

SCHOOL ENTRY PLAN IS ESSENTIAL FOR NEW PRINCIPALS

by

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Beginning a new principalship is challenging for both beginning and experienced school administrators. Every school has its own culture and identity that includes its history, traditions, norms, and values. In order to make a smooth transition, it is very important to respect the existing school culture that has been established over time. New principals want to make the smoothest and best possible transition into a school community and not honoring the culture can put new leaders at risk (Watkins, 2003). The main question for this project asks: What essential qualities can a principal utilize in a school entry plan to successfully transition into a new school placement?

### **It Takes a Village to Raise a Child**

Education and school have traditionally been the hub of our communities. Not only for the wisdom and knowledge that they create for our present and future, but for the connections that they create throughout the community. Former first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, in her 1994 book *It Takes a Village*, chose this title from an old African proverb because she felt the title offered a timeless reminder that children will thrive only if their families thrive and if the whole of society cares enough to support them. This saying has become an integral part of my own vision as a school principal over the past four years. As I look and build on what has worked in the past, I realize I must also continuously look forward in the changing times. Education is about looking beyond the children's intellect, and seeing the whole child. Education is about providing students with opportunities

to be challenged and still succeed. Linda Lambert (1998) states that, “Principals’ leadership is crucial because they are uniquely situated to exercise some special skills of initiation, support, and visioning” (p. 24). In doing so she further explains that school administrators must encourage greatness and challenge the status quo. Administrators of today must maintain high expectations and strive to see both teachers and students excel. Teachers and students alike must be given the opportunity to maximize their potential and they should be inspired to do so. Lambert (1998) defines leadership capacity as “broad-based, skillful involvement in the work of leadership” (p. 3). She believes that in order to be a successful leader all stakeholders must be convinced to view themselves as leaders too. With this in mind all children have the potential to attain greatness! Ultimately, when students leave their formative years of schooling, they can be set free with the confidence and the necessary toolbox to succeed. The job of today’s educators makes it essential that new and transitioning administrators embrace and believe in every child’s abilities and empower others to live out this vision daily.

### **The Village...my journey with the 3 E’s**

Alberta Education (2011) in the Framework to Learning refers to the toolbox including a common language for successful students as seen through the 3 E’s (ethical citizens, engaged citizens and an entrepreneurial spirit). The Wordle in *Figure 1* below is the process work my staff and I engaged in to explore the ten competencies of attitudes, skills, and knowledge that contribute to students becoming engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit which



*Figure 2. Inspiring Education*

Through this process, both teachers and school leaders strongly agree that they have a responsibility to be mentors and role models to students to foster engaged thinkers, ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit. We have a responsibility to cultivate a sense of community and belonging. Again the Hebrew saying “It takes a village to raise a child” rings true (Clinton, 1994, p. xi). Education must be a collaborative effort that needs leadership and a strong vision. Co-operation among all stakeholders is essential. A community is an essential extension of a school. Relationships between a school and its community, whether educational, entrepreneurial, co-operative or charitable, should not just be encouraged but pursued and put into action collectively. To be successful in our calling as administrators and educators it will, without a doubt, take a “village to raise a child” (Clinton, 1994, p. xii).

**Technology as Part of the Village**

Education is currently going through some dramatic changes. Technology has become part of the village that raises the child in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This most definitely has altered the way administrators, teachers, and students, communicate with and amongst themselves, with the greater community, and with the world. New ways of communicating and sharing learning are being developed and explored. There needs to be a transformation from using technology in schools to using technology for learning. School leaders have to provide instructional leadership to teachers so that they can adapt, and be adept at making the students’ learning

experience both meaningful and engaging. School leaders also need to work cooperatively to recognize that technology has created new needs and new definitions of what it means to be literate in today's world. For instance, school leaders can provide communication to families through Facebook, Twitter, email, phone messages, blogs, and the traditional newsletter. Another way to involve families in school events is online through surveys, responses to social media posts, and a Twitter Chat with a unique hashtag. It may be that families are more involved in the school when they have a voice in determining the events at Open House, School Council meetings, and school events. However, just being literate is not enough. Students must develop their curiosity, creativity, communication skills and critical thinking this will, ultimately need to involve all stakeholders.

### **The Village–All Stakeholders**

New administrators and transitioning administrators must remember to value and foster relationships which include parents and family as an integral part of “the village to raise a child” (Clinton, 2004, p.xi). The power of having all significant adults working together to raise a child cannot be underestimated. No one understands more than an educator how valuable parent involvement is in successfully educating a child. It is vital to keep parents, our partners, informed and actively engaged in their children's education. But all parents are not the same, and so leaders also have a responsibility to educate and inspire good parenting within our community. For those children who do not have a significant adult role model at home, administrators then have an obligation to create opportunities for educators to

provide caring guidance. Children cannot find an adult to connect with in a school, are children we have failed, and all children we have provided a meaningful relationship with is a success to be relished. Caring, compassion and empathy are cornerstones to a meaningful educational relationship.

### **The Village and Love**

I continually catch myself reading and rereading sections of the book, *Narrative Inquiry: Experiences and Story in Qualitative Research*, written by Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2013). I was greatly comforted by chapter five of the book. Walking in the midst of stories is exactly where I like to be as an administrator. I am always fascinated by others; their experiences, their diversity, and their dreams. As an educator with 25 years' experience, I have had too, as the authors describe, settle in the school, live within the social and personal dimension of context, and work alongside colleagues and community. As I travelled from one school to another, I likewise had to negotiate many different relationships, establish my purpose, transition from situation to situation, and make myself useful. Having a school entry plan has helped remind me of the importance of being respectful of the past, present and future allows us to situate ourselves purposefully in our role as administrators. I believe that both new administrators and transitioning administrators needs to be being mindful and open to the nuances surrounding events as they are lived, told, and retold. The literature review in chapter 2 and my own personal school entry plan as shared in chapter 3 allows a new and transitioning administrator opportunities to relive these moments in time, creating new

understanding, establishing new truths, and forging new possibilities. New possibilities cannot be ignored with the changing times in education today.

“It is the culture of schools that really matters” (Peterson and Deal, 2009, p. 253).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This paper examines the changing role of principal leaders with a special emphasis on the need for a school entry plan for new and transitioning principals. I have a confession to make. I have worked at eight different schools during my career and I fell in love with each one. Even though many of these communities struggled with what appeared to be, insurmountable troubles ranging from financial woes, to enrollment crisis, I fell in love with each and every one and moved from one school to the next with a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes. It is comforting to know that in a sense we must fall in love with our participants. However, we must be prepared to step back and see the larger landscape. Creating a positive school culture and maintaining staff morale are both important factors in improving student achievement results. Senge (2000) states, “a school’s culture is its most enduring aspect. An administrator may be able to change the rules of the school, but cannot tell the staff to “change their culture” (p. 324). Principals must be very aware of the culture of their school in order to make sure a healthy and positive environment for students and staff in order to maximize their achievement.

In the past, it was not unusual to observe schools where isolation and limited professional interaction was the norm. In educational settings today, where high stakes and increased accountability are the reality, teaching in isolation is no longer

an acceptable practice. I am constantly must work smarter, not harder through collaboration, common vision and goal setting, and a commitment to high expectations for all learners. With the changes taking place in Alberta Education today it is essential for schools to take an honest look at their own school cultures and work to create a positive working environment with the staff by reaffirming the importance of working smarter not harder. It is by working together with dedication and commitment on learning initiatives of the school district student success is maximized. (Lambert 1998).

Alvesson (2002) discusses the relationship between organizational culture and performance. He believes that when employees and managers have the same set of values, beliefs, and norms, the ensuing positive culture will result in organizational success. This approach also encourages shared decision-making between employees as well as the development of common goals. Members of the organization are highly motivated due to their increased sense of belonging and the responsibility they feel towards the company's success. In terms of this practice, assisting principals transitioning and being effective leaders, Terrence Deal has written extensively on the subject of culture and changing the culture in organizations. Deal (1990) states, "In order to transform schools successfully, educators need to navigate the difficult space between letting go of old patterns and grabbing on to new ones" (p.11). The process of letting go of these patterns will be the real work of the staff and developing new patterns has the potential to change "the way we do business" in schools today.

**Statement of Problem**

Transitioning into a new school setting can be a difficult process and can be especially challenging for principals. Principals today are the instructional leaders of a school setting and must be able to show leadership and ensure the smooth running of all processes in the school from their first day on the job. First impressions are also important when starting any new position in the workplace. The problem for this project is whether a principals can make a smooth transition to a new school by paying close attention to the culture by way of the school entry plan as an essential starting point. According to Cameron and Quinn (2011):

No organization in the twenty-first century would boast about its constancy, sameness, or status quo compared to ten years ago. Stability is interpreted more often as stagnation than steadiness, and organizations that are not in the business of change and transition are generally viewed as recalcitrant. (p. 1)

Cameron and Quinn (2011) go on to explain that unpredictable and continuous change in the workplace can make it difficult for managers to keep abreast of issues, predict the future, and maintain consistency within the organization. They warn that neglect of culture can result in the failure of the organization. School administrators must have a keen sense of the culture and history of their schools including understanding the needs of the stakeholders in the educational community. According to Fullan (2003), "Leading schools, as in any great organization, requires principals with the courage and capacity to build new cultures based on trusting relationships and a culture of disciplined inquiry and

action (p. 44).

Being mindful of the day-to-day interactions is imperative for a successful transition into a new school placement using a school entry plan. Organizational and managerial processes such as those found in schools, are best investigated in a way that retains the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life (Yin, 1989). My school entry plan, in chapter 3 and the appendixes shares with the new principal or transitioning principal time to document specific moments in time, allows them to capture rich detail of the experience including the then and now, the where and when, and the how and why.

### **Rational for the Study**

The role of the principal is well researched and there are a large number of articles written based upon the principal's role in building leadership capacity as the topic. Linda Lambert is one of the best known authorities on building leadership capacity and therefore much of the research shared in the literature review discussing leadership can be attributed to her. However, the research on principals in transition or brand new principals is limited.

That being said, an obvious beginning point was a description of the duties and responsibilities of the principal in a changing educational system. The identification of what exactly is leadership and the responsibilities of principals as Education is redesigned by Alberta Education was the first steps in developing a body of research on the topic. This is significant for new or transitioning principals since the content of this paper arose from essential qualities for today's successful

leadership within a school setting.

### **Summary**

This paper contains four chapters. Chapter one presented the introduction, purpose and the rationale for the study. Chapter two contains a review of the related literature, which is divided into the following areas: What is Leadership, the Changing Role of the Principal, and Beginning Principal with a description of the school entry plan to be shared in chapter three. Chapter three is the school entry plan which is a tool for beginning or transitioning principals. Chapter four consists of the reflection of the questions and project with a conclusion as well as recommendations for principals and future possible research. To me, the goal of education today is to enrich the lives of students while producing articulate, expressive thinkers and lifelong learners, who are socially responsible, resilient, and citizens of the world. As shared by Alberta Learning (2011) in the Framework for Learning above it is about engaging students in their learning, and maximizing the potential of each and every child. This is what I hope my school entry plan in chapter three and in the appendices attached in PDF will capture. Hope is, in essence, what I bring to my work. It is the motivating force compelling me to examine, question, ponder, and discover. Without the possibility of bringing hope, I would feel no purpose in my work. As we see different jobs being created in our world, while other jobs are becoming irrelevant, we look to develop the next generation of entrepreneurs in schools. This is often created by instilling what Alberta Learning (2011) refers to as a sense of “entrepreneurial spirit” within administrators that are always looking to

develop and further the organization.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

As has been articulated in the first chapter of this capstone paper, the role of the leader in education is changing and adapting to the demands of new curriculum as well as new students. The purpose of this capstone paper is to present the ideas for the support that is so badly needed for future principal leaders to be successful in transitioning to a new school assignment. In this literature review, I will unpack the essential leadership qualities in planning for successful principal transitioning either as a first year principal or a principal transitioning to a new school site. This literature review required an examination of literature and a focus specifically on three dimensions of successful leadership. The first section focuses on what the current research defines as leadership. That is, the shift to competency based teaching and learning and the transformation of professional learning. The second section unpacks the changing role of the school principal and the importance of leading professional learning communities, fostering relationships, building leadership capacity, developing positive school culture. The third section will review the role of the beginning principal with two key strategies for success. They are peer coaching or mentorship programs.

### **Principal's Role as Leader of the School**

As a leader, I believe in bringing a community together to share leadership in many different avenues which I will highlight this in this literature review as well as in my school entry plan in chapter 3. Linda Lambert defines leadership capacity as

“broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership” (2003a, p. 425). If educational leaders accept this as the definition, they must understand that a change in traditional school culture needs to take place. “Successful school leadership is not invested in hierarchical status but experience is valued and structures are established to encourage all to be drawn in and regarded for their contribution” (Harris, 2002, p. 22). When the idea of broad-based participation is embraced, educators can implement a “systemic framework for school improvement, a context in which teacher leadership is invited, supported and appreciated” (Lambert, 2003a, p. 425).

Firstly, administrators need to understand what defines teacher leadership is and isn't. They need to understand that real capacity building emanates from providing opportunities for professional conversations, not for formal leadership roles. Lambert indicates that teacher leaders develop curiosities through their daily associations with the teaching and learning process. “Teachers become fully alive when their schools and districts provide opportunities for skillful participation, inquiry, dialogue, and reflection. They become fully alive in the company of others. Such environments evoke and grow teacher leaderships” (Lambert, 2003a, p. 422).

Lambert's definition is related to the notion of professional collaboration. When given the opportunity to collaborate professionally, teachers' practice improve and, as a result, so does their ability to become leaders. When leadership is understood from this perspective, administrators stop looking for formal leadership roles in which to position their teachers, and begin looking for opportunities for

collective conversations that will invariably produce many more leaders than any formal role could have.

Learning and leading are intertwined concepts. “Distribution of power and leadership encourages teachers (and community members) to view themselves as important in shaping the school’s direction and values and in exercising influence beyond the school” (Crowther et. al., 2002, p. 51). If this ideal is understood, the concept of providing time for professional conversation just naturally makes sense. “By their day-to-day actions, principals build the culture of their schools” (Barth, 2001, p. 451). If school-based administrators want to build leadership capacity in teachers, certain structures must be put into place. One such structure is opportunities for professional dialogue. Teachers learn from each other through the process of collective reflection, debate and conversation. When engaged in these meaningful activities, teachers begin to see that their collective learning is in fact a form of leadership. What they do once they have reflected, debated and participated in important dialogue, will inevitably lead to improved teaching and learning, which is the primary goal of teacher leadership. Thus, all staff who are involved in redefining leadership realize that change comes from the “processes among us, rather than in the skills or disposition of a leader” (Lambert, 2003a, p. 424).

Once the culture of a school begins to change, the idea of capacity building will surely evolve. So as not to misinterpret, capacity building is not a natural extension of providing teachers with formal leadership roles in isolation of opportunities for collaboration. Rather, building teachers’ capacity for leadership is

summarized by Lambert (2003a) in stating, “Leadership actions are nestled within structures that serve as containers for the conversations... To begin and sustain teacher leadership, begin and sustain the conversation” (p. 426).

### **Making A Shift In Education**

In 2009-2010, Alberta Education engaged in talks with Albertans to uncover knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that Albertans would need to thrive personally and professionally in 2030. Alberta Education (2009) in its discussion paper shared the results of these talks, an analysis of data by highlighting values, skills, practices and knowledge that will be important to our children and grandchildren in a rapidly changing world. Out of these many conversations, a broad policy framework document was developed to describe the overall direction, principles and long-term goals for education in Alberta which identifies directions for new policies, our present programs of study were considered to be too content-focused:

Governments, business leaders, researchers and communities in Alberta, Canada, and around the world, investigating the requirements of 21st century learners, have identified the need for competencies to be more central in the education of young people if they are to be active participants in an increasingly knowledge-based and globalized society. Competencies enable students to understand their world, engage fully in their education, relate well to others, manage their lives wisely, and contribute positively to their communities (p. 9). Such programs required revision through a competency-based redesign process. Based on a review of national and international competency-based frameworks, on May 6,

2013, Jeff Johnson, Alberta Education Minister, released a Ministerial Order (#001/2013) to revise current curricula to include the following competencies:

- ...discover, develop and apply competencies across subject and discipline areas for learning, work and life to enable students to:
- know how to learn: to gain knowledge, understanding or skills through experience, study, and interaction with others;
- think critically: conceptualize, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate to construct knowledge;
- identify and solve complex problems;
- manage information: access, interpret, evaluate and use information effectively, efficiently, and ethically;
- innovate: create, generate and apply new ideas or concepts;
- create opportunities through play, imagination, reflection, negotiation, and competition, with an entrepreneurial spirit;
- apply multiple literacies: reading, writing, mathematics, technology, languages, media, and personal finance;
- demonstrate good communication skills and the ability to work cooperatively with others;
- demonstrate global and cultural understanding, considering the economy and sustainable development; and

- identify and apply career and life skills through personal growth and well-being.

Figure 3 below (2011) Framework for Student Learning illustrates the relationships among literacy, numeracy, competencies and subject/discipline areas outlined in the Framework for Student Learning.




Figure 4. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner

### Taking a New Approach

Principal leaders today are shifting their focus; investing in students to empower them and bring out their potential. They are emphasizing the development of key competencies in our students, cultivating engaged thinkers, ethical citizens and entrepreneurial spirits. The recognition that not all students learn the same way, and that textbooks and classrooms are just one way for them to experience education. Hargreaves (2010) emphasized that practices (new ways of teaching) travel well, but the reasons for changing practices (pedagogies) do not. Fullan (2003, 2005, 2010,

2012) clarified that teachers lose sight of why they change practices because, over more than the last decade in Canada, the United States and other Western countries, teachers have been bombarded with too many different directions for how to change classroom practices. As a result, strategic shifts from curriculum design will bring a common language throughout Alberta Education as the way curriculum is taught and redesigned as seen below in *Figure 5*.

| <b>TRANSFORM = 10 Pedagogical Shifts</b> |   |                                     |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Traditional</b>                       |  | <b>Student-centered</b>             |
| Content-based                            | -----   | Competency-based                    |
| Student as Recipient                     | -----   | Student as Inquirer & Creator       |
| Topic-driven                             | -----   | Cross-curricular Themes             |
| Short-term Assignments                   | -----   | Project-based Learning              |
| Memorization                             | -----   | Higher-level Thinking               |
| Summative Assessment                     | -----   | Formative Assessment                |
| Competitive                              | -----   | Collaborative Learning              |
| Single Grades                            | -----   | Multi-grades                        |
| One-size-fits-all                        | -----   | Differentiated & Personalized       |
| Print-based                              | -----   | Multimodal (print, visual, digital) |

*Figure 5. Making the Shift*

**Leaders Transforming Professional Development**

Edmonton Catholic Schools TRANSFORM professional development model involves teachers and consultants in a coaching cycles of planning, teaching, documenting, reflecting, and sharing changes in practices that are rooted in 10 research-informed principles or pedagogical shifts as outlined in Inspiring Education Framework (Alberta Education, 2011).

As school leader in my own school, I to continue visioning through staff Professional Development in a collaborative setting so that all staff have a voice working together to improve student learning through best practice. Learning and leading are in partnership with the community. Lambert (2004) highlights this as the first step in building capacity for shared instructional leadership. It is important for me then as a leader to continue to develop that sense of community through professional learning communities engaged in collaborative action research. Kemmis (2009) explains that action research is transformative and authentic because the research is collective and together with all stakeholders fully involved in the decision making process. Lambert (2003) believes that trust is critical because teachers can see themselves as valued and counted on. Principals in transition and new principals need to keep in mind the importance of engaging in action research because in this way instructional leadership is shared and provides a starting point to begin talking about reclaiming our roots as educators, what we want our programs to stand for, and transforming our programs for our students and with our students.

### **Student as Leaders**

Kemmis (2009) points out the importance of administrators taking into account the parents views about practice. To me this leads to leadership that is rich, diversified, contextual curriculum and as Eisner states, “that intelligence is not fixed and it grows through life experiences” (p. 22). Clay P. Beadford (2008) wrote that, “You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can, teach him to learn by creating curiosity. He will continue the learning process as long as he lives.” (p. 16).

Lambert (2003) explains that, “a student leader is one who has found her own voice, contributes to the world around her, and understands that her future is integral to the success of her community and society.” (p. 28). Eisner (1995) in his stance of Progressive Ideology highlights the importance of instructional leaders developing the whole child in a problem solving curriculum. Curriculum to Eisner is not purely academic in nature and therefore instructional leadership must involve the whole child including the social, emotional be equally developed in order to reach their fullest potential. Linda Lambert in her book, *Leadership Capacity for Lasting Improvement* (2003) highlights that the most powerful way to move forward through her own observations in schools towards shared leadership is through inquiry based practice. Linda Lambert in her book, *Leadership Capacity for Lasting Improvement* (2003) highlights that the most powerful way to move forward through her own observations in schools towards shared leadership is through a shift in practice to a more collaborative model whereby all stakeholders are involved are vested.

### **The Changing Role of the School Principal**

In this section I unpack the changing role of the school principal by highlighting the many qualities today’s effective principal juggles within each school day.

Douglas Reeves in his article, *The Dimensions of Leadership* (2006) stresses the importance of trust and integrity as the foundation of any lasting relationship. He believes that effective instructional leaders know that building positive relationship is key in fostering effective relationships in a trusting environment. Robin Sharma (2010) in his book ‘*The Leader Who Had No Title*’ wrote that, “The master in the art

of living makes little distinction between his work and his play. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence at whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him, he is always doing both” (p. 86). Krell, Fitchman and Dana (2012) explain that when positive relationships are developed, instructional leaders are able to find a ‘critical’ trusted friend who encourages risk taking and is open to sharing many perspectives. Warrant Bennis (2004) believes that “good leaders make people feel that they're at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization when that happens people feel centered and that gives their work meaning” (p. 10). In a school setting this leads to educators who take on ownership and want to engage in meaningful professional learning communities developing a vision and shared language that is goal orientated.

The goal in a learning community is to build connections between people, both socially and intellectually. Control interferes with this process; it distances people from one another. Commitment strengthens interpersonal connections...building a learning community is tantamount to developing a commitment to shared learning. (Prawat, 1993, p. 9).

As an instructional leader facilitating teachers shift as we redesign curriculum in Alberta, it is essential to provide time for collaboration in professional learning communities. Wagner and Kegan (2006) agree that over time participation in communities of practice will change the culture of reaction, compliance and isolation so prevalent in education. Margaret Mead reminds us as instructional leaders to,

“never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” I am able to commit to Thursday afternoon as a time for teachers to collaborate together in focus groups to develop student centered learning. I provide time for planning with a facilitator once a week and support teachers through collaborative PD where teachers have voice and are allowed to provide feedback. I am able to support the District’s initiative of Transform by engaging teachers in developing inquiry questions drawing from the work of Lee Crockett (2011) *Literacy is Not Enough: 21st Century Fluencies for the Digital Age*. His book has helped guide the faculty’s conversation when looking at the skills students need to be successful today, tomorrow and in the future. Hoerr (2008) in his article, *The Principal Connection/What is Instructional Leadership* reinforces the importance of principals as partners in education, learning with and from their teaching staff. Hoerr (2008) further shares that teachers are not necessarily looking for the answers from their leader, but they want a leader who understands and values their work and is able to listen to concerns. Mulford et al. (2004) found that:

...where decision making is perceived by teachers as collegial, collaborative, cooperative and consultative and providing adequate opportunities for participation, it will be more likely to lead to positive student perceptions about their school and teachers as well as perceptions about relationships and their own performance than where decision making is more top-down, executive or does not foster widespread involvement (p. 94).

When teachers were involved in shared decision making and site based management, they were motivated and the quality of their work improved. This level of involvement promoted a positive school climate which in turn had a positive impact on student outcomes. Ultimately, teachers want to know that they are supported in their work as instructional leaders, we engage in action research and transform our teaching practices together collectively. Christensen (1992) as cited in Fullan (1993) and his investigation on the changing role of the principal. Christensen found that it is essential for principals to keep students as the central focus, sharing power, foster a risk-taking inquiry climate, time to interact with all stakeholders, and continuous reassessment of the goals. Blase and Blase (1999) point out that effective instructional leaders such as the principal "hold up a mirror", serve as "another set of eyes", and are "critical friends" who encourage open communication and honest feedback with their teachers. The feedback is based on observations in the classroom and was specific, and shared in a caring, positive, and problem solving manner focusing on student learning.

Another quality principals in transition juggle is the role of instructional leader. An effective instructional leader creates a school culture of engaging learning environment with all stakeholders. Principals today are charged with creating or leading an inclusive school, one attended by all children within an age range from a given geographical area. For example, children in Edmonton Catholic Schools with disabilities attend the same school they would attend if they had no disabilities. In order for all children to thrive, the school environment itself needs to

change to adapt for all learners. Eisner highlights (2005) the importance of an inquiry based learning environment which starts from where the child is, based on their own experience. Eisner believes that the culture and community are just as important to foster as instructional leaders as the mandated curriculum since the background of the child influences what they learn.

Michael Fullan (1993), states that, “The research is clear: Nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families/community working together in partnerships...these forms of involvement do not happen by accident or even by invitation. They happen by explicit strategic intervention.” Lambert (2004) explains that using a shared leadership framework provides opportunities for children and teachers to feel welcome and inspired in the learning environment. Curtis and Carter (2004) encourage instructional leaders to move beyond referring to teaching materials that are “achievement-orientated outcomes that often convey a message that is dry and boring” (p. 122). Curtis and Carter also support the “natural tendency to investigate and theorize about things that provoke a sense of magic and wonder.” They support the changing of our mindset as instructional leaders about what materials would enrich our classroom and learning spaces by moving away from institutional school mentality and thinking about the kind of place we would want to spend our day. Crockett (2011) believes having students actively involved in an inquiry process will be a potential catalyst for designing the spaces in the school. Fullan (2004) supports Senge’s notion of effective instructional leaders who see themselves as designers not creators who can design

the learning process as facilitators, mentors and coaches. As Ruddick, Chaplain and Wallace point out:

Those bent on improvement in schools might usefully start by inviting pupils to talk about what makes learning difficult for them, about what diminishes their motivation and engagement, and what makes some give up and others settle for a “minimum risk, minimum effort” position — even though they know that doing well matters.

(As cited in Fullan, 2001, pp. 160-161).

All too often, shared leadership exists in organizational design, but not in practice. The ‘designed organization’ may not be an accurate representation of what happens in the day to-day lived organization (Spillane et al., 2008). Shared instructional leadership is enhanced when trusting relationships are fostered, collaborative professional learning communities are established which encourages a voice in deciding issues that are important to them and is shared collectively by all stakeholders.

An effective instructional leader maintains visibility and transparency and creates a culture that fosters mutual accountability; it becomes the responsibility of all staff to make sure that all students are successful. An effective instructional leader advocates, nurtures, and sustains a school culture and instructional program that promotes student learning and staff professional growth. They lead by "creating powerful, equitable learning opportunities for students, professionals, and the

system, and motivating or compelling participants to take advantage of these opportunities" (Knapp, Copland & Talbert, 2003, p.12, as cited in Murphy, 2006).

Lambert (2004) points out that everyone has the right, responsibility, and ability to be a leader. Therefore, as a school community, principal leaders need to believe and share in a passion for providing children learning opportunities through relationships with the geography, topography and climate of the land. Kemmis (2009) points out that in practical research the practitioner takes into account the parents' views about practice. Fullan points out the importance of the null curriculum in that by "...treating students as people comes very close to "living" the academic, personal, and social educational goals that are stated in most official policy documents." (Fullan, 2001, p. 162). The 'living curriculum' of how cross curricular links in a problem solving environment to facilitate shared instructional leadership of all stakeholders. Eisner (1995) suggests that children need to be engaged in a search for the meaning of life, seeking to understand the world surrounding them and the relationships that they form with others in the world. Eisner (1995) advocates Dewey's theory of cultivating the "whole child" to our approach to instruction teachers in my own school work collaboratively so that children are given many opportunities to revisit interpret and make predictions about learning, weaving daily moments into long-term investigations.

### **The Changing Role of the Beginning Principal**

The role of the principal has been described as instructional leader, business leader, office manager, consultant, counselor, and adviser. Research indicates that

principals in urban settings face as many as 100 separate events and 400 interactions a day (Morris et al., 1981). Understandably, the role of principal can often be overwhelming.

Many ‘hats’ are needed to effectively perform day to day tasks. Teachers will often be more than willing to assist a new administrator where needed in the beginning, but of course as time goes on, their day to day tasks within their own classroom eventually takes priority. Eventually, the new principal has to ride their own journey since educational administration programs cannot fully prepare new principals for the unique needs of each school site (Wilmore, 1995). Leadership means knowing what to do when (Thorpe 1995).

In addition most new principals transition from assistant principal. It is essential that assistant principals are prepared that the principalship is different (Rigger, 1995). Assistant principals know that the “buck” so to speak stops at the principal and they are not the final say. Greenfield (1994) explained how successful leaders must be thick-skinned. She says it is critical that people in authority ‘establish some kind of hard-shelled comfort level under attack, some discipline that allows them to absorb the blows and still keep going (p 23). Without this defense, she adds, leaders will spend most of their time worrying about criticism and not focusing on the job at hand.

Some believe that the only true preparation for a principal’s position is experience. In the book *The First Year as Principal: Real World Stories from America’s Principals*. Thorpe (1995) reported the interviews of 30 educators to give

“the delight, the frustration and above all the ambiguity attendant to that initial year” (p.xi).

Here we find career educators who have spent years in the classroom working with students, colleagues, and parents and know the essence of schooling as well as the technical side of how schools function. Yet, pulling it all together and providing the vision of where a school ought to go next, require a whole new set of skills. Leadership, it appears, is not experienced by the leader in quite the way it is experienced by those being led.

The gap between vision and current reality for new principals is highlighted by Sarason (1972) when he discusses the socialization of leaders during the relation of new settings. He states that new principals seem to react like theorists who are suddenly confronted with the application of their theories, and find that their theories have only limited use in the everyday operation of schools. New principals are willing to take risks in order to move toward implementing their vision of the school, a vision based on limited experience and understanding of schools and the role of principal, they find themselves having to modify and adjust their role based on their experience and having to readjust their vision to include contextual factors (Macmillan, 1998). Overall, there is not a lot of preparation for first year principals' from previous principals in the role or by district offices. Principals essentially learn on the “job” so to speak similar to that of a first– year teacher, and colleagues assume that their struggles are inevitable ( Brock & Grady), 1996). As a result, too often principals fail in their first year because they do not receive orientation and

support (Elsberry & Bishop, 1996).

### **Peer Coaching or Mentorship Programs for New Principals**

One of the most successful methods for initiating new principals into the role is structured mentoring programs (Brock & Grady, 1996). From a personal perspective, in my own first year as a principal, I participated in a principal mentorship training course once a month for the full first year as a principal. I was assigned a seasoned principal mentor to assist and guide me throughout the year. We attending monthly training meetings together and I was able to receive excellent support from administrators I admired and looked up to. I really appreciated the opportunity to be able to share difficult situations, and receive advice and feedback to help guide my practice.

Unless new school administrators have a structured peer coaching experience, they may rarely find time to reflect on their practice (Speck & Krovetz, 1996). In a 1993 study Krovetz and Barekman evaluated program participants' views about the benefits of peer coaching and instruction. These seven benefits were listed as significant:

- Reduce isolation among administrators.
- Build collaborative norms that enable administrators to give and receive ideas and assistance
- Enable administrators to work smarter, not harder
- Share successful practices (coach to person being coached, and vice versa).

- Transfer training from the classroom to the workplace.
- Investigate the connection between their own planning/organization and the consequences.
- Encourage reflective practice. (p. 37)

Clearly, peer coaching and mentorship is an important experience for all beginning principals. Peer coaching and mentorship lowers professional isolation, helps. Participants share ideas with colleagues, and encourages participants to reflect on their professional experiences (Speck & Krovetz, 1996).

In reality, new principals only have a basic understanding of what the principalship involves– the loneliness, the conflicts, the dull routines, the paperwork and the anguish involved in attempting to solve complex educational and organizational problems limited resources (Elsberry & Bishop 1996). New principals express a need for training in administration tasks such as preparing budgets, developing supervision and evaluation plans, organizing teacher professional development, interviewing, and conflict resolution (Brock & Grady, 1996). Many principal training programs believe that principals themselves can help each other become effective leaders and create schools where all children achieve (Franklin & Jone, 1997). As a result, many principals fail in their first year because they do not receive orientation and support (Elberry & Bishop, 1996).

### **Summary**

From the review of the literature on what is leadership, the role of the

principal and beginning principals many conclusions can be drawn. With the overwhelming skills required by the principal, it would be near impossible to develop these skills in any principal leadership program. Many of these skills must evolve over time in the role. The literature emphasized several key points that fall within the duties and responsibilities of a new principal or a principal transitioning to a new site. An underlying theme of the literature on the role of the principal was the importance of having a clear vision and goals (Lyons, 1999). The literature suggests the having an organizational tool such as the entry plan is key to help feeling overwhelmed as a first year principal. An entry plan consists of a leader's activities designed to gather information and to synthesize a variety of perspectives about the school or district. This has proven an invaluable tool in my first year as a beginning principal and as I transition to new schools as a principal. The uniqueness of each entry plan depends on the leader's responsibilities and the projects specific to the school and districts (Kinley, J. 2002; O'Rourke, Provenzano, Bellamy, & Ballek, 2007). An entry plan provides a quick scan of the environment, and furnishes a better understanding of school goals, climate, expectations, strengths, and needs (Neely, Berube, & Wilson, 2002). An entry plan forces administrators to develop vision, values, goals, and beliefs as a leader. It challenges principals to research the prospective position, and gives a good understanding of the school community. My Entry Plan, as shared in the appendixes will continue to be a living document that I reflect on and adjust when necessary. My personal school entry plan will help to guide and shape my success as I transition from school to school as a principal. I

believe it is essential for new or transitioning principals as it helps to establish a new vision and assess leadership progress. The Entry Plan is a guide for those first days and weeks as a new Principal. When developing my Entry Plan I have included conversations, document reviews, as well as questionnaires to all stakeholders as a guide to the structure of the entry plan.

### **Chapter 3: The School Entry Plan**

In planning for transition as a new principal, I would begin planning well in advance in order to ensure that both the administrative transition and the start to the school year were smooth and successful. Since the bulk of my experience in teaching and school administration is at the Elementary level, my school entry plan is targeted to this type of placement. Certainly, since my previous placements are in K-9 school I have made reference to junior high as well. Above all, in preparing for a first placement as a school principal, I would strive to ensure that my school entry plan reflected the needs of the various stakeholders in the school community — students, parents, teachers and other staff members.

#### **First Things First**

One of the first things to consider in terms of accepting a principalship in a new school is that administrative changes are often a source of anxiety for staff, students and parents in that they do not know what to expect from the new administrator. When the change involves a newly designated principal, this anxiety would likely be even higher as many people would wonder if the new principal had enough experience and the necessary knowledge to run the school effectively. As

Michael Fullan, in his *Leading in a Culture of Change* points out, “For better or for worse, change arouses emotions, and when emotions intensify, leadership is key.” (2001, p. 1) Recognizing that leadership is a key element in situations involving change, one of the first things I would do in preparing for my new assignment would be to review some of the literature about leadership and change in the school setting

### **Leadership and Change**

In *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Michael Fullan identifies five components of effective leadership: *moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, the ability to build relationships, knowledge creation and sharing* and finally, *coherence making*. (2001, pp. 3-6) An understanding of these five components of leadership would be helpful for anyone in a leadership position, but especially for the newly designated principal.

### **Moral Purpose**

Fullan defines “moral purpose” as “... acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers and society as a whole.” (*Leading in a Culture of Change*, 2001, p. 3) In a school setting, of course, our “customers” are our students and, to a lesser extent, their parents. It seems to me that at least part of what Fullan describes as “moral purpose” is summed up in the Edmonton Catholic Schools’ mission statement: “To provide a Catholic education which inspires and prepares students to work, to learn, to live fully and to serve God in one another.” Our district mission is focused on the needs of students and community. Teachers, in particular, because the bulk of their time is involved in the

important work of teaching students, also need to be provided with opportunities “to work, to learn, to live fully, and to serve God in one another.” As a newly designated principal, then, one of my goals would be to provide teachers with opportunities for meaningful professional development that focused on these areas. As well, I would work to ensure that each member of the school community felt valued and appreciated, that they were provided with the tools and materials necessary to do their jobs and that the school environment was such that everyone in the school community, staff, students and parents, could be productive and happy.

### **Understanding the Change Process**

Common sense dictates that the new administrator should not try to change too much about the new school too quickly. Minor changes in organizational procedures would likely meet with little or no resistance — as long as there were not too many of them and they helped to make the school run more efficiently and effectively for students, parents and staff. Too many changes all at once, however, can be disconcerting and uncomfortable for those effected by them. As well, it is important to respect the traditions and practices that have already served the school community well. To complicate matters, regardless of divisions, many dates for activities and information about procedures are published in school documents (such as Agenda planners or registration handbooks) well in advance of the start of the school year. Making changes in these areas can disrupt the school community in that, despite a school’s best efforts to communicate effectively, there are invariably a few people who are not informed about the changes. Finally, it would be a good idea to

bring any proposed changes in dates or procedures to the School Advisory Council before implementing them, just as a simple courtesy. The parents involved in the SAC might also have some valuable ideas in terms of any proposed changes, so it would be a good idea to include them in the decision making process. (This would also help to build solid relationships with the parent community.) The principal who forges ahead and makes a number of changes without the support of his or her school community runs the risk of alienating and demoralizing them. Therefore, in preparing to begin a new assignment as principal, I would be careful, at least in my first year at the school, to make only those changes that were absolutely necessary for the smooth operation of the school. I would also begin to lay the groundwork for other changes by bringing ideas for new initiatives to the staff and, when appropriate, the SAC, for discussion.

In terms of major changes in programs or practices that focus on improved student achievement, it would be wise for the new principal to proceed with caution. This is not to say that no major changes should be initiated. Instead, it is important to recognize that the change process is extremely complex and the implications of major change initiatives must be examined, understood, and planned for if such initiatives are to be successful. Michael Fullan, in *Leading in a Culture of Change*, lists six elements for understanding the change process:

- The goal is not to innovate the most.
- It is not enough to have the best ideas.

- Appreciate the implementation dip.
- Redefine resistance.
- Re-culturing is the name of the game.
- Never a checklist, always complexity. (2001, p. 34)

### **Gathering Information**

In terms of my school entry plan, once I had reviewed some of the key points in the literature about leadership and change, I would try to get a sense of what my new school is like in terms of program and dynamics. To this end, I would first of all take a look at the school's website in order to get a quick overview of the school's mission statement, programs and organizational structures. I would also be particularly interested in the students, their achievement levels and the social situations and communities they come from. Next, I would have business cards that reflected my new designation and placement made up so that I could give them to parents and members of the community at my new school. Following that, I would contact the current principal to arrange a tour of the school and a meeting—a friendly fact-finding mission. This would *not* be the time to discuss changes or to plan new initiatives. First of all, I am not officially the principal of the school until the start of the next school year and second, it is important to recognize and respect what has been achieved at my new school to date. In meeting with the current principal, I would like to discuss the following major topics.

### **Registrations for the upcoming school year**

In practical terms, the number of students who register in our schools has an

enormous impact on school budgets and on staffing, which in turn has an impact on the programs and resources we can offer students. Therefore, having a clear picture of projected enrollments is important in that this information will impact decisions made in other areas. As well, in terms of both short term and long range planning, it would be useful to know:

#### Elementary/Junior High

- What procedures are in place to process registrations (in June and in September) and to welcome new families to the school community?
- School Publications/Brochures/Registration Documents/Flyers/Signs
- Are there any District Programs offered at the school?
- Are there any special needs students enrolled at the school? What are their particular needs in terms of programming? What supports are necessary/available for these students? Transportation?

#### Junior High Only

- Which school are feeder schools if I was placed in a junior high setting
- How many of our students come from designated feeder schools?
- How many of our students come from outside of the District?
- What are relationships with feeder schools like?

#### **Begins with Conversations**

As Fullan points out, “classrooms and schools become effective when (1) quality people are recruited to teaching, and (2) the workplace is organized to

energize teachers and reward accomplishments.” (*The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 2001, p. 115) The staffing process is extremely important in that staffing decisions can have a profound impact on student learning and on the school budget. Therefore, as per our district protocol for principal succession, I would like to have input into the staffing decisions for the following school year. Some key areas to discuss would be:

- Roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal.
- Areas of responsibility/teaching assignments of current staff members.
- Anticipated changes in current staffing due to transfers, reassignments or vacancies.
- Number of teachers currently on temporary, interim or probationary contracts.
- Roles and responsibilities of staff members in addition to current teaching assignments (e.g., District Focus Programs, Leadership Team, Special Ed.)
- Programming needs/assignments that might require additional preparation time.
- Development of the timetable and class lists for the next school year.
- Current staff activities/ways in which teachers are recognized and/or rewarded for accomplishments.

Following this discussion, it might be possible to begin a preliminary staffing plan for the following school year. I would expect to be involved in interviewing and

hiring any new staff members so that I could attempt to recruit quality staff members. As well, at this time, I would like to:

- Arrange to visit my new school during a staff meeting in order to introduce myself to the staff and to distribute a questionnaire (See Appendix A) designed to help me to become familiar with each staff member, to assess the needs of the school with regard to programming, and to develop a clearer picture of the school's culture and general dynamics. It is very important for me to build relationships with my staff and have them begin to feel comfortable in communicating with me.
- Plan for at least one day to conduct one-on-one interviews with staff (20—30 minutes per person) in order to get to know each staff member and to review the questionnaire that was handed out at the staff meeting I visited. If the staff was particularly large, more than one day might be necessary to conduct these interviews. As per protocol, the costs of these interviews would be assumed by my new school.
- Arrange to meet with the support staff and the custodial staff to discuss their current areas of responsibility and their perceptions of the school and the school community.

The results of the staff questionnaire and the one-on-one interviews would be useful in terms of identifying needs and setting goals for the future.

**Budget**

The next major topic for discussion with the current school principal would be the school budget. In order to get a clear picture of the current financial situation in the school, I would like to see the financial overview and school financial reports for the past school year. After all, it would be next to impossible to plan for the next school year without knowing what the current financial situation was and where money has been spent in the past. In terms of long range planning, this would also be a good opportunity to discuss the school's current budget process, the budget expenditures over the past year, the School Advisory Council and their contributions to the school budget (fundraising), and any planned initiatives or professional development activities that might impact the budget for the following year. As well, a needs assessment of learning resources and technology, together with anticipated costs of these items would be appropriate at this time.

**Organizational Considerations**

Although reading about the school on the school webpage would provide a general overview of the school, the students and the general procedures and policies already in place, a discussion with the current school principal would provide a much more comprehensive view of such things as:

- Student achievement levels (Provincial Achievement Test Results)
- School hours of operation (Instructional Minutes and Bell Times)
- Timetabling (any possible hiccups for school start?) (Room Assignments)

- Registration procedures for Sept. Students/ Class Size
- Dates for newsletter publication (who does the newsletter?)
- Report card procedures and dates (Power School, Class Server?)
- Complementary course offerings if in JH
- Student activities/ social justice clubs
- School Conduct Policy
- Staff Handbook
- Registration Handbook
- School Calendar for upcoming year
- School website (who manages it?)
- Transportation (do we have buses?)
- Parish liaison (Priest?)
- Religious celebrations...Morning Prayer
- Teacher Sign Up sheet for Extracurricular activity
- School Advisory Council (President, School Bylaws, Procedures for electing members)
- Student recognition programs
- General organizational procedures for school opening
- Crisis Management Plan (Staff Emergency Fan-out)

**The School Growth Plan.**

The School Growth Plan is an effective means of examining a school's areas

of strength and areas for growth. As well, it provides information about the student population, achievement test scores, the school community, school initiatives and goals. Discussing the School Growth Plan with the current school principal would provide an opportunity to discuss how the school currently provides a Catholic education that inspires and prepares students to learn, to work, to live fully and to serve God in one another. A discussion of the School Growth Plan could also be used to celebrate successes and to indicate directions for further growth in terms of programming or professional development. I would also want to discuss how the Core Values and Eight Characters of Catholic Education as defined by Edmonton Catholic School District are currently being lived in the school community.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development is an integral part of developing a professional learning community. In order to plan for future professional development, it would be advantageous to know what has already been done. As well, as I've already mentioned, I would use the results of staff questionnaires and interviews as one way of determining areas for possible professional development. Reviewing with the current administrative team **their** vision for future professional development would be both respectful and insightful.

### **Last Minute Details**

The final area of discussion at my first meeting with the current school principal would be when and how much access to the school I should have before the end of the school year, when I could get keys for the school, and when a suitable date

(in July) for moving my things to the school would be. Becoming familiar with the Security alarm and access codes would also be important. I would need to ensure I have access to the following:

- PeopleSoft(staffing)
- AESOP(enrollment of students and staffing)
- Illuminate(report card information)
- MyECSD.net
- Web-mail
- Photocopier
- Log-in to Admin. Server...the NETWORK
- Does the school have any corporate partnerships/agreements/contracts?
- Joint Use Agreements (gym usage)

### **Next Steps: Document Review and Team Meetings**

The document review will begin almost as soon as I enter the building as principal. My review will include: building budgets, handbooks and board policies, the previous year's faculty and parent group meeting minutes, and staff evaluations. In addition, I will examine students' achievement data, building goals and school improvement plans. Much of the first few days and evenings of all new administrators are consumed with studying these documents, seeking clarification from other administrators regarding application and operation, and determining potential areas in need of change. In order to continue to get a feel for the

organizational structures of the school, I would request copies of the following:

- Staff Handbook/Staff Agenda
- Registration Handbook
- Parent Handbook
- School Growth Plan
- Staffing List/Allocation Spreadsheet
- Budget Document/Organization
- Calendar of Annual Events
- Crisis Management Binder

### **Meeting With Staff and District Personnel**

Another part of the entry plan involved meeting with internal district and building personnel and outside personnel. One of my first meetings will be with the secretary and custodian. Spending time to get to know the secretary and custodian is critical because the quality of these relationships built over time is vital for a principal's success (O'Rourke, et al., 2007). The secretary and I will discuss expectations and developed a daily communication routine and sharing of my weekly calendar. The custodian and I will set up facility maintenance goals and monthly meetings to monitor building and playground needs including repairs, routine and non-routine maintenance, and event planning.

An initial appointment will be made with consultants to review the curriculum and professional development focus and to confirm my involvement in supervising the building's curriculum and instruction. In addition, I will meet with

personal from facilities for assistance in becoming familiar with the security system in the building and district procedures. Other district personnel meetings may include the district finance officer, the special education and ESL consultant, and the transportation director.

To become more knowledgeable regarding the building's emergency response plans, I would arrange a meeting with the districts' Occupational and Safety Officer. I will request a walk-through of the building, where we design safe routes and locations for various situations. A school's emergency response plan should be a framework of key functions including the communication network, evacuation routes, potential long term shelters, and first aid (Brunner & Lewis, 2006). The plan is always revised with staff and parent input and shared with the district personnel at the start of school.

### **Conduct One-on-One Interviews**

The purpose of the one-on-one interviews, is to get to know the staff and to review the contents of my questionnaire. I would use this information gathered from the questionnaire as a means of beginning to work with staff to set goals for the school and to develop new initiatives to strengthen programming. As well, information gleaned from the questionnaire would give me a sense of the dynamics of the staff in terms of who the leaders, followers and potential resisters might be. This would be important information to have in terms of planning for staff development and strengthening programming for students.

**Meet with the Assistant Principal**

Before the end of the school year, I would like to set dates for a series of meetings with my assistant principal in order to discuss plans for the following school year. I believe strongly in a team approach to administration and to running the school. Therefore, I would want my assistant to be involved in the planning and decision-making process at our school. A team approach is of utmost importance.

**Meet with the Chair Person of the School Advisory Council**

Since effective communication between the School Advisory Council and the school is so vitally important in terms of building strong relationships between the parent and school communities, I would like to meet with the Chairperson of the SAC at the earliest opportunity in order to discuss how the SAC is organized, when the election of the new executive takes place, the activities the School Council has been involved in to date. I also met with the school council at an evening meeting and asked the group the same three questions. When I finish my visits, I will compile all the responses and keep them in two separate categories. All of the information, both positive and negative, will be shared with the parent committee and staff at our first meet the teacher meeting at the end of September. The information gathered will serve as the initial springboard for specific targets of improvement. This would also be a good opportunity to discuss the level of parent involvement in the school community. As Epstein and others note,

There is consistent evidence that parents' encouragement, activities, interest at home and their participation at school affect their childrens'

achievement, even after the students' ability and family socioeconomic status is taken into account. Students gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasize schooling, let their children know they do, and do so continually over the years. (As cited in Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 2001, p. 202).

### **Letter of Introduction**

At the end of the school year, I would send a letter of introduction to students and parents on school letterhead (See Appendix B). This letter would serve as the first step in building a relationship with my new school community. It could be included with the final report card.

### **August Ready!**

Before leaving for summer vacation, I would like to set dates with my assistant principal for meeting in August. As well, I would like to meet with the office staff to discuss registration procedures and to determine when they will start in August.

**Moving Day.** Before leaving for summer vacation, I would move my things from my previous school to my new one.

**Reading and Review.** Although I am already familiar with them, over the summer, I would plan to review our district *Policies and Procedures Manual* and the *School Act*. As well, I would continue to review educational literature related to leadership and change.

**Handbook Revisions.** In preparing for the staff's first day back at school, I would first of all revise the Staff Handbook. I would put the handbook into binders rather than have it coil bound so that pages could be easily added as needed. The Handbook would include the following:

- Welcome letter for staff (See Appendix C)
- Dates for staff meetings and professional development
- Religious celebration faith team sign-up sheets
- Extra/co-curricular sign-up sheets
- Staff room clean up schedule
- Prayer schedule (morning prayer)
- Weekly Staff Bulletins
- Supervision Schedule
- Room Schedules of Computer/Library/Gymnasium
- Timetables
- Class lists
- Option assignments (if placed in JH)
- Procedures for locker assignments/boot and coat rooms
- School map
- Alarm information
- Forms (Conduct reports, Acceptable Use Policy, Accident Report Forms)

**Staff Meeting.** In preparing for the first staff meeting of the year, I would first of all plan a Celebration to start the day. I would like to meet with teachers in the morning, and then I would provide lunch as a means of beginning to build community with my staff members. Working with my assistant principal, I would develop an Agenda for the first staff meeting that would include items such as:

- Staff meeting procedures
- Review of the staff handbook
- Review of the district field trip policy
- Review of the school's Crisis Management Plan
- Procedures and plans for the first week of school (including student assemblies)
- Review of school conduct policy
- Important dates for September (Picture Day, Meet the Teacher)
- Professional Growth Plans
- Review of the Twelve Teaching Standards
- Supervision Schedule
- Results of staff interviews regarding strengths and areas for growth for our school
- Reflective feedback sharing at the end of every term

**School Advisory Council.** I would arrange another meeting with the chair of the SAC in August in order to set a date for the first meeting of the year, to

develop strategies for encouraging parents to join the SAC and to discuss the Agenda for the first SAC meeting of the year.

**Registration Procedures.** Registration procedures would have been established in June. A review of these procedures would be necessary in August. As well, it would be necessary to meet with parents of students seeking to register for school in September in order to welcome them to the school community. If students were moving from Edmonton Public Schools, it would be necessary to discern their reasons for wanting to change to another school district and make sure that they were willing to participate in the faith life of the school before accepting their registrations.

**Professional Development.** The results of staff interviews regarding areas of strength and areas for growth with regard to the school community could form the basis for some of our professional development activities throughout the school year. Topics would be determined based on input from the staff. In addition, I would like to spend some time at staff meetings early in the year working on:

- Our District Mission Statement and how it is implemented and lived in our school
- Our School Mission Statement and how it is implemented and lived in our school community
- The Core Values/Eight Characters of Catholic Education/Permeation Binder and the ways they are integrated into the life of the school community
- Teachers' Personal Mission Statements and Professional Autobiographies

The results of these activities would be useful in identifying what teachers believe about teaching and learning. This information, would be useful in terms of identifying areas for growth and beginning the preliminary stages of developing (or continuing the development of) a professional learning community. I would also plan to share professional articles and literature with staff members during regular staff meetings. Finally, I would plan to spend some time at designated staff meetings on faith development activities.

**Building Relationships with the Students.** Another important way to identify areas for growth within a school community is to consult the students themselves. Older students, in particular, have very definite ideas about what makes a “good” school. As Ruddick, Chaplain and Wallace point out:

[T]hose bent on improvement in schools might usefully start by inviting pupils to talk about what makes learning difficult for them, about what diminishes their motivation and engagement, and what makes some give up and others settle for a “minimum risk, minimum effort” position — even though they know that doing well matters.

(Cited in Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 2001, pp. 160-161).

Students are very articulate in terms of identifying how they are best able to learn and to achieve. Yet, even though they are the primary focus in a school, students are often left out of the decision-making process. If we want students to be motivated and engaged in learning, then it is important to listen to their ideas and concerns. As

well, as Fullan points out, “...treating students as *people* comes very close to “living” the academic, personal, and social educational goals that are stated in most official policy documents.” (Fullan, 2001, p. 162). In keeping with our district Core Values, it is important to treat *everyone* in the school community with dignity and respect. As an added benefit, when students are treated well, they tend to treat others well in turn. One of the ways in which I would plan to build relationships with students would be to teach some classes. In this way, I would be in a position to discuss their ideas and concerns with them. As well, I would enjoy meeting with representative groups of students on a regular basis. I would also encourage teachers to consult with students in making decisions related to student achievement.

**Building Relationships with the Community.** An understanding of the community where our students live is important in terms of developing strong relationships with our students and their families. August would be a good time to visit the nearest Parish and businesses in the school neighborhood in order to begin the process of developing relationships with them. As well, it would be a good idea to meet with the principals of our feeder schools to get to know them and to see if there are areas where we could work together for the mutual benefit of our staffs and students.

### **Steps for September!**

**Newsletter.** The first newsletter of the school year is an important communication tool between the home and the school. My experience with school newsletters is that it must articulate/showcase the school and all the vibrant learning

events which are taking place in the classroom on a daily basis. Each month, I want the newsletter to be anticipated with enthusiasm by both students and parents.

Information about the school, the staff and activities planned for September must be included in the newsletter. As well, the tone of the newsletter should be welcoming and parents should be encouraged to visit or contact the school at any time.

**Meet the Teacher Night.** Meet the Teacher Night provides an excellent opportunity for parents to meet with staff to discuss the school and their children. I would like to make this evening as welcoming as possible so that parents feel that they are part of the school community. An informal barbecue (or any other food related idea) is a nice way to do this as it provides an opportunity for families to meet with teachers and staff members in a relaxed and informal setting. If you feed them...they will come.

**School Growth Plan.** By the end of September, I should have enough information about the school and its dynamics to begin working on our School Growth Plan. In developing this plan, a process in which staff, parents and students have input into the development of our school growth plan in terms of identifying new directions and goals for the school is extremely important in order to achieve “buy in” on the part of the various stakeholders in our school. The School Growth Plan should be shared with staff and the SAC.

### **Leadership Dimensions**

The changing role of the principal in Edmonton Catholic Schools is outlined in the Principal Quality Practice Guideline-February 2009. It outlines seven leadership

dimensions with an added eighth dimension of Religious/Moral/ethical Leadership representing our commitment to live the Gospel Teaching. Although my experiences in administration to date has helped to prepare me for the principal-ship and for leadership in these areas, I remain open to opportunities for personal and professional growth.

**Religious/Moral/ Ethical Leadership.** As an administrator in a Catholic school, I am called not only to lead, but also to serve the persons in my school and faith communities. At a time when Catholic education in our province is threatened, it is increasingly important to make our catholicity more visible and to articulate more clearly the many ways in which our faith is part of a lived experience in our schools. To this end, my personal goals in terms of religious leadership in my school include:

- Ensuring that the symbols of our faith are displayed prominently in hallways, the school office and in classrooms.
- Religious instruction is reserved for religious instruction (not for making up lost time in other subjects or for looking after “housekeeping” items)
- Religious celebrations are a focal point of the school year.
- Strong link between parish and school, including weekly mass.
- The Core Values and the Eight Characteristics of Catholic Education are integrated into the faith life of our school.
- Opportunities for faith development are incorporated into staff meeting time.
- Facilitating social justice projects from direct service to global humanitarian

relief

**Instructional & Capacity Leadership.** I believe that an effective leader must share his or her knowledge in areas of expertise so as to provide others with opportunities for personal and professional growth. It is important to be supportive of staff, students and parents and to recognize the efforts they have made in terms of educational practices or school initiatives. To this end, I plan to maintain a high level of morale within our school community by encouraging and supporting staff, students and parents in their endeavors and by recognizing their achievements in public and private forums.

I believe that an effective leader empowers others by encouraging them to share their gifts with others. I plan to provide staff members with opportunities to share their ideas and expertise with one another on designated professional development days. As well, I believe that staff members should have frequent opportunities for input into the decision-making process. In this way, they are encouraged to develop a sense of ownership for new initiatives. As well, when a number of people are involved in the decision-making process, ideas can be fleshed out, examined and considered from varying perspectives, so it is more likely that each of the positive and negative aspects of any given decision will be identified and dealt with.

**Management & Organizational Leadership.** One of my primary goals in terms of managing my school is to make things run as smoothly as possible so that teachers are able to concentrate on teaching rather than on organizational tasks that

take time away from learning activities. As well, I believe that it is extremely important that the lines of communication between the home and school are open, that all educational stakeholders are well aware of the policies and procedures that are in place at the school, and that people should feel welcome and comfortable about asking questions or seeking information about our school and its programs. I firmly believe that a well-managed school building leads to happy and productive students and staff. To this end, I plan to make sure that the focus within our school building is on teaching and learning in a positive and productive environment.

**Fostering Effective Relationships & Communication.** I believe that an effective leader knows that building positive relationships is key in fostering effective relationships with staff, students and parents. (Reeves, 2006) in his article, *The Dimensions of Leadership* stresses the importance of trust and integrity as the foundation of any lasting relationship. I believe it is critical to keep the confidentiality of students, staff and parents at the heart of any conversation. I believe building a trusting relationship opens doors for a safe and positive working relationship whereby everyone's voice counts and is valued.

**Embodying Visionary and Human Resource Leadership.** I believe that an effective leader must collaborate by involving the school community in creating and sustaining:

- Our District Mission Statement and how it is implemented and lived in our school community
- Our School Mission Statement and how it is implemented and lived in our

school community

- The Core Values/Eight Characters of Catholic Education/Permeation Binder and the ways they are integrated into the life of the school community
- Teachers' Personal Mission Statements/Classroom Belief Statements
- Parent involvement that is valued and critical in the learning process
- Preparing students for the 21st Century through critical and creative thinking opportunities
- Identifying and focusing on school improvement through PD by using student assessment data to progress towards achieving school goals (lifelong learning is valued and important).

In closing when a beginning principal walks through the door of the school for the first time, reality hits. A School Entry Plan is a great organizational tool to help principals quickly adjust to the reality of a new building and new challenges.

#### **Chapter 4: Final Thoughts**

##### **Professional Thinking**

As a result of EDC1 597 and the MEd program as a whole, I have been able to delve deeper into the qualities of successful leadership and curriculum theory. I continually catch myself reading and re-reading sections of the book, *The Curriculum Studies Reader* written by Flinders (2011). As a teacher and administrator for many years, I have often experienced uneasiness and doubt; often leading me to second-guess decisions and agreed upon protocols in policy, pedagogy, and curriculum. I am challenged as a leader moving forward to examine

how I think. This has been significant in the creation of my school entry plan for new and transitioning administrators. Do I need more rigor in my work as a leader?

So much of our curriculum today requires students to use critical thinking processes and to explore topics more deeply in order to make meaningful connections with the context. This back and forth uncertainty in my thinking reminds me that I am living in tension. When these tensions arise, one often feels that they are speaking with others who are presenting ideas in a confusing, muddled, and unclear manner. I could very much relate to both Mortimer Adler and Nel Noddings' perspectives and found myself thinking "in the center of a storm." On one hand I see the need for rigor and a prescribed curriculum. On the other hand I think the missing link in Adler's way of thinking is the choice factor and as Noddings stated, "the consideration of the persons who are, in their essential freedom and infinite diversity, central and instrumental in their own education (as cited in Flinders, 2011, pg. 194). The many innovative examples of curriculum within the text reminds me that because these tensions exist and must be recognized, it is important to begin my own work by finding neutral common ground and striving to build bridges between the two. Living in tension will be a reality as I beginning to question and puzzle over certainties located in many chapters within the Curriculum Reader and the current trends in education especially as Alberta redesigns curriculum. It is my hope that *rubbing against the boundaries* so to speak will help me in establishing new stories, new experiences, and new truths about curriculum today and into the future of education.

As I reflect on our MEd course work, I have found myself intrigued especially when going back to Chapter 14 of the Curriculum Reader (Flinders, 2011) and thinking once again about Praxis as explained by Paulo Freire. I continue to connect with his ideas that through Praxis we act to transform by using the true word (love) through dialogue. He presents his stance reminding me that without the spoken word we're oppressed and further expresses that it is through hope, humility, faith comes love which ultimately leads to the true word trust through dialogue. It is through dialogue students and faculty then that I see the importance of successful leaders building trusting relationships with today's students in order to prepare students for the future changes. It is necessary then for me to understand the importance of travelling inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within myself. I am reminded to look inward at the internal hopes, feelings, and moral disposition of those I work with. By looking outward I am provoked to consider existential condition, such as environment. In addition, by looking backward and forward I am considering the temporality of the past, present, and future. Every story is located in experience, left vulnerable to the retelling and interpretation of those who have not lived it. During my time reflecting about my experiences in our MEd program, I believe, in a sense, this has cause me to "live in between" what I understand and what I question. I will be retelling the stories of the past, telling the stories of the present, and imagining the stories of the past. The stories, all important and needing to be shared, all necessary if we are to reveal new

understandings and new truths which one day, might become interweaved as co-investigators within authentic dialogues of our future generations.

I was greatly comforted after taking the MEd program that walking in the midst of stories is exactly where I like to be. I am always fascinated by others; their experiences, their diversity, and their dreams. As a 25-year educator, I have had to, settle in the school, live within the social and personal dimension of context, and work alongside my colleagues and community. As I travelled from one school to another I likewise had to negotiate many different relationships, establish my purpose, transition from situation to situation, and make myself useful. My school entry plan illuminates the importance of being respectful of the past, present, and future allows us to situate ourselves purposefully through trusting dialogue of the spoken word of love so that oppression is not an option. I believe this implies being mindful and open to the nuances surrounding events as they are lived, told, and retold. Reliving these moments in time, creating new understanding, establishing new truths, and forging new possibilities. Hope is, in essence, what I bring to my work. It is the motivating force compelling me to examine, question, ponder, and discover. Without the possibility of bringing hope, I would feel no purpose in my work as a leader.

I have a confession to make. I have worked at eight different schools during my career and I fell in love with each one. Even though many of these communities struggled with what appeared upon my arrival, insurmountable troubles ranging from financial woes, to enrollment crisis, I fell in love with each and every one and moved

from one school to the next with a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes. In a sense we must fall in love with our participants, however, must be prepared to step back and see the larger landscape. This tension of full involvement and distance must be strategically co-constructed by all stakeholders. Within these specific moments in time, we can capture rich detail of the experience including the then and now, the where and when, and the how and why. This is where I will have to be mindful of hope, humility, faith and love remembering that balance is essential in capturing dialogue in the true word of love through trust.

In closing, the culture and community Eisner (2007) believes is just as important as mandated curriculum since the background of the child influences what they learn. It is my belief that school should be based on a strong image of children who are curious, competent and capable of constructing knowledge and, because I am a principal in a Catholic school, in a faith based environment. I believe Alberta is on the right track with curriculum redesign in achieving a vision of students as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit (Alberta Learning, 2011). As a principal I will be able to help guide and make the needed shifts in policy through Curriculums Redesign.

### **Recommendations: Why a School Entry Plan?**

As a result of the Masters of Education Program (MEd) as a whole, I have been able to delve deeper into the qualities of successful leadership and ultimately provide an essential tool by way of a school entry plan for future new administrator or administrators in transition.

An Entry Plan is designed to slow things down in order to counter the external pressures and internal responses that inexorably lead to jump reflex problem solving....An Entry Plan enables three kinds of learning: learning about your new place, learning about yourself, and collective learning about the organization as a whole. The result is that, as a new administrator, you make better decisions that are genuinely understood and acted upon by the people who must implement them

(Jentz & Murphy, 2005, p. 740).

A school entry plan supports the need for strong interpersonal skills, a strong clear vision, strong organizational and problem solving skills, and sound professional knowledge are required for success in both endeavors. A school entry plan also seeks to build relationships with community members through the collaborative and shared leadership model. Specifically, the goals outlined in the entry plan seek to enhance community and family involvement through learning, communicating, and sharing. First, reviewing all records and materials regarding the school, students, and the community is essential prerequisite work when becoming a new principal. In addition, meeting and networking with different players in the school and the community such as district administrators and local businesses can provide adequate cultural and systemic perspectives. Introducing oneself to new situations provides a good foundation to guide all the decisions, interactions, and relationships required to successfully navigate a first year principalship. Also, instructional leaders must guide the vision so that student achievement is maximized within the context of the

community culture. However, using consensus based decision-making for this process will help the community to find a common or shared purpose

These ideas, explained in more detail within the plan, will indicate to the community of learners that a principal is a change agent that hopes to implement change with the support of all stakeholders. A positive, all inclusive approach to a school entry plan will lead a successful transition for all principal leaders in transition.

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Appendix A

Staff Questionnaire

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

YEARS IN THE DISTRICT: \_\_\_\_\_

YEARS AT THIS SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

**CURRENT ASSIGNMENT DETAILS:**

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**POSITION IN THE SCHOOL:**

*(Please check appropriate box)*

- Office Staff
- Custodial Staff
- Support Staff
- Teaching Staff
- Out of Scope
- Other

I will be setting aside 30 minutes to meet with you personally within the next week or so. I would ask that you please complete and bring this questionnaire with you at that time. It is my hope that this questionnaire will provide me with some information about yourself and the school, so that I can better meet your needs and in turn the needs of our students. Thank you in advance, for your cooperation.

The goals of the one to one introductory interviews are:

1. To become familiar with you and your needs as a member of this staff.
2. To make a general assessment as to the needs of the school.
3. To acquire an understanding of the school's culture to establish a frame of reference.

## Appendix B

## Letter of Introduction to Parents

Dear Parents and Guardians:

In \_\_\_\_\_, I was designated principal of \_\_\_\_\_, effective \_\_\_\_\_.

As such, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I began my career with Edmonton Catholic Schools in 1990 and I have taught most grade levels from K-6. I come to you with an extensive background in Special Education, as well as specialization in Early Childhood. I am particularly blessed in that I have had wonderful experiences with staff, students and parent communities in the various schools I have been assigned to. I am also pleased to share that \_\_\_\_\_ will be joining our school community as our Assistant Principal. She also comes with a diverse background in Special Education and is excited about joining the \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ has a rich history and a tradition of success. Both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are honored and pleased to have the opportunity to work with your children and with such a dynamic and hard working staff.

My heartfelt thanks go out to the administration, staff and parent community of St. Gabriel School for welcoming both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ over the past two months during our visits to the school.

Once again, we are thrilled to be here and look forward to serving as the admin team of \_\_\_\_\_. In partnership with you, we will build on the school's history of success and together with our staff, and will work diligently at ensuring that we make decisions in the best interests of your child's education. I wish each of you a restful, safe summer and look forward to meeting all of you as we begin our school year with a full day on \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

Tisa Haesch

Principal

Appendix C  
Staff Welcome Letter

Insert Date>

Dear <Insert staff member's name>:

It's hard to believe that our summer is nearly over. I hope your summer has brought you much deserved rest and relaxation. Now, with our spirits rejuvenated and our bodies and minds rested, we can look forward to the start of another school year. I would like to welcome you back and to let you know that I look forward to working with you this year.

I have attached a copy of the agenda/activities for our first two teacher days on August \_\_\_\_\_. Once again, I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely yours,

Tisa Haesch