than the other-co-inquirers in ways that were more profound than simply accepting the positional leadership role of vice principal. Throughout the findings and analysis chapters, Andrew's voice is featured prominently. I attribute this to two reasons. First, besides myself, Andrew's presence at the meetings was the most consistent; he missed only one meeting. Second, and more importantly, was his recent acceptance of a vice-principal position for the upcoming school year. At the time of this research, Andrew was in a state of liminality. Heilbrun (1999) describes this space as one where an individual is "poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another" (p. 3). In Andrew's case, as he contemplated his upcoming shift from teacher to vice-principal, the degree of uncertainty and clarity found in this shifting of roles resulted in a greater degree of critical consideration. As such, the richness of his comments throughout our meetings was a reflection of his thinking. The other co-inquirers were not in the same space. Because Andrew was in a transitional space between being an established teacher and becoming a novice vice-principal, he was keenly attuned to the nature of this inquiry. Andrew used our meetings as reflective space in

which he worked at articulating an understanding of his own beliefs about leadership before stepping into a role where others would have expectations for his behaviour and performance as a positional leader.

The fourth co-inquirer was Tamara. Though she dropped out of the study after the first meeting, she agreed to allow any thoughts and ideas shared during that initial meeting included in the research. At the outset of the research, Tamara was enrolled in a master's program in leadership studies. She had recently returned to Canada after spending several years working as a teacher in the U.K. In the school where she had least been employed in the U.K., she was a Head Teacher which is a position similar to a principal position in Canada. Her motivation for being involved in this research came at a time when, as an experienced teacher and leader, she was struggling to establish herself in the local school districts.

Chapter Three: Knowledge Frameworks

Luttrell (2010) includes knowledge frameworks as one of the six components of a Reflexive Model of Research Design. The intent of specifically addressing knowledge frameworks, similar to theoretical frameworks is to illustrate the conceivably wide variety of concepts, theories and ideas that inform the overall research. I have chosen this approach because, in my opinion, it provides the necessary freedom to not only explore theoretical constructs expected in qualitative research but also to challenge the value of and construction of knowledge and understanding. Though Luttrell (2010) includes validity as a separately addressed aspect of the design, I have included it here because its influence is better situated amongst the ideas presented in this chapter.

Further, by sharing a variety of influential concepts, theories and ideas, the complex and intersectional nature of this inquiry is embodied more so than through a linear exploration of theoretical influences only. I draw attention to the image of the rubber band ball in Figure 4 to illustrate how the concepts, theories and ideas are understood in the context of this research. Consider that each coloured band is one of the concepts, theories and ideas included, but not limited to this section. While each is distinct because of its unique colour, each band, and



Figure 4 Rubber-band ball. This figure is a picture of a ball made of rubber bands where each band is intended to represent the multitude of concepts, theories and ideas that are interconnected to form a larger whole.

conversely, each concept, theory and idea intersect and interconnect to form the ball. Remove too many bands, and the ball loses its form. In this research, the concepts, theories and ideas are key aspects that form a greater whole. Understanding the image of a ball does not necessarily require understanding the nature of each rubber band but in order to illuminate the choice of the selected concepts, theories and ideas here, I offer the following explanations.

Philosophical Influences

To begin, I briefly address questions related to epistemology, ontology and axiology. These three philosophical factors provide a foundation for addressing important considerations in qualitative research and therefore necessitate clarity in how they pertain to this research. In considering Creswell's (2007) epistemological question, what is the nature of reality, I share in Ponterotta's (2005) belief that knowledge is based on multiple, constructed realities, rather than a single reality and that reality is subjective and influenced by the context of the situation, namely the individual's experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher. Our sense of knowledge and reality is strongly tied to emotional and experiential knowing, more than cognitive or rational understanding. From an ontological perspective, Creswell (2007) asks, what is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched? Reality is a social construct created by a dynamic interaction between researcher and participant in the effort to understand lived experience (Ponterotto, 2005). Lutrell's (2010) inclusion of the research relationships complement the social nature of collaborative inquiry in creating meaning through a dialogic process indicative of multiple, constructed and subjective realities. In this research, much of what was discussed among co-inquirers, circled ontological questions about being a leader. From an axiological perspective,

Creswell (2007) asks what is the role of values? In collaborative inquiry, the researcher's role as co-inquirer allows for the researchers beliefs to be valued along with those of the participants. Our exploration of values frequently guided the research participants to revisit what constituted *good* leadership.

Constructs relating to epistemology, ontology and axiology tend to be thought of as research terms; I believe that the nature of knowledge, being and values are threaded throughout and within education. Because the vast majority of Canadians have experienced mass public education or a similar form found in private education, education is known to all but not necessarily understood. Canadians have come to accept mass public education as a "normal part of their childhood and youth experience" (Wotherspoon, 2009, p. 54). This familiarity also opens the realm of educational research to what Phillips (2006) suggests is influenced by "historical, philosophical, and other inquiries" (p. 11) and subsequently is "open to social concerns and is influenced by social values" (p. 11). The social nature of education is an important consideration; little if anything in education takes place in isolation. Education is characterized by dialectical relationships: the structural, teacher/student, teacher/ leader, parent/teacher as well as the agentic, individual/collective, oppression/emancipation, privileged/disadvantaged (Spry, 2001, p. 711).

Education is a social process (or family of processes) that is open to sociocultural values, purposes, and needs and interests, with the work of teachers and administrators, and the efforts of students to learn, being affected by the beliefs all of them hold, their values, their degree of motivation, and their sense of self-efficacy. Educational research

that is to do justice to the nature of the phenomena being investigated must correspondingly be wide in scope. (Phillips, 2006, p. 11-12)

Identifying a singular or even narrow purpose for educational research given its complexity is an impossible task that then begs the question, what is the goal of the educational researcher? Neumann and Pallas (2006) suggest that an underlying purpose is “to deepen or extend understanding of educational phenomena” (p. 5). I adopt Neumann and Pallas’ position as grounding from which to proceed. I further outline my positioning in a *postmodern paradigm, constructivist-interpretivist stance, phenomenological perspective* and *validity*. I will also discuss three *sensitizing concepts* relevant to this inquiry: *praxis, reflexivity* and *transformative learning*.

Postmodern Paradigm

A paradigm represents “a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individuals place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). Though Bray et al. (2000) originally grounded collaborative inquiry and its predecessor, cooperative inquiry, in pragmatism, they admit “there is no dogmatic way to conduct a cooperative inquiry” (p. 5). Given the importance of the contexts of diversity and complexity in this study, I position this research within a postmodern paradigm where “knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender and other group affiliations” (Creswell, 2007, p. 25). I acknowledge that Heron and Reason (1997) suggest that cooperative inquiry resides within a participatory paradigm; however, the postmodern paradigm because of its attention to

multiple and often contradictory perspectives is more applicable to this research. While this research is connected to a participative framework because the co-inquirers are very much considered in relation to the living world described by Heron and Reason (1997), this research is not situated in action research which is frequently associated with participatory paradigms and frameworks. Koshy, Koshy and Waterman (2011) describe the purposes of action research as:

- Action research is a method used for improving practice. It involves action, evaluation, and critical reflection and – based on the evidence gathered – changes in practice are then implemented.
- Action research is participative and collaborative; it is undertaken by individuals with a common purpose.
- It is situation-based and context specific.
- It develops reflection based on interpretations made by the participants.
- Knowledge is created through action and at the point of application.
- Action research can involve problem solving, if the solution to the problem leads to the improvement of practice.
- In action research findings will emerge as action develops, but these are not conclusive or absolute. (pp. 2-3)

Though this research has elements of action research in that it is collaborative and that participants are active leaders, the primary reason that I have chosen not to situate the research as participative and/or action research, is that the intent of this research has no explicit expectation for action nor will changes to practice as a result of this research be implemented or evaluated. A postmodern paradigm is a better location for this research

because it allows for the acceptance of more than one route to knowledge (Dantley, 2002) as well as the embodiment of “social constructions and meanings that are crucial for understanding how organization functions day by day” (Morgan, 1997, p. 146). Further, the postmodern paradigm allows for the formation of identity as ideas emerge from people who are situated in particular contexts (Sumara, Davis & Laidlaw, 2001), in this case leaders, and creates conditions for leadership identity to be reframed as multidimensional, contingent and evolving and a result of persistent conflicts between “history and memory, language, and geography” (Slattery, 1995, p. 147). Finally the postmodern allows for a reality that is fluid and reflects the means by which people “adapt to new conditions of experiences and, at the same time, reinterpret the past” (p. 147).

By relocating this inquiry within the postmodern paradigm, space is created to extend beyond what Slattery (1995) describes as the modern “turmoil of contemporary schooling that too often is characterized by violence, bureaucratic gridlock, curricular stagnation, depersonalized evaluation, political conflict, economic crisis, decaying infrastructure, emotional fatigue, demoralization of personnel, and hopelessness” (Slattery, 1995, p. 20). To further justify the positioning of my study, I share Slattery’s (1995) detailed, yet somewhat hopeful, characterization of postmodernism as: (a) *post-anthropocentric* where individuals live in harmony with nature as opposed to the divergence that leads to exploitation, however, arguably, relationships based on exploitation are present in schools where individuals in leadership positions maintain control and power; (b) *post-competitive* where relationships emphasize cooperation and underplay the individualistic nature of competition where the collaborative nature of this inquiry contributes to the dissolution of hierarchical structures; (c)

post-militaristic where negotiation and dialogue replace conflict. From a post-competitive perspective, collaborative inquiry is founded on dialogue between co-inquirers as opposed to the study of an object/individual where a research framework is imposed; (d) *post-patriarchal* where equality in the social order is central and the power of religious, social, political and economic hierarchies is abated; (e) *post-Eurocentric* where the wisdom of cultures is embedded in understanding rather than historically imposed, where the context for this research is schooling in diverse contexts with no one group or individual is advanced as superior to another; (f) *post-scientistic* where the moral, religious and aesthetic become central to public policy and complement traditional scientific exploration.

In this study participants were encouraged to engage in deep reflection through creative means that included sharing anecdotes that provided insight into our individual stories (Slattery, 1995). This postmodern characterization, while decidedly hopeful, stands in sharp opposition to a climate of educational leadership where in the hierarchy of schools, the educational leader is often placed at the top of a hierarchy in a position of control and power.

Constructivist-interpretivist Stance

For this research, I adopt Ponterotto's (2005) explanation of a *constructivist-interpretivist* stance that "maintains that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection" (p. 129). Reflexivity is firmly embedded throughout the theoretical underpinnings of this inquiry as well as in the methods and methodology being embraced. In turn, meaning is made in the interaction between researcher and participants and they interrogate findings through dialogue and interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005) and that meaning is both socially and experientially based (Al Zeera, 2001). Dialogue and agreement featured

prominently in this approach and fall in line with tenets of collaborative inquiry. To clarify, the notion of dialogue is informed by the work of Bakhtin who advanced that all thought and in turn understanding is created dialogically. "All language (and the ideas which language contains and communicates) is dynamic, relational and engaged in a process of endless redescriptions of the world" ("Dialogic", n.d., para. 2). The process that the co-inquirers engaged in as we sought to understand leadership and our experience of it was very much an engaged process of relational and evolving understanding.

This is not to suggest that the participants in this study uniformly agreed on what leadership was or was not. We did however agree on the importance of seeking a greater understanding of leadership. The structure of our understanding of leadership was created through discourse and through engaging in a process orientation (Šarkan & Nemeč, 2010) as opposed a product orientation that seeks an answer or outcome. A constructivist-interpretivist stance is characterized by multiple, constructed and holistic realities, the inseparability of the knower and the known as well as cause and effect, and values that are interactive and subjective (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Creswell (2007) explains the characteristics of a constructivist-interpretivist stance further. While he separates constructivism as a paradigm from interpretivism as a community, the distinction does not enrich the stance I take in my approach to this research so I proceed without the distinction.

Phenomenological Perspective

In my original conception of this research, I anticipated and planned the methodology for this study to be a phenomenology and the method of understanding the life experiences of leadership to be autoethnography. Following my candidacy exams, I was encouraged by

members of my committee to consider collaborative inquiry as a methodology because to access a rich understanding of how individuals conceive and enact leadership, the participants would need to be invested in and have ownership of the research. The type of ownership is best characterized by Heron (1996) in his description of collaborative inquiry as research “*with* people not *on* them or *about* them” (p. 19). I stand by my choice of collaborative inquiry as a methodology yet I cannot ignore that life experience which features in phenomenological research, provides an important context for this study.

Titchen and Hobson (2005) generally define phenomenology as “the study of lived, human phenomena within the everyday social contexts in which the phenomena occur from the perspective of those who experience them” (p. 121). In our discussions of the meaning of leadership, my participants and I drew heavily on our experience of and with leadership. For Creswell (2007), the focus is what participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon and he states that the purpose of phenomenology is to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of a universal essence” (p. 58). The term *universal essence* is problematic for my inquiry because it implies a product orientation where we explore leadership as a phenomenon and therefore derive a definitive answer or solution to the problem of leadership. I do not believe that human experience can be reduced to a fixed entity that transcends socially constructed knowledge to be applied without recognition of the unique contexts, relations and experiences that constitute our experience and inform our identity. Those unique context and relations were rich sources of understanding for the co-inquirers in this study.

As a perspective or philosophy, phenomenology “contributes to deeper understanding of lived experiences by exposing taken-for-granted assumptions about these ways of knowing” (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007, p. 1373). Bray et al. (2000) draw on hermeneutic phenomenology where “learning is an act of interpretation” (p. 23). In this study, as co-inquirers were constantly interpreting our understandings as we shared them amongst each other in addition to questioning how we and others had come to understand and enact leadership.

Throughout the study we continually circled around, through and within our life experience with and of leadership. Given the potential for participants to interrogate their experiences with leadership as a phenomenon, I looked to more informative characterizations of phenomenology in line with the nature of this study; characterizations that support our collaborative inquiry and its co-inquirers more than dictate the terms of how the study should be conducted. I draw in equal measure on the concepts of *interpretive phenomenology* (Van der Mescht, 2004), *transformative phenomenology* (Rehorick & Malhotra Bentz, 2008), and hermeneutic phenomenology (Laverty, 2003).

In interpretive phenomenology, “the researcher contemplates the meaning *others* make of objects, or experiences. This essentially constructivist element has significant implications, chief of which is the fact that the *others'* (the research participants) embeddedness in cultural, political and historical contexts is an integral component of the enquiry” (Van der Mescht, 2004, p. 2). Understanding the meaning that the participants make as *others* is important in understanding leadership as it is understood and practiced by the self and how it could be

practiced in schools. As it applies to the collaborative nature of this research, self and other were the same in that we were the researcher and researched; the traditional distinction between researcher as self and participants as other was blurred because we assumed both roles simultaneously. While we attempted to interpret the characteristics and actions of leadership, our collective understanding was constructed by examining how we observed and interacted with others as leaders. Throughout later chapters, I will share examples where the co-inquirers situated themselves outside of the traditional role and characterization of leader. I will also discuss how the co-inquirers interacted with leaders and how those interactions influenced the leadership understandings of the co-inquirers.

In transformative phenomenology, the research experience “clears the focus, reflecting a deeper and truer image of who we are. In the final two phases of this collaborative inquiry, acting and meaning-making, co-inquirers began to focus more on themselves as leaders and how their prior individual experiences intersected with our evolving understanding of leadership in general but more importantly of who we were as leaders. “The phenomenological looking glass also reflects the lifeworld behind the image, revealing structures that we had not seen before, and pathways to new destinations” (Rehorick & Malhotra Bentz, 2008, p. 4). It is these pathways to potential change that lead to the action necessitated through the application of critical reflexivity, praxis and transformative learning to be discussed shortly. Given the synergic, collaborative nature of this research, both an interpretive phenomenological and transformative phenomenological perspective is important.

Further, given the relationship between dialogue and collaboration with interpretation and understanding, hermeneutic phenomenology also informs our ongoing understanding of the experience of leadership. I acknowledge that there are distinct interpretations of hermeneutic phenomenology depending on whose version one subscribes to. Husserl (1970), Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1976) each offer conceptions of hermeneutic phenomenology. Rather than subscribe to one philosophy over another, I consider a broader sense of hermeneutic phenomenology drawing on those aspects most relevant to this inquiry. From the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, “meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our background and experiences” (Lavery, 2003, p. 8). Texts are important pieces from which hermeneutic interpretation is drawn. I will not define the meaning of text other than to say that our dialogue, discussion and collaborative analysis as generated during our inquiry meetings form the text from which we based our individuals and collective interpretation of the meaning of leadership. Gadamer (1998) offers one important perspective worth noting because the act of questioning that he discusses can be seen throughout the findings of this research.

Understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else’s meaning.

Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one’s own thinking on the subject...To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were. (p. 375).

Validity

On a personal level and fundamental to this study is the belief that research has an ethical obligation to initiate or contribute to positive change based on evidence heuristically generated from within and that this research be articulated in such a way that both the evidence and its subsequent value have genuine application. It is not enough for research in education, a social construct, to serve the world of academia without deference to the profoundly pragmatic demands of education. Knowledge construction is not so analytical or linear that in answering a question, the result becomes universal or absolute no longer worthy or further questioning; even from a positivist perspective, such a pursuit is unfeasible. From the constructivist perspective shared earlier, the search for definitiveness is simply not possible because the pursuit of knowledge is cumulative; knowledge created as a result of research is both credible and reputable “because they stand up to scrutiny, replication, and reanalysis” (Henig, 2009, p. 145).

Traditionally, validity in research was synonymous with testing and measurement (LeGrange & Beets, 2005). As such, validity has undergone a reconceptualization that “is openly ideological, disclaims any notion of value neutrality, and aspires to emancipate those involved in the research process by empowering them to take control of their own lives and challenge the status quo” (Sparkes, 2001, p. 542). As a result, validity has taken on descriptive monikers like *catalytic*, *crystalline*, *ironic*, *paralogical*, *rhizomatic* and *voluptuous* (Sparkes, 2002; emphasis added). For this study, catalytic and rhizomatic validity are of the greatest relevance because of how they align and support the other constructs discussed in this chapter but also

because approaching validity as catalytic and/or rhizomatic supports the process orientation of this research.

Given the nature of collaborative inquiry where participants are co-inquirers, the traditional role of researcher as overseer or sole interpreter is diminished if not eliminated. I view this as strength as opposed to limitation to achieving catalytic validity. Lather (1991) describes catalytic validity as the degree to which the process of research is transformative or empowering. According to Lather, the research should have “reality altering effect and channel impact so that participants gain self-understanding and, ultimately, self determination through research participation” (p. 68). Anderson and Herr (1999) describe catalytic validity as the degree to which the “research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (p. 16). Because of the collaboration that occurs among participants, the control typically exerted by the researcher over the construction of meaningful knowledge or understanding is significantly minimized. In doing so the likelihood of participants democratically contributing to change in their institutions or in their practice increases (Beach, 2003).

A postmodern paradigm creates space for knowledge that does not emerge out of a hierarchical system but rather out of an unpredictable, complex array. LeGrange and Beets (2005) build on Lather’s challenge to modernist validity through the rhizome as a model of postmodern knowledge where to act rhizomatically is:

... to act via relay, circuit, multiple-openings, as crabgrass in the lawn of academic preconceptions ... There is no trunk, no emergence from a single root, but rather arbitrary branchings off and temporary frontiers that can only be mapped, not

blueprinted ... Rhizomatics are about the move from hierarchies to networks and the complexity of problematics where any concept, when pulled, is recognised as connected to a mass of tangled ideas, uprooted, as it were, from the epistemological field. (p. 117)

Of chief importance is that knowledge and meaning that arise from co-inquirers be promoted equally. The collaborative inquiry meetings with co-inquirers were the embodiment of rhizomatic functioning. Through sharing based on personal reflection, new ideas and meanings emerged that we had not previously discussed or if we had, remained ideas worthy of being revisited and that took on new meaning as a result of our conversations. These were recreated as a result of our dialogue in otherwise unpredictable locations which gave rise to a great mass of tangled, yet valuable questions that serve in providing direction for further reflection/action cycles.

Even though I borrow from qualitative conceptualizations of validity to situate my own research, Garman (1996) offers seven principles, *verité*, *integrity*, *rigour*, *utility*, *vitality*, *ethics*, and *verisimilitude* that may better suit not only this research but qualitative inquiry more generally. The first principle, *verité*, requires the researcher to demonstrate that the work is consistent with accepted knowledge in the field. Throughout the literature review, I attempt to situate this inquiry in literature that focuses on educational leadership. While the scope of this research does not allow for me to review all scholarly work relating to leadership, I have chosen to discuss current scholars who have published research relating to educational leadership. Of greater measure may be the veracity of the work once completed and published for consideration by other scholars but that measure will occur outside of the current scope. For now, I refer back to a quote I shared earlier to justify the necessity and value of this research,

“to develop a clearer picture of what it is that some leaders possess (or do, or *are*) that makes their leadership effective has perhaps never been more urgent” (Van der Mescht, 2004, p. 3).

The vitality of this research is one that I have considered thoughtfully yet acknowledge that as a collaborative inquiry I have limited control over. As the author, I shared personal stories and anecdotes in the opening chapter in an attempt to assist the reader in understanding the motivation for this research. Co-inquirers shared stories and anecdotes throughout our discussion, excerpts from which I include in upcoming chapters but I have the privilege of shaping this work whereas my co-inquirers, because their stake in this work is different, do not. Finally, Garman (1996) asks two important questions in relation to verisimilitude: “Does the work represent human experiences with sufficient detail so that the portrayals can be recognisable as ‘truly conceivable experience’? Does this research render accounts that readers not only read but feel and believe?” (p. 19). I found the words of the co-inquirers to be powerful examples of how they have conceived leadership over time and through their own experiences. However, I may be biased in judging the power of their words because I benefit from knowing them, seeing their faces and hearing their voices.

Sensitizing Concepts

Though the term *sensitizing concepts* is more common to grounded theory research, the value of similarly acknowledging concepts that influence this research is important. Sensitizing concepts highlight the starting points and important features of a qualitative study (Bowen, 2006). Charmaz (2003) describes sensitizing concepts as those ideas that reside in the background and “offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience; they are embedded in our disciplinary emphases and perspectival proclivities” (p. 259). Gilgun (2007)

aply points out that “research usually begins with such concepts, whether researchers state this or not and whether they are aware of them or not” (p. 7). In keeping with that sentiment, I will humbly appropriate the term to highlight three important concepts that inform this research: *Reflexivity, praxis, and transformative learning*.

Reflexivity.

Though I briefly discussed reflexivity in my introduction to this research, it warrants further discussion here as a sensitizing concept but it is necessary to preface it with an understanding of *reflection* as a separate concept. Reflection is frequently referred to in education circa John Dewey, educational philosopher, and Donald Schön, reflective scholar. In teacher education, we frequently ask pre-service teachers to engage in and demonstrate learning through engaging in reflection because it provides a “critical underpinning of growth and learning” (Ryan, 2005, p. 1). Similarly, we expect and in some cases, require that reflection be actively practiced by teachers. In British Columbia, the provincial context for this research, as part of the Standards for the Education, Competence and Professional Conduct of Educators, the expectation is that “Educators engage in professional development and reflective practice, understanding that a hallmark of professionalism is the concept of professional growth over time” (Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia, 2014, para. 7). In these examples, reflection involves looking back on experiences as a means of constructing knowledge about one’s self and about the world yet this is a relatively unsophisticated act. Consider this: reflection is a process is akin to looking in the mirror. We check to see if our hair looks just right, if it doesn’t then we make adjustments to correct the flaw and the learning concludes. This is a decidedly positivist approach to problem solving where there is a clear question with

an equally clear response or answer that in essence results in the problem being solved thus learning stops until the next problem arises.

In collaborative inquiry, Bray et al. (2000) draw specific attention to the importance of reflection. However, engaging in the act of reflection is a relatively simple act that does not represent the contextual complexity that exists when studying lived experiences or experiential phenomena where understanding and meaning-making are a result of process more than product. For this reason, I advocate for reflexivity over reflection. The concept of *reflexivity* requires the individual to not just look back and contemplate but to consider their contribution to the construction of meanings and the reinterpretation of their actions in light of newly constructed meaning (Willig, 2001). Danielewicz (2001) articulates an explanation of reflexivity that suits the nature and context of this research.

Reflexivity is an act of self-conscious consideration that can lead people to a deepened understanding of themselves and others, not in the abstract, but in relation to specific social environments . . . [and] foster a more profound awareness . . . of how social contexts influence who people are and how they behave. . . . It involves a person's active analysis of past situations, events, and products, with the inherent goals of critique and revision for the explicit purpose of achieving an understanding that can lead to change in thought or behaviour. (pp. 155-156)

Engaging in reflexivity takes reflection to a deeper level that requires critical thought and careful consideration followed by ongoing action derived from a process of understanding.

Reflexive understanding is generated by engaging in mindfulness and introspection with careful

consideration of the complexity of the situations and events that present themselves in classrooms and schools. In this context, I use a social psychology perspective where mindfulness is “the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective” (Langer, 1997, p. 4). In contrast, mindlessness refers to “entrapment in old categories; by automatic behaviour that precludes attending to new signals; and by action that operates from a single perspective” (p. 4). In reference to his own practice as a researcher and educator, Ryan (2005) explains that the reflexive process includes introspection.

The reflexive process involves introspection. A deep inward gaze into every interaction whether it be in teaching or any other interaction in life. Interactive introspection was the tool I used to improve my interactions and study my thoughts, feelings and behavior. I considered my mental state, my emotional being, thoughts and motives within a context. I also used reflection: However, this occurred after my action and not during, which meant I was being personally reflexive when I was introspective during the moment. (p. 2)

Where reflection is often individual, *reflexion* is decidedly relational. Jun (1994) believes that the critical questions of past actions and future possibilities are what builds self conscious ethical action. He also suggests that reflexive practice is guided by two key questions: (a) *who am I and what kind of person do I want to be?* And (b) *how do I relate to others and to the world around me?* From a research perspective, reflexivity can be viewed as *personal* or *epistemological*. According to Willig (2001), personal reflexivity “involves reflecting upon the

ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers” (p. 10). Epistemological reflexivity places greater emphasis on research design and how that design may influence findings. While the latter is important, personal reflexivity is more relevant as a sensitizing concept in this inquiry.

Furthering the importance of being reflexive, I consider criticality as an important feature in the process of inquiry. To be reflective, one is able to amend misinterpretations in what we believe and how we act; to be *critically reflexive* requires analysis of that which founded those beliefs and actions (Bray et al. 2000) and a degree of action based on those findings. Brookfield (2000) suggests that individuals must be willing to “identify assumptions they hold dear that are actually destroying their sense of well-being and serving the interests of others, that is, hegemonic assumptions”(p. 127). Similarly, Ryan (2006b) acknowledges that being critical requires skills that

... allow one to discern the basis of claims, the assumption underlying assertions, and the interests that motivate people to promote certain positions. These skills enable people to scrutinize the evidence and logic that proponents of a course of action employ to support their arguments and conclusions. Critical skills allow people to recognize unstated, implicit and subtle points of view and the often invisible or taken-for-granted conditions that provide the basis for these stances (p. 114).

Praxis.

Administrators need to be able to look critically at themselves, reflect on their often-privileged positions, and understand how they can assist in including others in the leadership process. (Ryan, 2007, p. 345)

Ryan's (2007) call for leaders to turn the mirror back onto themselves bears elements of *praxis*: reflection, understanding and action. Praxis is a term frequently referenced in scholarly work but I do not wish to take for granted any shared understanding of the meaning or intent of praxis. Ergo, it is necessary to explain what is intended here in the use of praxis. Seo and Creed (2002) assert that praxis is based on the free and creative reconstruction of patterns of analysis that include both constraints and capacities. Individuals are active not only in the reconstruction of the social but of the personal as well. Fundamentally, theory and action continually interact to inform each other. In the setting of educational leadership, Cardno (2007) describes situations where praxis is required.

Each time a leader embarks on the process of managing a dilemma, and in every encounter between the leader and others, there is praxis as the theory of learning associated with managing leadership dilemmas interacts with the practice in a reciprocal way. (p. 34)

Leadership figures prominently in the daily functioning of schools, yet the theory-to-action cycle is treated uncritically. The need for effective leadership is pervasively viewed as a means to improve schools yet as Ford (2010) states, there is "little critical appreciation of what this might mean in practice" (p. 48). This observation is an important one because it draws attention to the theory-practice gap in leadership. There is an implicit assumption that theory informs practice but in my own experience as an educator, I am not convinced that this is a

reality or if it is, the theory that is put into practice lacks the critically reflexive element necessary to contextualize theory. This is especially relevant in contexts of diversity where literature on educational leadership “indicates that school leaders respond to diversity by retreating into cultural norms, sameness and traditional approaches” (Starr, 2010c, p. 18).

Shields and Oberg (2006) offer a framework for leadership praxis characterized by clarity of a leader’s moral purpose, willingness and ability to exercise agency, and presence of *savvy*. The authors draw on Fullan’s (2001) definition of moral purpose where Fullan states that students benefit from identifiable goals, gaps between high and low achievement are diminished because expectations are reasonably challenging and the pursuit of deeper educational goals that lead to continuous improvement. Agency represents the ability and willingness to “act in order to achieve one’s mission, goals, and objectives in a proactive way” (p. 5). The third criterion in the framework bears the most interesting implications regarding praxis and reflection and action. Savvy demands a balance of pragmatism and perspicacity or shrewdness. Educational leaders who function in this framework demonstrate risk-taking by going beyond the confines of the traditional to attend to needed change. They take into account “what is important, or truthful, or desirable from what is not” (p. 18). It is contextual, relevant and very much based in the experience of being a leader. The ability to critically think is carefully balanced against action with deference to the many pressures to adapt to cultural, institutional, professional and social pressures that bog down education (Walker & Quong, 1998). Praxis as indicated here is an important aspect of leadership but I contend that reflexivity is not a natural skill; it requires practice. As such, I point to autoethnography as a

means to engage participants in the reflexivity required by this research and ultimately to transformative practice.

Transformative learning.

Transformation is the zone where new knowledge and ideas are generated. We envision education and a deeper understanding and appreciation of culture(s) as engines for social change, projecting humane futures—futures in which a democratic ideal is realized for all. (Sumida & Meyer, 2008, p. 361)

Generating understanding of a phenomena or experience is critical in praxis; transformative learning is the foundation for such understanding but also for socially just action. Further, research that transforms promotes a mutual relationship of respect between the researcher and researched, in our case we are the *researchers*, those with whom we work, despite not being the focus of our study, must be considered as part of the *researched* because so much of what we are examining stems from the understanding of leadership as a relational act between and with our colleagues. From a theoretical perspective, transformative learning includes a shared vision for social action, community building, promotion of dialogue and the reduction of social distance (Deal, 2006). According to Sumida and Meyer (2008), the process of transformation has the potential to trigger “profound, positive, personal, and societal change” (p. 360) that fosters deep emotional and mental engagement. At its core, transformation is about “acknowledging relationships, seeing things differently, feeling our diversity in our universality, challenging old assumptions with extraordinary insight and intent” (p. 360). A transformative experience, where an individual experiences a profound shift in thinking or understanding, has the potential to help the individual as well as those s/he encounters, envision ways of strengthening our understanding of the world around us that may otherwise have gone unnoticed or unacknowledged (Sumida & Meyer, 2008). Davis-Manigaulte, Yorks,

and Kasl (2006) assert that transformative learning, the type that will promote transformation of practice, includes a holistic change in how a person both affectively relates to and conceptually frames his or her experience; thus, it requires a healthy interdependence between affective and 'rational' ways of knowing (p. 27). Those immersed in the construction and leadership of education and more importantly, those responsible for its direction, benefit from locating themselves within the system in order to build a foundation for transformative learning and emancipatory pedagogy (Eisner, 2004). Austin and Hickey (2007) go further in their description of the importance of transformative practice and the role of the constituents.

Socially transformative education draws both student and teacher into a consideration of their own positioning within the social dynamic, one that provokes the conscientisation necessary to understand the power of contemporary socialization processes that support structures of inequality, oppression and exploitation as achieved largely through the colonizing of mass or popular culture by the dictates and imperatives of global capital. (p. 22)

Mezirow (1975) is widely credited with the original theory from which many scholars have built upon to conceptualize the field of transformative learning. In his early work, Mezirow (1975) described ten phases of personal transformation: experiencing a disorienting dilemma; undergoing self-examination; conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations; relating discontent to the similar experiences of others, recognizing that the problem is shared; exploring options for new ways of acting; building competence and self-confidence in new roles; planning a course of action; acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action; trying out

new roles and assessing them; and reintegrating into society with the new perspective. In his later work, Mezirow (1994) added a step between eight and nine of “renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships” (p. 224). In 2000, Mezirow expanded the process to include attending to frames of reference, the inclinations and deep rooted sense of rules that we use to interpret experience (Cranton, 2006). Mezirow developed his own work further by recognize the disorienting dilemma as being less the result of a single event to more of a cumulative effect.

Educators hoping to go beyond the linear nature of his conceptualizing and its emphasis on cognitive processes have expanded Mezirow’s seminal efforts. Tisdell (2001) writes about a university course session where her students revealed personal stories that lead to significant shifts in their understanding of, in this case, race relations, concluding:

I do not think it is possible to have a transformational experience by merely “critically reflecting” on experience. Further, an overreliance on rationality can *prevent* a transformational learning experience from happening. I do not think that participants in the critical incidence would have had a transformational experience only by critically reflecting or rationally thinking about our experience. The affective component – the sharing of our vulnerability – along with the critical analysis was what made the experience transformational. I would argue, contrary to Mezirow, that affective involvement and expression is also a *necessary condition* for transformational learning to happen.” (p. 160)

The affective component of transformative learning that Tisdell (2001) mentions is more in line with the relational nature of collaborative inquiry and better suits the design of this research. Cranton (2009) explains that the relational perspective of transformative learning requires that knowledge is created through “story-telling, sharing experiences, careful listening to each other’s points of view, and a drawing out of each person’s thoughts and feelings” (p. 97) which requires a level of acceptance and shared experience found in a collaborative inquiry. Belenky and Stanton (2000) suggest that in earlier conceptions of transformative learning theory, *separate knowing*, understanding generated analytically by building more defensible knowledge through logic, rationality and reasoning, was central to transformative learning. Conversely, when we consider connected knowing, judgement is suspended, and “empathy, imagination and story-telling as tools for entering into another’s frame of mind” (p. 87). Such a view is more holistic in nature than the original rational approach to transformation. On the *Transformative Learning Centre* (2014) website, the importance of a relational lens for transformative learning is highlighted.

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. This shift includes our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations and our relationships with other humans and with the natural world. It also involves our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender, our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living, and our sense of possibilities for social justice, peace and personal joy. (Transformative Learning Centre, 2014, para. 1)

In the course of a collaborative inquiry, individuals share insights and perspectives but the co-inquirers holistically generate the understanding generated. Taylor (2008) draws on the work of Tisdell (2003) to describe this relational perspective as a *cultural-spiritual view*. Connections and intersections are integral in generating knowledge and meaning in the process of the transformative learning but are equally so in the process of collaborative inquiry. Tisdell (2003) describes a mentor as collaborator with “a relational emphasis on group inquiry and narrative reasoning, which assist the learner in sharing stories of experience and revising new stories in the process” (p. 9). This description mirrors Bray et al.’s (2000) description of the initiator in collaborative inquiry; in a collaborative inquiry group, inquirers develop relationships that disrupt the “power over” situation common to leadership and schools.

In addition to a relational perspective shared by transformative learning and collaborative inquiry, Cranton (2006) includes a *social change perspective* closely connected to social justice and emancipation. While the Freirian roots of social change that liberate from oppression is not an explicit goal or outcome in this research, an awakening of consciousness or conscientisation based on a cycle or cycles of reflection and action (Freire, 2000) is. Through the process of conscientisation, transformation includes not only change in an individual’s way of seeing the world, but also structural change in the social world that provides the context for the individual’s life. As a result, empowered learners act to transform their world (Baumgartner, 2001). In a review of the work of bell hooks and Angela Davis, Brookfield (2003) summarizes the purpose of transformative education as to “help people uncover and challenge dominant ideology and then learn how to organize social relations” (p. 224). Scott (2003) helps clarify this when she says "transformation includes structural changes in the psyches of persons and in the

structures of society" (p. 281). Psychological changes can be associated with an emotional response that invokes a powerful connection between the self and the social world (Dirkx, 2001). Selby (2002) advances the concept of *radical interconnectedness* as a more complete relational metaphor for transformative learning. In this conception, a both/and approach versus an either/or approach is a necessary feature of transformation as is a focus on inner journeying. This interiority allows the individual to experience empathetic, embodied learning, spiritual learning and slow learning that resides in relational, multidimensional ways of knowing.

By including a brief overview of the previous concepts relevant to this research, my intent is to provide a broad base or grounding upon which this research has been conceptualized and built. Referring back to Luttrell's (2010) Reflexive Model of Research Design, the knowledge frameworks are integral to understanding research in general but in the case of this research, the inclusion of descriptions of a postmodern paradigm, constructivist-interpretivist stance, phenomenological perspective, praxis, reflexivity and transformative learning are specifically relevant to this study of leadership experience as it has been studied, interpreted and analyzed. Despite the use of the reflexive design, I have also included sections more common to dissertation research. The following, *literature review*, provides further grounding for this study by drawing on theories of leadership as well as explanations of diversity and complexity.

Chapter Four: Literature Review

... schools, like other areas of cultural life, are caught on the cusp of a new era, one between a modernist paradigm (characterized by professional values such as responsibility, meditative role, and concern for bottom-line results) and the postmodern pattern (with swift currents of institutional changes marked by decentralization, pluralistic demands from multiple voices, and school system redesign). (Maxcy, 1994. p. 3)

When industrialization became firmly rooted in society, its effects did not remain isolated to the factories that drew people into the cities and contributed to the urbanization of culture. Education also made a significant and lasting shift toward the factory model, driven in large part by the demands of industry to produce workers who could be as productive as the factories themselves. In the early 20th century, the influence of scientific management in schools coincided with the industrial boom, making it natural for education to borrow from industry. “The sudden propulsion of scientific management into prominence and the subsequent saturation of American society with the idea of efficiency together with attacks on education by the popular journals made it certain that public education would be influenced greatly” (Callahan, 1962, p. 52). Though this quote is specific to the United States, Canada followed suit. Callahan offered scathing criticism of the administration and leadership in public education for its heedless reproduction of Taylor’s notions of scientific management (Begley & Stefkovich, 2004). One might argue that the homogeneity of the population then lent itself to an efficiency model at a time when Canadians were far less diverse than they are today however such an argument is flawed. According to Riehl (2000), public education has served a

pluralistic society since its outset when many of those being educated for the factories were members of minority ethnic groups or lower socioeconomic class. Despite knowing that the standardization of teaching and of children is, as Eisner (1994) notes “an oxymoron” (p. 7), the lackluster model of efficiency founded during industrialization has become a foundational and problematic model for education, one that has been perpetuated more by its leaders than by its constituents.

Since industrialization, education has continued to borrow from a range of disciplines, but significantly from business and management. In doing so schools have “promoted and adopted organizational arrangements that invested particular individuals with power so that the latter would be able to force, motivate or inspire others in ways that would help schools achieve the comparatively narrow ends of efficiency and productivity” (Ryan, 2006a, p. 3). Such an approach problematically lends itself to a managerialist focus whose goal is simply product or output (Lumby, 2006). The intent of efficiency and productivity are out of step with the complex reality of schools yet are firmly entrenched to the detriment of education.

The focus of this section is to explore what I believe to be a tension created in the space between what educational leadership is and what it should be. Underlying tensions are a product of how society views schools, how those schools function and how society views leadership. Public education in Canada is founded on the “values and belief systems of the dominant cultural and linguistic class” (Goddard & Hart, 2007, p. 16). Educational leadership has essentially developed along ethnocentric lines overshadowed by a Western ideology originating in the United States and United Kingdom (Walker & Dimmock, 1999; Begley, 2006).

Further, schools continue to operate in ways that advance the white, protestant, Anglo-Saxon culture from which our education system is based (Villa and Thousand, 1995; Walker & Quong, 1998). So while leaders espouse the importance and value of leadership, their own cultural hegemony may constrain their ability to “enact positive strategies to build awareness and acceptance of all people” (Bruner, 2008, p. 494).

Locating leadership that is responsive or adaptive is problematized by the socialization of leaders who respond to complexity through an agenda of sameness. “Some managers insist that the best way to reduce conflict and maintain harmony is to focus on the ways in which people (and structures) are alike. It is argued that people work together best if they ignore their differences” (Walker, 1994 as cited in Walker & Quong, 1998, p. 90). Such a simplistic approach is oriented around the linearity of problem-solution or ask-answer. Yet, the differences yielded in complex environments are what contribute to the richness of education. Reigeluth (2004) reminds us that educational leaders “must constantly adjust and adapt the process to the emerging, ever-changing reality of a particular educational system and its environment” (p. 8). Rusch (2004) asserts that “silence, blindness, and fear” (p. 19) often moderate leaders’ consideration of diversity and complexity in schools because such discussion potentially involves confrontation. Moreover, the conservative nature of schooling where classism, racism and sexism have a continued presence, “a fiction of tolerance” (p. 59) and “myth of neutrality” (p. 59) are perpetuated and inevitably cultivate compliance as opposed to critical reflection (Riehl, 2000). When differences do emerge as they repeatedly do, forcing the common good in statements like “students are at the heart of our decisions” not only ignores the reality but

further the status quo which serves the dominant culture, yet continues to keep those marginalized by difference on the outside of the circle.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify in current literature where the role of the leader is at odds with the diversity and complexity found in contemporary schools. Embedded in the discussion is consideration of the discourses of schooling. I define discourse as “a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (Vedøy & Møller 2007, p. 61). In addition, discourses are integral in human communication as “dominant, moving ideas that subtly influence meaning, depending on context” (Rottman, 2007, p. 56).

Hallinger and Leithwood (1996 as cited in Goddard & Foster, 2002, p. 3) assert that societal culture “exerts a significant influence on administrators beyond that of the specific organization’s culture” (p. 3). The significance of their argument speaks directly to tensions that emerge in schools where philosophy and ideology of the principal may be at odds with the beliefs, values and expectations of others. Though ‘dominant’ can be synonymous with ‘majority’, I choose instead to ground the word ‘dominant’ in reference to the group that holds the most power or exerts the greatest influence as opposed to the more numeric sense gained from the use of the word ‘majority’. Situations where disparity emerges become particularly problematic when the actions of that principal fail to respond to or address the needs of non-dominant groups, often the students and parents and increasingly teachers and staff.

My lens focuses on the interplay between the role of leader and leadership theory as they relate to diversity and complexity in schools. As a result, one of my aims here is to assess the contribution to knowledge made by current literature used to inform school leadership,

diversity, complexity and scholarly research. Through an analysis of pertinent literature, the purposes of this chapter, therefore, are twofold: first, to examine the relevant theoretical frameworks of professional knowledge in its approach to leadership as it exists in the complex world of education; and second, to discuss the tensions that emerge from the intersection of leadership and that complexity.

I begin by discussing the perspective for this review and tensions that concern school leaders with respect to the impact of administrative leadership in schools. This chapter concludes with an attempt to provide a meaningful context for the leader operating in the complex world of education as I move forward into the data gathered for this dissertation. Two lenses are critical to this review: first, meanings of complexity and diversity and second, a frame for leadership.

Creating Meaning for Complexity and Diversity

Today, schools are a complex, orchestral weave that includes a range of diversity in curriculum, personnel and organizations too numerous to list (Murakami-Ramalho, 2008). According to Chambers (2003), Canadian students are “probably the most ethnically, racially, linguistically, and religiously diverse of any school population in the world” (p. 223). This is no less true in the United States where one third of the school population is considered ethnically, linguistically or culturally diverse (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Riehl, 2000). The pressure to provide an inclusive and effective education with deference to “race and ethnicity, social class, gender, national origin and native language, sexual orientation, and physical disability” (Riehl, 2000, p. 56) continues to mount, particularly for administrators who struggle to find ways to address the needs of diverse students and their families (Goddard & Hart, 2007). Beyond the obvious

complexity in dealing with a range of constituents, policymakers hastily attempt to select and implement changes to programs and curriculum without consideration of what is required and how and what that process will yield (Trombly, 2014). Diversity describes the external world in which we function as leaders. Complexity describes the internal world of schools where intersections and challenges are less measurable or reportable yet are an equally important consideration.

Diversity.

As the key administrators at the school level, principals must take the lead role in meeting the demands of these social, economic and demographic changes. Principals exhibit varying degrees of success in providing the leadership required to adapt to the pluralistic society. (Goddard & Hart, 2007, p. 8)

Though Goddard and Hart (2007) refer specifically to school principals, the sentiment can be more widely applied to leadership with the same degree of accuracy. A discourse of diversity has replaced discourses of equal opportunity in Western democracy and more specifically in the realm of education. Increasingly, educational reform has required “that schools, teachers and educational leaders should be responsive to cultural, racial, gender, sexual and religious diversity” (Blackmore, 2006, p. 181). When applying the term, ‘diversity’, multiple definitions, conceptions and beliefs are found throughout in the field of education. Lumby and Coleman (2007) assert the notion of diversity is “the range of characteristics which not only result in perceptions of difference between humans, but which can also meet a response in others which may advantage or disadvantage the individual in question” (p. 1). Rayner (2009) offers an equally broad description of educational diversity as a “range of

individual differences, comprising a set of social and personal factors, which form a key aspect in any and every educational setting” (p. 433). More specific definitions attempt to list criteria such as age, beliefs, disability, education, ethnicity, religion, orientation, values, nationality, physicality, social class and socio economic status (Norton & Fox, 1997). In a school context, conceptions of diversity describe “a myriad of shared actions, behaviours, beliefs, norms, and understandings held by the collective of students, parents and staff of that particular school community” (Billot, et al., 2007, p. 4).

Vedøy & Møller (2007) offer three approaches to diversity. The first, *conservative*, associates social behaviour and biology where the role of the majority is to stifle difference in favour of assimilating the minority to create a mono-culture. While diversity may demand understanding, the conservative approach perpetuates “a predominantly homogenous white male leadership in politics, business” (Blackmore, 2006, p. 186). Correspondingly, Riehl (2000) states, “assimilation has been the dominant approach to diversity in the public schools, and equality of opportunity through homogenization has been the goal” (p. 56). Unfortunately, in many schools this assimilationist approach is still a common response to diversity (Rayner, 2009). In large part, administrators as members of the majority have actualized assimilation.

The second approach to diversity in schools is *pluralistic*. Pluralism implies coexistence, living together at the same time and the same place, and is considered legitimate when distinct groups function within the parameters set by the dominant host culture (Norton et al., 2007). Empirically, Vedøy and Møller (2007) studied the attitudes, beliefs and actions of two principals in response to diversity in their schools. Both principals believed in the value of diversity but had distinctly different approaches, one characterized by caring for the other by respect.

Embedded in the attitude of caring is a dissonance. Caring in this context is something that the majority gives and the minority passively receives implying unequal membership. This implicit discourse serves to propagate the suppression of democratic processes required in the development of diversity and serves to further the “preservation of status quo” (p. 65). Conversely, the second principal through discourses of respect models the third approach, critical multiculturalism. Of note here is that the discourse associated with *multicultural* reaches beyond simple attention to culture to encompass “all influences that contribute to the dynamic identity formation of an individual or group” (Shields & Sayani, 2005, p. 381). Moreover, multiculturalism has a more ideological basis in “freedom, justice, equality, equity and human dignity” (p. 96) that implies interdependence and interconnectedness (Norton, Gaskill & Holzman, 2007). A critically multicultural approach places significant value on social justice, freedom and democracy. Acknowledging this profusion of beliefs, values and norms is central to understanding the experience of members of the non-dominant group. Blackmore (2006) advances that diversity as a source of “societal resilience and educational vitality” (p. 183) impels us to make it a priority not only for students but also for society. If we revisit Kohl’s (1999) accusation that education fails to lead in terms of equity and justice, perhaps an authentic commitment to genuine representation and critical approaches would precipitate education’s role as orchestrator as opposed to minion.

Complexity.

As much as diversity is a reality in schools, so too is complexity. Drawing on the work of Hopper (2012), complex systems exist when the “whole is greater than the sum of the parts; the interactions and products of the interconnecting parts enables a person’s learning, as

adapting and re/forming skills and knowledge, to emerge in a way that is unique to the system” (p. 152). Schools are complex systems in part because as much as learning is guided by a curriculum, the ways in which learning actually occurs are unique to the situations, contexts and individuals who come together at any given moment to enable individual and collective learning. The absence of an event or individual does not limit learning that learning occurs differently as a result of the new and or different influences. Schools are about the adaptation and reforming of knowledge which at any given time is happening on multiple levels. Leadership is occurring in that system. Ferch and Mitchell (2001) suggest that the “world in which leaders operate is not neat and orderly; it is dynamic and often very chaotic” (p. 73). In keeping with a postmodern paradigm where learning and knowledge emerge from an unpredictable, complex array (LeGrange and Beets, 2005), I view successful leadership as the antithesis to linear, hierarchical or patriarchal. To locate one’s self in a more holistic, interconnected mindset, leaders must have “the courage to let go of the old ways, to relinquish most of what they have previously cherished, and to abandon their interpretations about what does and does not work” (Branson, 2010, p. 24). As inspiring as Branson’s words may be, abandoning firmly held hegemonic beliefs is no simple task. I hope that through this research, I will be able to offer a better understanding of how leaders are able to reimagine and enact leadership that embraces complexity to create space that not only allows them to become “inventors and discoverers” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 7) but also empowers those around them to do the same. I acknowledge that a hierarchical, linear style of leadership existed in the majority of schools I worked in. Though it is unfair for me to assume that all schools function the same way, I worked in

multiple schools in multiple countries and believe that this cross section accurately represents a common thread in K-12 education. The existence of a top-down style is problematic for a variety of reasons but perhaps most importantly is that a hierarchical model, or top down structure where individuals at the top wield the power, is based on a military model with which most teachers and students in today's schools have no direct experience. There has been no significant military action in the life span of the majority of today's teachers and students that required substantial membership, as was the case at the time of industrialization. There are few primary organizations that deliberately or intentionally function using hierarchical models but many who do so because that is the most significant historical model available. I cannot say unequivocally that school communities are more complex today; I have no direct experience with schools in years past. But I do believe that the current era of unparalleled access to information and globalization makes this world and subsequently education, complex in ways that we have not previously seen and therefore must meaningfully address.

Trombly's (2014) description of complexity emphasizes a whole instead of the sum of parts.

Complexity emphasizes that complex systems should be regarded, not as the sums of their constituent parts, but as networked wholes wherein cause and effect relationships – the “spirit's connections” about which Goethe (1832/1961) writes – are neither linear nor random, and are anything but inconsequential. (Trombly, 2014, p. 46)

He also emphasizes complexity as sites for growth. Both views are key to leadership practice. Considering education and in turn leadership from the perspective of complexity

requires, for some, a shift in thinking. Wheatley (2006) says “we inhabit a world that co-evolves as we interact with it. This world is impossible to pin down, constantly changing, and infinitely more interesting than anything we ever imagined” (p. 9). My choice to acknowledge complexity is a simple one; to me it makes sense not just in relation to the constructs previously discussed in this work, but more importantly in what I have seen and been part of in schools. For this work, I am only beginning to understand the role that complexity theory plays in understanding learning and leading, but at present the aspect of complexity theory most akin to this research is the notion of emergence and deep learning. Emergence is important because it represents an authentic view of learning and leading where the new ideas are not fixed in terms of binaries of right versus wrong, instead new ideas reference evolving understandings generated from new insights by artists, authors, and scientists (Davis & Sumara, 2012). Deep learning, in contrast to surface learning that is often procedural and extrinsically motivated, is created by “the excitement of knowing more deeply, by uncovering or creating new layers of insight, by taking tasks beyond minimal requirements into spaces of explorative possibility” (Davis & Sumara, 2012, p. 34).

In reference to leadership, the reality that I understand based on my time in schools is one where in order for a leader to influence learning, s/he “must constantly adjust and adapt the process to the emerging, ever-changing reality of a particular educational system and its environment” (Reigeluth, 2004, p. 8). Leaders must be able to learn within these complex systems in ways that are both emergent and deep in order to be effective.

Leadership Theory: Views of How to Lead

Many frameworks for leadership exist and are advocated for, too many to delve into in the context of this chapter. In this discussion, my intent is not to advance any one concept or definition of leadership as being superior to another. Instead, I provide a brief overview of the discussion of leadership when referenced with diversity and complexity as opposed to defining leadership. My primary reason for avoiding a set definition of leadership is that by doing so, leadership can become limited to that definition. Given “the nature of how they are organized, of the work in which they are engaged, and the fact that they are populated by, and exist to serve, human beings” (Trombly, 2014, p. 43) schools and education are complex. To reduce the leadership that occurs within that complexity is counterintuitive. However, to understand my perspective of leadership, a discussion of how I conceptualize leadership as it is relative to this study is necessary. I also wish to address that in this discussion of leadership, attention is given to principals as leaders. In part this is because there is a great deal of leadership research that focuses on the principal. Though I have explained earlier that neither the co-inquirers, consider leadership synonymous with a title like principal or administrator, nor I cannot exclude or ignore people leading from those positions.

First, Sergiovanni (2000) advances *authentic leadership* where the purpose acknowledges that leading in and for diversity is based on multiple meanings that are socially constructed. Such a purpose acknowledges that authenticity is built on the recognition of the unique values, beliefs, needs and wishes of local professionals and citizens who best know the conditions needed for a particular group of students in a particular context (Sergiovanni, 2000). The aforementioned view of leadership is in line with *values-informed leadership* which

“acknowledges and accommodates, in an integrative way, the legitimate needs of individuals, groups, organizations, communities and cultures – not just the organizational perspectives” (Begley, 2006, p. 570).

Shields (2004) puts forth *transformative leadership* as being “deeply rooted in moral and ethical values in a social context” (p. 113). Furthermore, such leadership places greater emphasis on leadership as movement towards a desired outcome as opposed to management as the maintenance of existing conditions (Astin & Astin, 2000). This conception also decentralizes the individual as leader and instead emphasizes leadership as a collaborative response. Shields and Sayani (2005) advocate *cross-cultural leadership* emphasizing the contexts of leadership where the term culture is applied in its broadest interpretation as “polytextual, multivoiced, and multiscripted” (p. 384) and diversity is innately present in learning spaces. Cross-cultural leadership underplays diversity as a problem in need of solving and reframes diversity in terms of opportunity and possibility. Key action requires leaders to stand firm in fostering understanding of diversity and translating those understandings into “respectful action” (p. 384).

Ryan (2007) advocates a category of leadership that is *inclusive*; literature in this area “promotes participation of others besides administrators in governance processes” (p. 93) but goes beyond the simplistic interpretation of inclusion as “integrating the excluded, marginalized and problematic” (Ryan, 2006a, p. 7). Hierarchical structures of leadership that maintain or reinforce injustice are replaced by symmetrical relationships intended to overcome divisions. Rayner (2009) offers three principles to form a structure for inclusive leadership:

- An *integrative principle* of leadership facilitating the collection, synthesis and use of knowledge acquisition and management.
- A *relational principle* of leadership interacting as mediation between structure and agency. This reflects activity focused upon ways and means and is always situated in contexts defined by purpose, people and evolving *praxis*.
- A *functional principle* of leadership. As a process, leadership requires continuous learning, adaptation, instrumental application and management of knowledge as part of its operation. (p. 439)

Through these principles, leaders seek balance as well as reflections of “culture, ethos and milieu” (Rayner, 2009, p. 439). When used intentionally, Rayner’s principles contribute to shaping common purpose and ensuring understanding. Other examples of leadership included in the category are emancipatory, participative, teacher, and critical leadership. Though each has different foci, the common thread between them is recognition that not all men, women and children are able to take part in governance and decision-making; “many are excluded by virtue of the more global class, race and gender relationships in which they participate” (Ryan, 2007, p. 93).

Branson (2009; 2010) describes wise leadership where intuition and instinct are valued yet have been ignored by leadership theory. His view is couched in leadership in its response to change.

In times of relentless and indiscriminate change, people expect their leaders to provide them with some sense of optimism, security, guidance, purpose, and meaning. They want their leaders to understand their specific predicament and to act accordingly with

wisdom, empathy, and expertise. Today, people require their leaders to act so as to not produce harm but rather to do good, to honour others, to take positive stands, and to behave in ways that clearly show that their own self-interests are not the driving motivation behind their leadership. (Branson, 2009, p. 2)

Schools are consistently sites of change relating to curricula, policy and personnel. Wheatley (2006) asserts that the human species is far less amenable to change than other species. Assuming this to be true, the role of the leader is essential in embracing and successfully negotiating change. Branson (2009) notes the typical position in response to change is defensive. By taking such a stance, the leader adopts one of three responses: do nothing in order to avoid prompting further resistance; distance one's self in an effort to avoid responsibility or mandate compliance by using one's power to assert control and acquiescence. Disappointingly, I have seen all three of these reactions far more than I have seen the "courage, resilience, confidence, honesty and forthrightness to provide transparent channels of open communication" (p. 17). Fullan (2005) refers to leaders able to embody these characteristics as "systems thinkers in action" (p. x); that systems thinking embraces schools as complex entities. Further, relationships are central to those same systems.

Building on a wealth of research on relationality and leadership, Uhl-Bien (2006) advances relational leadership as a process outside of the traditional unidirectional dynamic of leader as captain or commander. This is a dramatic departure from the belief that being a leader requires an individual to assume or be recognized in a defined position of leadership. Relational leadership also requires that we view leadership as a relational term that "identifies a relationship in which some people are able to persuade others to adopt new values, attitudes

and goals, and to exert effort on behalf of those values, attitudes, and goals” (Hogg, 2005, p. 53). Wheatley (2006) shares the belief that anyone hoping to lead can neither ignore nor remove one’s self from the “the web of relationships through which all work is accomplished” (p. 165). Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) add that

Relational leadership requires a way of engaging with the world in which the leader holds herself/himself as always in relation with, and therefore morally accountable to others; recognizes the inherently polyphonic and heteroglossic nature of life; and engages in relational dialogue. (p. 1425)

Sergiovanni (2000), Shields (2004), Astin and Astin (2000), Ryan (2006a; 2006b; 2007), Branson (2010) and Uhl-Bien (2006) all approach leadership from an ideological stance that affirms the importance of uniqueness and is responsive to the inimitable needs of complex organizations and the diverse groups that dwell within them (Chemers & Murphy, 1995). Nevertheless, the pragmatic verity of schooling and the lives of those who operate in it remain at odds with these ideologies. Educational administration struggles to break away from the primarily male, white, middle class dominance of leadership that advances “white privilege, oppression and racism” (Lopez, 2003, p. 71) linear thinking and decision-making, leaving members underserved. The reality of diversity and complexity in schools requires leaders to rise to the responsibility of addressing values conflicts in order to respond and adapt (Lumby & Coleman, 2007).

The Influence of Emotion/Values

Blair (2002) presents a perspective that falls within Rottman’s (2007) view of leadership as traditionally being gendered, individualistic, and sexualized. Blair discusses the

contradictions of expectations placed on head teachers in Britain. Drawing on research commissioned by the U.K. Department for Education and Employment and conducted by the Open University, Blair demonstrates that Head teachers feel pressure to develop policies that reflect new ways of thinking and working removed from the authoritarian position as a 'strong' leader, in response to multiethnic contexts, but the straightforward writing of the policies does not ensure the enactment of the policies is guileless. The execution of policies belies the "collaborative, democratic philosophy that might underpin the school's ethos" (Blair, 2002, p. 184). The contradiction in Blair's work is in the necessity of head teachers to adopt a 'hard', or rational-technical approach necessary to change overt and subtle forms of opposition yet also demonstrate a 'soft' approach conscious of "a social and pastoral environment that nurtured a desire to learn in students whose experiences in school as well as in the wider society encouraged rebellion and disaffection" (p. 184).

Beatty (2009) speaks to the uncertainty created by emotional responses in leadership. Principals feel pressured to seem "in control and emotionally detached" (p. 156) yet such a stance fails to allow them to fully integrate with those who require an authentic response generated by the needs of constituents and not imposed upon them. Beatty (2009) reminds us that while emotion can be vexatious, it is imperative to leadership because it changes perceptions of both work and self. As a result, leading becomes "as much about acting so as to not produce harm but rather to do good, to honour others, to take positive stands, and to behave in ways that clearly show that their own self-interests are not the driving motivation" (Branson, 2010, p. 4). In Begley's (2006) research on the valuation processes of school principal, he points out that values can contradict professional expectations, resulting in tension.

Our personal values as well as those of the profession, organization, community and society are not necessarily consistent or compatible with each other. As a result, these influences and values derived from the various arenas of our environment can generate inconsistencies and conflicts. (Begley, 2006, p. 578).

Those contradictions perpetuate an unmitigated tradition of mistrust in leadership (Beatty, 2009). Begley (2006) explains that because ethics, principles and values are subject to multiple interpretations, their application will vary significantly from one context to another. The reality of school leadership demands attention and response to the value conflicts that are created by the collision and intersection of different communities (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). Despite multiple interpretations, school leadership comes from a decidedly middle-class Euro-American mindset that overestimates its value outside of that group; it is a decidedly emic perspective. Failing to examine how the contradictions emerge and why they emerge contributes to the tensions faced by leaders and constituents.

The Pressure to Conform

The pressure of uniformity, sameness or conformity, as mentioned earlier, is a significant theme worthy of further discussion. Blair (2002) contends that school leaders have a propensity to view difference homogeneously, drawing on the example that South Asian students are often considered as one group despite distinctions between “religion, language and social class” (p. 180). Walker and Quong (1998) assert that school leaders are expected to adapt to meet the global challenges of value differences demanded by diverse school population, yet they must also respond to the conservative organizational demands of “standardized curriculum, national testing, and various accountability mechanisms” (p. 87) as

well as the orthodox expectations of school boards; an unavoidable paradox results from the contradiction between difference and sameness.

In this global era, nations throughout the developing world find themselves "copying" values and associated behaviors from Western countries. This adoption of so-called "global values" occurs despite important cultural differences between Western Judeo-Christian cultures and those of Asia and the Third World. At an organizational level, pressures toward cultural uniformity reveal themselves in beliefs, assumptions, and actions that treat one cultural perspective as more valid and appropriate than others.

(Walker & Quong, 1998, p. 82-83)

The resulting pressures towards conformity sabotage a school leader's ability and in some cases desire to respond to "new ways of leading, learning, and working in schools" (p.84).

In Oplatka's (2004) review of studies and commentaries in refereed journals of comparative education and educational administration, he notes that literature relating to educational leadership and the principalship is slanted towards the west despite the varying educational systems around the world. The literature subsequently views leadership through a decidedly Euro-centric western lens that does not adequately address the dissimilarities of a western ideology and that of other approaches (Oplatka, 2004, p. 48). Similarly, Rottman (2006) asserts that how educational leadership is conceptualized and acted upon is in large part due to "hegemonic masculinity and heterosexism" (p. 3). Blount (2003) offers the following explanation:

...school superintendents existed in figurative relationship to teachers as husbands did to wives. In Victorian era marriages, husbands handled financial resources in the home

and governed their families. Wives managed the day-to-day affairs of the household as they demurred to their husbands. In similar fashion, superintendents managed school funds and directed the labours of teachers. (p. 9)

The philosophical pressure to lead in the midst of diversity and complexity contradicts a wider societal expectation of what it means to lead. Based on data from a Canadian qualitative pilot study describing how schools respond to the changing demographics of the contemporary world, Goddard and Hart (2007) noted a decidedly assimilationist approach to the leadership of schools. The principals interviewed contended that “all students were treated the same” (p. 15) regardless of culture or ethnicity. Those same principals purposefully “resisted any attempts to recognize diversity and difference” (p. 16). This stands in stark opposition to Branson’s (2010) call for leadership that is “expert and intuitive, practical and thoughtful, purposeful and empathetic, strategic and flexible” (p. 5).

Implications for Diverse, Complex Leadership

Thus far, the literature reviewed here indicates that school leaders respond to diversity and complexity by retreating into cultural norms, sameness and traditional approaches. Throughout the literature, little empirical evidence exists to describe *how* school leaders effectively or authentically respond and/or adapt to the diversity and complexity of the contemporary world. Instead, the literature suggests that leaders do little to critically interrogate their role in perpetuating inequalities and injustices as well as antiquated traditional approaches. Branson (2009) suggests that this lack of attention can be partially attributed to the diminution or disregard of the subjective, intuitive voice as a guide. Too often,

leaders are taught to rely heavily on rationality as the basis for decision-making but the complex situations that arise in schools are far from rational or formulaic.

Significant research focuses on the tensions as school leadership and cultural diversity converge; less research exists to indicate that school leaders are successfully creating culturally responsive learning communities. Nonetheless, several scholarly studies point school leaders in the direction of authentic practice that is responsive to diversity. McAllister and Jordan-Irvine (2000) characterize cultural competence in terms of educating others about cultural values and how an individual can influence people's expectations. Gudykunst and Kim (1984) describe cultural competence as having affective, behavioural and cognitive traits that are open to ideas beyond that of one culture as well as possessing the desire and ability to commit to unity and difference in equal measure. If we accept that diversity is the norm in schools, principals must be expected to lead "without marginalizing or alienating important parts of the similarly diverse school community" (p. 15); understanding school culture and demonstrating cultural competence as well as recognizing the impact of each on school leadership is key. Because leadership is a "socially constructed process" (Goddard & Hart, 2007, p. 15), it stands to reason that socio-cultural influences values and norms shape human behaviour. In the following section, I draw on examples found in the literature that offer insight into how leaders value difference, engage in dialogue and undertake reflection.

Valuing difference.

Walker and Quong (1998) and Goddard and Hart (2007) emphasize bringing difference to the forefront; by valuing difference we assist people in seeing the validity of difference. A sense of empowerment is necessary to open oneself to difference. Once that opening occurs, a

sense of comfort grows from learning and working with others of difference (Walker, 1994). The result is an increased desire to learn in schools that leads to improvement in practice. Of greatest importance is the necessary departure from simply recognizing difference. Responsive leaders who are committed to valuing difference interrogate the beliefs and values that shape school practices and use them as “the basis for learning new ways of working” (Walker & Quong, 1998, p. 84). The merit of valuing difference is difficult to dispute but what do leaders need to do to shift the established hegemonic thinking in regard to difference? Goddard and Hart (2007) believe that leaders must be taught about diverse values and the implications for how those values inform expectations and influence action. One obvious venue for teaching leaders to value diversity without perpetuating marginalization is through post-secondary education. In British Columbia, an expectation for administrators in schools is to have or be in the process of completing a master’s degree in school leadership; however coursework that theorizes the recognition or importance of diversity or that state that schools are complex is not enough to develop the perspective and understanding necessary to successfully navigate either.

Valuing complexity.

Schools are complex systems because of the way they are structured, the nature of the learning and the populations that are served within them. Wheatley (2006) also includes the “energetic nature of meaning” (p. 152) as a further example of complexity. This requires us to abandon the need to ‘train’ individuals or dictate terms in place of embracing a collaboratively educative process, “life demands that I participate with things as they unfold, to expect to be surprised, to honour the mystery of it, and to see what emerges” (p. 153). In an era of hyper-

individualization, to embrace a process orientation that involves others we must also understand and value the relationships that are created through engagement in process. Education and schools will continue to be built upon relationships; the quality of those relationships and the primacy of them are what require greater attention. Branson (2009) argues that given the complex nature of education, leaders need to be able to “enable and encourage positive and constructive interpersonal interaction throughout the organisation” (p. 118). Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005) offer *sensing*, *presencing* and *realizing* as skills or actions necessary for leaders to engage in complex systems. Sensing is about inner knowing where “the person’s more informed, cognisant, attentive, and vigilant awareness enables the production of a unique and comprehensive, but intrinsic, perspective of the whole situation” (Branson, 2009, p. 121). Presencing is similar to mindfulness in that it requires the leader to suspend and redirect attention so that perception emerges from within the wholeness of the living system. In other words, it requires the leader to let inner knowing emerge and recognize that knowing as valid (Senge et.al. 2005). Realizing is the dynamic process of co-creation of meaning that enables leaders to “adapt, create, and progress” (Branson, 2009, p. 120). Through realizing, leaders are better able to “see new possibilities, envisage new ways, or adopt new expectations” (p. 120).

Engaging in Critical Dialogue

Begley (2006), Ryan (2007), and Walker and Quong (1998) agree that through critical dialogue, space is created for school leaders and stakeholders to reconcile “tragically persistent values conflicts and breakdowns in communication between and within our societies” (Begley, 2006, p. 572) and to move beyond silence (Ryan, 2007). Failure to do so means that

unexamined values and beliefs are either applied randomly or ignored which becomes detrimental to both the democratic process and the interconnectivity of that democracy. Engaging in critical dialogue leads to improved “knowledge, insight, or sensitivity” (p. 343) enabling broader, more enhanced, global perspectives. Walker and Quong offer a specific strategy to achieve critical dialogue: *double-loop learning*. In conventional *single-loop learning*, decision-making extends from the need to have stated goals or objectives; if the need is addressed by a resource or strategy then it is used. In double-loop learning, the decision is weighed against values or “what the school exists to achieve” (p. 101) before change is undertaken which ensures that any approach, strategy or innovation is not uncritically considered and adopted. In schools where diversity is valued and complexity recognized, the needs of those constituents weigh heavily in decision-making because critical dialogue is taken up.

Promoting Reflection

Begley (2006), Begley and Stefkovich (2004), Bruner (2008) and McDonald (2009) advocate for active and systematic reflection by school leaders as fundamental to success in leadership. The antiquated practice of emulating the values of other principals or leaders viewed as experts does little to promote the responsive, relational thinking necessary for fostering “meaningful and positive change” (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009, p. 4). Ignorance, deficit thinking or admissions of colour blindness do not do enough to transform or lead schools. When administrators make declarations of colour blindness, the overt message is that as members of the human race we are all the same, a hegemonic claim that members of the dominant class

have the comfort of asserting (Shields, 2004). McDonald (2009) maintains that school leaders must painstakingly examine their own biases, to which Begley (2006) is in agreement.

It is not enough for school leaders to merely emulate the values of other principals currently viewed as experts. Leaders in schools must become reflective and authentic in their leadership practices. There is no reliable catalogue of correct values that school leaders can adopt as some sort of silver bullet solution for the dilemmas of administration. School leadership situations are much too context-bound to permit this kind of quick fix. School leaders need to be reflective practitioners. (p. 584).

Begley (2006) also articulates that in order to understand and respond to the “value orientations of others” (p. 575), the school leader must first understand their own “values and ethical predispositions” (p. 575) as well as their motivators which is directly linked to identity. This process must be coupled with the active development of an appreciation for “how values reflect underlying human motivations and shape subsequent attitudes, speech and actions” (p. 575).

As I stated earlier in this chapter, my intent was to focus on the interplay between the role of leader and leadership theory as the two relate to diversity and complexity in schools. As I have shown in this chapter, leadership theory exists that supports the value and necessity for shifting collective understanding of leadership away from the captain of the ship metaphor towards more authentic, transformative, inclusive, relational styles of leadership that is better suited towards the diversity and complexity that prevails in schools. Much more accomplished scholars than myself have established this and while their work was not part of my graduate

study in leadership I believe such theory to be more common in current coursework. However, such theory has done little to impact the structure of leadership in schools where in my experience the hierarchies remain strong because leadership is not exclusive to position nor is the act of leadership restricted to only those who have undertaken graduate study. Leadership in schools happens much more organically in multiple forms, from varied perspectives and in contexts that theory cannot predict. Leadership is an experience that is emotional, contextual and relational. As each of these and other factors intersect, the commonalities become more discrete thus the need to study individuals experience of and with leadership which is the focus of this dissertation. The next chapter is a discussion of collaborative inquiry, the methodology I have chosen to investigate the experience of leadership. In subsequent chapters, I share the findings and analysis derived from the collaborative inquiry that we engaged in.

Chapter Five: Methodology

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world... these practices transform the world... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2004) contextualize existence in the world as interconnected therefore making it difficult to remove or isolate experiences. It is precisely because of our interconnected existence in the world that our perceptions are so important. For research to have value and validity, the perceptions of the researcher should not usurp those of the participants, but each should contribute with the other in the co-construction of meaning. The idea of co-construction is important given the educational context of this research because education is based in relationality.

Methodology: Collaborative inquiry

Collaborative inquiry emerged from Reason's (1988) participative human inquiry and is strongly tied to Heron's (1996) cooperative inquiry. Featured in collaborative inquiry is a purposeful need to maintain flexibility in developing the inquiry as it emerges so as to allow for co-inquirers to have maximum potential, not just for participation but also for ownership of the process and results. Bray et al. (2000) define collaborative inquiry as "a process consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of importance to them" (p. 6). Byrne-Jiménez and Orr (2007) further characterize collaborative inquiry as being informed in large part by lived experience as a "way of studying a problem (that) leads to the creation of new knowledge, new courses of action, and the

empowerment of participants” (p. 43). Heron (1996) states that in order for change in practice to come to fruition, collaborative inquiry should foster the development of *informative inquiry skills* as well as *transformative inquiry skills*. The former develop skills around information gathering while the latter is the site where understanding of context and meaning is generated. Embedded in both skills is the meaning of *knowledge* which, in the case of this research is: *experiential*, derived from interactions with people, places and things; *practical*, developed through practice of doing something; *propositional*, accepted knowledge as well as the theories; and *presentational*, the ways in which we choose to express understanding (Byrne-Jiménez & Orr, 2007).

Beyond the descriptors and characterization above, the rationale for my choice of methodology is that collaborative inquiry is research “*with* people not *on* them or *about* them” (Heron, 1996, p. 19). Education and, in turn, schools are relational in nature (Giles, 2011). Between teacher and student, the interaction is relational as the two actively engage in the construction of learning opportunities (Giles, 2011). Ideally, this underlying relationality should also apply in the interactions between leader and teacher, leader and staff, leader and student, leader and parent, recognizing that leader is not necessarily distinct from other roles. Such a synergic approach stands against the problematic notion of the educational leader as one who controls, orders and demands as characterized by Rottman (2006) and Beatty (2009) earlier in this dissertation. In earlier chapters, I presented a view that hierarchical leadership is common in schools. That view of the structure of leadership mirrors a positivistic research position where the researcher studies others without deference to creating a sense of community within the research process. I have come to understand that a sense of community does not

always come from the pursuit of an answer or product, it comes from engaging in the process. Collaborative inquiry provides the framework for a process orientation towards generating understanding.

According to Bray et al. (2000), collaborative inquiry loosely follows four phases: forming, creating, acting and meaning making. In table 1, I briefly outline each phase as it occurred for this research. These phases are informed by Heron's (1996) work with the forefather of collaborative inquiry, cooperative inquiry. The "defining features" (p. 2) offered by Heron (1996) inform the cycles of action and reflection that occur in the phases of collaborative inquiry. First, cooperative inquiry requires an intentional interplay between reflection and making sense on the one hand, and experience and action on the other. Much of the initial discussion of my participants with me was based in reflecting on our past and present experiences with and of leadership. Included in those reflections were explanations and discussions of how our understandings shaped our beliefs and actions about leadership as well as how our understandings shaped what we believed about others leadership. Second, cooperative inquiry requires explicit attention, through agreed procedures, to the validity of the inquiry and its findings. As practicing leaders we situated ourselves less around traditionally quantitative notions of validity instead aligning ourselves with verisimilitude. Referring back to Garman's (1996) questions, *does the work represent human experiences with sufficient detail so that the portrayals can be recognisable as 'truly conceivable experience'* and *does this research render accounts that readers not only read but feel and believe?* We in effect were able to confirm this for ourselves because the accounts shared both resonated and represented our experiences as leaders as well as others with whom we had worked. Third, cooperative inquiry

requires the integration of presentational knowing through the use of aesthetic, expressive forms, propositional knowing through words and concepts, and practical knowing, that which has been experienced. In addition to being informative about the topic of the research, the experience should also be transformative where any aspect of the inquiry is subject to an awakening or awareness (Heron, 1996). Ideally, a transformed awareness leads to action “where people change their way of being and doing and relating in their world” (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 180). Though I cannot say definitely that our discussions resulted in transformed action, I say with confidence that our perceptions and understandings of leadership did change because of how our discussions evolved and how co-inquirers raised questions of themselves and each other during our meetings.

Table 1 Phases for the study of leadership praxis

	Phases for Collaborative Inquiry (Bray et al. 2000)	Emphasis	Actions	Length of time per phase	Meetings
Pre-inquiry		Participant recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email invitations Present inquiry to members of the Network for Performance Schools and members of the CSML cohort Open informational meeting 	6 weeks	
Phase One	FORMING a collaborative inquiry group	Orienting the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introductions and shared purpose Group goals Ground rules for collaborative work Meeting schedule and support 	4 weeks	Meeting # 1
Phase Two	CREATING conditions for group learning	Individual reflection and sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on research Questions as guide Share personal story as starting point to frame inquiry 	8 weeks	Meeting #2
Phase Three	ACTING on the inquiry question(s)	Collaborative reflection & interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual sharing & questioning Revisit the research questions (brainstorming, re-phrasing) Agree to design for phase four Practice dialogue and reflection 	8 weeks	Meetings #3 - #6
Phase Four	MEANING-MAKING by constructing group knowledge	Research Findings & Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capturing and understanding the experience Communicating to the public 	4 weeks	Meetings #7-9
Post-inquiry			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'putting it all together' Confirmation with participants 		

Note: Frequency of meetings was determined by the needs of the group.

Pre-inquiry phase.

During this phase, the focus was participant recruitment. Using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007), I initiated contact by email with individuals currently working in the field of education who occupy positions or self identify as educational leaders. The email briefly outlined the nature and purpose of the study as well as the level of commitment required. Initially I contacted specific individuals who had been identified by colleagues as individuals potentially interested in this research. I asked those individuals to recommend colleagues or peers who might be interested. Based on those recommendations, I contacted subsequent potential participants until I had nine interested individuals. I sought representation from different levels of leadership experience: individuals with less than five years of leadership experience in schools, individuals with 5-15 years of leadership experience in schools, and more than 15 years of leadership experience in schools. Based on the response, I was prepared to address a meeting of the network of Performance Schools to further recruit participants as well as speak to individuals currently enrolled in the graduate programs in Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria but this step proved unnecessary. Once I had nine participants, I facilitated a face-to-face meeting to further detail the nature of the study. During this meeting, I went into greater detail about the requirements of participation, benefits of participation, the timeline for participation.

All of our meetings were conducted as a group and recorded using free recording software downloaded onto an iPad. My choice to use this means of recording our meetings was for the ease of use but also because the iPad was a device that people were familiar with and that did not interfere with the nature of our discussion. Our sessions took place in various

locations at the University of Victoria; the iPad allowed for ease of recording of our sessions because of its portability and reliability. The first four meetings were transcribed by an impartial individual while the final four meetings remained as audio recordings only. My decision not to transcribe the final four meetings was deliberate. The audio recordings allowed for a degree of connection to the data recorded because the voices of the co-inquirers could literally be heard in ways that did not exist in the transcribed data from previous meetings. Also, in our collective analysis of our first four meetings, each co-inquirer identified salient points. For the purpose of writing this dissertation, having written transcripts of the initial meetings made accessing the specific information identified by the co-inquirers easier and more accurate. The information represented throughout the upcoming chapters is taken from those meetings. In some cases, I have selected verbatim quotes from the transcripts of the meetings to illustrate an idea or to provide the reader with a less filtered account of the co-inquirers voice.

Before proceeding with the explanation of the different phases, I wish to note that the following sections focus on the general process that we followed for this collaborative inquiry. To help the reader focus on the findings and analysis of this collaborative inquiry, I have included more specific detail reflective of our collective focus on leadership in chapters five and six.

Phases one - forming.

In phase one, the focus was on orienting the group (Bray et al., 2000). In this phase, I took on the role of initiator with the expectation that my role would change to that of co-

inquirer as the inquiry progressed. Because this research and subsequent research questions are grounded in my own experience as an educator, I shared this experience with the group by reading and explaining the story that I opened this proposal with to provide participants with insight into my motivations. I invited participants to share their vision of the inquiry. Bray et al. (2000) recommend that in this phase, participants be encouraged to share assumptions about their motivations for participation and potential benefits they hope to experience. I offered an initial structure for our meetings with a focus on three goals: 1) creating an authentic learning experience that grounded in our experiences where every participant had equal footing; 2) viewing our experiences through the lens created by research questions as those questions evolve; and 3) “establishing ground rules for collaboration consistent with the central tenet of working *with* people” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 61).

I invited participants to share their stories, revisiting the initial research questions as the lens through which we initially view these problems, recognizing that the research questions may, and would likely evolve, as the inquiry progressed. Logistically, it was necessary to determine the physical context for the inquiry (Bray et al., 2000). For the initial meeting, I secured space at the University of Victoria but indicated that the location of further meetings would be to the needs and desires of the group. Bray et al. (2000) suggest consideration of the “spirit of the place” (p. 58) where “the space should provide a ‘psychological space’ that enables the group to separate itself from the outside cares and concerns” (p. 59). Following the first meeting, which took place in a seminar room in the MacLaurin Building at the University of Victoria, our next five meetings took place in the faculty lounge in that same building; the final two meetings took place at the Student Union Building also at the University of Victoria. Co-

inquirers agreed to the location prior to each meeting. The initial meeting was attended by five co-inquirers. After orienting the group to the purpose of the study and explaining the collaborative inquiry process, I asked the co-inquirers to share some of their history with leadership and why they were interested in participating in this research. The co-inquirers revealed the various leadership roles they had assumed and offered brief insight into the nature of those roles, most of the leadership roles identified initially were positional roles like Head Teacher or Team Leader. The co-inquirers offered tentative insight into their motivation for participating, the most common reason was to understand themselves better as leaders. All of the meetings were recorded using free recording software on an iPad. There was no obtrusive microphone to distract the co-inquirers or that acted as a reminder that they were being recorded. Using such a tool helped to contribute to a relaxed, friendly open atmosphere. I offered to email the audio recordings of each meeting to the co-inquirers but in the initial three phases of this collaborative meetings, the co-inquirers declined.

Phase two – creating.

During this phase, we met as a group twice. To further facilitate a collaborative process, each of the co-inquirers was given a journal to record any thoughts or ideas. These were not shared because they did not get used to the extent that I had hoped. In providing the journals, I had hoped to provide a second space in addition to our group meetings where the co-inquirers could individually record and make sense of their emerging leadership thoughts and ideas with the goal that these ideas would be shared with the group at our subsequent meetings. In retrospect, I wish that I had pushed the use of these in greater detail because the journals would have been a rich source of data. I speculate that their lack of use was not because of the

ineffectiveness of the journal as a tool, but that co-inquirers did not have the time to meaningfully devote to them. For the co-inquirers, I believe that the meetings were, to them, a rich enough space for them to engage in and share their emerging ideas about leadership. The first meeting was attended by three of the four co-inquirers, Andrew, Chelsea and myself. The second meeting included Alexandra as well. These three individuals and I remained for the duration of the research while Tamara, who attended the phase one meeting, dropped out for personal reasons. Once the inquiry group was formed, we examined the research questions and came to a consensus as to the meaning of the questions and whether the original questions were still relevant. Bray et al. (2000) suggest a process of brainstorming to illuminate the qualitative, experiential and cultural basis for the research questions. In light of the re-interpretation and possible revision of the research questions, co-inquirers examined the questions by engaging in a process of shared reflection. This process was unstructured in that co-inquirers shared their reflections most often as they connected to the ideas or insights shared by one of the other co-inquirers. For example, when Chelsea shared her motivation for enrolling in her master's program, she introduced the importance of connectedness or of having the *pulse of the school*. This led Andrew to share insight into his beliefs about how a master's degree fosters interest and develops thinking skills. I offered insight into how my school mentor, who supervised the practical component of my master's degree, and I differed in the philosophy and practice of leadership.

In addition to explanations of collaborative inquiry, I explained to the co-inquirers that prompts or questions might be offered to guide future discussion. The intention in providing these was not to dictate the terms but provide participants with access points. Suggested

questions and prompts were derived from the discussions we had and the interests of the group. We did not have a formal agenda for any meeting. Instead we allowed topics or ideas of interest brought forward by co-inquirers to be the prompt for the beginnings of our meetings. The first meeting was an exception to this process. Our initial prompt to begin our discussion during the first meeting was to share an artifact that was representative in some way of their experience with leadership that co-inquirers were willing to share. I began the discussion by offering the image of the *Mongolian Monster* (Figure 1) using it as a launching point to explain my motivation for studying leadership. I also shared the pictures seen in Figures 6 and 7 of my grandparents alternately sitting at my grandmother's desk in her classroom.



Figure 5 *My grandmother - the teacher* is an image that was shared with co-inquirers during phase two of this dissertation.

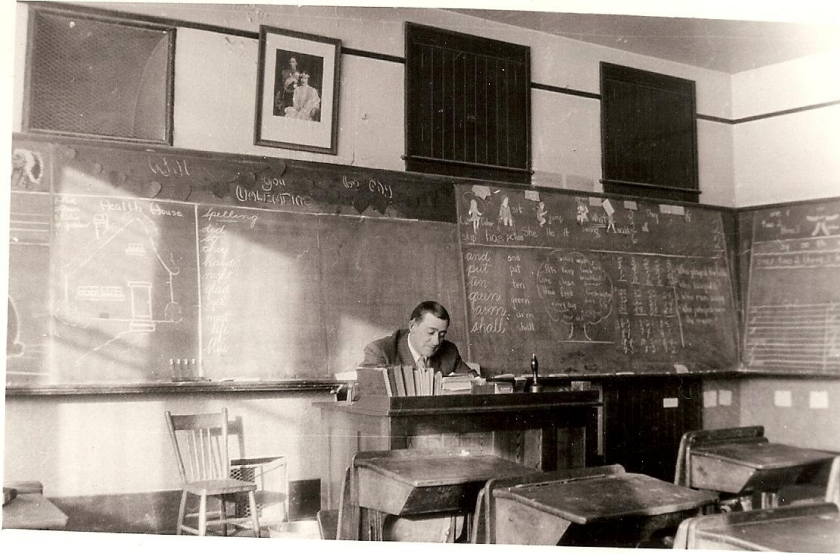


Figure 6 *My grandfather - not the teacher* is an image that was shared with co-inquirers during phase two of this dissertation.

My intention in sharing these images was to help set a tone that was both comfortable and personal so that co-inquirers could feel safe about revealing their thoughts and ideas. In revealing to the other co-inquirers, insight into my history, I hoped to encourage them to do the same. The artifact that Andrew brought was a small wooden carving of a salmon that was a reminder of one of his early experiences with a strong mentor. Chelsea brought a scrapbook that she had completed in one of her Masters courses. The scrapbook was part of a course assignment that required her to look back on her history as a school leader. When shared in our group, each one of these pieces allowed the co-inquirers to speak to a particular memory or memories that were personal examples of their individually forged ideas of leadership and the roots of those ideas.

Phase three – acting.

During phase three, the focus was engaging in repeated cycles of action and reflection based on insights and experiences brought to the surface by each co-inquirer. Also in this phase the roles of group members were firmly collaborative where the participants including myself became positioned as co-inquirers so that all members had equal ownership over not just the inquiry but of the process we engaged in to explore the meaning of leadership. I did not have to set the tone or begin meetings with a question for us to respond to because our conversations occurred quite naturally without prompts or the necessity of a form leader to guide the discussion. Though I had a different sense of ownership over the research because our meetings were the data for my research, I was a co-inquirer. Questions that I posed during our meetings were not preset interview questions, they were questions posed in the moment based on the nature and content of the conversations. The other co-inquirers asked questions similarly. Positioning of group members as equal, models a style of educational leadership that places greater emphasis on leadership as movement towards a desired outcome as opposed to management as the maintenance of existing conditions (Astin & Astin, 2000). This conception also decentralizes the individual as leader and instead emphasizes leadership as a collaborative response. Given that successful collaborative inquiry groups are leaderless (Bray et al. 2000) in structure and form, the group determined the direction of the inquiry as it emerged in our collaborative inquiry group. Bray et al. (2000) advocate having a rotating facilitator for the group who monitors discussion, timing, and progress (Bray et al. 2000). We did not do this; in each discussion there was a natural flow that did not require mediation.

Phase four – meaning making.

At the heart of phase four was the construction of meaning acknowledging that the purpose was discovery not validation (Bray et al, 2000). The value of meaning making in collaborative inquiry is found in the enriched insights generated through interpretation and re-interpretation when experiences are shared. New meaning continually emerges as the co-inquirers engage in repeated cycles of action and reflection. Bray et al. (2000) suggest the use of audio/video recordings, learning journals or other qualitative record keeping during this phase to capture the group's experience. As mentioned previously, all of our meetings were audio recorded to provide a source of data that could be revisited by the co-inquirers at any time but also to provide direct evidence of the ideas, insights and themes that emerged throughout this inquiry. The form of analysis to be used was determined by the collaborative inquiry group. Bray et al. (2000) suggest storytelling, dialogue, reflection and other modes of expression such as pictures or metaphors. Heron (1996) refers to this stage as *making sense* which can be done through presentational means, nonverbal art forms, and propositional means, verbal forms used to "categorize, analyse and theorize" (p. 90) or combinations thereof. In addition to our conversations, we relied on collaborative, visual process akin to *Open Space Technology* (OST) as our main strategy to make sense of the ideas and insights that we were sharing.

During this phase, participants engaged in individual analysis. I emailed each of the previous audio recordings to the participants for them to listen to. We tasked ourselves with listening for salient points that would be shared with the group. Once each of the co-inquirers had an opportunity to review the audio recordings, we engaged in a collective analysis of the

audio transcripts from the previous four sessions. In keeping with the creative interplay between questions and the methods used to address those questions and the discovery orientation of collaborative inquiry, we sought to move beyond our previous method of pure dialogue to make sense of our discoveries by employing a simplified version of *Open Space Technology* (OST). OST is a technique frequently used by organizations to engage large groups of participants in addressing complex tasks. OST creates problem-solving momentum by capitalizing on shared responsibility, energy, passion, spirit, and creativity (*open space*, 2014). Participants engage in an emergent structure that allows for equal representation of salient issues, the organization of those ideas and strategies to create understanding of both the issues and structures that enable them. (Open Space World, 2014).

These OST sessions spanned across two meetings; the co-inquirers were initially tasked with listening to the recordings of the initial meetings and then identifying noteworthy terms, phrases and salient ideas that presented meaning to them and were asked to be prepared to explain their ideas. These were written on sticky notes and brought to our meeting where we collectively addressed the meanings brought forward by each individual. For example, Andrew identified questioning as an action that stood out when he listened to the transcripts of our previous meetings as did I but we each noted different aspects of questioning from different points in the recordings. These layers are examples of reflexive interpretation. Such interpretation comes from the co-inquirer's "judgement, intuition, and ability to 'see and point something out'" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 272). For our OST sessions, we began by randomly adding each of our key points on a 3' x 12' poster; the poster is depicted in Figure 7.



Figure 7 Collaborative analysis using open space technology showing a picture of the resulting open space technology analysis is depicted.

Individuals looked for places of commonality or loosely based themes where they might add their points. Once each person placed their key points on the board we began to collaboratively rearrange and organize them by obvious commonalities based not only on what was written but more importantly, the discussion of why certain points emerged as important to each of us.

Post-inquiry phase.

The post-inquiry phase is dedicated to the logistics of concluding this research as a requirement of the dissertation which includes revisions requested by committee members, the Oral Defense of the dissertation and the publication of the dissertation by the University of Victoria. Another aspect of the post-inquiry phase is recommendations for the dissemination of the findings. I discuss these in the chapters eight and nine. In the construction of this

dissertation, I have divided the work into nine chapters. My choice for the manner in which I have included chapters is outlined in chapter two. In chapters six through nine, I have included verbatim quotes to support the findings I am representing for two reasons. First, the selection of included verbatim quotes is intended to present direct evidence from the transcripts of our discussions that support the ideas, insights and themes identified by the co-inquirers in our collective analysis. Given that my stake in this research as a requirement of the dissertation, I devoted considerable time during the writing of the dissertation to reviewing the transcripts to locate verbatim quotes; the co-inquirers did not review the transcripts to the same degree of depth because their investment in the outcome as a dissertation was not the same. Audio recordings of the sessions were available to the co-inquirers but to the best of my knowledge, none of the co-inquirers reviewed the transcripts following our final meeting. Second, the use of verbatim quotes honours the voices of the co-inquirers by sharing their original words. As I have discussed earlier, I acknowledge that my bias undoubtedly seeps through the writing as it did in our discussion, perhaps more so than the other co-inquirers because of my investment in this research as a requirement for the dissertation. In addition to verbatim quotes, I have at times paraphrased conversations derived from our meetings. My intention in doing so is to provide the reader with insight into our evolving understanding of leadership that is contextual. In some cases, providing the reader with verbatim quotes lacks the necessary context that would help the reader bridge the content of our discussions with the ideas that were emerging. My decision to do so is in line with the constructivist-interpretivist stance I discussed in chapter three. Note that verbatim quotes from the transcripts and/or recordings are represented using *Cambria* font and indented to differentiate them from other block quotes

used throughout this dissertation. I have also provided the meeting date and either line numbers or timing for each of the quotes in parentheses immediately following the quote.

In chapter eight I identify five themes that feature as central ideas that have come from this research. Prior to the identification of these themes, the ideas and insights that I identified in the findings in chapters six and seven came directly from the data. I wish to note that during phase four of our inquiry meetings together, I shared my interpretation of preliminary themes with the co-inquirers based on our preliminary collective analysis using OST. The initial themes I shared with the co-inquirers included building capacity through questioning, seeking understanding through questioning, reflexive self-awareness, reflexive praxis, journey towards empathy, power sharing, and meeting people where they are at. We did not discuss these preliminary themes in terms of seeking agreement or consensus. Instead, these themes served as discussion points to which we further examined our evolving understanding of leadership. We discussed why those ideas had been brought forward. As I have indicated earlier, the tone of our meetings was not goal orientated in that we were seeking to distill our discussions and understanding into key points to be taken forward to others. Instead, any ideas brought forward by the co-inquirers primarily served as discussion points from which we continued to build and interrogate our experiences. This was the primary value for participants. The generation of themes as they are represented in chapter eight is for the purpose of this research as a dissertation to which I am responsible in ways the other co-inquirers are not.

Chapter Six: Findings from Phase One (Forming) and Phase Two (Creating)

This chapter focuses on the findings elucidated in the first two phases four phases of this collaborative inquiry: phase one – *forming*, phase two – *creating*. Figure 8 shows the sequence of the phases. In the simple terms of *what, so what, now what* model, this chapter addresses the *what* stage by bringing to light our findings. The questions guiding the initial phases were the original research questions: What is the meaning of educational leadership in a diverse and complex postmodern world? What are the enabling qualities and practices that educational leaders espouse? How do the life experiences of educational leaders inform practice and philosophy?

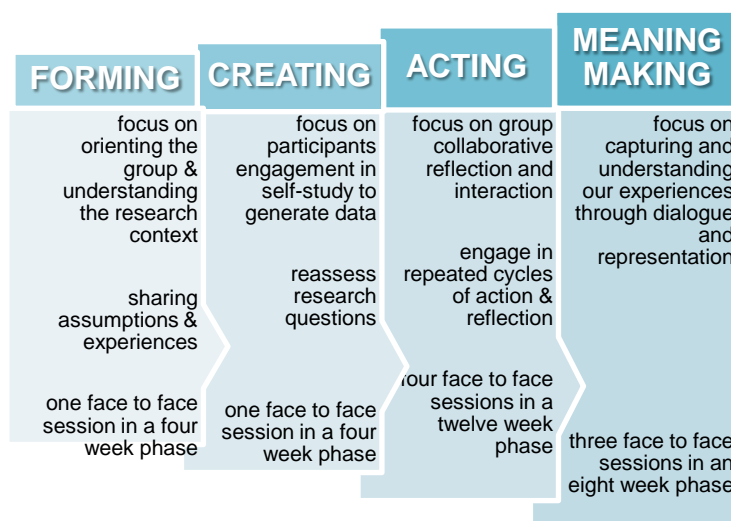


Figure 8 Four Phases of Collaborative Inquiry outlining the focus of each phase of this collaborative inquiry

Forming (phase one) - Connecting to the experience of leadership

This section is intended to contextualize the collaborative learning that took place as a result of sharing our leadership stories and experiences. Our first meeting was attended by five co-inquirers: (1) Tamara, a current graduate student enrolled in leadership studies at the

University of Victoria and former head teacher in a U.K. public school; (2) Alexandra, a middle school teacher working in SD 61 (Victoria) and a literacy coordinator; (3) Chelsea, a middle school teacher on leave from Grand prairie Public School District in Alberta who was also enrolled as a graduate student in leadership studies at the University of Victoria; (4) Andrew, a middle school teacher working in SD 61 (Victoria) who had been recently appointed as Vice principal for the upcoming school year; and (5) myself, a former secondary school teacher and team leader currently completing a graduate degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria. Following the first meeting, Tamara withdrew from the study but agreed to have any comments made during the initial meeting included in the study.

While each of us brought a unique perspective drawn from lived experience, there were also many commonalities between our educational experiences that help to illustrate not only our beliefs about leadership but also the agency of leadership; those actions and choices that we have considered, experienced, enacted and envisioned. Each of us had between 10 and 15 years of teaching experience, primarily in grades seven to twelve. Two of the co-inquirers had spent the majority of their educational careers in British Columbia while the third was from Alberta. The fourth and fifth co-inquirers had a range of both Canadian and International experience in K to twelve education; the fourth in private schools in the U.K. while the fifth co-inquirer in addition to teaching in BC public schools, had also worked in Pre-kindergarten to grade twelve international schools in Pakistan, Kuwait and Mongolia. Each of us had participated in leadership throughout our educational careers in a range of recognized roles including team leader, committee chair, grade level leader, head teacher, program coordinator, and athletic director but also in non-titled roles. Only one co-inquirer had a formal

administrative role having been recently hired as a vice principal for the upcoming school year. Throughout our inquiry discussions, co-inquirers shared leadership stories of self and other and how those experiences impacted their interest and participation in leadership. In our discussions, we addressed the term leadership broadly so as to allow individuals the greatest degree of latitude for engaging in their understanding; this approach was intentional. As discussed earlier, leadership in schools is frequently associated with positional leadership where one is considered a leader if there is an accompanying title such as head teacher, vice principal or administrator. Such a narrow view is problematic and not reflective of how we as co-inquirers view effective leadership in schools or out of schools. To associate leadership with individuals in position of power afforded by title perpetuates a patriarchal hegemonic structure of schools that intentionally limits some while advancing others instead of placing value on community and relationships.

In our conversations, there were frequent references to *good* leadership though this adjective oversimplifies the characterization and agency of the leadership that we envisioned and modelled. Throughout our meetings, we questioned the meaning of the adjective *good* in reference to leaders. In some ways this speaks to a recurring question: what sets others and us apart as educational leaders? Being set apart is a reference to being situated outside of the traditional and hierarchical forms of leadership that we have seen in schools and that arguably do little to serve the complex and diverse needs of students, teachers, parents, staff and community members. In this chapter as well as the following chapters, I will share the qualities, dispositions and actions that we identified as being critical not just to good leadership but, more importantly to *our* sense of leadership. We confidently and unquestioningly consider our

philosophical and pedagogical stance as *better than* the hierarchical, transactional styles we had experienced and witnessed. At the time of our discussions, we did not name our position but in retrospect, I can say that it is rooted in relationality and empowerment where leadership is about creating and facilitating connections. Instead of the leader standing at the top of the mountain like in a hierarchical model, our leadership structure has no elevation, no one person remains above anyone else. The landscape instead was more fluid or organic where people could shift and adjust their position with the help and support of a leader to rise up when needed or with the help of others. Such a vision is aligned with the view of schools as complex and of learning as rhizomatic. Earlier, I shared Wheatley's (2006) view that the world we live in which includes education is one that co-evolves through the interactions of individuals. Our interactions modelled Reigluth's (2004) belief that educational leaders must be able to "constantly adjust and adapt the process to the emerging, ever-changing reality" (p. 8). With each experience or idea brought forward by a co-inquirer, the possibility of connection presented itself in the attempt to generate a collective and interconnected understanding of the meaning of leadership. I also shared the concept of validity as rhizomatic that, in the context of this research, is equally relevant to the process of learning. I share the latter part of the earlier quote, "rhizomatics are about the move from hierarchies to networks and the complexity of problematics where any concept, when pulled, is recognised as connected to a mass of tangled ideas, uprooted, as it were, from the epistemological field" (Lather, 1997, p. 117). During our discussions, our ideas about leadership emerged through our discussions, we built on each other's ideas and often used an idea brought forward by someone else as a catalyst for our own ideas. As each of us discussed and shared our ideas about leadership, new

meanings formed in ways that we could not have predicted because we did not know what any of us would say or share prior to the moment it was shared. This is the type of connectedness found in rhizomatics.

We each had stories of educational leaders who were ineffective or disconnected from our vision of leadership. Our motivation was not to understand their actions and qualities or to intentionally categorize them as good or bad; we sought to better understand our own conceptualizations of leadership in terms of what we do and how we function. Though we also acknowledged that we had to draw on our experiences observing and interacting with others because those experiences have shaped how we understand ourselves as leaders. Even though this pursuit of understanding was frequently discussed as binaries of good/bad, we acknowledged that our sense of leadership was far more complex than such a simple dichotomy.

We began by sharing our own motivations and histories, acknowledging that we all considered ourselves active leaders not just in our careers. By using active, my intention is to show that leadership was less about holding a position or title, and more about an ongoing process where we participated not just when asked but because the activity required it. Andrew shared his first involvement with leadership as being out of necessity more than a deliberate desire to lead.

*Andrew: I started coaching in high school ... because my cousin needed a coach.
Lisa: But it was more out of necessity, is what you are saying
Andrew: Yeah, yeah, it wasn't that I felt like I wanted to be a leader, it was that they needed a warm body. (Tr05-14, 5:38-6:10)*

Chelsea shared a similar experience with her involvement as a Sparks Group Leader when she was paired with a more experienced Group Leader, but one who struggled to organize the children. Despite being a junior person, Chelsea recognized the need to do things differently, and took the lead.

The chaos that was ensuing meeting after meeting, kind of made me step up and say, 'Okay, we need to do this differently, then it became me organizing and doing things and roles kind of changed. (Tr05-14, 13:45-13:55)

As a group, we agreed that we were often the people who, like Chelsea said, stepped up.

Though we often volunteer, this is not to say that generally leadership requires service. For us, being involved actively as opposed to passively, was a form of action that we each took up.

Instead of being a passive member that benefitted from participation, we invested ourselves in the success of initiatives and community by taking action. Andrew described this as a willingness to do the “heavy lifting”.

I think the difference between the follower and the person that provides support is the willingness to do some of the lifting, the heavy lifting kind of thing where it's really easy to go along and say 'yeah, I'll go along with this for a while'. But, to take ownership of it is a different piece. And, rather than saying 'yeah, I'll go along with it', but 'yeah, you know what, I believe in this and I want take a role ...' (Tr05-14, 17:58-18:33)

Examples from outside of a school experience can be found in the idea of service. Each of us consistently volunteered for small roles bringing food to potlucks or providing rides to events for our children or friends, but also in the needs of the organizations that we were already connected to like dance or soccer. We each had occupied more traditional titled leadership

roles as adolescents such as team captains, we were involved in student leadership; in our professional lives, we had each been a coordinator, committee chair or head teacher in some capacity but we were also the people who organize social activities or coached children's teams. Being an active leader was very much a conscious and consistent choice to take on greater responsibility for the greater good. This action seemed to permeate how we situate ourselves. Though it is difficult to characterize leadership as a passive process, our reference to ourselves as active leaders focussed less on individual actions and more on the way in which we approach others – individuals, communities, situations and problems. In the following section, each co-inquirer shared their response to what led them to consider themselves as leaders.

Each co-inquirer responded to the prompt about what led them to becoming a leader. In our initial conversations I noted that regardless of our past and present experiences with leadership, each of us had a natural connection to leadership in the knowledge and feeling that we *belonged there*; in other words, leadership had been something we had always been part of so much so that it was very much embedded in our identities. This sense of self or knowledge of self is derived from experiences that have shaped and influenced the worlds in which we dwell and our engagement in growth and change. Johnson (1989) likens the sense of self we described to “knowledge in progress” (p. 364) that is created in the “flow of practical activity, is directed toward ends (some of which are given in advance, while others become determinate only in and through our structured actions), and is a context-sensitive exercise of imaginative capacities for dealing with problematic situations” (p. 364). The creation of such knowledge is a result of repeated patterns of experience that possess conscious and unconscious meaning which lead to sequences of actions that support a greater purpose (Johnson, 1989, p. 366). For

each of us, our sense of being a leader was derived of repeated opportunities to practice. In the following section, I will share examples of how each of the co-inquirers describes their opportunities to engage in and practice leadership.

In some cases, we had *practiced* leadership in traditional ways, officers on student councils, members of sports teams, or holding titled positions of leadership like captain or chairperson while in other cases we had been intentionally and unintentionally influenced by mentors in leadership roles. We recalled key individuals with whom we had worked that prompted us to consider the value of leadership and the type of leader we considered ourselves to be. During our early meetings, Andrew shared with us, two examples of mentors that he identified as leaders that he identified with. For Andrew, his relationship with his grandfather as well as a former employer stood out because those individuals modelled characteristics and actions that Andrew admired and wanted to emulate. During our second meeting together, Andrew shared with us that his grandfather had personality traits, a dry-wit and sarcastic view, that Andrew recognized in himself, but more importantly, his grandfather challenged Andrew to ask questions to get beneath the surface of how or what to understanding why. Andrew identified with a former employer because that individual was willing to not only solicit Andrew's ideas even though he was a novice, but that employer valued and built on those ideas within their working group. In Andrews words, what set this leader apart for him was that Andrew said that this leader was "his willingness to get the new perspectives, and bring in new ideas, and synthesize that into something that was so much more" (Tr02-22, L578-580). I was equally influenced by particular individuals but in very different ways. Though my father was the first leader with whom I identified, I did not

consciously choose to model the practices I had witnessed and experienced with him. His actions and behaviours as a leader were more traditional in that as a coach, he instructed me what to do as a player. As a father, the guidance he offered was more mandate than conversation. Nonetheless his influence on me as a leader was no less profound than Andrew's grandfather in that it led me to question much of what I saw. This questioning influenced my conception of leadership in that some of the key leaders that I revealed in our discussions were profoundly negative examples of leadership; in my mind, exactly what a leader should not be. For Chelsea and Alexandra, their initial conceptions of and experiences with leadership came from connections to teachers. During our third meeting together, Alexandra recalled a drama teacher whose encouragement of and confidence in Alexandra helped to motivate her to take the risk to step outside her comfort zone by joining a club that was occupied by students much older than her and to ultimately perform with that group as an equal. Chelsea felt connected to an elementary teacher who encouraged her to be a mentor to younger peers in the classroom. Chelsea had transferred from another school where the math she had studied was ahead of the current group so instead of forcing Chelsea to sit through the same material, her teacher gave her the opportunity to help the other students. In that class, Chelsea felt more like a teacher than a student because she was able to help her peers with their math.

In our early conversations, our focus was recollecting our experiences of occupying leadership roles. These positions often involved titles like captain, team leader, coordinator or chairperson and were positions that others recognized as leadership positions. For us the title or recognition did not speak to what leadership meant; more importantly, it was the *experience* of leadership that we connected to and based our thinking and feeling upon, not what we had

cognitively learned about leadership theory. At this point we had not yet named the qualities that we connected to or resonated with. In recalling and re-examining the recordings of the meetings that took place in phase one, I looked for examples of what we had shared. We spoke of experiences where we were valued or saw leaders valuing others by listening to ideas and valuing those ideas as actionable. Embedded in those experiences were connections to self-worth (Lisa), being supported and encouraged (Andrew), bringing people together (Andrew), being connected (Chelsea). I emphasize the importance of our experiences because of how it connects to the process of learning. Storkerson (2009) states that experiential knowledge and knowing “focus on the contextualized or situated, ecological, level everyday existence as it unfolds to an actor, rather than on, structured argument that is schematized, enclosed and defined from outside” (p. 2). Repeatedly throughout our discussions and in the information shared here, our experiences are the main source of our understanding of leadership.

In collaborative inquiry (CI), the research questions evolve and change based on the consensus and action of the group. In our case, we modified the questions to more accurately reflect our inquiry. The modified questions were: *What is the meaning of educational leadership in a diverse and complex postmodern world? What are the enabling qualities and practices that educational leaders espouse? How do the life experiences of educational leaders inform practice and philosophy?* Throughout the inquiry, important sub-questions emerged that added depth to our inquiry. I will highlight these questions throughout this chapter as well as in the next chapter. Drawing on the earlier work on cooperative inquiry by Heron (1996), collaborative inquiry requires space for the meaning of knowledge to be understood as *experiential, propositional, presentational and practical* (Byrne-Jiménez & Orr, 2007).

Experiential understanding is an active process centering on the recollection of experience and the action generated as a result of reflecting. Through our discussions, we consistently drew not only on our own experiences but also of those we had seen. In collaborative inquiry, a key aspect of generating experiential understanding is in the act of reflecting in action. For us, this process is the act of reflecting on our leadership experiences as we previously engaged in them, while we currently engaged in them, discussing those experiences and evolving our understandings based on emerging ideas and re-conceptions. Ideally, this process would also mean that based on these emerging understandings, our actions of leadership would be altered but documenting the demonstration of these actions was not part of the scope of this research. The focus of reflection in action is in the act of dialogue, what was chosen to be shared and how our understandings evolved as a result of the sharing. Throughout this chapter, I share examples of the co-inquirers reflecting on past events and through those reflections creating new meaning of what it means to lead and consider how those events influence their actions as leaders. As we shared our experiences and interactions with leadership, evidence of these four ways of understanding were brought forward. As such we did not enter into our discussions with prescribed questions or a set outcome in mind for each session that sought to specifically answer the research questions from any epistemological framework. Instead we let the discussion unfold naturally which revealed our varied understandings of the practice, theory and experience of leadership over time and space and which continually informed the process of meaning making. We did not set out with the explicit goal of identifying how we make meaning but the process was very much what we were engaged in.

Because my contribution to this inquiry had the added layer of being a dissertation study, I took on the role of initiator during the first meetings. To provide a context and starting point, I shared some of the history and impetus for my pursuit of understanding these questions. I spoke of my own motivation for initiating my doctoral work being a reaction to the negative interactions with leaders I had worked with particularly in international schools. I shared a story (see page 11) of the experience with a principal in an international school that I had worked at during 2001. As one of the primary leaders in that school, his disrespect for the cultural norms of both the community and its members was not just insolent but an example of how a position of leadership is not synonymous with the ability to lead. This attitude, coupled with his representation of self as sole authority, is the embodiment of a strongly hierarchical model of leadership within that school that placed him at the top of a power structure and the teachers and students at the bottom.

... that's one of the reasons I kinda got started in all of this, and it was an experience that I had while I was teaching overseas with a – a principal there that was really, unfortunately, one of many that kind of – not shocked me, but disappointed me. And that's really where I start out with this, kind of from that negative experience. (TR02-22, L13-17)

This passage is an example of what Lather (1991) describes in reference to catalytic validity where participation in the research process can lead to transformation or empowerment. Though this research formally started much later than the time when the story occurred, I consider that story to be the beginnings of my transformative conscientisation. That story is one of several 'moments', two of which I shared in the introduction of this research, that are part of the disorienting dilemma that Mezirow (1994) includes as part of transformative learning. As I was sitting in that principal's office, listening and watching him interact with that

parent, I experienced a profound sense of discomfort born of the wholehearted belief that *this is not right*. My reaction was deeply instinctive and emotionally rooted; even as I recall that story here, the emotional connection is still there. This story and the sharing of it served as a compass or benchmark from which I judged the leadership abilities and actions of other throughout my career as secondary teacher and beyond.

For Tamara, the motivation to be involved in the study came from a different place. She considers being a leader as a central part of her identity. She had a history of being actively engaged in leadership roles but also identified to the group that her sense of that engagement with leadership was a comfortable, natural place. I have underlined for emphasis key phrases in the quotes that serve to highlight important aspects of what each co-inquirer said.

You know, probably just from very, very early on always wanting to be a leader in things that I did. Like student council president in high school and wanting to be a dance teacher very early on. And I always wanted to be a teacher of some sort, and found myself sort of wanting that position of leader in other aspects of my life. It just feels like a really natural place for me to be. I'm not saying I'm fantastic at it, but – and I've sure got a lot to learn. But yeah, it feels like a natural – feels like where I wanna be. It's that challenge that I kinda crave. (TR02-22, L121-127)

For Tamara, the desire to lead was something she recalled at an early age. Her explanation of it being a natural space speaks to her motivation to seek out more opportunities to lead but does not address why she pursued leadership, what motivated her or what those experiences contained to further motivate her desire to lead.

Chelsea shared a similar observation about her own motivation, indicating that leadership was also part of her identity. I characterize identity as never being a “fixed point or a final product. Instead ... identity is a process that cannot be achieved in isolation. It requires

participants and participation” (Starr, 2010b, p. 193). Though Chelsea recalls leadership being part of her identity, her recollection is about the act of leading more than the title of leader. In our first meeting together as a collaborative inquiry group, we discussed how we had come to identify with leadership. Building on Tamara’s belief that she had been a leader since a very young age, Chelsea said to the group, *“I’ve always kind of had a leadership . . . gene, or whatever it is” (TR02-22, L188-189)*. Chelsea went on to explain to the group that she often is the person to step up and help or get things done that needed to be done. She was the person to raise their hand when a group needed help. She organized her childhood and adult peers during activities, she joined groups and committees not just as a member but as someone who volunteered to go beyond passive membership to help the group and people in it. Chelsea’s comment echoed similar sentiments from the other co-inquirers; we each felt that we had always led in some capacity, often through volunteering when others did not. Chelsea shared that even as a child at play, she was organizing and directing. She recalled playing school with friends and that in her recollection, she always played the role of teacher while her peers were the students. This idea of playing the role of leader is one that we discussed on several occasions. As you will read throughout this chapter, we, like others, held certain mindsets around leadership. Those mindsets include ideas like leaders are frequently in positions to tell others what to do or that leaders have a title, like ‘principal’, that gives them a measure of power that others do not possess. Yet, we continually challenged these ideas because of and in spite of perpetuating some of those mindsets.

Similarly, Alexandra identified that she too had been engaged in leading at a young age (see underlining in the following quote) but that engagement may not have been as natural a

space as that identified by Tamara and Chelsea. Leadership for Alexandra was fraught with more tension because it placed her in a position of intervening or generating conflict.

I think I've always been, I started being a very reluctant leader, but I've always ended up in the leadership role, somehow, since I was really little. I don't know. It's partly too, I think I discovered on the other side that, I like things the way I see they should be. So I'm very bossy and I end up jumping in a lot, because of that, I've discovered over the years that just sitting back and watching, I get like, "Ok no, this isn't working. I really need to start meddling." So, that being said, I also did – I was in leadership through high school (Tr02-22, L312-319)

Again, this notion of leading as directing resurfaces as we recall our own leadership histories.

For Alexandra, her initial experiences, like Chelsea, included leading as an active process that requires an individual to take charge, deliver instruction and tell people what to do. In the course of our discussions, we agreed that these actions were generally associated with many forms of leadership but were also problematic. By equating leadership with the act of telling people what to do, there is decidedly less of a focus on listening to or acting based on the needs of others.

For Andrew, there were two touchstone stories that he connected to and revealed to us. Before sharing those, it is important to clarify what is meant by a touchstone. Strong-Wilson (2007) describes a touchstone as “a text or experience that teachers kept returning to and that became a place from which other stories were implicitly compared” (p. 70). In a research project I was previously involved in, we described touchstone stories as those recollections, memories or stories that “emerge as a crucial place to find emotional, spiritual and intuitive resonance” (Tanaka, Stanger, Tse, & Farish, 2013, p. 68). The first touchstone came from Andrew’s involvement in sport where he was drawn to the role of coach as leader.

But I knew from a very young age that I was always drawn to coaching. I was always drawn through sports and always drawn to team sports, as opposed to individual sports and I played competitive tennis and traveled around, and always went to doubles, because I knew that for me success was always much more rewarding when I'm sharing it with people. And I think that's probably what leads me to leadership is I like seeing other people succeed, and that's way more rewarding for me than even when I succeed. (Tr2-22, 408-414)

An early identifier for Andrew was the connectedness of sport where those involved uniquely experience competition. He identified feeling successful and helping others feel successful as an emotional connection to leadership, one that is felt rather than thought. In his experience, the coach/leaders and his team mates were bound together through the common pursuit of success not so much through the competition as the relationships. His second touchstone story focussed on his connection to his grandfather as an adult mentor. Specifically, Andrew was drawn to his grandfather's ability to question.

For me it wasn't my parents, it was my grandfather. Who has, who had the same dry-wit, sarcastic, smart whatever – you know like response and it was always challenging and coming up with a joke. Which is what I do to while I'm thinking, right, and that quick response to something to put people off so I have a minute to process it and then come back to it. And he was always the one that was, "What'd you want to do that for?" Right, and literally, "No, what would you want to do that for?" (Tr03-06, L761-767)

Andrew's grandfather modelled the importance and value of questioning and a way to prompt Andrew to think more deeply and consider the motivation and reasons behind his decision making. That questioning is foundational to Andrew's leadership practice.

I also had a family connection that inspired my leadership practice. My connection with my father, like Andrew's grandfather, was informed by the value of questioning as an act inherent to leadership.

I do distinctly remember him being the person who was always labeled the devil's advocate, who was always trying to get people to figure out why. (Tr03-06, L745-746)

Moving beyond the questions of what and how that generally reveal the superficial or mechanical aspects of situations and problems, the devil's advocate prompts others to consider alternate perspectives with the intent of revealing new knowledge or challenging conventional understanding. Such questioning prompts individuals to consider why decisions are made, who they benefit and who they do not. I also connected to leadership through my experience of playing softball as a child then basketball and volleyball as an adolescent. Embedded in those experiences were powerful feelings of self-worth and reward as well as connectedness. For me, the feeling of self worth was generated by reward where reward was the recognition by others of my skill and ability. The sense of connectedness was derived from belonging to a team, in essence a default community in which my status as a member was higher because I was recognized as having more skill or ability.

I remember distinctly that feeling self-worth and the success associated with that. And so I think that's where the initial idea of leadership comes from for me, but I think it diverged on a very different path at some point, and I'm not quite sure why, 'cause I maintained that idea of sport, but the idea of, kind of the bossiness involved in the idea that – I think it's very – the façade of being a team vs. really being a team. (Tr03-06, L146-151)

I raised the issue that my elevated social status which in turn contributed to a sense of self worth was problematic because it was artificial. Being considered or judged by others as being athletically talented resulted in a higher position in the team/community. Alexandra shared similar experiences with drama where her status as a grade nine student was elevated to equal amongst grade 11 and 12 students because she volunteered to be part of drama despite it

being an activity normally populated by older students. It was not the designation of leader that characterized these experiences as noteworthy, instead it was the sense of empowerment and community derived from them that we connected to. Similarly, being a designated leader like a principal is not a marker for a successful school. While the adjective 'successful' is problematic because it can be viewed so broadly, the key here is that one individual wielding power cannot make for a successful team or community, but participation in a culture of empowerment and validation was, for us, a precursor to the desire to lead.

Though for me, self-worth and reward were personal reactions based on being recognized as a talented athlete, from that recognition came a greater responsibility. As an athlete that others recognized as talented, there sometimes came an expectation to speak out. I was frequently chosen as a team captain but was rarely sure what the expectations of that role were. I was recognized as a leader but in my experiences leaders as coaches, teachers or parents were often tasked with telling others what to do which is not the expectation of a peer or team member; the two roles conflicted.

My sense of connectedness related to a sense of belonging to a team, that default community that was previously mentioned. Some of those relationships within the team were formed genuinely as a result of prolonged time together where conversation happens during the in-between spaces of games and practices when we talked with each other without the same purpose of talk during practice or games. Other relationships within the teams were less authentic because they were a product of location, not choice. I did not choose my teammates yet they were part of my community regardless of common interests or beliefs. This can be

similar in school contexts where teachers have little, if any, input into the positional leaders chosen for their schools or the individuals they work with. Despite being part of a group, they may not be part of a community because that community lacks shared interests or background beyond that which is demanded by the job. In my experience, many former athletes went on to positions of leadership in schools such as athletic director, vice principal or principal. But several of those individuals approached leadership as if it were a team sport where the administrator was the coach and the teachers were the players. In these situations, the voices of teachers tended to be lost in the coach-player power dynamic where the coach in the traditional sense was the boss responsible for managing and training. These coach-player or principal-teacher relationships were less about fostering relationships and community and more about managing outcomes and products and training individuals to meet those outcomes, two very different approaches to leading. Recently, coaching has become part of the leadership lexicon, particularly in business. According to Riddle (2011), "leadership coaching uses the relationship between the coach and the person being coached as a platform for questioning assumptions, stimulating reflection, creating alternatives, and growing perspectives" (p. 7). While I personally applaud the use of leadership coaching to engage in the actions described by Riddle (2011), I have never seen leadership coaching in action nor do I recognize the actions described by Riddle (2011) as being part of sport-related coaching based on my experiences.

The initial motivations shared by the co-inquirers were centred on assuming the role of perceived leader, individuals recognized within their communities as leaders, and the actions required of their leadership. We recognized this as distinctly different from the role of designated or positional leader, such as principal. However, we also acknowledged that playing

on teams or being involved in sport, participating in student council, identifying or emulating the actions of mentors were not exclusive qualifications of being a leader. Instead, those experiences like others presented us with opportunities to test our sense of leadership. Our perceptions of what it means to lead were more complex than simply occupying a position or having a title. These initial thoughts, born out of our own experiences, were our introductory ideas in exploring the research question, *how do the life experiences of educational leaders inform their practice and philosophy?*

At the time when the co-inquirers shared their experiences and views of leadership we were yet to delve into the deeper meaning held in those experiences and views, however our conceptions of leaders' characteristics and dispositions were already beginning to emerge in our conversations. We spoke of individuals with whom we had worked and events that we had been involved in or witnessed that gave us reasons to pause and consider our understanding of and the enactment of leadership in schools. Those moments of pause happened closer to actual events. We compared general stories of individuals whose authoritarian style, like the style I described in the anecdote, *The Mongolian Monster*, isolated them from teachers and students. We also shared stories of principals that we had each worked with who rarely left their offices to engage with students or teachers. In the moments when we worked with individuals like these, we had no mechanism to discuss and interpret them; therefore they stayed with us as memories or touchstones until our co-inquiry meetings when we had the opportunity to revisit them, reflect on these events ask questions of ourselves and each other, and form new understandings. Our comments reveal initial evidence of the value of confidence (Andrew, Tamara, Lisa), challenge (Andrew, Alexandra, Lisa), criticality (Andrew, Lisa, Alexandra) and

intuitiveness (all). As we entered into the second phase of this collaborative inquiry, we delved into more of the leadership characteristics and dispositions that the co-inquirers shared and examined.

Creating (phase two) – Collective visioning of leadership

In the next phase of our inquiry, our attention shifted from establishing a group focus and purpose to an exploration of our vision of leadership as we had observed and experienced it individually prior to this research. Our intention was to address the research questions generally rather than form a concrete answer to each question. Instead, we used the research questions as a launching off point to allow co-inquirers to raise points and contribute to the questions as well as build on that which was brought forward by each co-inquirer. In phase two, the nature of our questions naturally circled around the second question: *What are the enabling qualities and practices that inclusionary educational leaders espouse?* We did not focus on *inclusionary* as a descriptor of a different type of leadership. Nor did it guide our discussions in any specific way. My original intent of the question was for *inclusionary* to be in reference to contexts where diversity featured prominently. For us, diversity did not portray or apply to a specific construct; instead we considered diversity as an accepted norm in education, characteristic in some way of all educational settings. In chapter two, I supplied several characterizations of how diversity is described in reference to school culture. The definition provided by Billot et al. (2007) most accurately describes how we conceived diversity in the course of our discussions. Those authors describe diversity as “a myriad of shared actions, behaviours, beliefs, norms, and understandings held by the collective of students, parents and staff of that particular school community” (Billot et al., 2007, p. 4). We did not see

representations of cultural, linguistic, socio-economic or gender difference to name only a few as featuring prominently in our views of leadership. In future work, I hope to explore the intersections of leadership and diversity with other inquirers.

Because we valued diversity as a norm in schools as opposed to distinctive, the more significant question therefore became: *what are the enabling qualities and practices that educational leaders espouse?* The verb espouse is not simply synonymous with modeled which is a superficial representation; instead, the intent of espouse is to reveal qualities that educational leaders believe in, can speak to and act upon in meaningfully implicit and explicit ways. As we began to interrogate our conceptions of leadership, insight into the first question, *what is the meaning of educational leadership in this diverse postmodern world*, emerged.

In this section, collective visioning of leadership, our focus was on identifying the qualities of educational leaders based on what we had individually seen and experienced. In this section, the qualities identified are attributed to the individual co-inquirers. Though we were in agreement with the qualities identified, we each contributed distinct ideas. I now present the beliefs of co-inquirers in their own words that include their beliefs about leadership, where those beliefs originated, and how they view leadership in current school contexts. As their definitions and images of leadership started to become clearer to the group and to the individual participants themselves, I also offer insight into the context of those discussions.

Empowerment, Relationality and Questioning - Co-inquirer 1 (Andrew).

Andrew's sense of leadership was deeply connected to the idea that an educational leader needs to create conditions for others to empower themselves. Such empowerment requires that the leader to listen more than speak and in doing so create space for others to contribute to a collective vision of education.

And I think that's what makes a good or a strong leader, right. That willingness to muddle up what you believe or willingness to take what you believe and go, you know what? Go with it. Run with it. I'm here to support you and I'm here to share my experience when you maybe get lost, right, but at the same time go find your path, right. And your path is going to be different from my path, right. (Tr02-22, L975-979)

That ability to listen is akin to *generous listening*. Schultz (2003) asserts that this form of listening is more than active listening because individuals must also listen to the experience, rhythm, and nuance of situations and interactions. As a reflexive practice, generous listening also helps to facilitate understanding around not just what or how but more importantly why. That sense of empowerment was born from a relational space where multiple, simultaneous perspectives are seen, empathy drives action and collaboration is valued over competition (Allan & Evans, 2006). Further, a relational space is one where all individuals not only have a voice but where that voice is honoured.

I think that's maybe the leadership piece that resonates for me is how do you come into a situation as a leader? Either imposed leader or someone who takes on that role and makes sure that everyone has a voice, right? Because if people don't feel like they have a voice, then they're shutting down. (Tr04-18, L191-194)

Andrew spoke of an early experience working for but more notably *with* an individual who honoured the voices of those around him. Andrew had been hired to work for an

environmental company. As part of his training, he was invited to a company retreat. When recalling this, Andrew described a touchstone moment when a leader who, during a large team meeting, asked for Andrew's opinion even though he was new to the team. Andrew said that he could have declined to comment, and in other situations would have because he would not have believed that his voice would matter. However in this situation, this leaders espoused generous listening as leadership practice, Andrew chose not only to speak, but to question what was being said without fear of judgement. According to Andrew, by asking for and valuing the ideas of others, this leader enabled the group to effectively approach problems and in doing so perpetuated a cycle of leadership that fed into itself. Essentially, by one individual leading in this manner, all individuals were leading.

It was his ability to go, what do you got? And coax that out of people, and we've had conversations since then about that time and him going, "I didn't really do it, you know, I just asked." I said, "Yeah, but you asked." Right, it would have been really easy to go, "Oh yeah, he's brand new right, so we'll just do that." But it was his willingness to get the new perspectives, and bring in new ideas, and synthesize that into something that was so much more – more, because of all those contributions. (Tr03-06, L574-580)

Though Andrew did not label it as such, the actions of the leader Andrew described could be categorized as a form of *distributed leadership* where leadership is less focussed on individual actions and more on group interactions. Instead of leadership practice being "equated chiefly with the actions of an individual and cast as the product of an individual's knowledge and skill, the distributed perspective draws attention to the inter- actions of people and their situations" (Spillane, Camburn, & Stitzel Pareja, 2007, p. 110). In retrospect, the label of distributed leadership is less important than Andrew's affinity towards leadership as a group process.

When considering the leader in this touchstone story, Andrew also spoke of the leader's ability to question as a means to open spaces; this was an important skill that Andrew tries to consistently model in his capacity as a leader in his school. Questioning is an act requiring reciprocity; even rhetorical questions that are intended to go unanswered still provoke thought and ideas. In Andrew's opinion, when a leader is able to question in ways that aren't intended to or perceived as critique or directive, rather to create spaces for individuals to participate, new perspectives are not only welcomed but also become part of the act of questioning.

And I think, for me, the leadership – what makes leaders really leaders, is their ability to question, their ability to be open to new perspectives, whether they're theirs or not, and that was my experience with XXX. (Tr03-06, L562-565)

In the case of the leader in Andrew's story, spaces created were productive for problem solving, meaning making and capacity building. Harris (2003) contextualizes this by making the connection between learning and leadership: "leadership is part of the interactive process of sense-making and creation of meaning that is continuously engaged in by organizational members.... Taking this view, leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively" (p. 314). Such an approach is relational in nature because the process is undertaken by a group, but is facilitated by the actions and mindsets of individuals like that explained by Andrew. The relational space created through questioning and empowering does not include a hierarchical or transactional form of leadership whose flow is linear or one directional. As such, Andrew's view of leadership is holistic; all pieces play a role in coming together to create leadership that is not simply the sum of its parts, rather a multidirectional and interconnected entity built through collaboration and collegiality.

... my vision of leadership is all about working with adults and working with different groups and being willing to try to have or try to assemble or put together the pieces into a bigger vision, that's bigger than my own one piece. And that is, I think what, what is always spoken to me, is people that are able to take what they believe, but also take everything else and try to synthesize it together or bring it together to form a picture. (Tr02-22, L441-446)

Andrew believes that leadership requires self-awareness and adaptability but as a relational concept. Through self-awareness, leaders are able to acknowledge and recognize multiple perspectives while appreciating those perspectives in ways that build the collegial spaces necessary for leadership to be effective. We did not specifically address what it means to become self-aware, though it is a worthy consideration. Based on our discussion, I characterize our understanding of self-awareness as recognizing our strengths and weaknesses and how those strengths and weaknesses help and hinder us in relating to and in turn engage in leadership with others.

So I think there is, one of the things that I find in a lot of people that I respect is a self-awareness, but also an appreciation that it's not my way or the highway, right. There's lots of different routes to get from A to B. (Tr04-18, L321-323)

For Andrew, self-awareness is directly connected to adaptability. A leader must be able to set aside preconceptions or even their own vision in order to respond to the needs of the group. That responsiveness both to individuals and situations is, in Andrew's view, critical in building environments that promote good leadership.

Self-awareness, authenticity and intuitiveness – Co-inquirer 2 (Chelsea).

In the course of our discussions together, each co-inquirer shared their experience with and beliefs about leadership based on their educational experiences. These rich conversations

allowed each co-inquirer to tap into their own connections to leaders and leadership. Andrew brought forward notions of empowerment, relationality and questioning, but also touched on self-awareness. Chelsea focussed more of her attention on self awareness as a skill while sharing additional insights. Chelsea wondered to what degree knowing one's self and one's story was necessary to engage in the kind of leadership that we were drawn to. Chelsea believed, and the group agreed, that the process of interrogating one's beliefs, experiences and biases was valuable yet underexplored in the process of becoming an educational leader whether it be through actively leading in schools or through participation in leadership education like that found in graduate leadership programs.

I think it will be interesting to find out if there's a connection between how well people know their own stories to the type of leadership that they embody in their daily lives. I took a leadership through narrative class with XXX last semester and it was, you know, that was kind of the idea, know your story first and then you can lead from your story. So it would be interesting if knowing your story and knowing who you are as a leader is that piece, right? (Tr02-22, L627-632)

Chelsea shared insight into her personal choices around leadership, making the distinction between being an administrator and a leader; she noted that one does not necessarily require the other. Chelsea emphasized that leaders are those that are connected to “the pulse of the school” which is a sense of what is happening in classroom spaces as well as the spaces between. Being connected to the pulse was more than understanding how the school functioned and more about who the members of the community and how those members were connected.

One of the reasons I chose the program that I'm doing now is because it's not administrative leadership, because I don't think educational leadership equals administration. And for a lot of people that's – if you're doing your Masters work in education it's to be an administrator, and I don't see that as the source of true

leadership in a school. It happens, sometimes people in that position are the leaders, but in my experience, more often than not, they're not the leaders, and it's the instructional leaders or the teacher leaders on the staff that can, you know, have the pulse of the school, gauge what's going on – they're the relay between the administrator and the rest of the bodies to kind of, not make waves, or see that initial reaction. (Tr03-06, L263-271)

Chelsea also characterized intuitiveness or intuition as a leadership skill. Leaders lead without making it a conscious act. Ruth-Sahd (2003) draws on research in Nursing to characterize intuition as “the immediate knowledge about a fact, or truth, as a whole and the awareness of past, present, or future events without the conscious use of such processes as linear reasoning, rationality, or analytics” (p. 130). Ruth-Sahd also acknowledges that intuition is an important aspect of “discovery, holistic problem-solving, understanding, and knowledge generation” (p. 130). This is not to say that intuitive knowledge remains only with the individual, more that it starts with the individual who then shares depending on the context, individuals and relevance. That unconscious knowing is at the core of leadership practice for Chelsea because it informs her actions and interactions. In her characterization, Chelsea makes direct reference to the holistic problem solving that leaders do to mediate events.

In Chelsea’s experience leaders are often those individuals who invest in the larger school community, not just in their classrooms. This observation was one we were all in agreement with, both in what we had observed and in how we ourselves participated in schools. We each worked with teachers that I colloquially referred to as *backpackers*, those teachers who arrive at the school with their bags on their backs no earlier than required, satisfactorily complete their duties during the day, and throw their backpack on their back to leave the school as soon as possible. Their energy and focus is primarily and almost exclusively on what happens inside the walls of their classrooms during the teaching hours of the day and

not on the wider school community. Those same individuals rarely voiced their thoughts or ideas. None of us were ever backpackers. We understood schools as communities that include multiple sites for co-constructed learning so we contributed to those communities by being involved in the wider school community through coaching, supervision, participation on committees as well as other opportunities. We recognized that by approaching schools as communities, the students, teachers, parents, staff and administrators invested play an important role in sustaining that community. In addition to being involved and connected to the needs of the community, such involvement requires exalting the voices of all. Chelsea touched on what Andrew also shared; leaders are those that honour the voices of others.

I've had staff say to me, "You're the person that facilitating a meeting can calm down the group of people getting excited about this idea." Or, you know, "You make sure that everybody has a voice and feels acknowledged and heard." (Tr03-06, L646-648)

In keeping with the reflexive nature of this inquiry, Chelsea used Andrew's ideas as a lens through which she viewed her own experience and more importantly, made sense of that experience as a past and current leader. As a result, she shared the following anecdote.

I remember sitting in one of our very first teachers' conventions and whoever the president at the time was stood up and said, you know, "If you have any issues with our convention programming, you know, join the committee, because don't complain until you're contributing." And so, that weekend I sent an email being like, "How do I get on the committee? Because this really blows right now." [Laughter]. I was much more diplomatic. So, when I left for school in June my teaching partner got the staff and students to put together a wish book, kind of scrapbook for me to say like, here's you as a leader in our school. Which was really cool to get because their selections in here from people who I respect as educators, who said, you know, "You inspire us. You lead us." (Tr03-06, L630-640).

Flexibility and perseverance – Co-inquirer 3 (Alexandra).

Alexandra added to our emerging vision of leadership by drawing attention to a leader's ability to shift from expert to apprentice and to foster that same fluidity in others. The context that she used was the empowerment of students as leaders in her classroom. The power-over nature of the teacher-student relationship mirrors that same power dynamic that exists between administrator and teacher. Alexandra's choice to use an example from her classroom speaks to leadership as an authentic relationship that exists in context, in this case, her classroom. Alexandra described the interactions between herself and her students devoid of the traditional teacher-tells-student relationship. She shared how often her students take on the role of teacher in her classroom by leading the learning, sometimes from a stage-like location at the whiteboard but at other times in the conversations the students have with her when they question her decisions as a means to bringing forward their own ideas in shaping assignments or activities. While this does not occur in her classroom every minute, Alexandra described a very nuanced flow in her classroom where students are teachers and she is the student.

And I really like that idea that everyone's always in a shifting state of being an expert to the apprentice state and that it – when you're in that – when you allow a classroom or any situation to be in flux like that. That it allows students to know that they can take over the expert role and then re-shift the conversation that it's not always, like you're saying, here's me, I have all the information. (Tr03-27, L1102-1106)

Her comments also serve to further destabilize the hegemonic power structures that frequent classrooms. Alexandra works hard at maintaining a student-led classroom here students are not

just involved in the decision making but where she truly values their ideas. In the context of this conversation, she also spoke about the importance of being open to the ideas of her students which we all agreed with. As a leader she embodies relational practice in the way she connects to students.

Alexandra's commentary connects to what Andrew brought forward as the act of empowerment. Alexandra's observation applies more to the environment or conditions that a leader sets up to foster empowerment. In her classroom, student voice matters. She doesn't just listen but she helps student learn to take action based on that voice. Those relationships in her classroom are built on a genuine trust and respect for each other and each other's ideas. Even though as the teacher she traditionally has more control than the students, she does not see her role as one who should be in control or dictating terms. Instead she prefers to teach students how to negotiate power. In her case, the act of leadership can be silent so that students can move into those expert states while she and others become the apprentices.

I find a really effective leader is flexible in being able to see exactly that, that is, has that ability and is a teachable – I don't know, but has the ability to say, "Hey, wait a second, there's a couple spots that you might have fit, but hey let me do two seconds more digging and actually take the time to think, oh, even if I could just take this protocol that I'm supposed to take and slot you in and you're next on the row and Arbutus is next 'cause it starts with 'A'. Wait a second, I know you have this background." I think that's a piece of that flexibility as a leader, that you can – you look for those and you keep your eyes open for those things. (Tr04-18, L22-30)

Alexandra also brings forth the notion of *digging deeper* as an example of the importance in taking time to not just recognize people's strengths as they exist on paper but to utilize those strengths in meaningful ways. Her comments were in response to Andrew's description of how he was assigned to a school as a vice-principal. She was describing a process where the central

administration took the time to match the strengths and interests Andrew expressed during his interview and during his time as a teacher to the needs of the school they assigned him to as opposed to simply placing Andrew in the school that was at the top of a list of vacancies. Alexandra's comments help to illustrate leadership as a practice of perseverance. Though at the time we did not acknowledge it, perseverance was a characteristic that began to thread through our analysis and discussion but one in which we had difficulty locating its origins. We wondered how and why our sense of perseverance as a characteristic of leadership came to be?

Connectedness and Advocacy - Co-inquirer/Author 4 (Lisa).

I agreed with Chelsea when considering the importance of knowing one's self in order to foster connections. Knowing one's self was considered a necessity in understanding how a leader represents oneself and how that self potentially connects to others.

It just makes sense, kind of, you kinda have to know yourself and what you're about, to be able to share that with the world. (Lisa, Tr02-22, L641-642)

The comment, 'it just makes sense' is one that draws on my belief that understanding oneself requires a necessary logic yet this logic is a far cry from being traditionally reliable or objective. I noted that throughout our discussions there was very little reference to leadership as cognitive or rational aside from what was observed in those others we judged as being ineffective leaders. As I shared in the introduction of this dissertation, for some leaders a measure of control is not only synonymous with leadership as an educational practice but also that control is a way of functioning in the world. In my school experience, for some individuals leadership is less about people and balanced relationships and more about creating a structure that

advances the leader as the one with the most control. I saw this in the way administrators made decisions and issued instructions as a result of those decisions almost as decrees without consultation. On the rare occasions when consultation was requested, feedback generally did not change the outcome even when teachers or students were in obvious opposition. In one example, I attended a school-wide meeting on the standard of health insurance at a school I worked at in 2005. An announcement had been circulated to staff indicating that all medical and dental claims would no longer be processed by the clinics, instead they had to be filed directly with the school. The change to the process for health insurance claims arose amid rumours that the school had failed to pay the health insurance premiums and that our coverage would be denied by the clinics. The administration called for a consultative meeting for all staff to explain changes to the health insurance policy and expressed the desire to welcome ideas and feedback. At the meeting, teachers expressed concerns and suggestions for how the system could be improved, administrators sat at the front of the room behind a long table, seemingly listened and even asked some questions. At the end of the meeting, we were informed that the decision had been made and that all claims were required to be made through the school's finance office. While this is only one anecdote, it serves as an example that stands in stark contrast to the relational nature of schools.

But there's some control issue there and this is, this is a difference. I think some people become leaders because of the control, so that hierarchical model and it works for them, 'cause they – they function in the world that way. (Tr03-27, L1090-1093)

Control as problematic was of key importance to me. I shared the drawing (Figure 1 from chapter one) that depicts a foreboding figure with sharp edges and corners that is representative of the intimidation and negativity that permeated a former principal's approach

to leadership and her interactions with her *followers*. The sharpness of the edges prevents outside forces for coming in contact with her unless they wish to risk harm. Relationality cannot exist or be fostered when there is no capacity for connection. The principal depicted had an approach to leadership that was strongly built on power and control, so much so that describing her actions were difficult for me. I did not and still don't have the words to fully articulate how strongly this individual stood in opposition to what I believe about leadership.

... it became very obvious, very quickly that she had a real sense of leadership as being power and control. In such an exaggerated way that that's what's really difficult for me to articulate. Imagine, I mean you've probably worked with some really weak administrators, who were really into, "I'm at the top of the hierarchy, do what I say, because I said you had to." Take that times about twelve hundred, and that's where this woman was. (TR 03-06, L56-62)

Though a personal example, this depiction powerfully shows what I do not want to be as a leader nor would I wish to work with people who model what is depicted. In connecting to my experience as an adolescent involved in sport, I liken her style of leadership to a manipulative coaching mentality of tear-down-to-build-back-up where the coach delivers consistently negative feedback until the athlete believes that s/he cannot do things right. The athlete becomes so desperate for positive reinforcement that the coach is able control the athlete by doling out feedback and instruction that the athlete absorbs because they desperately want the coach's approval. While I did not experience this manipulative style of coaching, I know many athletes who have and sadly, several coaches who model such a style. One major problem with this approach is that some athletes never recover from the put-down stage.

After describing the persona depicted in the drawing, I followed with my vision of the structure of leadership.

But then there's the difference between this kind of, you know, this pyramid model where the person's at the top versus more of a . . . kind of – and it's not even like that actually, it's almost more of a interconnected kind of set of circles where everybody's functioning together. (Tr03-27, L1094-1096)

Among the co-inquirers there was consensus on the idea that successful leadership was more about interconnectedness found in complex rhizomatic systems and less about linear directionality in top-down structures. Our collective experiences with and participation in leadership were born much less of rational thought, hierarchical structures or control and more of deeply emotional, experiential and relational ways of knowing and interacting as well as advocacy instead of control. We spoke of leadership in these as ways with a far greater sense of resonance and meaning. In a general sense, resonance implies a sense of significance or richness that evokes association or strong emotion (Resonance, 2014). Taken this way, that feeling of resonance connects to intuitive knowing in that meaning or understanding comes from a place that may not be rationally or cognitively known. For us, leadership acknowledges and includes emotion, experience and relationships that makes sense and feels natural.

The drawing included in Figure 9 is a representation of leadership intended to show the relationality and interconnectedness of leadership absent from the other drawing (p. 20). Some of the designs are similar and the use of black and white in the images is also the same as in the

previous drawing. However, in this drawing there are no sharp edges and fewer square or box-

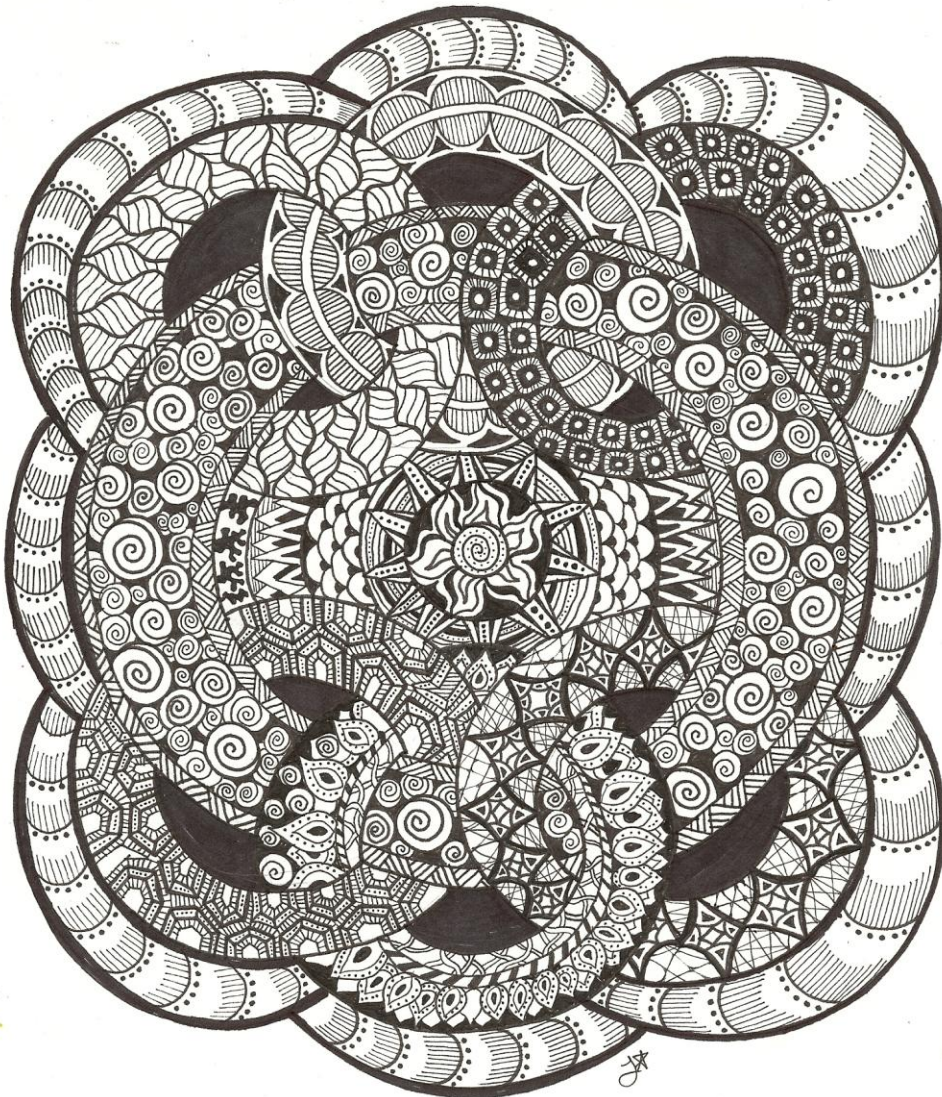


Figure 9 Interconnectedness and relationality. This figure is an illustration of an alternative to leadership advocating power and control.

like frames. Instead, there are a series of interconnected and overlapping circles with designs that are more organic and that flow into each other. Another key feature of the second drawing is that because of the level of detail, an observer has to pause and focus in order for their eye

to pick up the other circles and where they connect. This action mirrors the ongoing cycle of action and reflection found in leadership praxis. Leaders must consider the details as well as the bigger picture when making leadership decisions but also how those ideas connect and in turn influence other thoughts, beliefs and actions. In the characterization of leadership that emerged in our discussions, we valued enabling qualities in ourselves and others such as *empowerment, relationality, questioning, self-awareness, authenticity, intuitiveness, flexibility, perseverance, connectedness and advocacy*. We did not take turns identifying these qualities. Instead, these were the qualities that each inquirer focussed on but they were co-constructed in and by our dialogue. In addition to depicting the relational aspects of leadership, the second drawing also shows the relationship between our individual and collective ideas of leadership as well as our relationship with each other in the process of further understanding leadership.

Following the principles of dialogic learning, each quality that emerged was a product of the discussion and sharing of ideas between us (Flecha, 2000). Our interpretations and actions were based on the contributions made by each other in the particular context we were in. As such the qualities that I included here create an overlapping construction, depicted in Figure 10, of the characteristics of leadership that we value based on our experience with and understanding of leadership. The use of the VENN diagram is intended to illustrate the connectedness of these qualities. Though I chose to present them as somewhat distinct they were not disconnected from each other. The co-inquirers spoke of and commented on the characteristics discussed by each other. Suggesting that all leaders must possess and enact these characteristics slips us back into a positivist paradigm that requires us to define leadership in a way that applies to all. In keeping with a postmodern view, the characteristics

we brought forward are a result of our own situated experiences and understandings and cannot be applied as a universal truth.

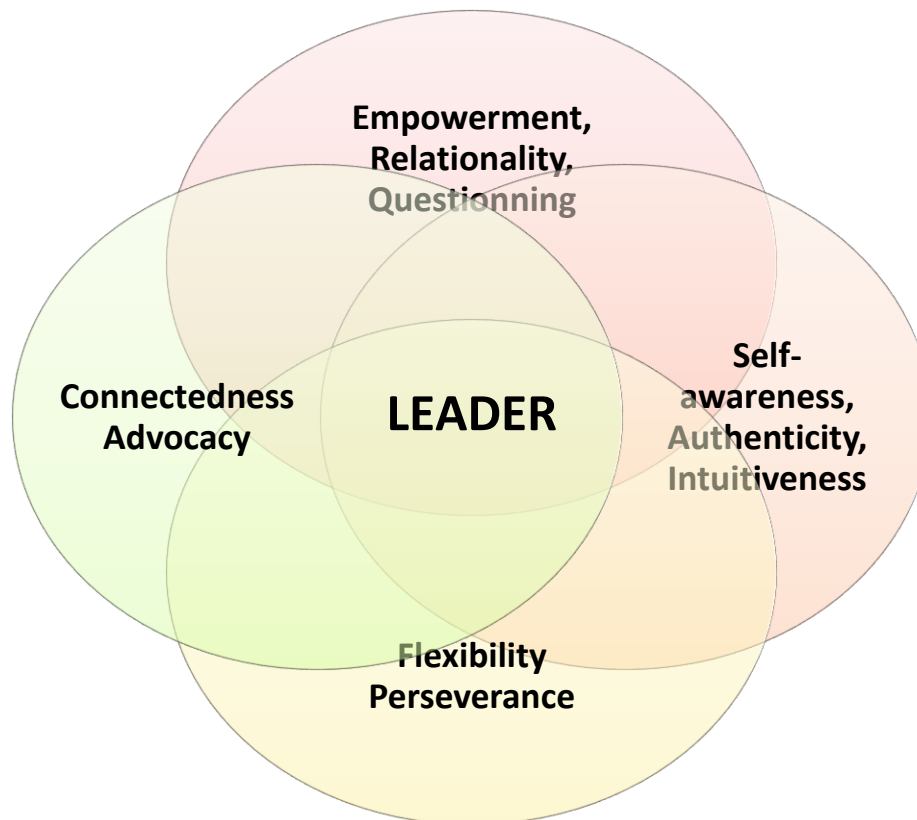


Figure 10 Characteristic and qualities of leadership. This figure is a Venn diagram listing the qualities and characteristics of leadership identified in phase one and two.

While there was significant agreement between us regarding the qualities of leadership, the next phase, acting, was where our ideas and experiences became more significantly reflective of our own practices. The resulting merge of vision and action came together to form a more holistic sense of the meaning of leadership as opposed to a checklist of characteristics.

Chapter Seven: Findings from Phase Three (Acting)

Referring back to the *what, so what, now what* model, this chapter continues to address the *what* stage by further elaborating on our findings. This focus of this chapter is on the findings elucidated in the third phase of collaborative inquiry, **acting**. The questions guiding this phase continued to be: What is the meaning of educational leadership in this diverse postmodern world? What are the enabling qualities and practices that inclusionary educational leaders espouse? How do the life experiences of educational leaders inform practice and philosophy? Of note, given the nature of collaborative inquiry, phases three and four contain elements of analysis conducted by the group. Co-inquirers examined the audio recordings of previous meetings and using open space technology, we collaboratively identified key ideas that led to the formation of sub-categories. My analysis of the overall findings as the researcher responsible for this dissertation is primarily found in chapter eight though as one of the co-inquirers analysing the data, the voice of my analysis is also embedded throughout this chapter. At times in these chapters, I offer context or explanation outside the parameters of our inquiry meetings from my perspective not to advance my ideas and thoughts over those of the co-inquirers but with the desire to create a richer understating. This choice is the enactment of reflexivity threaded throughout this dissertation.

Reflection in action

In the previous two phases, we discussed salient characteristics of leadership that held meaning for us. These characteristics were ones we had witnessed, experienced and connected with in ourselves in others. Much of what was brought forward in the initial phases drew on experiential, practical, propositional forms of knowledge inherent to collaborative inquiry

through a dialogic process. The primary means for our interactions in the initial phases was through dialogue as conversation. Such dialogue establishes mutual understanding by promoting “the sharing of information and experiences, and where different opinions, attitudes and tastes are revealed” (Renshaw, 2004, p. 7). In the previous phases, we followed an unstructured format where individuals were welcome to share their beliefs and ideas of leadership. Those ideas were also prompted by what others said and shared. The form and intent of our initial dialogue shifted from conversation to *dialogue as inquiry* in our expression of the fourth form of knowing in collaborative inquiry, presentational knowing. Dialogue as inquiry is different than dialogue as conversation in that each co-inquirer continues to contribute their views but those views are actively interrogated and questioned by other co-inquirers with the intention of clarification as well as “working consensus or tentative agreement” (Renshaw, 2004, p. 9). While in previous phases, knowledge was presented exclusively through dialogue, in the next phase, we expressed knowledge by documenting key ideas to be viewed, questioned, connected and rearranged by physically constructing a movable mind map (Figure 8). The key ideas were individually identified after each co-inquirer listened to the audio recordings of our initial meetings. I wish to acknowledge and credit the co-inquirers with the significant investment of time and energy in this phase. Engaging in this form of analysis is an integral aspect of collaborative inquiry but this was not our motivation. Andrew, Alexandra and Chelsea had a genuine desire to further their understanding of leadership which was the primary motivator in this phase of the inquiry. The success of this dissertation owes in large part to their commitment.

There was a marked shift in our purpose in this process as we undertook the collaborative process of making meaning using OST, that was less present in previous meetings. What emerged from the process of reflection in action was an epistemological focus relating to the pursuit of understanding as opposed to knowledge. Little of what was discussed came from a cognitive or rational space; instead our understanding came from a deeply emotional and experiential sense of understanding. In this phase, four key areas surfaced in our pursuit of understanding leadership: *questioning, capacity building, knowing one's self* and *connecting*.

In our initial discussions, co-inquirers identified enabling qualities of leadership that they valued: *empowerment, relationality, questioning, self-awareness, authenticity, intuitiveness, flexibility, perseverance, connectedness and advocacy*. Listening to the audio recordings of our conversations required co-inquirers to engage in reflexive interpretation, “ways of seeing which act back on and reflect existing ways of seeing” (Clegg & Hardy, 1996, p. 4). As they listened to themselves and each other, the qualities we discussed prompted further thinking. As a result, there was a shift in focus during this phase towards the enabling practices or actions of leaders and the types of things they do that embody the characteristics that we value.

Questioning.

During our conversations and in our subsequent attempt at understanding the themes that arose, each of us identified *questioning* as a thread woven through our experiences as leaders and with leaders. In a hermeneutic tradition like that shared in chapter three, we had asked questions to interrogate and understand others, but more importantly, in the process of

this collaborative inquiry, we were using questioning to open up the possibilities for meaning that Gadamer (1998) refers to where “dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed” (p. 375). Our transformation is both our understanding of leadership but also our practice. Not only was this an act of leadership but a means for us to explore our understanding of leadership. Andrew spoke to this the most directly. In his view, questioning was a central action required of leadership but one that required a degree of consciousness (awareness of the other and tact) so that his act of questioning did not create unnecessary conflict.

Right? I’m not saying, “You’re doing it wrong,” but, “I really want to understand why you’re doing it like that.” Right? And that – the questioning piece is a big one for me, so how do we go about that as opposed to – maybe moving away from a challenge aspect to a more of an inquiry aspect, right. And I think that’s something, that I think, I work on all the time, and I work on that with my students, I work on that with my friends, I work on that with my family, right. How do I find ways of questioning in a way where it’s disarming, as opposed to arming? (Tr04-18, L272-278)

Andrew’s use of arm and disarm are indicators of the response mechanism he sometimes experienced when engaging in questioning as a practice. Andrew, Alexandra and I identified that in many cases our own acts of questioning were perceived as a threat or challenge though this was not our intent. Andrew acknowledged that when people “bark, he barks back” and while a flawed way to challenge or question what is happening in schools, this sentiment was something we all related to. We believed that as leaders we had a responsibility to challenge ideas and in some cases people. I justified this by sharing my belief that “the reason that you are challenging things is to make things better” (Tr05-14, 20:06-20:09) to which we agreed; this

was often our motivation for questioning as well. Andrew built on this by explaining that with the challenge is the desire to understand.

Can you explain it to me because I really don't get what's going on. And that's one of the traits that good leaders is that instead of going 'I can't believe you said that' they ask 'can you tell me what happened there because I don't, that doesn't fit into my framework or my understanding or my experience, and you know, I am not saying you are wrong, I don't get it so can you explain it to me. And again, it keeps coming back for me to that questioning piece. How do we question in a way that's again empowering and all these different things without being confrontational. It's not about a fight.'" (Tr05-14, 20:26-20:57)

My perspective on questioning is informed by Starratt's (1991; 1994; 2004) work on ethical leadership which is relevant here. Starratt (1991) posits that the ethics of justice, care and critique underpin the ethical dimension of leadership. My sense of questioning as a leadership practice came to life in my discovery of Starratt's (1991; 1994; 2004) work, particularly as it relates to the ethics of critique and care. The ethic of critique is a belief that the educational leader has a responsibility move beyond accepted hegemonies of "power and privilege, interest and influence" (p. 190). In order to achieve a higher moral purpose, the educational leader has a responsibility to the individuals in the schools, the education profession and to the "society of whom, and for whom, he or she is an agent" (p. 191). The ethic of care furthers that moral responsibility by stating that the educational leader is obligated to attend to the side of administration concerned with the "desire to dominate, to intimidate, to control" (p. 196).

When these under-sided issues dominate an administrative exchange, they block any possibility of open, trusting professional communication. Mistrust, manipulation, aggressive and controlling actions or language on the part of the administrator or the

teacher or both can lead to a relationship that is hypocritical, dishonest, disloyal, vicious, and dehumanizing. (p. 196)

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) built on Starratt's (1991; 1994) work to include an ethic of profession where the focus of leadership practice is on the best interests of students. At the end of my master's degree as I considered my philosophy of leadership, I intentionally chose to embed these ethics as a guide to bridge the theory I had been learning and my practice as a leader. I included three questions in my leadership philosophy: what do we do? How do we do what we do? And how can we do what we do better? The purpose of these questions was to provide a mechanism whereby consistently asking and answering the question, I was leading not based on my own self interests but from a place that emphasized institutional growth and focus on the evolving needs and best interests of the people in the schools where I was leading. My belief was, and is, that in order to walk the talk of the ethics of care, critique and profession, we have to be willing to continually examine our individual and collective ideas and actions. At the time of the two anecdotes that I shared earlier, I believed that the necessity of interrogating what we do was an essential aspect of leadership so I asked questions about what we did and why we did them. When other individuals, often those in positions of leadership, felt as though the question was a form of attack, the questions evoked a negative reaction. The result was a stall in the process of understanding intended by asking the question. Though Andrew may not have been as influenced by Starratt's (1991; 1994; 2004) work as I was, I believe that commitment to questioning was similarly ethical in its purpose. Andrew addressed this as a desire to improve.

Wait a minute, I see a different way of doing this. And a lot of people will say I see a different way of doing it, but it's like, "Hmm, but I don't want to step on your toes but that willingness, or either that blind faith or that confidence in yourself to go, 'well let's try something else, right? And that experimentation goes back to the questioning. How can we do it, try something different to see if we get a different result. (Tr05-14, 14:34-14:59)

Despite Andrew's explanation of the positive intent of questioning practices, the intent was not always the same as the outcome. Though he viewed questioning as a vehicle to greater understanding, a sentiment we all agreed with, we also shared the view that questioning for understanding was uncommon in leadership. The type of negative exchange between individuals in positions of leadership and others, when questions were perceived as condemnation or denouncement, inevitably resulted in tension that obstructed Andrew's ability to raise questions. Embedded in the importance of questioning was contending with the purpose of asking questions. Questioning as inquiry is meant to achieve an understanding of what we do in order to potentially make improvements to those practices that we sometimes forget to question.

Essentially by asking simple and complex questions and creating spaces for others to do the same, there can be a greater sense of buy-in or investment in the well being of the community. However, because administrators are often seen as those responsible for the bureaucracies and policies, questioning the policies can be, and in our experiences were, mistakenly viewed as challenging the person responsible for the policy instead of challenging the relevance or importance of the issue. Andrew referenced situations in his school that he has encountered where people become offended when he challenges them. The fine line he refers

to is how the challenge is asked – does it promote questioning and an interrogation of practices or policies or is it construed as a personal attack?

I get into a lot of trouble personally because when people bark, I bark back, right? And then they're like 'why are you attacking me? You attacked what I said.'... It's a bit of a fine line. (Tr05-14, 19:13-19:33)

We agreed that the purpose of the challenge was to “make thing better” but creating a climate for questioning intended to create conversations around improvement remains a challenge for each of us. Despite the struggle, we remain committed to asking the questions because we believed it is an important leadership quality.

Andrew: How do we question in a way that is again, empowering and all of these different things without being confrontational necessarily, right? It's not about a fight

Lisa: And you've probably learned that the hard way. Am I guessing?

Andrew: I haven't learned it yet...

Lisa: And you've learned it probably...

Chelsea: Yeah, several times in different meetings (laughter)

Alexandra: I'm working on it

Lisa: And I would say the same thing (Tr05-14, 20:46-21:14)

For some, the act of questioning can easily become a manifestation of power; only certain individuals are allowed to ask questions, those in power like principals, while others, like teachers or students, are responsible only for answering the question as it has been offered. In other words, there are assumptions that it is acceptable for a principal to pose questions because he is seen to have the power to initiate change whereas a teacher may ask the question but if that question countermands the desires of the principal in power, the relevance

or value of the question may be lost in a power struggle. If someone steps outside of the hierarchical roles, particularly by asking questions, the resulting judgement labels the asker as wrong reminding the asker of their lesser position in the hierarchy.

I share the following example to illustrate what is meant here. In one of the schools I taught in, the administration decided that the gates would be locked promptly at 8:00 am to ensure that students would arrive to school on time – the decision was meant to penalize students for tardiness. Students who did arrive late would not be permitted entry regardless of the reason. This was an international American curriculum school located in Pakistan. At the time, foreigners were the target of serious threat that necessitated the installation of blast planters to absorb the impact of potential car bombs as well as bullet proof glass coating on classroom windows. Regardless of the nationality of the students, leaving them unprotected outside the schools gates put them at increased risk. When the late policy was questioned for these reasons, the teacher who questioned the policy for these reasons, she was told that it was not her decision to make. This same teacher had publicly voiced concerns to the same principal over various policies at previous staff meetings. Though I did not hear all of her concerns, the ones I did hear were not voiced disrespectfully and in many cases raised legitimate questions about why our school operated as it did and were those decisions in the best interest of students. Later, at a dinner hosted by another teacher, the principal whom she asked the question of told me that she was a trouble-maker that he intended to fire before Christmas. While this story is specific to one event, it serves as an example of where the principal saw questioning his flawed policy as a threat to his authority that ultimately left students unfairly and unnecessarily at risk.

This same mentality is seen in Andrew's description of battle lines drawn with regard to the job action that was taking place in British Columbia at the time of our meetings. While in the previous paragraph, the attention was on individuals disagreeing with a leader and therefore being stigmatized, Andrew provided an example where questions about how the job action would impact students, parents and families, ostracized the askers who were not in positions of power in the union. He described the battle lines being drawn as "you are with us or against us" which left no room to question the decisions being made with regard to job action and how those decisions would impact the learning communities in the schools. This is further evidence that when leadership is threatened, the interest of students is compromised. If individuals questioned decisions about job action, union leaders judged them as being in the wrong camp. By raising this, Andrew shed light on the complexity of leadership in educational communities.

What about the learning communities within our buildings because I get that you want to protect the union community of professionals but what, how does that blend in the community of children, parents, families that are all within there. And how can you, if you are looking at a nested circle, how can you just worry about one nest and none of the other aspects to it? (Tr05-14, 38:18-38:26).

Our collaborative inquiry group recognized that questioning as inquiry was built upon empowerment and understanding but it was also a leadership act that for us needs to be developed, nurtured and trusted. The belief that questioning for inquiry was a skill that needed to be developed stems from the admission that we had not witnessed questioning-as-inquiry consistently modelled as a leadership trait nor was it one that came naturally to us.

Upon reflective discussion, each of us had experienced moments where our questioning practices met with a lack of acceptance and resistance by some of our peers but in many cases, by the administrators in charge; we were labelled as 'trouble-makers' for challenging their authority. Andrew spoke to this through his experience as an athlete dealing with coaches.

... and I think that, that's been my experience where I've either really resonated and got along with elite coaches or just been totally against what they're doing and going, "Ok well, I get this, but explain why." And that challenging, like you say, the questioning, becomes a big, big deal. (Tr03-06, L186-189)

Frequently, the genuine intent of asking questions, generating understanding, was not heard by those who held power, like Andrew's coach, and in some cases, our peers and colleagues.

Instead the questions were defensively reacted to, causing an emotional friction that blocked the pursuit of understanding. Once those defensive walls were erected, we, particularly Andrew, Lisa and Alexandra, experienced frustration. We believe that through questioning there is a degree of emotional engagement that challenges people in potentially negative ways.

I admitted that I continue to question leadership practices and have done so for as long as I can remember and on several occasions suffered for it by being disregarded as a trouble-maker.

Not all of my questions were altruistic. There have been several occasions when my questions were intended to challenge individuals because I disagreed with them and their philosophy, particularly in cases where a leadership style or philosophy perpetuated the role of the leader as above or ranking higher than others. I shared the following story with the co-inquirers, though I have written it more clearly here for greater clarity.

When working at the school with the principal who was the subject of the second anecdote I shared in chapter one, the board of directors brought in an outside consultant to

determine if the concerns that others and myself had raised about her leadership were justified. Stories of racist comments, threats, failure to be given reimbursement for contractual benefits were just a few to come to light yet these were primarily raised with each other as opposed to publicly or to the consultant because many teachers feared potential reprisal if the principal remained in charge. I distinctly remember being in a full staff meeting with the consultant when one teacher said that she had worked in other international schools and the behaviour of this particular leader was just the way international schools operated. I stated very clearly that this was not true at every international school, or any other school, and that good leaders and schools were not ruled by intimidation or fear. Prior to that moment my discontent for the principal had been private and though some people nodded their head in agreement to my comments, by standing up to what I believed to be unethical behaviours I became labelled as trouble-maker because I was not willing to accept the status quo of poor leadership. Labelling like this was frustrating but for me in the above anecdote and for my fellow co-inquirers, situations like this did not diminish our resolve to ask questions nor to challenge but we agreed that we needed to consider how to ask those questions in ways that made clear a goal of questioning-as-inquiry for understanding.

Though we talked about the metaphorical brick wall that we repeatedly ran into while questioning, with that was a continual undercurrent of reflection as we learned how our questioning could be accepted in its more pure intent, i.e., understanding. The following quote is mine in reference to the story shared previously during our discussion.

I distinctly remember on many occasions working in the schools and one school in particular having a hundred percent conviction that I was right, and being incredibly

frustrated with the idea that, how can anyone not see this? And really feeling as – almost, not offended so much, but just, what is it? Is it me? Like, how can you not get this? And I’ve come to realize it had nothing to do with me. People just didn’t engage in that part, they didn’t care (LS, Tr03-06, L983-988)

In the early years of my teaching career, I questioned individuals such as principals in power positions and met with responses similar to those I encountered by my previous coaches.

I became a person who questioned a lot of that, so you end becoming a person who stirs the pot all the time, and you get that label, which I think is a really important part of leadership. You need people to question you about the status quo and what’s going on, but I learned the hard way that people don’t like that. (LS, Tr03-06, L157-161)

The people who dislike the questioning of the status quo were primarily those responsible for maintaining it and others who were complacently involved, those who may have been affected but did not feel the need to reject the practice even if they may have disagreed with it. In our experiences, questioning was sometimes reduced to binaries of right or wrong with little attention to the importance of the grey areas rich with insight into improving practice and engaging in reflective strategies that lead to capacity building. Accompanying this concept was a wondering that we were unable to answer; if we agree that questioning is key to our practice of leadership, why does our understanding of questioning as an act of leadership remain uncommon or result in being both misunderstood and mislabelled? Our best guess in these conversations was that the more dominant form of questioning, as criticism, was too pervasive to simply be set aside but this answer wasn’t wholly satisfactory either. Was our approach to questioning a product of our growth, experience, other factors or some combination of factors? In the course of our discussions and in the initial writing of this dissertation, I noted the places where we had lingering on unanswered questions. These questions will be explored in upcoming chapters.

In response to a situation Alexandra described in her classroom when she was questioning her students in the effort to promote a greater degree of critical thinking, Andrew acknowledged his shifting approach to questioning as it became more geared towards understanding.

You don't really know how things work, and it's like, "yeah, well you don't know how things work. So what do you think?" And that's – there's a real strength I think in the, you know, "I'm new here, so can you explain it to me, 'cause I don't get this?" And bringing on those discussions, those conversations, those – and challenging but respectfully challenging. (Tr04-18, L264-268)

We spent considerable time addressing questioning as a leadership capacity. Chelsea illuminated the purpose for questioning in simple terms. In her description, her motivation for understanding situations and context was the pursuit of understanding beyond the superficial. In her words, *"I'm never okay with something at face value, I always want to know the why behind something"* (Tr0306, L829-830). The context of her statement was in reference to her experience as a child bringing home her report card and being questioned by her father. Her desire to know what is behind something was motivated by what Alexandra alluded to earlier about digging deeper (p. 131), again in the pursuit of understanding as opposed to knowledge acquisition.

Andrew: But I think that the accountability piece is moving beyond challenging in a punitive way...

Chelsea: Oh absolutely.

Andrew: and challenging in an inquiry way.

Chelsea: Yes.

Andrew: In a, in a – an attempt to gain deeper understanding, right? So...

Chelsea: And that challenging isn't a criticism or a fault finding mission, but that we're looking for better ways of doing things. (Tr03-06, 832-844)

From Chelsea's example we suggest that questioning what is underneath, exploring the why of situations more than the what and how, is an enabling quality for leadership that we see as essential to our practice but also of others who we understand to be effective educational leaders. This pursuit of understanding, though seemingly natural for us, was not a common practice. Chelsea shared her insights into the complacency that created significant obstacles.

you know, one of the things that I worked on with my staff last year is the idea of to TTWWADI, That's The Way We've Always Done It. And to question, why do we do this? If the answer is because we've always done it this way, maybe we need to really rethink our pedagogy. And so, with the staff I was trying to get them to see like, why does your year start out with Welcome back to Grade 2 booklet on the desk? Why does your year start out with, you know? Why is the office there? Why – you know, why are we having all – why are these norms established in our institution for no reason other than, that's the way we've always done it? And it was a really huge step for people to say, "You mean I don't need to follow, you know, the order of the chapters in the textbook? (Tr03-06, L716-725)

The 'TTWWADI' mentality that Chelsea described was one that we each encountered at various points. Our conversations around this issue led us further in our characterization of leadership where questioning was more than a required process but an action that was ingrained in our philosophy and practice. We had to recognize that this belief was more reflective of our understanding of leadership and less of what we had seen in the practice of others; the majority of the leaders we had worked with did not question in ways that we question. Chelsea elaborated on questioning as being a necessary act in the pursuit of understanding where understanding is necessary to educational change.

And I think part of the whole process of educational changes or educational leadership is, being able to ask questions that people don't necessarily want to hear, that you

don't already have an answer to, 'cause you really genuinely want to know, and a willingness to put the effort into search out that answer – whatever it is for you at that time, because, you know, I think the difference between just poking at and asking questions and doing something about those questions, like searching for the answer, maybe that's why they'd like administrators to have a Masters degree. (Tr0306, L872-879)

Generally speaking, asking the difficult questions, those 'why' questions is more challenging because the answers are not always clear. By asking the difficult questions, the complexity of situations is revealed which can challenge a leader's ability to address the issue quickly and efficiently. In education, we have come to value a degree of efficiency that complex situations do not lend themselves to. An example of this is the low test scores. How can we improve test scores reveals an answer from which we can develop a structured solution. The answer lends itself to a clear plan of action where people know what to do but without understanding why the test scores are low, any initiative to improve them will inevitably fail. Asking why our tests scores are low does not offer similarly straightforward solutions.

A question that emerged from this vein was, what set us apart as leaders more inclined towards the 'why' questions? Why had we not bought into, as Chelsea put it, a more widely unquestioned TTWWADI approach? Why, despite sometimes a negative reaction, did we continue to seek and promote understanding through questioning? This wondering re-emerged throughout our conversations as we attempted to understand why digging deeper to understand the complexity of situations seemed out of sorts with how others approached problems. Yet that questioning as inquiry whose purpose was generating understanding resonated with us as being instinctively *right*; for us understanding the why was critically important before formulating action.

Connecting.

Building on the role of questioning, we discussed how leaders make connections to foster community. Embedded in that is the role others play in the interaction and engagement that create leadership. Though we discussed enabling qualities in the first two phases of our inquiry, this phase has focussed on the practices of leadership, which includes connecting. Leadership is an action that cannot occur in isolation; it is inherently relational. Andrew suggested that idea of relationality was derived from a sense of community where he assumed leadership roles.

I took on stuff when I was here but more out of social things. So I ran a tennis club, I was involved with different clubs and groups, and more just the social aspects of it. (Tr05-14, 8:31-8:44).

Alexandra shared the same recollections with drama as being an empowering experience.

I just went and did drama by myself which was a stepping stone or milestone to realizing I could do anything. I could walk into the drama room with all grade 11 and 12 cool kids and I was 12, and still say, 'I'd like a role'. (Tr05-14, 6:49-7:25).

Chelsea commented similarly about her experience with student council, noting that her sense of empowerment came from other's people's validation that she could lead well and the feelings of self worth derived from that recognition and a sense of belonging.

As I mentioned earlier, we deliberately avoided using labels to describe certain types of leadership so as not to limit ourselves to certain conceptions over others, and though relationality is embedded in relational leadership, we did not categorize ourselves as relational leaders. We did however, agree upon the value of relationality as a leadership practice born of a sense of community. What differentiated our experiences were our connection to and the

embodiment of that relationality. We briefly discussed the origins of this sentiment, wondering how and why the idea of connectedness seemed to take root for us, referring back to earlier conversations about having a devil's advocate or critical friend in our lives. Key to the importance of those interactions with a devil's advocate or critical friend as a positive experience informing our sense of leadership was the nature of our connection to those people.

Andrew: There's a social piece to it, right? There's the social piece in that if someone if someone is always challenging you without the experience of, or the confidence, or the safety, or the community where you go, 'oh yeah, well that's a friend of mine...

Chelsea: Hmm, hmm (agreeing)

Andrew: ... its okay for them to challenge me, or that's my father or my grandfather, or someone that I have a relationship with, right? Where someone who's going well, 'get off my back', right? If I don't, it's a quick 'why do you have to pick apart everything I do. You know? (Tr 06-04, 14:57-15-29

The social piece Andrew refers to is about connections between people. Without the connection, a sense of trust is lacking which results in the negative interaction where the individual feels like they are being attacked.

Though I included a more theoretical perspective on relationality as well as on relational leadership in earlier chapters, further discussion here is warranted. Branson (2010) explains that relational understanding is derived from an emotional and intuitive place that allows us to make sense of "interpretations, perceptions, and beliefs" (p. 91). Traditionally, the practice of leadership has been viewed as a primarily rational endeavour (Branson, 2010). From our discussion, I say confidently that the majority of our experience with leadership supports Branson's claim. However, I say with equal confidence that for us as leaders, we not only

privilege relationality as a leadership practice over rationality but also actively engage in a relational approach. Throughout our careers we encountered individuals whose philosophical and pedagogical approaches could be seen as relational or rational but organizing them as one or the other is neither productive in generating further understanding nor is it realistic in the postmodern sense of multiple realities coexisting and interacting.

In chapter six (p. 130), I included an excerpt from Andrew about the role his grandfather played as a mentor. Andrew's grandfather instilled in him a solid foundation for Andrew's approach to leadership, particularly in how Andrew views questioning. In his recollection, Andrew remembered initially dismissing his grandfather's questions but recognized that his grandfather wasn't criticizing Andrew, but prompting him to think or consider the situation further.

Andrew: "Well you wouldn't get it." "Well, then explain it to me." You know, and that devil's advocate, that challenge, that interest, and for me it was never – the accountability piece was never challenging why, it was just have you thought about it? Right, and have you worked through it and I think that's why I'm reading this book, because the accountability part from leadership to followers or from district admin to different levels of the hierarchy that are present in our system is a huge, huge challenge... (Tr03-06, 771-777).

In chapter one, I shared my recollections and stories of principals for whom I worked and how those powerfully influenced my desire to understand leadership. Alexandra's recalled her first experience joining drama as an eight grade student where her membership in drama as a younger student gave her a sense of community as well as mentorship.

When I was twelve I was in grade eight, I was very young, and I wanted to go try out for the school play and it was – they'd stopped having drama class and so in this eight to twelve school the whole school play was pretty much the old kids who took drama and were in grade eleven and twelve. And this girlfriend of mine, said she wanted to go

– she would go, at the last minute she chickened out and so the first day I didn't go to the try out and then they made another announcement the next day and I thought, "No, I really want to do this." And so I went by myself and it was the first time too that I took a different path from this group of friends also, but then I made all these connections that were in the older grades who treated me, even though I was like the little tiny kid sister, they gave me a lot of confidence going into the next few years of high school, because they included me in their conversations and I was involved in this play with them and I had two lines, and I went to every practice. (Tr03-37, 472-484).

Chelsea's understanding of how people supported her and viewed her a leader as well as her experience being the 'teacher'.

Isn't it funny, like I was a . . . was an unpaid TA is basically what I was in grade seven, helping the little boy in grade four learn to read. Like he had – I would say he was at a grade one reading level in grade four. And I became his reading program and I don't even know – it was awesome I – I made lessons, we made flashcards, like I had stickers. It was awesome! (Tr03-27, L214-218)

Embedded in each of these anecdotes are touchstone stories that have stayed in our consciousness and that we shared as a means to inform our understanding or/and enactment of leadership, particularly as a relational practice. Those were profound interactions for us that served to shape our own sense of leadership as a collaborative and relational endeavour. Andrew spoke earlier of his touchstone moment with an influential mentor who supported and encouraged him (p. 116). For Chelsea, the early stages on her teaching career were built upon collaboration where those collaborative relationships were professionally rewarding and and personally motivating.

And I think – so because that kind of was my normal through my training. That's what I sought out in my relationships with colleagues, is I need those collaborative pieces. (Tr03-27, L127-129)

We recalled relationships and interactions built on a sense of empowerment that came from collaboration or connection. Alexandra recalled her teacher education program where the goal was to become collaborative which complemented her style because she described herself as being collaborative “*by nature*”. Similar to collaborative inquiry where research is “*with people not on them or about them*” (Heron, 1996, p. 19), leadership as we understood it was also more about being *with* people.

Capacity building.

In our attempt to understand questioning and connecting, we discussed their relationship to capacity building, another significant action that we individually and collectively identified after examining the audio recordings of our previous conversations. Capacity building is a leadership practice that “supports collaboration encourages and nurtures the empowerment and capacity of other individuals in the school” (Slater, 2008, p. 56). During our discussions, Andrew referenced a video that appears as part of Sivers’ (2010) TED talk, *How to start a movement*. Andrew used to explain his belief in the under-recognized value of capacity-building as part of leadership.

I don't know if you have ever seen that video, the YouTube video, it's the one, crazy guy dancing, and he is dancing in the field and then its, it's not the first person that goes out and dances with him, it's the third and fourth person that, they put themselves out there and go you know what, it's not just one person doing crazy dancing. But to make that effort, to support what's going on and I think that, that a really strong leadership piece that people sometimes don't value enough. The leadership is often the person or the people that are supporting the one person who has the idea. And going, 'you know what, it's not about my idea, but I really want to support you and your idea and build some momentum around this change and that aspect of being a leader without being the front man and support them in their journey. (Tr05-14, 15:56-16:57)

In my earlier review of the literature (chapter 4), I suggested that in the past schools leaders were the principals that directed the actions of others because the role of leader was in line with a more managerialist focus born of an age when the structure of schools was directly influenced by the structure of industry (Lumby, 2006). A managerial focus isolates the manager/leader from others because s/he is also the decision-maker to determine the how, when and why of what needs to be done. While some school leaders continue to model managerial practice, that directive style of leadership did not resonate with us. We revisited this in our collective analysis when Andrew posed to the question: “*how do we move from a vision of self to a vision of being part of a bigger group?*” (Tr0604, 19:54-19:58). From there Chelsea questioned how leadership is and should be viewed, to which Andrew responded with an explanation of the importance of viewing each other more as equals in leadership, not as followers.

Chelsea: Do you think it is important then or, maybe an important piece to leadership, that leaders not only see, you know, see themselves as an individual in the group but see the group as its own entity? Like ...

Andrew: Absolutely.

Chelsea: Do you know what I am saying? ...

Andrew: If you look at that video right, the first follower idea where you know that this isn't my thing but I am going to support it and... I'm going to go in and I see value in it and that brings other people into it, is really important as opposed to the crazy guy who's out going 'yeah, let all dance. C'mon dance with me'. Right? And if that was the case, if he took that approach, where this one person is like, 'follow me, this is the way' then it probably wouldn't have been successful. Right? Whereas if a couple sort of follow and again that idea where he made the comment about treating the first few followers as equals not, 'okay, you're with me, now follow me here'. It's that group that is saying 'oh yeah, here's where we are going. What do you think? how does this work?' (Tr0604, 20:09-21:30)

Upon re-examining all of the recordings and transcripts of our meetings, I note that we never once made mention of or referenced examples of a managerialist-style leader or hierarchical ‘captain of the ship’ as one that we wanted to model our leadership practice after. In our collective analysis, Andrew described leaders he respected sharing a vision built by the group as opposed to the individual and having the conversation about what needs to be done and why.

In increasingly complex educational contexts, like those we have been and continue to be part of, capacity building is an important, if not essential, leadership practice. Chelsea shared her experience working with capacity-building leaders.

When I think about the leaders I loved to work with and aspire to work with and be, you, they aren't the people who that haul people into closed door meetings because you questioned them in front of other people (Tr05-14, 22:28-22:36)

Capacity building is about creating conditions for empowerment so others can use their skills and talents to lead *with* others as opposed to directing others (Slater, 2008). Andrew used an analogy from his involvement in sport to explain his experience with capacity building.

Coaching vs. training. And training is okay, well here's what you need to do to get to here, but coaching is, okay, we just lost, right. Why did we lose? What can we learn from it? What can we take to our next, next thing, right? And how do we, how do we support what happened here and grow from it, right, and learn from it? (Tr03-06, L898-902)

In Andrew's understanding, coaching is an activity akin to capacity building in that there is more to the act of coaching than a superficial desire to improve one's individual performance such as that found in training. For Andrew, coaching is an act of capacity building that is a collaborative practice. Slater (2008) indicates that capacity building leads to greater creativity, more

profound learning and increased motivation. Andrew sees the value in this because of his involvement in sport where the pursuit of greater understanding in order to improve was not just led by an individual but encouraged within a team.

Interestingly, upon reviewing the recordings of our conversations, Andrew embodies his belief in capacity building in how he phrases his comments. Andrew repeatedly used a plural pronoun in his explanation, implying that in order to improve, the process of coaching must be collective, much like leadership. Being a leader is no more a singular activity than being a teacher; it is a relational act. The structure or nature of that relationship is a significant feature for us in differentiating the type of leadership we believe in and act upon. We each encountered and experienced the hierarchical or top down relational structure of leadership where capacity was limited by the singular directionality of the relationship, from the top to the bottom. I spoke earlier about my experience as an adolescent questioning coaches; part of the failure in that approach that led to my frustration was because the structure was hierarchical.

Within capacity building is a connection to emotion in that we need to feel valued or emotionally connected in order to buy in. In the simple analogy, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, the emotional response to leadership as capacity building is like honey because capacity building is a positive act based on empowerment, creativity and motivation (Slater 2008). In revisiting the emotional connection we had to notions of leadership, we discussed an earlier idea that I shared about a belief that the negativity of deficit thinking too frequently guides change and subsequently leadership; it is like the vinegar and the fly analogy.

Let's look at what we're doing well. How do we build on what we're doing well? 'Cause we have this tendency to go deficit thinking into, we have to fix what's broken, if we even engage in that at all. (Lisa, Tr03-06, L3252-354)

We also recognized that a source of frustration or negative emotion came from how leaders value their community. Chelsea pointed out that “*people don't want to buy in if they are the stepping stone*” (Tr06-04, 24:33-24:35).

In our conversations, I raised the point that sometimes in order to facilitate capacity building, we must also look at and build on what we do well and not focus on fixing problems. This relates to approaching leadership with a solution orientation as opposed to a problem orientation. We had often witnessed colleagues, and at times ourselves, get bogged down in the problem. A useful commentary on how to these situations is Andrew's commentary on how to approach situations so that buy-in and in-turn capacity building occurs. Andrew referred to it as “*bridging the gap*”.

And it you look at the traditional hierarchy with the quantitative, accountability piece, helping translate, helping interpret, right, the idea of success and using new language and bringing in the 21st century learning stuff or whatever it is that you need to use that will sway this person or people to go, 'oh yeah, well that's a new way of looking at it, and not saying 'this is wrong' or going up to the superintendent and going, 'you need to change this' ... Here, I can help you with your understanding and support it this way. Again it's that translation piece, how do we bridge the gap as opposed to throwing them off the cliff? (Tr 05-14, 23:39-24:40)

The translation that Andrew referred to is the ability to explain things multiple different ways, particularly because as teachers as we help students understand. Leaders must be able to do the same for the people they work with to create access points or acceptance.

Knowing one's self.

Though we explored the idea of knowing one's self less explicitly, it is important in that without knowing one's self, understanding how and why we question, connect or build capacity is disconnected. Knowing one's self is a thread that ties the other three ideas together. We recognized that a sense of self born out of practiced self-awareness and humility was a necessary quality of a leader. One exchange illustrates that we believe equally in self-awareness as elevating the practice of leadership.

Lisa: And so, I think in there somewhere, in all of this somewhere is – I think a degree of self-awareness, because I think if you're self-aware –

Chelsea: And real self-awareness.

Lisa: Yeah.

Chelsea: 'Cause I sometimes think, leaders think they're self-aware and have this like false sense of knowing, and then build weird visions and, practices from that.

Lisa: Yeah. Like, 'cause I think it's this idea of reflexivity as opposed to reflection. So reflexivity there's action tied to that. So you actually have to do something with it, so the idea of praxis, tie it into that. But then it's, I think, also tied to that, in that process is the ability to relinquish control.

Alexandra: And not be afraid that you won't – you can't take it back when you need to.

Lisa: Yeah or relinquish the control, er, maybe it's not control so much as relinquish the – maybe it's the power. (Tr03-27, L1177-1196)

Our reference to *realness* is one that in the moment went unquestioned yet when we revisited the concept, none of us were entirely sure how to explain it; we understood it in an embodied and intuitive way. The realness we referenced requires the humility and confidence to not only admit mistakes but to let those mistakes be seen. Arriving at that sense of self came from

reflective practice, a willingness to challenge our practice and an amenability to dwell in places of discomfort.

... for a lot of people going through a system, you become a product of that system. So to actually change your approach is quite radical for a lot of people. And I also think that people like yourselves have probably made that shift somewhere along the way, that shift in thinking. But however, why is a much bigger question. (LS, Tr02-22, L455-458)

Our comfort with change seems to be the antithetical approach to what we have witnessed in others. At the time of our meetings we did not explore our understanding and possible comfort with change as a leadership characteristic. As the researcher responsible for this study, I noted several points or questions that went unaddressed but in retrospect are worthy of further analysis and discussion. I will include these in the final chapters.

Though the self does not exist exclusively without being informed in some way by the other, our recollections were less cognitive and more emotionally driven which is perhaps what made them so profound. We *felt* strongly connected to the ideas we shared; the passion with which we spoke cannot be communicated here on paper in a way that does justice to the sentiments of the co-inquirers. The comments we shared were about people -- a father, grandfather, mentors and friends -- we valued and who had valued us because of their beliefs, the actions they chose and how those choices influenced our thinking about leadership. Others that we did not or could not connect with because their beliefs and actions fell outside of our own had evoked no less of an emotional response and had also influenced our understanding of leadership. We made choices to share certain anecdotes and beliefs over others but our commentaries were based on interactions with a wide array of leadership styles, beliefs and actions. We became more confident in the value of our experiences to inform our practice of

leadership. From a relational and collaborative perspective we were being empowered by each other to walk our own talk. Cloud (2009) explains that if a leader expects others to trust them and in turn join them in creating or contributing to change, then that leader must be able to hear them, understand them and empathize with them. In our meetings, this is what we were doing for each other. We each at various points expressed how much we enjoyed our discussion and at times wished we could persuade others to join which leads me, as the researcher, to consider another question. How do we foster that relational sense of support, collaboration and capacity building for others in ways that enable them to carry forth the same practices? As we continued to try to understand how we reached our own ideas of what it means to lead and in recognizing the importance of capacity and community building, we circled around, through and in between who we believed ourselves to be as leaders and in turn how we enacted those qualities. This is the focus of the next inquiry phase, meaning making.

Chapter Eight: Analysis and Meaning Making (Phase Four)

This chapter moves into the *so what* phase as a hybrid of our collective analysis conducted as part of the final phase of the inquiry as well as my own post-inquiry analysis. In the preceding three phases of this collaborative inquiry, I have advanced characteristics and actions of leaders as brought forth by our inquiry group. Embedded in those sections, and throughout this dissertation, are threads of action and reflection in my writing of the dissertation as well as in how we as co-inquirers revisited ideas reflexively. In keeping with the reflexive stance explained, we built our understanding of leadership through knowledge that was “experientially derived, seldom articulated, but constantly and consistently acted upon” (St. Germain & Quinn, 2005, p. 79). The same understanding informs our practice. Our process stays true to Olivares, Peterson, and Hess’ (2007) suggestion that what is missing from understanding leadership is deeper exploration of how leadership is experienced. For the purpose of this section of the dissertation, I examined the transcripts for specific quotes that supported our collaborative examination, those that best supported the themes and ideas that were identified by the co-inquirers and recorded on sticky notes to be categorized during our collaborative analysis. The quotes that are included in this chapter are specific examples of what we noticed from the initial audio recordings. Those quotes are included throughout this section; the quotes do not appear in a sequential order because in this phase of our inquiry, we were re-examining previously discussed ideas and concepts to both generate further discussion and add layers of meaning. The quotes included are intended to illustrate a clearer picture of our discussion and reflections, in particular, what specifically we were basing our reflections on.

As I embark on sharing the themes born of this research, I use this juncture as an space to address two important questions related to the validity of the claims I am about to make: how do we, as co-inquirers know the qualities and actions we brought forth are in fact qualities of leaders let alone good leaders? And, how is it that we, as co-inquirers, feel capable of creating such labels? I addressed this conceptually in my earlier discussion of validity when I shared Garman's (1996) perspective on establishing validity (p. 51) but I will revisit here as well. By doing so, previous qualities and practices discussed as well as the five themes to be discussed are understood as valid claims of leadership as action.

In prior phases, the co-inquirers identified dispositions and actions synonymous with how their experience of and with leadership has shaped their understandings. In her discussion of relational leadership, Fletcher (2012) indicates that connection is the primary site for human growth. Not only is the collaborative nature of this research couched in connection, so too are the experiences brought forward by the co-inquirers and the process by which those stories are examined in our inquiry meetings. Further, Fletcher suggests that for understanding to emerge, factors such as empowered action, new knowledge and the desire for connection feature prominently. The experiences shared by co-inquirers that illuminated empowered action as questioning, advocacy, authenticity and perseverance speak to the *verité*, utility and verisimilitude of the research as valid. Similarly, the co-inquirers spoke of relationality, connection and capacity building as both dispositions and actions of desirably, effective leaders, each of which is interpreted as representations of the desire to be connected.

In addition to sharing our observations of leaders and identifying the characteristics and actions that were salient to us, our conversations moved inward towards our own experience and the practice of leadership. To distil these discussions to a basic question does a disservice to the richness of the conversations. For the sake of understanding the purpose of our discussions, one can say that we were attempting to understand ***who we are*** as leaders where actions were the personification of our experiences and understandings. As we turned our lens inward, the distinction between leaders as others and ourselves became more integrated; when we spoke of others we were also speaking of ourselves. To express this connection, I join the pronoun *we* with a tilde (~) sign to the word *leader*. In mathematical terms, the tilde indicates equivalency or similarity between two values. While we began our conversations around leaders as other, in the final phase of our inquiry, our representation was no longer separate from other leaders nor singularly focussed. We were considering leadership as our way of being in the world.

I have also chosen to deliberately situate the co-inquirers in the themes because this research was conducted collaboratively. While it is my dissertation, I feel strongly that these themes be directly connected to the co-inquirers. Although I believe that these themes represent important understandings of leadership that constitute new knowledge, I also shy away from suggesting that they are universally applicable to all forms of leadership. Perhaps more important than the themes is the value of collaborative inquiry as a structure for the co-inquirers to further their understanding of leadership conceptually and practically. I believe that each of the co-inquirers has the capacity to carry their understandings forward to be shared with colleagues. I also believe that each of the co-inquirers could facilitate collaborative inquiry

groups in their own educational settings that would not only provide the co-inquirers with continued opportunities for growth but also would provide opportunities for others to develop greater understanding of leadership in ways that are currently uncommon yet vitally necessary. In keeping with the postmodern location I have chosen for this research, I wish to emphasize that as much as I hope that these themes might influence a broader understanding of leadership, I cannot guarantee this. In chapter nine, I will provide a discussion of how the themes presented here may be taken up to further a broad understanding of leadership. I also wish to note here that the identification and representation of the following themes come primarily from my perspective as the researcher, not the perspective of the co-inquirers. We did not collaboratively determine these themes, not did we collaboratively determine the subsequent recommendations I share in chapter nine. I acknowledge that this is a departure from the tenets of collaborative inquiry but a necessary departure given the requirements of this research as my dissertation. Despite the value of collaborative inquiry, particularly for this research, I am also bound by the requirements of the dissertation as a body of work constructed by myself as a single author and researcher.

Theme one: We~leaders engage in reflexivity

In my initial proposal for this research, I spoke of reflexivity as being a sensitizing concept. I did not specifically bring this to the attention of the co-inquirers by using a definition or by sharing any research associated with critical reflexivity because I did not want the term to unduly influence their thinking. Throughout the process, I was cautious about using jargon and technical phrases because of its potential to distract co-inquirers from the exploration and sharing of their own experiences. Nonetheless, my belief that reflexivity is one the

characteristics that differentiates us as co-inquirers from other leaders that we have worked with and for seeped through my bias. I expressed my struggle in understanding why 'leaders' engage in reflective practice that leads to action while others do not; why I am reflexive while others in my experience have not been. In my case, I am a naturally reflective thinker; since I was a child, I habitually analyze what people say and do as well as the meaning behind what they say and do. This process of questioning has been a part of my life since adolescence. In my continued development as a teacher and emerging development as a researcher, that reflective thinking takes form as reflexivity. I am rarely dismissive of words or acts as meaningless; this research is a testament to that process. While the co-inquirers may not describe themselves as I have described myself here, I do consider them to be actively reflexive in their attempt to learn, understand and enact leadership. Their participation in the research is testament to their commitment to being reflexive. Returning to the explanation I shared in an earlier chapter, reflexivity is:

... an act of self-conscious consideration that can lead people to a deepened understanding of themselves and others, not in the abstract, but in relation to specific social environments . . . [and] foster a more profound awareness . . . of how social contexts influence who people are and how they behave. . . . It involves a person's active analysis of past situations, events, and products, with the inherent goals of critique and revision for the explicit purpose of achieving an understanding that can lead to change in thought or behavior. (Danielewicz, 2001, pp. 155-156)

By participating in this research, we are walking the talk of being reflexive because the knowledge and experiences we bring forward and subsequently understand in light of those conversations are examples of reflexive practice. Through the examples shared, the co-inquirers show that they too have engaged in a similar process over time as they seek to understand their own role as leaders. We acknowledged and engaged in our own reflexive process by admitting that how we question can be problematic but it is something that we continue to try and make sense of; we are still learning about how to question in ways that are less confrontational but what is most important is that we continue to learn about our practice as leaders because we want to.

I have been seeking to better understand the nature of my behaviour as a leader since I began my master's degree. During our early meetings, I recalled instances as a teacher when I recognized situations around me as problematic but my peers and colleagues did not.

... – what's really intrigued me, and I think I said this little bit last time, is where does this all come from? So why did I have a sense that something was wrong and other people just seemed to just go along with it, and they seem fine with it. (Tr03-06, L102-105)

This comment is part of a thread of discussion that spanned over several sessions. I posited the idea that good leaders engage in reflexivity. This was brought forward in different ways by the co-inquirers who agreed that reflexivity was an action that was more inherent than learned but one that was critical in differentiating quality of leadership.

Lisa: This is something that I've long thought, is that the people that are able to lead the way that I think, you're naturally reflexive. I don't think this can be taught and I know lots of people argue with me about this –

Alexandra: I agree.

Lisa: – but I don't think that can be taught. I think you can teach the skills around reflection, you can talk about it formatively, but I think this is [drawing] if you do this naturally, you're in a whole different category, I think.

*Chelsea: Absolutely, and I think that's the different between good teachers and great teachers.
(Tr03-27, L1360-1371)*

The context of this conversation made us consider whether reflexivity can or should be taught in the development of leadership practice. We further wondered whether reflexivity is developed through other means then applied to leadership. For Andrew, reflexivity manifested in the form of playing devil's advocate as he intentionally and consistently looked at situations, problems and ideas from the opposing perspective as a strategy to develop greater understanding not only for himself but in others. For Andrew, he believed that engaging himself and others in reflexivity was a means to challenge the status quo or hegemony that at times negatively mires leaders and education.

They call – I mean, the devil's advocate piece is interesting because I own that role most of the time, right. Like I'll challenge what I believe just so that I can get a reaction or chip away at what I believe and try to, you know – and that, I think there's that, again, the questioning piece. The willingness to challenge for deeper understanding, as opposed to challenge to – or hold accountable or measure to a certain level. (Tr03-06, L846-851)

For Andrew, reflexivity requires a leader to challenge her/his own beliefs as well as the beliefs of others. That challenge is necessary to achieve “an understanding that can lead to change in thought or behavior” (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 156).

Our recurring discussion about reflexivity led us to challenge our understanding of the nature of reflexivity as merely a thought process. Engagement in the action of being reflexive is not necessarily a cognitive process that interrogates beliefs and action in a systematic way but

one that incorporates other ways of knowing. Rajvanshi (2011) shared the view that both the heart and gut have neurons like those found in the brain. While the brain has significantly more neurons and is therefore the primary organ for thinking, the neurons found in the heart and gut communicate information to the brain via the vagus nerve. McCraty, Atkinson and Bradley (2004) determined that the heart is somewhat responsible for the formation of knowledge commonly referred to as intuition. Recognizing this, knowledge created from reflexive practice may be akin to knowledge similarly built through intuition. Intuition can be a powerful informant of reflexivity. Through our inquiry meetings, we legitimized intuition by articulating how we have come to know without justifying that knowledge based on someone else's theory. Our understanding, while informed by some theory, is born intuitively of our actions as leaders.

In one of our conversations I made reference to the construction of emotional knowing in the context of Mezirow's (1994) work on transformative learning.

So then I started reading some more and found other evidence of emotional knowing as being informative. But it struck me that when I was reading this, that it's not really a disorienting dilemma, it's not an event. It's actually the space created between the event and where we are and trying to figure out, what's happening in between that, and then I – so then I started thinking about this idea of leadership in terms of – this question keeps coming up to me, how do we get to where we are? Like how did we end up here, as opposed to going just down the – close the door to your classroom route – which so many people do, and we see those people, and I'm sure they're very good at what they do, but they've chosen not to go down the same path and I can't quite figure out why. (Lisa, Tr03-37, L109-118)

This passage illuminates the complexity of how in the case of this dissertation leaders come to be based on their experiences and interactions. Because the intersections created through the sharing of our experiences cannot be predicted nor can the nature and value of those intersections be anticipated, defining a path or formula towards the type of leadership we are

characterizing is unlikely if not impossible. Knowing this, some might view the value of this type of research as limited because of the impossibility of using it to prescribe clear steps to becoming a leader. Given the postmodern location of this research and acknowledging that complexity provides an undeniable context, I disagree with those who may devalue what we as co-inquirers have come to know about leadership. Further, I argue that the lack of prescription points to an important consideration that I will share here. What is lacking in the preparation process of leadership in education is the time and space necessary to make sense of the experiences and intersections that inform our understanding. Because these experiences and intersections go formally unexplored, their value in the formation of leadership identity and in understanding leadership in general are random at best.

Those intersections and experiences could be considered the framework for Mezirow's (1975) idea of the disorienting dilemma as the accumulation of events as opposed to a singular event. In keeping with this, a singular event is unlikely to lead to transformation though it can be a catalyst to a part of a series of event or considerations. From our discussions, it became apparent that engaging in reflexivity created a pattern of disorientation that was a space that was natural for us. We witnessed many of our colleagues whose mission, whether born of conscious thought or not, was driven by the shortest, most linear path or the path of least resistance. We questioned this process but in the following excerpt, Andrew elucidates the reflexivity that we engaged in as synonymous with growth.

It's the idea of growth, right? That whole, that's what I struggle with, that's probably my big question that came out of my thesis work was: how do we define growth? Right, growth doesn't need to be here to there, I'm leaving this behind, right, and progress and keeping up with this and – it's like, well wait a minute. No, growth can be sitting

here right, and going, okay, yeah. I have a better understanding of what's going on so I can change the way that I do things, right. (Tr04-18, L619-624)

Interestingly, the idea of growth often associated with progress or movement can and does happen in one place; mindfulness is an example of such practice. Drawing on conceptions of mindfulness-mindlessness from a social psychology perspective, mindfulness is “the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective” (Langer, 1997, p. 4). In contrast, mindlessness refers to “entrapment in old categories; by automatic behaviour that precludes attending to new signals; and by action that operates from a single perspective” (p. 4). Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) posit that mindfulness leads to “a greater sensitivity to one’s environment, more openness to new information, the creation of new categories for structuring perception, and (4) enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving” (p. 2). Senge et al. (2005) equate mindfulness to *presencing* where deep listening, full consciousness and awareness and an openness to one’s preconceptions lead to “Being able to consciously feel, understand, analyse, and employ one’s immediate experience” (p. 88) to inform action and deliberation. A static positioning as a site for growth defies the privileged linearity of learning; ask a question, obtain an answer is an $a+b=c$ model for learning but one that we did not identify as being part of our growth as leaders nor was it the kind of learning we wished to promote. For us, progress, growth or learning is multidirectional, multilayered, and interconnected. Andrew further articulated the process one engages in during that moment of introspection.

And is the challenge – am I contributing to that challenge and if so, how am I contributing, right? And is it – is it meaningful to me? You know, because realistically that’s all we have control over, is ourselves and how we respond, right, our response to

things. So, how can we adapt, validate, support, right, emphasize our response in relation to a situation that we're in. (Andrew, Tr04-18, L574-578)

Andrew's comment is an excellent example of the kind of engagement in reflexive practice to achieve understanding that we were drawn to and motivated by. Andrew's thoughts speak to the relational nature of leadership. He is considering his response but in relation to those that he is involved with in a particular situation, not in relation to what the organization or policy requires. As I mentioned earlier, at the time of our meetings, Andrew's perspective was distinct because he was contemplating the role he would be playing as a vice-principal in the coming months. In this sense, I believe he was projecting and visioning his own actions in light of our discussions.

Theme two: We~leaders act based on self-awareness

This second theme is closely tied to the first theme relating to reflexivity in that self-awareness is necessary for reflexivity to occur. I have separated the two deliberately. While they are complementary, they are also distinct. Engaging in reflexivity is an action derived from self-awareness yet one that also informs self-awareness. As we explored our own experiences as an act of self-awareness, we were engaging in a reflexive analysis where we examined our own biases, theoretical predispositions, and preferences (Schwandt, 2001). The understanding yielded through that process fed back into our awareness and understanding of leadership. Self-awareness emerged throughout our discussions as a connector between characteristics and dispositions. Earlier, in relation to questioning, I shared examples of our collective struggle with how we question. Alexandra provides one example of why this is important.

*“being aware that this (questioning) is not always a positive quality that I have but in some ways it is. In some ways it is exactly what the room needs for me to be, me”
(Tr05-14, 21-35-21:40)*

Instead of hiding her tendency towards questioning, Alexandra’s awareness of this quality in her also helps her to recognize situations when that questioning is needed.

We cannot be critically reflexive without being self-aware. While these two actions seem to lead towards an overly inward focus on self, this was not the case. We wondered how closely the actions of reflexivity and self-awareness were tied to our degree of experience; possibly because as an inquiry group, we were very close in age and years of experience in education, our beliefs could be directly correlated to that age and experience. We experienced teacher education similarly in terms of how we were taught to teach. We had also been party to similar conversations that have occurred in education over the past 15 years. We dismissed this as being too convenient because it did not take into account our prior knowledge that was wide and varied. However, what we did recognize was that by sharing our stories and beliefs about leadership we were creating meaningful connections based on the act of telling our stories. In effect we were learning more about our own stories so that we could understand leadership not just as an abstract concept but also in practice. Chelsea described this process as *knowing your story*. Andrew offered us another consideration. Even though we made the conscious decision to study our own practice, perhaps it did not require the conscious decision to do so. Andrew spoke of a colleague in his school district, a well-known and respected principal at a nearby elementary school at the latter stage of his career, who modelled reflexivity and self-awareness but defied the age and experience comparison we attempted to make. Andrew cited

this individual as an example of a leader modelling reflexive practice. In Andrew's view, this individual success in being reflexive was because of the individual's vast experience as a leader and his comfort being honest with himself and others. Though Andrew did not cite a specific example where he witnessed this individual being 'reflexive', Andrew made the point was *"certain people are drawn to that process [being reflexive] sooner than others, right. Or are, kinda, expedited maybe. I think that, other people, you know, maybe aren't ready to examine and be that brutally honest with themselves, right, and explore that, and aren't comfortable in that"* (Tr02-22, L. 649-660).

Finlay (2002b) describes reflexivity as an act of experiencing the world while moving back and forth in a "kind of dialectic between experience and awareness" (p. 533). In her sociological work, Birch (1998) describes her process of reflexivity as one where the more she told her sociological story, the more her sense of self as a sociologist was discovered. Andrew is going through a dialectical process similar to Birch's (1998) description. The more he spoke of his leadership stories and experiences, the more Andrew's sense of his leadership self develops. I speak specifically of Andrew, here, but this is no less true for any of us. The process that Andrew articulates is an example of him traversing through his past experience working with a key colleague. As he shares and considers the events of his memory, he is also making sense of those experiences in light of what he is coming to understand about that mentor's leadership as well as his own.

Andrew's reference to a strong leader colleague on the cusp of retirement confirmed our reasoning for dismissing age and experience as being key factors for what makes a good leader. Frequently, we hear the generalization that teachers and leaders who have been around

for a long time should just retire and make room for newer individuals who are creative and innovative. It is important to acknowledge that, as shared in Andrew's example, age and experience are less influential over leadership practice than the ability to engage in reflexive practice, or to learn to be comfortable in one's own skin in order to create connections with others. As Andrew spoke, we nodded in collective agreement over the value of being honest with and about one's self but was left wondering where and why we, and individuals like Andrew's colleague, had developed an affinity for reflexive practice. Alexandra shared her insight within the same conversation. With her sense of self-awareness came a confidence to be honest and direct without feeling the need to hide those parts of her but to pre-emptively let others know whom she was. By doing so, Alexandra was acting to disarm relational conflicts and open herself to more genuine ways of connecting with colleagues because they knew more about her. This is what Savin-Baden (2014) referred to as disclosing value-base, a necessity for reflexive practice and for fostering connections.

... it's not that I've become more honest with myself, but I've become more honest with other people. Where especially in leadership roles where I start out now by saying, "I'm bossy and sometimes when I get excited I go so far to the big picture you need to slow me down." Whereas before I would overwhelm people or step on people's toes and not be able to express the negative sides of my personality. Where I think that process of being able to say, "I see who I am and here's what might frustrate you so I'm putting it on the table". Let's just say right now, don't take it as this or that, but –"
(Alexandra, Tr02-22, L. 708-717)

That act of disarming was brought up originally by Andrew. He used this phrasing when describing his interactions with people when his style of questioning raised conflict or resulted in defensiveness. He did not use the word in the sense of weaponry; instead, Andrew was suggesting that to disarm meant to allay hostility. Alexandra's comment suggested that by making her bossiness open to her colleagues, when and if she did start to become bossy,

people would not move to a defensive position against her because they knew more about her and why she chose that style. This is not to say that she expected her colleagues to agree with her ideas because she told them about her 'bossy' style, but it is important to note the difference between disagreeing with ideas versus disagreeing with a person. It is Alexandra's belief that in order for her to genuinely connect with her colleagues, she had to represent her true self. In doing so, she helps to foster relationships built on reciprocity. By being vulnerable and admitting her own shortcomings, others may feel able to do the same, thus creating conditions for more authentic relationships born of respect and trust as opposed to power and control. When we consider models of leadership we see regularly in schools that are managerial or hierarchical, it is easier to see why reciprocity and collaboration may be counter intuitive for some. By engaging with others as peers instead of peons, the linear dynamic that is normally preserved gives way to more interdependent relationships reflective of complex systems. That hierarchy has, in some cases, legitimate origins in terms of how history and industrialization influenced leadership. If one considers the pervasiveness of industrialization on education, the hierarchical construct makes sense.

Given its historical origins, the idea that school structure goes relatively unquestioned is not surprising. The presence of structure existed at the advent of public education. Even in the late nineteenth century as public schools emerged in cities, educational systems replaced random schools and those systems were "carefully articulated, age graded, hierarchically structured groupings of schools, primarily free and often compulsory, administered by full-time experts and progressively taught by specially trained staff" (Katz, 1976, p. 383). As industrialization became firmly rooted in society, its effects did not remain isolated to the

factories that drew people into the cities and contributed to the urbanization of culture.

Education also made a shift toward the factory model driven in large part by the demands of industry to produce workers who could be as productive as the factories themselves. Since the taxpayer was then funding public education, it became natural to expect that education play a role in training and preparing society's youth for positions in these factories (Starr, 2010a).

One of the greatest flaws and most obvious reasons that top-down leadership is no longer effective is simply because we no longer reside in a world of industrialization. Information and globalization have resulted in obvious changes to the world we live in but, under the surface of both lies significant changes in how we interact and how we expect to be valued. Despite the belief that we are in an age no longer served by hierarchical power structures, phrases like 'tow the line', 'be a team player', 'don't rock the boat' and 'play the game' are still common references to the role that people should play. The problem with the phrases is that despite the implicit messages about being part of a team or group, these phrases are rarely said from a place where collaboration is valued and encouraged. Instead, individuals who have the power to utter them as well as enforce them utter the phrases. In other words, those on the receiving end of such phrases should make sacrifices even if they disagree because someone with more power is telling them they should. Implicit in those same messages is that in successful leadership relationships, silence rather than challenge is required; this view serves the individual leader but no one else. Andrew shared this insight as an example of the mentality of 'play the game'.

I think that there are some administration, like I say, are very – are products of their up-bringing, right, which is much more traditional, very hierarchical, right, and are

*good at – and the one's that get in and go, “You know what? You just gotta play the game, and then you make change.” It's like well, the game's broken, right, and you look at some leadership programs and I've taken courses going, “Well wait a minute, why do we do this?” You know, hang on – don't tell me how to be good at it, I need to know why I want to be good at it, first thing. What's the – what's the background?
(Andrew, Tr03-06, L329-336)*

To a degree, the ‘play the game’ mentality comes from a place lacking in critical or creative thought where following the rules is what matters most, not questioning the rules. We find this mentality frustrating because it rarely serves the needs of the individuals because the individuals, whose needs change, are not factored into the rules in an ongoing, evaluative way. The rules are made and generally changed as a reaction to an isolated problem instead of proactively being addressed before problems emerge.

Interestingly, we were all enrolled in or recently completed graduate level education where critical and creative thought was encouraged and rewarded. Conceivably, our thinking about leadership was driven in part by a mindset strongly influenced by creative and critical thinking. In those same academic spaces, we were each encouraged to reflexively consider our stories more deeply and how those stories informed our thinking and our individual research. Alexandra shared her insight in relation to her master's degree.

And it was through trying to find my research question of what is it that I did want to find out, and why do I get so worked up about certain aspects of the French Immersion issue that – it was through that process of really trying to fine tune and writing my story, and part of my thesis was my story of where I – how I got to this place and why. (Tr 02-22, L728-732)

While we had all engaged in a form of reflective thought prior to any formal graduate coursework, our thinking around the connection of reflexivity to personal and professional growth or leadership capacity was challenged in that the type of questioning we engaged

ourselves and others in was either uncommon or unrewarded. Where others may not have chosen or had the ability or inclination to be reflective about their practice, we were. I worked with principals both overseas and locally who clearly distanced themselves at the top of the ladder. My story of the 'Mongolian monster' is a prime example of this. Alexandra and Andrew, because they worked in the same school district, shared stories of times at the end of the school year when administrators would get shuffled to new schools. Teachers would hope that they got the principals who by reputation were good or would lament the loss of leaders who were assigned to new schools. Teachers would tell stories of individuals who had reputations for "pushing" people and for creating "charged" environments.

Though we shared some of these stories, they did not dominate our conversations. Our focus was less on the actions of others and more on making sense of leadership in the context of our own actions, dispositions and values in the past, present and future. We questioned our own reflective nature, wondering not just why our focus was not simply reflective but how our reflexive thinking informed our choices and actions. We were fortunate to have come together as like-minded individuals but were left wondering, where we had developed this mindset? Was it the courses, programs or instructors that prompted our reflexive turn? We believe that while related, our similar stances were not an exclusive product of graduate work. We agreed that our reflexive practice began much earlier.

The place that Alexandra referred to in the previous quote is less about location and more about her journey. She wondered how and why her curiosity about and passion for French immersion had developed.

It was through trying to figure out my thesis question, because – and for me my whole process through French Immersion – I was in French Immersion, I've taught in French Immersion for years now, I've fought through two districts of trying to get French Immersion out of 1962. Or actually catch up to where it was supposed to be, where it's not – is more what it is. The original vision is beautiful, but through that process of trying to understand why I get so angry about certain things in French Immersion. And it was through trying to find my research question of what is it that I did want to find out, and why do I get so worked up about certain aspects of the French Immersion issue that – it was through that process of really trying to fine tune and writing my story, and part of my thesis was my story of where I – how I got this place and why. (Tr02-22, 722-732)

Similar to Andrew, the more Alexandra told her story, the more she began to identify with it.

The same was true as we continued to make sense of our leadership understandings and experiences. As we pursued this thread, we continued to wonder more about the nature of our reflexivity. Andrew suggested it was born of a sense of presence which bears similarity to mindfulness. Though plausible, we hesitated to label our leadership practice as mindful, in part because our chief experience with the word related to what we had heard about yoga and clichéd phrases like 'live in the moment'. We agreed that while being present, similar to that which Senge et al (2005) spoke of, was important to us, our mastery of being present was a work in progress. We also agreed that focussing our efforts on the here and now without treating events and people as stepping stones to where we might want to be was a more genuine way to approach our work but that it did not come naturally to us. Andrew, who said that becoming a vice-principal should be about being vice-principal, not becoming a principal, shared an example of this.

I think that's one of the challenges is to find people who are comfortable, even if this isn't their end, the end of their journey or their destination. They're comfortable enough going, "Ok, well I'm going to commit to being in this place and within this role until the next role makes itself available." And, because if you don't do that, then you – you're not able to sit there and do that collaboration and make those connections when you're looking beyond where you're at, right. And I think that comes back to some of the personal journey stuff that we were talking about last time, well there's

the ethnography or looking at what gets there, but being comfortable enough to go, "This is where I am. This is where I need to be now," right, and doing what you can to – (Andrew, Tr03-06, L318-325)

Theme three: We~leaders value tension as a means to generating understanding and relationality

Throughout this inquiry, questioning came up repeatedly as a skill we considered necessary as a leader. However, questioning was also a complicated practice that had been a source of frustration in our leadership experiences in that questioning directly impacted relationships. If our questions were perceived as negative despite our intent to use questions as a strategy leading towards improvement and understanding, that questioning impeded the formation of relationships which are necessary for the relational stance discussed in the final upcoming theme. For each of the co-inquirers, connecting and forging relationships was central to our beliefs about leadership. However, in the process of forging those relationships, the presence of discord or tension was a thread. We understood discord as disagreement or differences in ideas, like a tension but one that is potentially resolvable. Our understanding of how discord arises was not driven by individually motivated confrontation with the underlying desire to exert control nor was it based on unproductive, intentional criticism. None of us intentionally wanted to assert our superiority by undermining the beliefs and ideas of anyone else. For us, tension or discord and any resulting friction was an acceptably welcome feature of interactions based in a desire to initiate positive change. In other words, during any change process, we believe that a degree of disagreement is necessary to bring forward new perspectives required to see the subject of change from multiple angles. Tension emerges from

multiple thoughts and opinions that may be in opposition. In the course of revealing those ideas, potential agreements and new understandings can also emerge but if we don't ask the questions or offer ideas that may disagree, we cannot truly understand the multiple perspectives that exist in complex systems like education.

Consider the development of a web where the ideas of individuals offered are like strands of that web similar to that seen in Figure 11. As individuals offer ideas, they cross or intersect with other ideas within the web. When the idea crosses the web to be met by another, the idea does not disappear or break, instead it becomes connected to another idea and another individual. The person or persons on the receiving end use that information to formulate their own understanding, whether they are in agreement or not. That newly formed information through discussion is sent back into the web where it intersects in new or other places. The intersections are the sites where as ideas connect, the dynamics change. The complex intersections are examples of how ideas presented through discord can be influenced and in turn influence new understandings and perspectives that are rich and multilayered. Without the discord that we referred to, decisions are made with information too limited in scope to be of true value.

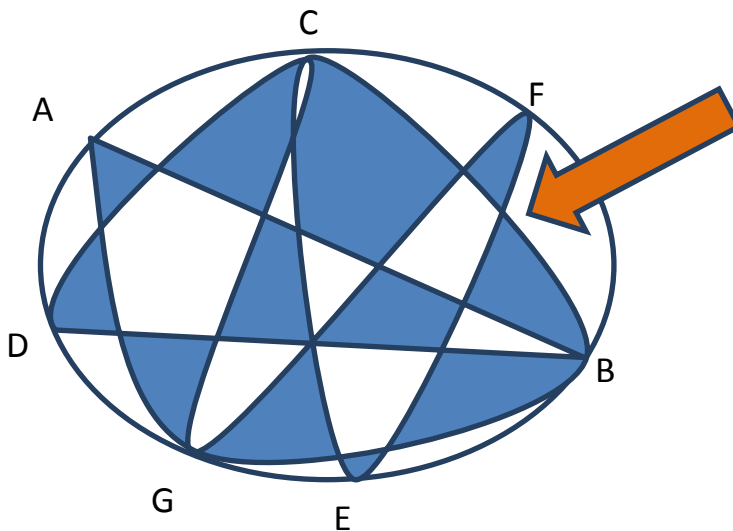


Figure 11 Connection and intersections figure as an illustration depicting how when information is shared, that information intersects with the ideas of others to form new understanding.

Chelsea made reference to her future goals of inspiring change or being part of change in education by becoming a leader in teacher education. Using the web analogy, in order for Chelsea to foster positive change, she is willing to listen to other voices and to know that her voice is part of a greater community of voices, all with valuable ideas to share. By doing so, the intersections not only honour the voices and ideas of other members of the community, they also lead to ideas that are rich with multiple perspectives. In our experiences, leaders who were unable to use discord or tension as a catalyst for change were unable to welcome the voices, choosing instead to ignore or silence them. The resulting capacity for change was limited as a result.

Embedded within our conception of discord was accountability. In order for us to be accountable to ourselves and to others, a key feature in being relational, we identified the need to welcome and recognize discord as vital in developing understanding that ultimately leads to action. The nuance is directly tied to that ability to be reflexive and self-aware. Those two actions are what create space to recognize the anxieties that others may present, the rigidity to

which people hold, and to understand our own motivations, all this occurring in a reflexive manner where action is the result of the nuanced understanding.

Andrew: But I think that the accountability piece is moving beyond challenging in a punitive way –

Chelsea: Oh absolutely.

Andrew: – and challenging in an inquiry way.

Chelsea: Yes.

Andrew: In a, in a – an attempt to gain deeper understanding, right so.

Chelsea: And that challenging isn't a criticism or a fault finding mission, but that we're looking for better ways of doing things. (Tr03-06, L832-844)

We agreed that a nuanced approach to tension was a skill that we each continue to work towards. In looking back, our belief in discord likely emerged from unsuccessful interactions with conflict where we felt as though there were clear winners and losers, though neither label was productive in addressing the issues that set the stage for the conflict. I share the following exchange because it was one we revisited during our collective analysis. This dialogue provides insight into our view of the problematic nature of tension when hierarchies of leadership shut us down and in turn shut down the potential for generating understanding and awareness. The tension that Andrew is referring is not in reference to a specific event, rather general interactions between teachers, sometimes at meetings, when individuals disagree. The individual responses to Andrew were drawn from the co-inquirers experiences in similar situations when we had experienced disagreement.

Andrew: The tension that comes out of that and tension, I think is sometimes under-rated, right, and it's – people go, "Tension's a bad thing." Well, no. As long as it's respectful, right, and you're not, you don't get so caught up in the tension you . . .

Alexandra: . . . But I think that type of (tension)– it's super healthy. It's when we hit that like, I'm so not budging on this and you – just like you were saying visceral. Like you've just like, somehow you've managed to jar me like right down to my core, where I'm so angry that I'm in tears. That – what I've been trying to work through for the last couple years, you know, that's always with people in a leadership towards me – you know it's always someone that's there, not here that happens with me.

Lisa: No, I know exactly what you're saying.

Alexandra: You know? 'Cause when it's someone I see as we're-all-the-same –

Andrew: But I don't think that, and I may be totally wrong, but that may not be you against that individual, but more you against that recognized . . . the hierarchy.

Lisa: The hierarchy.

Alexandra: Oh yeah, totally. That's why I've been trying to pick it apart, I always try to pick everything apart. [Laughs]

Andrew: That's one of the things that I think, through my, sort of, reflection, my self-awareness is I sorta go, "Okay, so what am I really mad at here? Like, what's getting me going?"

Alexandra: Yeah.

Andrew: You know? And, yeah, you know what? You and I are fighting, but let me just think about me for a minute, you know?

Lisa & Andrew: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Andrew: 'Cause I want to win this fight and I don't care if I need to re – you know? So I think there's – we all get hung up on structures that we see in place, that we go, "This is not okay. This doesn't work for my awareness or understanding."

Alexandra shared her emotional response to tense situations that I could relate to having experienced similar reactions. Andrew shared his strategies for approaching conflict and potential discord. I share this excerpt in part because it provides insight into our learning and growth as leaders. We recognized our sometimes flawed approach to tension in that as Andrew described it, *“I want to win this fight”*. His reference was not to a single event but in viewing disagreements as battles he needed to win. He was referencing a mentality of going into each situation with a goal of ‘winning’. More importantly, we recognize this quality about ourselves and are trying to find ways to acknowledge tension as a positive site for personal and professional growth without contributing to making tension an obstacle to understanding.

So I sit there, and I’m like, “No, yeah challenge me. Challenge.” ‘Cause I have come to this place and [words indiscernible] is a great example, like I go, “Yes, this is the –” and it’s not the all, end all, be all, but it’s an answer to a lot of things, right. And I sit there and I go, “Aha, why aren’t people seeing this?” You know, and I think there is still some of that perfectionist. Where I like going, yeah challenge and let’s have this really deep conversation and if we both going away feeling that we agree and – then great. And if we don’t – then great too, and the discussion continues, right. (Andrew, Tr03-06, L960-967)

The example that Andrew was referring to is my approach to this research of understanding leadership where as the researcher, similar to a leader, I was not dictating the terms or telling the co-inquirers how or what to do. Instead we were working through the process openly and collaboratively. Of note here is that Andrew was seeking or welcoming the challenge of ideas as a means to generating understanding. Any discord or conflict created as a result should not unfairly or negatively influence the validity of the ideas. Yet too often, reaction to discord is directed towards an individual. We continued to share and discuss those experiences where we actively played a role in conflict that was antagonistic and adversarial; the pivotal role that conflict plays in our leadership capacity became clear. We did have to acknowledge that

realizing and accepting our affinity for tension was not always obvious. Alexandra shared that she had been oblivious to her confrontational nature until her family pointed it out.

I've always been very non-confrontational in my relationships. I always describe myself as that, yet like I say, start talking about it and I think my family pointed it out to me at one point when I was in my early twenties, I was actually confrontational. No I'm not. I hate confrontation. They're like, "Yeah, but you do it." (Alexandra, Tr04-18, L468-471)

Even when her family told her, Alexandra initially denied her confrontational nature. Though the rest of us did not have family members so willing to be honest, we were able to recall pivotal moments when we recognized that tension was also a creative space. During this conversation, Andrew shared the argumentative yet natural relationship with his brother as one that also defined his early interactions with others.

You know, and that, that's me thriving on that animosity or the antagonism or whatever, right. The tension that comes out of that and tension, I think is sometimes under-rated, right, and it's – people go, "Tension's a bad thing." Well, no. As long as it's respectful, right, and you're not, you don't get so caught up in the tension you . . . (Andrew, Tr04-18, L488-492)

Andrew spoke about long arguments he had and still engaged in with his brother. When they were younger, Andrew and his brother's discussions were more emotionally charged, sometimes even resulting in physical fights. The roots of my experience with conflict came through my relationship with my father, the consummate devil's advocate. For many years during my adolescence, we had a strained relationship, in part because we were similar in how we approached discussion; it was an argument meant to have a clear winner. Because he was the parent with more power, he always won. I learned that in order to be heard, I needed to defend my position or argue my point in order to win.

But never feeling like I had the skills to be able to – it was always, you were saying, you know, questioning to disarm as opposed to arm. I could arm, like the best of them, and get the fight going. But never quite being able to figure it out in a way that was more, “let’s look for the solution here.” (Lisa, Tr04-18, L413-416)

That was the beginning of my history of promoting a negative style of conflict that was unproductive; I sought to beat the individual not build the ideas. One of the commonalities between us as co-inquirers was that we seem to have emerged from negatively charged spaces of conflict or tension. In doing so we did not characterize ourselves as winners of an argument but as contributors to understanding, our own and others.

Though we could not qualify whether others engaged in leadership had shared experiences with conflict and discord we suspected that for many, the act of leadership consciously or unconsciously continued to be an interaction that required a winner and a loser. We also suspected that leaders, some of whom we had worked for, consciously or unconsciously resided in negative spaces designed to declare a winner with little acknowledgement or understanding of how ineffective it was. Our understanding and enactment of a nuanced approach to conflict was a result of our reflexive approach. Andrew described, in his quote on page 190-191, how his agency in conflict evolved from an instigator seeking to win, to a participant seeking to evolve.

Often our sense of conflict was associated with negative interactions; ones that in the past we actively fostered. We recognized that we had changed our approach but had not abandoned questioning as a practice of leadership. Our sense of questioning shifted from attack or interrogation to a deliberate focus on understanding. We agreed that conflict was necessary but that the style of conflict was of critical importance in the practice of leadership.

We recognized that while many leaders we have encountered dwell in a space that craves power, those who were not as power-orientated stand out to us and others in part because they are easier to connect to, more approachable than the monster with the sharp edges that prevent access and more an entity that promotes spaces and openings to welcome new understandings. I shared some of what makes those individuals stand out particularly in how they respond to conflict.

And I think that's become more and more apparent over the last few years at how – there's a certain quality that people have and I don't know if it's a humility or a confidence or a . . . it's some kind of combination of factors that allows people to do that. They don't have to assert what they think is the right way to do it, they may still be quite committed to what they believe is the right or right thing to do. But, also willing to recognize that theirs is not the only view and it is possible to modify their own view based on those around them, but still be willing to say – if someone's completely off base, which we run into quite often – being able to say, you know, "I'm not sure that's the way to go and here's why." So again, it goes back to that, kind of, is it humility? Is it confidence? Is it both? Is it a hybrid of a few different things? (Lisa, Tr04-18, L416-426)

As was the case throughout our inquiry, this thread resulted in questions trying to pinpoint what was different for us. Why didn't we dwell in these spaces like our peers? What changed for us and why? Our reflexive questioning is evidence of our willingness to *walk our talk* by interrogating our own practice. This is a practice of authenticity.

Theme four: We~leaders are authentic

In my initial proposal for this research, I included Sergiovanni's (2000) definition of *authentic leadership*.

School effectiveness requires authentic leadership, leadership that is sensitive to the unique values beliefs, needs and wishes of local professionals and citizens who best know the conditions needed for a particular group of students in a particular context.

No 'one size fits all' will do. Leaders with character ground their practice in purposes and ideas that define the schools they serve as special places and then act with courage and conviction to advance and defend these ideas (p. viii)

We discussed and grappled with the definition of authentic leadership primarily because of the limitations for labeling ourselves as one type of leader over another, questioning who determines whether the label applies and what is the purpose of the label; whom does it serve?

We agreed on some of the features of leadership that Sergiovanni (2000) highlights in the quote above. For example, he spoke about respecting those who best know the conditions needed; for us this is about respecting the knowledge and voice of teachers in the leadership process. Perhaps our belief stems from being well grounded in teaching practice, all of us are teachers who lead. This relates to the distinction made earlier between positional versus personal leadership. Though at various points in our careers we each had leadership titles associated with positions, we did not feel that our actions or beliefs about leadership were defined by those titles. We also believed that as leaders, we must be able to make decisions based on the needs of those we work with and for. In this sense, being relationally accountable was a guiding principle for us that is implicit in Sergiovanni's (2000) characterization of authentic leadership. Though we were reluctant to label ourselves as authentic leaders, the term authenticity was less problematic. By definition, authenticity relates to an "emotionally appropriate, significant, purposive, and responsible mode of human life" (authenticity, 2013)

but we recognized authenticity as a complex process that drew together presence, relationality and mindfulness. We identified authenticity as a key aspect of our philosophy and pedagogy but also believed that being responsive was an important component. We had seen these qualities, presence, relationality and mindfulness in others. Andrew described those qualities as being “*really comfortable with where they’re at when they’re there*” (Andrew, Tr03-06, L310-312). Conceivably, a leader could be comfortable without being responsive or relational if one equates comfort with complacency. This was not the form of comfort Andrew was referring to. In this case, comfort was a reference to knowing one’s self well enough to being able to authentically respond to the ideas and questions posed by others without feeling threatened by the challenge.

The mental and physical presence that comes with being comfortable in one’s own skin contributes to the responsiveness that we saw as being an integral piece of authenticity. We also modelled authenticity in our own practice. What was more notable however was that others responded to us in meaningful ways when we were being authentic.

Lisa: Well, I almost think that authenticity question is, it goes back to again, where you are in that particular time and place. Who you’re connecting with, why you’re connecting with them, and it becomes a real, kind of, complicated web of intersections that – and that’s where the authenticity emerges from.

[Agreeing]

Lisa: The idea of authenticity is very much a relational concept, you can’t – someone has to view you as authentic in order for it to actually, kind of, sink in or fit. It’s not the kind of thing, like you said, you can think you’re authentic, but if you walk in there and it doesn’t fit, then it doesn’t matter. (Tr04-18, L549-560)

In our discussions of authenticity, I brought forward the idea that being authentic requires a degree of vulnerability in order to foster the connection required of relational spaces. In

education, we fling around the term *risk-taking* to the point that has become a skill expected of successful students. The *British Columbia Integrated Resource Package for English language Arts* among others, expressly values risk-taking as a valuable and necessary skill required of students (Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia, 2007). Taking risks requires students to place themselves in vulnerable positions, where taking such a risk may result in mistakes, and from a grading perspective, we typically don't reward mistakes. While this opens room for debate about how we view assessment and learning, this is not my intent in raising this issue. I raise this because traditional ideas of leadership do not typically value vulnerability as a strength or requirement because the perception of being vulnerable requires one to risk being considered weak. If we revisit the captain of the ship metaphor I raised in my earlier discussion of relationality and leadership as well as in the discussion of more traditional views of leadership discussed in chapter four, vulnerability is a fairly new consideration for leadership. Teachers and adults repeatedly tell students and children that we learn from mistakes so much so that learning from mistakes is a conventional wisdom. Yet as adult role models we do not embrace vulnerability and risk the way we suggest to students, which hampers our ability to be authentic. Being authentic and in turn vulnerable is very much an act of risk that requires us to let go of some of the restrictive structures that bog down education. By letting go, space is created which can be occupied by authenticity that leads to trust and connection, arguably desirable qualities of leadership. A specific example of this came from Chelsea who shared with us when she was designated as an interim principal, she moved her desk into the hallway to make herself more accessible to students, and teachers. In her mind this was a simple yet meaningful way to show people she was there for them. Such a strategy, though simple, was a

radical departure from how others were enacting leadership. More generally, throughout this inquiry, we shared several personal anecdotes about our parents, grandparents that required elements of risk merely through sharing them yet they were embraced and built upon. Yet, leadership is disconnected from vulnerability.

... few leaders strive to grow in vulnerability, wanting instead to project strength and confidence. Ironically, they limit their potential for success, because it's not the smartest or most competent leaders who succeed most but those who achieve adequate competence, and then enhance that with trust-inspiring vulnerability. (Lencioni, 2011, p. 16)

Often leadership is associated with courage. The school leader has traditionally been "someone particularly proficient at command-and-control tactics, the all powerful, all knowing, larger than life heroic commander-in-chief" (Beatty, 2009, p. 153). Yet, Jordan (2008) suggests that vulnerability is a necessity for courage.

When we have the courage to move beyond certainty and invulnerability we enter the world of learning, curiosity, and, dare I say, love. We risk the hope of becoming part of something larger, transcending the illusion of the separate self. We can enjoy the spaciousness of real humility or we can become paralyzed with shame, a sense of personal inadequacy. (p. 212)

We thought that some leaders might confuse risk taking with positioning themselves as the face of decision making; when a decision is made, the leader takes responsibility for it, therefore becoming the face of the decision. We referred to the phrase 'that's why they get

paid the big bucks'. This was a phrase we had heard as a form of defense or the legitimization of bad decision-making. We agreed that being the face of decision-making was far different than the vulnerability and authenticity that we were discussing. The chief difference is akin to an argument of breadth versus depth. The type of risk associated with being the face of decision making relates to breadth; it is essentially superficial in its value but broad in its application because many people might associate the decision with the individual leader without significant consideration of other individuals or factors. The depth of vulnerability and authenticity comes from a much more connected, relational space where a leader is one of many involved in a process. That same leader is not at the top of a decision-making hierarchy but one member of a larger, group of individuals connected not just by the subject of the decision but because in the process of the decision, individuals have been heard, valued and considered. Earlier Andrew shared two examples of individuals who were able to do this effectively, a workplace mentor (p. 122) and a colleague in the same school district (p. 193). On the other hand, in the anecdotes from chapter one, I shared examples quite the opposite that illustrate how problematic leadership is when individuals are not heard, valued and considered.

Theme five: We~leaders are relationally accountable

Just as the first two themes about self-awareness and reflexivity complemented each other, so does authenticity, as discussed previously, and relational accountability to be discussed here. By being authentic and vulnerable, we as leaders are open to possibilities to not just be better connected to our peers and collaborators but we are also accountable to those same people. By framing authenticity and vulnerability as "an experience in which we are open to the influence of others at the same time that we are open to our need for others" (Jordan,

2008, p. 213), we create conditions for relational accountability. The connections forged are based on trust, authenticity and empowerment as opposed to power. I first came across the term relational accountability in the work of Wilson (2008) who posits that “concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them” (p. 74). Being relationally accountable means we are accountable to people more than policy, organization or institution. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) describe relational accountability as being enacted through practicing respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. For Wilson (2008), and Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), their use of relational accountability relates to an Indigenist paradigm. To explain my use of an Indigenist paradigm and relational accountability, I offer Wilson’s justification:

It is my belief that an Indigenist paradigm can be used by anyone who chooses to follow its tenets. It cannot and should not be claimed to belong only to people with ‘Aboriginal’ heritage. To use an analogy, one does not need to be female to be a feminist.

Researchers do not have to be Indigenous to use an Indigenist paradigm just as researchers do not have to be “white” to use a Western paradigm. (Wilson, 2007, p. 4)

My intention is not to appropriate the term but to acknowledge that being relationally accountable is grounded in a tradition where knowledge is about relationships. “Rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people or things, we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of (Wilson, 2008, p. 80). I borrow from this idea because while knowledge is about relationships, so too is leadership. The idea of relational accountability in our discussions stemmed from some of the enabling qualities we identified such as empowerment, relationality, authenticity, intuitiveness, connectedness and advocacy. For each

of these, there is a connecting thread of how we construct meaning and in turn value because each of these requires trust in self and other. In order to trust self or other, we must have a reason; that reason comes from the relationship we have forged through our experiences with self and other. When situations or opportunities have arisen, how a person reacts, interacts and behaves can encourage or discourage trust.

I tread carefully in using the word accountable because of its association testing and effectiveness. For us, accountability was more rooted in quality, more specifically the quality of relationships. Thayer-Bacon (2003) suggests that relationality is about a “humble approach to knowing” (p. 255) where our intention in our interactions is understanding the other person as much as understanding what that person is saying. To be humble in knowing is to listen without critique not just to the words, but what comes with those words; the perspectives, emotion and experience that the individuals also share. Though we did not specifically identify this characterization at the time, relationships, connection, and the value of people spanned across our conversations.

We questioned whether the ability to empower and be relationally accountable is a skill that can be taught or whether some people who naturally possess a sense of this coincidentally find their way into leadership. We recognized that the aspect of giving people voice could be learned, but we were also skeptical as to what degree it is learned versus inherently known. Perhaps labelling such knowledge as inherent is too generous, considering that all learning is a process that has an origin of some type. A more accurate description could be that leaders who are strongly relational possess a more developed sense of intuitive knowing. Though this

description is speculative on my part, I believe a brief discussion of intuitive knowing is worthwhile for two reasons. The first is that typically graduate programs in leadership do not address, facilitate or explicitly value intuitive knowing in leadership training. As a result, it is possible that leaders who possess a greater sense of or reliance on intuitive knowing developed that ability through experiences outside of any concrete study of leadership theory or practice. Oxford dictionaries (2014) define intuition as “the ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning” (intuition, 2014). Bacon (2013) argues that *intuitive intelligence* as a leadership skill can and should be a greater focus of leadership training. For Bacon, intuitive intelligence requires being present, seeing the whole picture, clarifying intention, engaging values and fierce resolve. Leadership has an instinctive or intuitive element that, as Andrew mentioned in a passage shared earlier, has something to do with knowing one’s self and being able to trust that judgement gleaned from that knowing as being valid.

We also noted that while empowerment tends to be viewed as one directional where the leader is expected to empower followers, we saw it as being more than that. Chelsea reminded us that empowerment can and should be reciprocal or developed from within.

How I see myself as a leader is how others have told me they've seen me as a leader. And through their feedback I've kind of grown more confident in my abilities as a leader, because I think I just do things that are what I think need to be done and I don't always recognize that that's a leadership role, but I'm not okay with letting things go by if I think things need to be changed, and then not want to not say anything either. (Chelsea, Tr03-06, L625-630)

We also discussed the value of *meeting people where they are* which requires us as leaders to pay attention and know people. Individuals require different approaches in order to be able to foster genuine connections. Sometimes this comes from simply knowing how someone takes

their coffee which seems like a simple task but it is one that requires deliberate attention. To illustrate this, I share insight from Alexandra who described the importance of knowing people in her interactions with colleagues in her capacity as a literacy coordinator.

Well and paying attention to the people you work with. So to know enough to go to – like I've got one colleague and I spoke of him before and I love him to pieces, but he drives me mental, but before any sort of new thing comes out, I have to go give him the one-on-one pep talk and how it's, you know, it really does work and you're actually really doing it already, I'm just going to use some different words. And then I'll sit down with you afterwards and we'll plan it together, and we'll almost individual TA time, um, before, you know, you work with the group, because otherwise he can't handle the processing of it all. Um, but that requires knowing the people that you work with and that's the difference I think between, sometimes the emotional or the true leaders in a school versus an administrator, because not all administrators know these things. (Tr 03-27, L1422-1432)

Scholarly knowledge and understanding of leadership has moved us away from the style of leadership where there is a captain and a crew, a general and an army. Authentic leadership (Sergiovanni, 2000) and relational leadership (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Whealtes, 2006) are examples of labels or descriptors of leadership antithetical to hierarchical structures. These labels are not exclusive to educational leadership but to societal leadership in general. Public and private industry spend millions of dollars training CEOs and higher management on how to lead. Yet for us as co-inquirers, all of that scholarly knowledge was more rhetoric than action. Based on our shared experiences, the common beliefs and the pursuit of understanding we identified through this inquiry continues to situate us apart from many who occupy leadership positions in schools and with whom we have worked. As I explained early on, my contact and experience with leaders who comfortably dwell at the top of the mountain is overwhelmingly the norm. This was the case for the co-inquirers as well.

Through the sharing of our beliefs and experiences, our style and confidence in the philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings went unchallenged yet questions remained. Why were we different? What led us down a different path of leadership? We engaged in the same types of typical leadership oriented experiences like team sports, student council, team leaders, and committee chairs similar to those 'generals'. We pursued graduate work to develop our thinking and our understanding just like many of the captains yet we did not and likely will not ever become a captain or general, nor will our beliefs change. Our commitment is based on the characteristics, dispositions and actions we identified but still I was left wondering why? How do these differences arise? Is it something embedded in all of us that simply needs to be drawn out in others as part of their training?

Throughout this chapter as well as the preceding findings chapters, I have addressed the research questions: *what is the meaning of educational leadership in a diverse and complex postmodern world? What are the enabling qualities and practices that educational leaders espouse? And, how do the life experiences of educational leaders inform practice and philosophy?* Though a departure from the conventional understanding of collaborative inquiry, I chose to advance my responsibility for this research as a dissertation by re-examining the data individually to identify any existing evidence that provides insight into the questions. I stand by the merit of the themes as contributions to an understanding of the experience of leadership. These themes are particularly important because they represent the experiences of individuals who are leaders but whose voices at times go unheard or ignored because they do not have a title from which to legitimize themselves to others as leaders. I say with confidence, having worked in elementary and secondary, private and public, denominational and non-

denominational schools in Canadian provinces and internationally that schools are populated with leaders without whom schools would suffer yet how those individuals conceptualize leadership remains in the margins. By honouring some of those voices, this research contributes to a broad understanding of leadership as a way of being both individually and collectively that emphasizes *authenticity*, *reflexivity* and *relationality* (see Figure 10) as core concepts or meta-themes. I identify *authenticity*, *reflexivity* and *relationality* specifically because, in reviewing the data, we conceptualized these repeatedly. In the earliest phases of this collaborative inquiry, we characterized the qualities of leadership in terms of *authenticity*, *reflexivity* and *relationality*. Empowerment, intuitiveness and perseverance are characteristics or qualities embedded in leaders who are authentic where courage is required of authenticity. Through questioning we acted courageously and with conviction, despite judgement of others, to “advance and defend” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. viii) what we believed to be the best interest of the greater community. Questioning which is threaded through this inquiry is an act of reflexivity as well as authenticity. Arguably, the questioning practices we engage in as leaders contribute to leadership as a relational endeavour. Connectedness and advocacy are aspects of relationality as a key component of leadership praxis. Going back to an earlier explanation of relationality where individuals become weavers of a fabric “fashioned by transforming divisive incompatibilities into creative tensions” (Allan & Evans, 2006, p. 9), we acknowledged the divisiveness of leadership, particularly in the hierarchical structures and actively dismantled those hierarchies through questioning and the enactment of leadership that promoted connections between people over individuals. I make this claim carefully because leadership is not a problem now solved as a result of this research. We, like many of our colleagues

encounter situations where we are told what to do and regardless of disagreement, we may have to comply despite our misgivings. Doing so is not a failure nor does it render these findings and themes less valid or important. These themes are not intended to be a solution to a problem or an answer to a question. Instead I hope that they are thought provoking and worthy of consideration, perhaps offering insight into a meaningful alternative to the hierarchical limitations of leadership. Again in our collective analysis of the data, *connecting*, *questioning*, *capacity building* and *knowing one's self* emerged as key components of leadership praxis, as shown in Figure 12. These qualities or actions informed the five themes that I have discussed in this chapter; they are also embedded in the core concepts or meta-themes of authenticity, relationality and reflexivity. These three meta-themes are the threads woven throughout the anecdotes, stories experiences, ideas, insights and meanings we have circled through and around over the course of this inquiry. Though hesitant to make a grand claim, I do believe that if leaders understood these qualities and were able to model them, cracks in the hierarchical, problematic leadership seen in schools may emerge. Whether those cracks reveal light within or compromise the structure itself is yet to be seen. The more important question at this stage of this inquiry is how can we create an authentic, relational and reflexive leadership mindset that will guide meaningful change to leadership practice? In chapter nine, I humbly offer some suggestions in response to this question.



Figure 12 Thematic view of the experience of leadership. This figure shows the relationship between the themes identified in chapter eight as well as the core concepts at the heart of those themes.

Chapter Nine: Implications for Further Study

This focus of this final chapter is the *now what* phase where I will offer insight into what actions or next steps may be taken up as a result of the research conducted in this dissertation. When I conceived this research at the beginning of my doctoral program, I was reacting to a personal history of working for poor leaders whose leadership style, decision and beliefs for me were intensely problematic. In retrospect, I was trying to *solve* the problem of leadership that I had experienced without understanding what was underneath that problem. I was looking for an answer, formula or product that would confirm my belief that there was a better way to lead in schools. By engaging in this research, I believed that participants would be able to take what they had learned into schools and make those schools better. I wrote that my intent for this research was to de-stabilize the hegemony of school leadership and crack the armour that surrounds it to make room for catalytic change. I look back to that statement and recognize that at the time I wrote it, I still did not understand what I was trying to understand in my own study. I was focussed on the principal as leader. As I have documented throughout previous chapters, the belief that in order to be a leader one must occupy a recognized position such as principal is both an inaccurate and problematic representation of how we, in this study, conceived leaders and leadership. Having recently presented my findings at the annual Canadian Society for the Study of Education conference, I know that others see similar issues with how leadership is understood and acted upon in education.

What has emerged more clearly for me now is that the purpose of this research is developing an understanding of leadership as an experience from an *emic* view of the researcher as insider as opposed to the *etic* view of outsider looking in (Patton 2002). That emic

view requires a process of meaning making that is both personal and contextual; it is, in my opinion, that personal perspective that is glaringly absent from how we educate pre-service teachers in preparation for their journey into the complex, diverse world of education.

Considering that almost all leaders in schools are also teachers or in some cases began as teachers, it stands to reason that research like this that focuses on knowing our own story is well placed in teacher education. I will attempt in these final pages to outline how we, as teacher educators, can facilitate a process that will ground pre-service teachers and future leaders in their own story.

At the time I was engaging in the data collection and analysis, I was also a research assistant on a project at the University of Victoria focussing on Transformative Inquiry (TI). This was a professional inquiry course required of all pre-service teachers enrolled in the elementary program that used TI as a framework. I, as well as my colleagues teaching the course, encouraged pre-service teachers to engage in a process that created conditions for deep, profound learning. The intent behind the TI approach was to enable pre-service teachers to “negotiate the complex and vibrant terrain of learning~teaching” (Tanaka et al., 2014, p. 3). The TI process pushed pre-service teachers to delve into complex questions about their identities as teachers and to grapple with the complexities of education. As a mentor to this process, I tried to consistently guide pre-service teachers towards understanding what they were passionate about and where those passions intersected or bifurcated and sometimes even remained charged with polarity. Often the pre-service teachers that I worked with expressed a frustration that their TI work had no clear path or took them in too many directions. By the end of the course, many expressed frustration that even though the course was ending their work wasn't

done yet. As an instructor, I reminded them that research and subsequently learning is a journey that rarely has a definitive end point; instead, those journeys, much like those in life, having natural resting places. I am now approaching one of those resting places for this research as I conclude. In this final chapter, I offer insight into how what was learned in this research may be taken up in other contexts.

Process over product

I now turn to the *now* what stage of this dissertation. Through our discussions, the co-inquirers made sense of leadership in their own ways but in ways that included our collective dialogue. The process that each of us engaged in individually and together was meaningful because we came to understand more about leadership, ourselves and each other in ways that we had never previously been able to do because a) no space or forum for such investigation previously existed and b) we formed a community driven not just by interest in leadership but motivated by the support for ourselves and each other. Drawing on Wenger-Trayner (2014), we formed a community of practice where we shared our concerns and passions for leadership that was nourished by an implicit desire to be better leaders but was equally fed by the relationships that enabled us to learn from each other. I am proud of our learning but more appreciative of the support that fostered the learning. We brought to light some important considerations of leadership that emphasize the need to help leaders recognize the importance of authenticity, relationality and reflexivity in their own practice; these are the products of our inquiry. Now that the research is coming to a conclusion, I am wondering about the process that is needed to help others understand leadership in ways similar to how we conceived it. We characterized leadership by referencing terms such as authenticity, reflexivity and relationality,

but can we say that our characterization of leadership has universal appeal? Is our conception better than the managerialist one? This is a question we did not answer directly, but having been present for all of our discussions, I believe that I can speak for our group in responding that the qualities, characteristic and actions that merged through our understanding of leadership are valued by others and arguably need to be valued more. If we look to the current and repeated job action in British Columbia there may never be a greater affirmation of the need for greater authenticity, reflexivity and relationality than right now. The current job action is one example of a longstanding hegemonic power struggle that exists between teachers and government. While this epic struggle is not the focus of this dissertation, grappling with the complicated nature of power as it relates to leadership is implicit throughout as is the role leadership plays in both perpetuating and destabilizing power. As I have included repeatedly throughout this dissertation, the structure of schools and in turn how leadership functions in that structure is deeply hierarchical where power disproportionately lies with very few. Though it is recognized that problem solving and improvement are “facilitated by the development of reflective professional practice” (Boyles & Davis, 2002, p. 25), I have questioned how such reflective practice would find a meaningful place in schools in ways that foster authentic change. As long as reflective practice is being paradoxically encouraged in teacher education and in standards of practice, yet goes unrewarded and even punished within the structure of schools, a powerful dilemma faces those who question power because they do not have the legitimate capacity to change it. While, despite my best intentions I cannot *make* change occur on the scale I believe it necessary, I cannot give up either. My contribution to destabilizing the power hierarchies that limit schools and marginalize voices is to offer an alternative; to

demonstrate that through authentic, relational and reflexive practice, like that discussed, modelled and learned by the co-inquirers in this study, leaders do not have to mandate, dictate or command in order to be considered leaders or to be agents of change.

I have referenced the phrase *knowing your story* that came from Chelsea. I believe that knowing one's story means that we must look to understand how and why we have chosen to teach and lead, but in order to understand those motivations and how our experiences influence our practice, we must engage in the challenging work of interrogating our beliefs, values and dispositions. Revisiting Palmer's (1997) quote that I shared at the opening of this research, teaching and leading emerge from "one's inwardness, for better or worse" (p. 5). As I weave through the implications for this research, my inwardness will inevitably and unapologetically come through. I do so as a way to walk my own talk.

I have spoken of transformation or conscientisation as being outcomes of this research. In keeping with the spirit of collaborative inquiry, the intent of this research is not validation of one form of leadership over another, nor is it the development of a specific theory that can guide future study of leadership. Instead, this research has revealed the importance of a dialogic and relational process in contributing to the development of leadership identity as well as generating individual and co-constructed understandings of leadership. That process is based in characteristics, values and actions based in authenticity, relationality and reflexivity. I again acknowledge that I have had little control over the outcome in terms of how participation in this research has shaped the beliefs, values and actions of the co-inquirers; only the co-inquirers can determine this for themselves. Yet I remain convinced of the value of engaging

leaders in a process that may illuminate who leaders are and how their interactions impact relationships and communities. I also believe that the dissemination of this research has the potential to positively influence education by encouraging individuals invested in it to engage in greater dialogue and investigation into how individuals experience leadership, and understand from an emic perspective. There are courses, books and theories of leadership that can and are offered, but as has been presented throughout this dissertation, those courses, books and theories do not seem to be enough on their own to precipitate the practice of authentic, relational, reflexive leadership. If they were, we would see more authentic, relational and reflexive practice. The improvement I see is in generating a better understanding of leadership that is not restricted to positional or title, but of relationships and integrity. Hickey and Austin (2007) speak of interrogating one's own beliefs as a means to create the critical dialogue advocated by Begley (2006), Ryan (2007), and Walker and Quong (1998), the intent of which is to deeply interrogate the lived experiences that shape our philosophical and ideological practices; reflexivity is embedded in this engagement. I assert that collaborative inquiry facilitates a similar purpose. From these critical realizations of the processes of identity formation, conscientised approaches to understanding the world, critiquing the various power structures that moderate it and, perhaps most significantly, transforming these understandings into emancipatory professional practice feature as potential outcomes. For institutions offering structured seminar-type spaces in teacher education programs, these are critical spaces for pre-service teachers to make sense of what they are seeing experiencing and learning.

I envision collaborative inquiry groups that examine the meaning and practice of leadership as an essential component of education at the undergraduate and graduate level.

Collaborative inquiry groups can mobilize the theoretical intent of critical pedagogy as a means of interrogating constructions of self to enable emancipatory pedagogical practices (Hickey and Austin, 2007, p. 27). Such an investment at the very least presents the opportunity to engage with existing tensions such as leadership, diversity and complexity, as well as other factors. I do not represent this research as the “silver bullet solution for the dilemmas of administration” (Begley, 2006, p. 54) but I am committed to the belief that school leaders must become authentic, reflexive, and relational in their practices in order to truly lead for the cultural and relational responsiveness required. Others like Begley (2006), Fullan (2005), Ryan (2007), Wheatley (2006), Branson, (2009; 2010), Starratt (1991; 1994; 2004) and Sergiovanni (2000) to name a few, have addressed this similarly. My research is the contribution that I and the co-inquirers make to address leadership in education. We must engage individuals who consider themselves and are considered by others as leaders to know their story/ies. By doing so, more authentic relationships and connections result in turn feeding into a culture of leadership as opposed to promoting positional leadership.

Further study

Over the course of our inquiry meetings, we explored the meaning and practice of leadership through our own experiences. In addition to supporting collaborative inquiry groups in undergraduate and graduate education as a process for exploring the experience of educational leadership, I draw attention to one area that emerged in the course of this research that I believe warrants further study: the role of childhood and adolescent experiences in the formation of leadership identity. On several occasions, as mentioned in earlier chapters, we were left with questions primarily centered on how or why we had come to our understandings

of leadership. While we reflected on and made sense of own experiences individually and collaboratively, there were times when perhaps more time considering the origins of our experiences would have yielded even richer understandings. Though we each included stories or touchstone moments, I believe that with more time and focus, many more touchstones exist born of our experiences in childhood and adolescence in our first interactions with leadership. We asked and wondered how our approach to questioning as a leadership practice developed and whether it was a product of our growth, experience, other factors or some combination of factors. We also questioned how, without any formal acknowledgment of or training in, we developed a reflexive mindset. We questioned how and why perseverance was characteristic of leadership identity for us. We also wondered why we were not drawn to the power structures that pervasively inform leadership. Speculatively, I wonder how our leadership practice would have evolved had attention to leadership qualities and practice been explored from the perspective of our adolescent experience.

For all of us, we made a connection to leadership at a young age through our involvement in sports, student council and other group affiliations or through the influence of mentors. Our participation in these types of activities and their influence on our conceptions of self as leader are not surprising. According to Mullen and Tutten (2004), girls who participate in group and local leadership activities, like my own and Chelsea's participation on student council and Alexandra's participation in drama, draw heavily on those experiences to inform their identity as leaders. For others, sport leadership activities, like tennis for Andrew, inform their sense of leadership. However, it is important to note that despite our involvement in activities identified as precursors to leadership behaviors, participation in these activities does not

automatically result in individuals assuming leadership roles or identifying as leaders. How others may or may not have taken up leadership, based on the data in this study, is not the scope of this research but it does raise some interesting questions. Building on what has been learned in this dissertation, continued investigation of how adolescents experience leadership is an aspect of leadership study that remains underexplored. We identified events that took place in our early adolescence as being interesting when we began the acting phase of our inquiry but that needs to be explored in greater detail. I referred to experiences with leadership during these years as a “switch that had been flipped” (Tr06-04, 5:06-5:08). I envision two possibilities for exploring adolescent experience of and with leadership. The first perspective would be from adolescents themselves as they explore how engagement and non-engagement in leadership influences their conception and enactment of leadership. The second is the a retrospective inquiry by adults, like the co-inquirers in this study, examining how their adolescent experiences with leadership shaped and/or influenced the vision and action of their current leadership practice.

Understanding how adolescent experiences influence the vision and action of leadership practice.

In this study, Chelsea, Alexandra and I specifically referred to three important factors that she experienced as an adolescent that continue to be considerations in her leadership identity as an adult: the desire to improve, experiencing social validation and establishing a sense of self worth. I spoke briefly earlier about the sense of self worth associated with being identified as a leader that is similar to the sense of social validation Chelsea referred to. These ideas point to the necessity of relational community as creating the conditions for the

formation of our leadership identity. In a discussion of authentic leadership development in adolescents, Whitehead (2009) agrees that investigating leadership from the adolescent perspective is warranted.

Repurposing leadership development with a tighter linkage to the inner-world of the adolescent, and balancing against the real-world complexities of gender and ethnic differences, places leadership developers in a better position to tap into authenticity. Effectively delivering authentic leadership pedagogy to adolescent students requires methodologies that integrate what Walker and Shuangye (2007: 193) call 'seeing leading and learning as inseparably integrated' with the contextual factors of the adolescent's world and culture. (p. 861).

The natural question stemming from Whitehead's (2009) claim is 'how can we make those tighter linkages?' I believe that a collaborative inquiry populated by students interested in leadership would create that relational context that would foster a greater degree of understanding of leadership. However, it may also necessitate a longitudinal approach in order to confirm that the discussions of and understandings formed about leadership through the experiences of adolescents would in fact inform their practice as adults. While this is an interesting possibility, I offer an alternative that advocates autoethnographic study, conducted by adults, as another way to make sense of and generate understanding of the experience of leadership as informed by adolescent experience.

An autoethnographic study of adolescent leadership experience in forming leadership identity and praxis.

As demonstrated in this dissertation, leadership is a convoluted hybrid of the personal and professional, institutional and organizational as well as local and global. In my own experience living and working overseas, I can attest to this complexity and if navigated using an authoritarian compass, the school leader can at best maintain what little ground is gained through arbitrary and superficial responses to both complexity and diversity. The literature reviewed in chapter four as well as the findings and analysis of this research confirms the value of authentic, reflexive, and relational leadership. While collaborative inquiry is one strategy for investigating such leadership, I offer *autoethnography*, undertaken during teacher education as a meaningful response to the tensions and struggles involved in leadership. Because engagement in reflexive dialogue is a time consuming, arduous process, it may preclude leaders from investing in an autoethnographic process that requires substantial time and energy. Situating autoethnographic study into coursework during teacher education may help to provide a solid foundation from which teachers and leaders can draw on throughout their career.

Because autoethnography revolves around the exploration of self in relation to others and the space created between them, disciplines like education are ripe grounds for autoethnographic study because a social construction of knowledge, identity and culture is inherent. As a form of critical pedagogy, autoethnography often places emphasis on a transformative or emancipatory process for the individual and in the more widely constructed social relations in which the individual participates. Exploration of identity is not a

straightforward process when considered from a postmodern perspective: identity demands a process of infinite interpretation, reinterpretation of experiences, circumstances and conditions emphasizing the interconnectedness of past and present, lived and living. As identity changes, adjusts and questions itself to form meaning, it is viewed as contextual and adaptive; a creation of fluidity whose movement is based on the demands placed upon it (Slattery, 1995). Sumara et al. (2001) acknowledged that “ideas emerge from people who are situated in particular contexts, and who are influenced by particular histories” (p. 158). The transformative value of autoethnography in education comes from the in-depth analysis of the complexity of the lived experiences of the self, the nature of the ebbs and flows, then goes further to examine the emergent identity in relation to others and the culture in which we dwell. Schools maintain a “delicate, complex, and subtle process of cultural transmission and self-actualization” (Eisner, 2004, p. 301) as well as a myriad of *locations* within education. Those who are immersed in the construction of education, and more importantly are responsible for its direction, benefit from locating themselves within the educational system in order to build a foundation for transformative learning and emancipatory pedagogy (Eisner, 2004).

Autoethnography allows the individual the opportunity to effectively acknowledge the pragmatic demands of education and of everyday life to take stock of experiences and how they shape who we are and what we do. The subsequent process becomes one of conscientization as a process of awareness moves individuals towards a practice and pedagogy of emancipation at micro and macro levels (Austin & Hickey, 2007). Such emancipation can liberate individuals from the hegemony of sameness that plagues educational leadership and to critically examine the space between “nationality, religion, gender, education, ethnicity

socioeconomic class, and geography” (Chang, 2008, p. 52; Spry, 2001). Understanding the forces of diversity empowers leaders to “examine their preconceptions and feelings about others, whether they are “others of similarity”, “others of difference,” or even “other of opposition” (p. 52). The emphasis on a cycle of enlightenment, reflection and action as a critical process of self analysis in relation to cultural and social discourses and therefore greater understanding, makes autoethnography a valuable tool in examining the complex, diverse and messy intersection of leadership, diversity and complexity.

Engaging in autoethnography enables powerful examinations of the relationships between self and other as well as between self and experience. By creating the conditions for greater understanding through a deep interrogation of one’s adolescent experiences with leadership, leaders may be able to more profoundly and meaningfully engage in the conscientisation I discussed in chapter one. Autoethnography in its study of the space between self and culture engages the individual in “mutually enriching and authentically human capabilities – action and reflection, or action based on reflection, and reflected based on action” (Blackburn, 2000, p. 7). The relationship of action and reflection is foundational to a reflexive stance, something the co-inquirers of this study modeled and practiced though why they chose such a stance remains unclear. Autoethnography is a valuable tool in examining the complex, diverse and messy intersections that inform leadership in education.

Examples of autoethnographic study

Though autoethnography is a relatively new method of understanding educational and/or leadership experience, it is not unheard of. Boyd (2008) in his autoethnography of his

sense of white privilege provides a description of how his autoethnographic research facilitated a transformative learning experience that informed how he positioned himself in both his personal and professional worlds.

The difference now is that I am aware of those tendencies coming out of my place of White privilege, and I am seeking to forge a new way for myself. I am trying to live in that tension between cautious action and critical reflection, between the need to engage in dialogue for mutual understanding and the need to actively listen to the experiences of colleagues and friends of color. (p. 223)

As mentioned in chapter one, Pepper and Hamilton Thomas' (2002) examined leadership style and its impact on the school climate resulting in a better understanding of the problematic nature of Pepper's, a school administrator, authoritarian style. The results of Pepper's autoethnographic study were personally and professionally beneficial. She shifted her leadership style away from being the captain of the ship in a hierarchical construct, to creating a more positive and caring school environment. Arguably, through autoethnography, Pepper identified and put into practice the authentic, relational approach to leadership that the co-inquirers in my research advocated for in themselves and others.

From their work with pre-service teachers, Hickey and Austin (2007) suggest that value autoethnography is the engagement in critical dialogue with the self as a means to understand past actions and inform future ones. The intent of autoethnography is to deeply interrogate the lived experiences that shape our philosophical and ideological practices. From these critical realizations of the processes of identity formation, conscientised approaches to understanding

the world, critiquing the various power structures that moderate it and, perhaps most significantly, transforming these understandings into emancipatory professional practice feature as significant outcomes.

In chapter one, I shared a story of one of my experiences with a leader that was in part the beginning of my dissertation journey. In the following paragraphs, I share a brief insight into part of my autoethnography in a humble attempt to further demonstrate how autoethnography can inform leadership.

Adolescence

I was consistently viewed as a leader on basketball, softball and volleyball teams because of my skill level and as a result was chosen to be a team captain for the teams that I played on during high school. My relationship with coaches who were some of the first traditional leaders I had contact with had significant impact on me. I use the adjective traditional because those coaches were very transactional in their approach to leadership; they made the decisions, told you what to do and how to do it, and for the most part I followed those directives. Despite a sense of self-worth derived from my involvement in sport, that self-worth was not rooted deeply; it was not built on empowerment or reflection. My self-worth was derived from how others viewed me, as 'skilled', 'talented' and 'distinct', but I would not have described myself that way. I felt as though even though others may have seen me that way, I was not good enough. That sense of self did not help me build relationships that existed outside of the constructs of playing a team sport where almost by default relationships exist driven solely by circumstance. On teams, because I was a skilled player, I was judged as better than others, my actions, beliefs or dispositions were seemingly irrelevant to the label leader. The team construct that clearly places some individuals in a hierarchical order above others does not genuinely exist outside of those teams. In my experience as a teacher, I saw that artificial construct imposed on schools where those with the title of principal were viewed as better than others, in some cases without ever having interacted with those same others.

Because of my skill as an athlete, I was seen by others as a leader and by default was in a spotlight more often; people in the school knew who I was, they knew my name, they saw my picture in the paper or heard my name in the school announcements and all of those interaction were because of my involvement in sports. I never had a discussion with anyone about what it meant to be a leader but there

were assumptions tied to that role; captain was similar to coach in that my captain's voice was supposed to garner more respect than the voice of another player. One of the assumptions that I made was that as a captain, I should be asking questions or in some cases telling people what to do; I was modelling what I had seen coaches do. As a result, I did question the actions of coaches usually in front of the rest of the team and with few exceptions was met with negative response. Admittedly, though through the haze that memory can create, I remember feeling that it was my job to question. In retrospect, that had far less to do with how I was viewed as a leader or my responsibilities as a captain, and more to do with an innate sense that being a leader required you to critique....

Adulthood

For many years, I continued to pound away at a brick wall. As a result, I was at times viewed by my peers and by those in charge as someone who thought they were better than others. In retrospect, I understand the label because I did believe what I was seeing and doing was better than what many others were doing. My beliefs were veiled in the faith that I was more focussed on what was in the best interest of students. I also believed that I had the capacity to shoulder more attention and blame for being the trouble maker because I had more experience with it. Once I began my study of leadership as part of my masters research, my perspective began to change, albeit slowly. The focus of my master's degree was educational administration. I had chosen this area of study for two reasons. The first reason was pragmatic; a degree in educational administration gave me the greatest degree of flexibility. If I chose to pursue administration, then I would have the credentials to do so. I had been involved in leadership in various capacities since I was young so it seemed like a natural fit. The second was the reason that continues to fuel my interests today. I did not realize at the time of engaging in my masters that my curiosity was about how leadership was experienced and understood less than how it was practiced. Even though many of the assignments that I did during my Masters coursework were orientated towards how to be a principal, I repeatedly gravitated towards why people wanted to be a principal. As I began to consider those reasons, I began to notice with much greater clarity how the personalities of leaders was seen and how that vision influenced people's perceptions and their willingness to engage in tasks put forward by leaders.

The insight into my story as I have shared it here is part of my journey to understand my sense of leadership as well as others. The autoethnographic process that Boyd (2008), Pepper and Hamilton (2002), and I engaged in and that Hickey and Austin (2007) facilitate suggests that

there is value in autoethnography as a means to better understand the experience of leadership which in turn, meaningfully informs the practice of leadership.

For my candidacy exams in preparation for this dissertation research, I was asked to respond to Kohl's (1999) statement, "educational leadership has never been known for its boldness or originality, in particular when it comes to issues of equity and justice" (p. 310). Historically, even subtle changes to education grind slowly forward, though sometimes at a pace that makes it hard to see progress, but progress does occur. I believe the success of any progress requires a degree of investment that is sometimes absent from change because of how that change is framed. Theory struggles to find its place in meaningful ways among the practices of educational leaders because that theory is often presented from outside one's experience, meaning that in order for any theory to have traction, it must resonate with the individual. Any ideas or labels attached to leadership must mean something to the individual for them to take up those theories or ideas as being of value. The challenge is in connecting theory and practice with experience in deliberate ways and meaningful ways.

Perhaps the space required to inch education and understandings of leadership forward should be the responsibility of the self as a member of the collective. By creating space in teacher education coursework, autoethnography can mobilize the theoretical intent of critical pedagogy, as a means of interrogating constructions of Self to enable emancipatory pedagogical practices (Hickey and Austin, 2007, p. 27). Such an engagement at the very least presents the opportunity to engage with the existing tensions as leadership and culture intersect in the complex environment we call schools. I see autoethnography as a productive

and meaningful way to ground leaders in their own story which will in turn help them to authentically connect with their others invested in education. By doing so, we foster a leadership mindset that benefits the entire community.

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