

Exploring School District Supports and the Strength of Leader Efficacy: A Case Study

by

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Abstract

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This study explores school district supports for leader efficacy. Enhancing leadership self and collective efficacy (LSE & LCE) positively impacts leader performance, which advances student learning and supports school improvement. I conducted a bounded case study of an urban school district. Evidence of district conditions and supports came from district documents, a survey and interview data. LSE and LCE were measured for 32 principals and vice-principals. This study supports the findings of an earlier study that identified ways in which district leaders, through district conditions, have the greatest impact on LSE and LCE. Evidence revealed that the district under study satisfied these conditions and also showed strong measurements of both LSE and LCE. The results show this district is finding effective ways to support and enhance LSE and LCE. District conditions are described and recommendations for continued improvement made.

Keywords: Leader efficacy; collective efficacy; leader performance; student achievement; school improvement; district conditions; district leadership

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Dedication

To Michael, Colin, Renata and my students—who have really been my teachers and provided the inspiration for this project. You continue to inspire my desire to become a better teacher and leader.

Chapter 1 Introduction: Self and collective efficacy linked to learning and life-chances

I. The structure of the introduction

It is not uncommon for teachers to remark on the learning habits of their students. A student who persists with a task, even if success does not come right away, stands out. Some students are quite remarkable for their persistence and teachers often report heart-warming stories of students persevering against the odds. Similarly, it is surprising to see a capable student give up a task early. To a teacher, or parent or even an outsider, the student appears able to succeed and questions are likely raised about the student's belief in his/her capability or efficacy. One of the key factors in determining whether a person will persist with a task or role, even without immediate success, is a psychological phenomenon called self-efficacy (SE). If a person's self-efficacy is strong for a particular task or performance then s/he is more likely to take the task on and complete it. When self-efficacy is weak, a person is less inclined to persist in the face of failed attempts and/or may avoid the task entirely (Bandura, 1997).

Most of us, when asked to perform a task or participate in some kind of activity, have an idea of how successful we might be. In other words, we have beliefs about our ability "to do". According to Albert Bandura, Stanford University researcher and the "father" of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), individuals possess beliefs about their unique capabilities and this set of beliefs is self-efficacy (SE). Additionally, individuals within a group may possess a belief about their joint capability, which is something more than just the sum of individual SE's. It is a group attribute, which Bandura (1997) terms collective efficacy (CE). Research shows that school improvement is most effectively implemented where leadership is shared and involves both formal and informal leaders (Harris &

Muijs, 2003; Harris, 2004). While I believe this to be true, I have narrowed my look at leadership in order to keep the study manageable. This research examines organizational supports for self and collective efficacy with a very specific focus on school districts and formal school leadership at the Principal and Vice-Principal level.

There are a number of underlying premises, which make my study worthwhile. I will link the premises so that it becomes evident how this investigation fits into the bigger picture of school improvement. First, I will define the constructs associated with efficacy beliefs and position them theoretically. Next, I will link these constructs to leadership and describe what is meant by increasing the life-chances of students. Finally, I will link SE and CE to learning and the research questions.

II. Self and collective efficacy: Theoretical perspectives

This study uses the construct of self-efficacy (SE) in a manner consistent with Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1997). Bandura wrote that it was his hope “that a better understanding of personal and collective enablement [would] help chart optimistic courses of human development and change” (1997, p. viii). My hope is that the construct of self-efficacy applied to the context of formal school leadership may further school improvement through positive change in some small way also.

Self-efficacy affects what a person chooses to do, where s/he chooses to do it, and how s/he chooses to cope with it. SE also affects how much effort a person is willing to invest in the pursuit, and the extent to which s/he will persist with the necessary actions to achieve a desired outcome. This is especially true with respect to stressful or complex pursuits. Bandura describes efficacious people as those who “take advantage of opportunity structures and find ways to get around institutional constraints or turn to

collective action for change”(1997, p. 6). From a workplace perspective, efficacious people tend to be those who lead change. An improving school district, uses its efficacious people as leaders and provides the structures to support positive changes so that those with strong beliefs in their abilities can make changes happen. In such a district, positive individual and social changes are seen as mutually supportive and even essential features of bringing about improved life-chances for students. Improving the life-chances of students is a product of both positive personal change (in students, teachers, and formal leaders) as well as positive social change, which is a product of collective efficacy (CE).

I used SE theory as the epistemological basis for my study because it not only provided the constructs of SE and CE, but also offered ways to enhance them. The link between SE and perseverance contributes to better performance. Skilled performances usually come about because of persistence in practicing behaviours associated with the pursuit. Greater persistence means more opportunities for reflection. In response to reflection and feedback, incremental changes can be made and performance improved.

Enhancing CE improves performance outcomes for the entire group. It is also true that enhancing SE can improve entire group performance. In order for a group to have its greatest collective success, the group members must exercise their personal capability and put it to best use. Bandura notes, “optimistic self-appraisals of capability raise aspirations and sustain motivation in ways that enable people to get the most of their talents” (1997, p. 72). Applied to leadership, the link between SE, CE and performance outcomes means that enhancing SE and CE also enhances the performance of school

leaders. This ought to be incentive enough for districts to find ways to strengthen and support school leaders' efficacy.

According to self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), positive SE and positive CE complement rather than rival each other. This might happen to an even greater extent when individual goals are linked to group goals. Or, as in the case of schools, when leader and school goals are aligned and linked to district goals. One way to ensure that goals are linked for schools and districts is to focus the goals on improving learning.

Levels of self-efficacy are significant in determining learning performance outcomes. At the essence of much learning is persistence and a willingness to make mistakes. The research shows that the higher a person's self-efficacy, the more likely s/he is to perform well. This may be applied to those in leadership positions, especially since much of current writing on educational leadership stresses the importance of learning as part of the leadership role (Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2005; Harris & Hopkins, 2000; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). I frequently hear and read that effective school leaders are lifelong learners. If this is the case, and I am convinced from my own experience that it is, then since self-efficacy is so important for learning, it must also be important for leaders.

This thesis examines self-efficacy in the specific context of formal school leadership. The structures districts provide to support both leadership self-efficacy (LSE) and leadership collective efficacy (LCE) are analyzed. LSE is the self-efficacy of an individual leader and is a personal belief in one's capability to lead effectively. Along the same vein, LCE is the collective efficacy of a group of leaders and for this study is

defined as formal school leaders' belief in their collective capability to carry out effective school leadership together.

III. Increasing the life-chances of *all* students

As an educator, there is a main driving force behind all the work that I do including my thesis: school improvement to increase the life-chances of *all* students. Some clarification about increasing the life-chances of *all* students is necessary. The challenge of delivering top quality education to *all* learners requires wide-spread change. Schools are faced with having “to figure out how to serve a public mission in a world that is increasingly comfortable with privatization of services” (Lieberman & Miller, 2004, p.4). The spread in social, cultural and intellectual capital between students continues to grow. It is more and more difficult to provide satisfactory education for *all* in the face of growing inequities between students. The necessity of improving the life-chances of students may be even greater now, than it was when Ralf Dahrendorf described life-chances as much more than just a phrase with pleasant connotations, loosely defined by some as “the sum total of opportunities offered to the individual by his society, or by a more specific position occupied in society” (1979, p. 28).

Dahrendorf developed the term conceptually noting that life-chances are not features of individuals, but result for individuals in the context of society. It is a two-part concept that involves the interaction of both opportunities within and ties to society. “Life-chances provide us with opportunities, not just choices, but meaningful choices, not just linkages, but achievable linkages, and these opportunities make us grow” (1979, p. 39). It is Dahrendorf’s definition I adopt when referring to the job of school improvement to increase the life-chances of students. This conception requires that school leaders and

classroom teachers have a firm grasp of the concept of equity. A system where students are treated fairly according to their needs, but not necessarily equally, opens the possibility for differentiated instruction. Dahrendorf identifies the disparity between students who 'have' and those who 'have-not' as crucial. It is the education gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' which must narrow if life-chances for *all* are to improve.

IV. LSE and LCE linked to learning and the research question

School improvement is a large field to which many other fields contribute including curriculum and instruction, educational assessment, and educational leadership. It is easy to see how curriculum, instruction and assessment are linked to learning since the links can be made directly. Even more, most of us, whether we are teachers or not, have had direct experiences with either good, bad, or something in between of curriculum, instruction and assessment. We are less likely though, to have perceived direct effects from leadership on our own learning. The connections between leadership and learning are more circuitous and indirect. Despite this, leadership effects are not diminished, and a considerable body of research has established the significance of leadership for learning (Leithwood, forthcoming; Robinson, 2008b; Robinson, Loyd & Rowe, 2008; Wahlstrom & Seashore-Louis, 2008 to name a few).

Many leadership actions and/or reactions are connected to the personal beliefs and educational expectations of leaders. Teacher efficacy, the extent to which teachers believe they can be effective in helping students learn, has been strongly linked to the learning that goes on in classrooms (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Similarly, school leader efficacy, the belief that school leaders have in their ability to help

teachers teach, affects the work done by teachers and in turn the success of students.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) have done extensive research to determine whether or not leader efficacy could be considered an important link between leadership and learning.

Leader efficacy has a strong influence on school and classroom conditions, which in turn influence student learning. Leithwood and Jantzi tease out leadership self-efficacy (LSE) and leadership collective efficacy (LCE) from each other to examine the impacts on learning. LSE refers to an individual leader's efficacy and LCE refers to the aggregate efficacy of leaders across the district. LSE is a personal feature whereas LCE is an organizational or systems feature. They found that district leadership did have a strong indirect influence on leader efficacy. Effective district leaders were good at capacity development; building structures for collaborative work; creating a culture of collaboration; and managing the district's instructional program well—all of which impact leader efficacy.

Much of the research, which links leadership to learning, also identifies key leadership behaviours exercised by effective leaders. LSE and LCE may contribute to the frequency with which these behaviours are performed, and the success of performance outcomes. It has been shown that where LSE and LCE are higher, performance outcomes are also higher (Bandura, 1997). Two research questions fall naturally out of this link. What structures and supports are in place in school districts to enhance LSE and LCE? And what improvements can be made so that both are further enhanced? An underlying assumption is that districts have a mandate and/or moral purpose to bring about school improvement. These are the questions with which I began my exploration.

Chapter 2 Literature Review: Support for linking efficacy, leadership, learning and life-chances

I. Introduction: The compelling push for school improvement

There are some today who paint a rather bleak picture of the future of education. The problems they say are partly due to failing leadership. They point out that governments repeatedly ask schools to do what they are ill-equipped to do and that schools usually draw their leaders from within their own ranks thereby maintaining the status quo of leadership, which, they claim, has not proven to be very successful. Researchers such as Richard Elmore (2000) suggest we might do better by examining successful leadership for improvement in other sectors rather than studying the “same old, same old” of educational leadership. Elmore claims that educational leadership is out of focus. There is so much attention paid to the management of structures and processes, he says, that not enough consideration is given to leading instruction. He makes the claim that instructional leadership “is a rare thing, to which few are committed” (2000, p. 6), and at the same time points out that “schools are accountable for what students learn, meaning that *someone* should manage the conditions of learning in schools so as to produce a given result” (p. 9). School leaders must guide and direct school improvement, described by Elmore as “change with direction, sustained over time, that moves entire systems, raising the average level of quality and performance while at the same time decreasing the variation among units, and engaging people in analysis and understanding of why some actions seem to work and others don’t” (2000, p. 13). The research indicates (Birky, Shelton & Headley, 2006; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Slater, 2008) that the most effective principals are those who guide and direct, but do not control improvement within a system of distributed, instructional leadership. And even though leadership is

shared, it is not so diffuse that *someone* is not directly responsible for the outcomes. Furthermore, the research shows that, *that someone* is more likely to be effective and successful if s/he believes s/he can be (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

The desire for improvement in student learning provides a compelling push to set the wheels of school-wide change in motion. School-wide change is an extremely complex process to which leadership is a crucial contributor. Most of the literature on school change devotes considerable space to school leadership (Fullan, 1999; Fullan, 2005; Fullan 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2005; Harris, 2003; Kaser & Halbert, 2009). Leadership is high on the agenda for districts, government education authorities, university education departments and teacher unions. Why all the interest now? Educators on the frontlines have always looked to leadership as an important factor for influencing both failing and thriving schools. Perhaps, it has taken so long for the official bodies to jump on board, because it is only recently that research has been done to definitively back-up what teachers and principals have always felt—leadership for learning matters. Along this vein, research findings linking leadership and learning can provide useful insights for improving leadership capacity in districts. While the evidence on developing strong leaders does not indicate that it directly or single-handedly brings about improvement in student learning, there is support for considering “leadership development as a key part of almost any comprehensive large scale reform strategy” (Leithwood, forthcoming, p. 1) in schools. Review of system structures and supports, done with an eye to enhancing those areas most likely to have an impact on improving student learning, is a worthwhile practice. This, coupled with research on school-wide change advances the field of educational leadership in a positive way.

Effective educators know that self-regulation as a regular, reflective practice is essential for understanding one's own learning and moving it forward. District leaders who foster such competency in their school leaders contribute to the capacity for both individual learning and organizational learning. Viviane Robinson's work (2008) has identified the potential for leaders to have a hand in improving student learning by promoting and providing the resources to develop such critically aware practices. Practitioners of educational reform often engage educators in some form of ongoing reflection (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Harris & Hopkins, 2000; MacBeath, 2007; Wright, 2009). It typically follows a pattern where participants engage in reflection on their actions during and following teaching and learning to determine what's working, what needs improvement and what doesn't work. This process is done with the goal of improving instruction.

A similar process might be applied in learning to be a better leader. Fullan says "when it comes to learning, effective leaders are greedy" (1997, p. 45). The link between self-efficacy and self-reflective practice provides a way to show how this is so. Bandura, Adams & Beyer (1977) showed that the higher a person's SE for a particular task, the more likely the person was to perform the task. When it comes to educational leadership this means a great deal given that the research shows there are specific behaviours that are consistently linked to effective educational leadership (see Robinson 2008). School leaders with a higher SE for a particular behaviour are more likely to perform the behaviour more frequently. Frequent practice itself, affords opportunities for reflection. Positive action in response to reflection is an essential part of learning and development. The very process of reflective leading builds capacity and thereby enhances SE.

Where leadership development is valued, systems and individuals engage in meta-cognitive learning (Fullan, 2005). Reflective practice by teachers contributes to development of language to describe improving practice. In the same way, reflective practice by leaders builds the vocabulary of leading for learning. Districts that are professionally private, where leaders do not talk about leading, do not foster leaders' ability to explain what they do. Conversely, districts that are collaborative enable leaders to broaden their vocabulary on leadership praxis. Leaders who *can explain* what they do are more likely *to explain* what they do, and thus contribute to leadership development. Having a rich vocabulary for leadership and learning enables leaders to reflect on their practice using a common language, which aids collective inquiry into improving leadership for learning.

I have a broad interest in exploring the vocabulary of leadership for learning and in determining more about the links between leadership development at the district level, leadership practice and student learning. Via my research, practitioners were given the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and assess what district supports and structures were in place to enhance their belief in their ability to do their work both individually and collectively. A strong belief in one's own ability, supports persistence of action and confidence, which have been shown to positively influence desired performance outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Specifically, I wanted to know what district supports were available to school administrators, which contributed to both their LSE and LCE and thus to more effective performance of leadership behaviours.

II. Format of the Review

The link between leadership, change, and improvement in student learning sets the stage for the review of the research. There are several facets to improving student learning one of which is effective leadership. The literature shows that the effects of leadership on learning are indirect and significant (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Kaplan, Owings & Nunnery, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Mulford, 2005; Robinson, 2008a; Robinson, 2008b). Leadership is also an area where real, practical improvements can be made. The more effective leaders there are working in schools, the greater the chance that leadership will impact student learning for the better (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). Improved student learning, which has been shown to increase the life-chances of students, is the core moral, social, and economic purpose for providing the best possible system supports for leaders (Fullan, 1999), one aspect of which is supporting LSE and LCE.

This review first identifies and describes influences on and supports for SE and CE. Next, justification for the study is drawn from the literature. Leadership is first linked to learning, then to self and collective efficacy through the research. Links in the literature are used to show how LSE, LCE and learning are connected and district conditions are linked with LSE and LCE. Finally, gaps in the research are identified, and the stage is set for the case study.

III. SE and CE: Influences and supports

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) identifies four domains through which self-efficacy can be enhanced. These include mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1997). Mastery experiences enhance SE, such as when an individual has the opportunity to attempt new skills or solve novel

problems and is successful. For school leaders these opportunities may be provided in the form of job-embedded professional development; chances to solve manageable problems when learning a new role such as that of vice-principal or principal; and/or teacher opportunities to lead in supportive circumstances where success is likely. Opportunities for mastery are also likely to be available through a mentoring relationship in which the mentor provides situations for the learner to exercise leadership skills, as when principals and vice-principals work collaboratively. Vicarious experiences enhance SE. School leaders may have vicarious experiences in a variety of ways, such as visualizing a successful performance, observing others model leadership behaviours skillfully, or by hearing about how other effective leaders solve problems in similar circumstances. Verbal persuasion is effective in enhancing SE. For school leaders, verbal persuasion may take the form of encouragement and constructive, timely feedback from superiors, such as district administrators for principals, or principals for vice-principals. Peer feedback may also play a role in verbal persuasion, as in coaching/mentoring relationships. Lastly, emotional arousal influences SE and in schools is most likely to come from inspirational or transformative leadership.

Of these four domains, Bandura (1997) found mastery experiences had the greatest impact on SE. When mastery experiences are positive, they result in stronger and more generalized efficacy beliefs. Information about capability is gained by enacting the behaviours that are key to the pursuit. Reflection on feedback received during and after the performance is also part of the mastery process.

Vicarious experiences, while processed in a different cognitive manner than mastery experiences, also build SE. Social comparison is a means of vicarious experience

that may result in increased or decreased SE depending on the outcome of the comparison. If a person outperforms other members of his/her cohort, then SE beliefs are likely to be raised, whereas, if a person underperforms other members of his/her cohort then SE beliefs will likely be lowered (Bandura, 1997).

Another form of vicarious experience, modeling, builds SE in two ways. First, it provides a social standard against which a person might measure his/her own capabilities. Second, modeling serves as a teaching/learning opportunity. Seeing the way another person tackles various aspects of a common role may help expand the repertoire of the observer and thereby increase capability, which in turn raises SE. Such instructive modeling brings a degree of predictability and personal control to the pursuit (Bandura, 1997).

Modeling is accomplished in two ways. In direct modeling, the model is part of the observer's immediate social network. For example, the model and observer work in the same workplace. Whereas with symbolic modeling the observer is exposed to models through various forms of media. Symbolic modeling has the added advantage of convenience, insofar as the observer may view the performance when it suits and as often as needed. Also, symbolic modeling can be targeted to demonstrate successful use of specific skills and/or successful performances (Bandura, 1997). A variation on direct modeling, self-modeling, may enhance SE in the same way that peer modeling does. Some advocates of this approach encourage school leaders to record themselves in their role as leader, in order to reflect on and improve practice.

Verbal persuasion builds SE. Stronger SE results from positive verbal feedback that addresses ability, without referring to effort invested in the performance. This has

implications for the way feedback is constructed and delivered. Views on leadership, whether it is an inherent quality or an acquirable skill, may also influence the way feedback is given and/or received. In more successful efficacy building, the pursuit is viewed as a composite of acquirable skills by both the person engaged in the pursuit and those providing feedback. In addition, the way feedback is framed influences its affect on SE. For example, feedback focused on gains tends to enhance SE, whereas feedback that highlights performance shortfalls is more likely to have a negative impact on SE. Verbal persuasion alone tends to have a greater impact on SE when it undermines ability. Also, the characteristics of the persuader, such as who they are, the position they hold, their credibility, and their level of knowledge or “expertness” may mediate the impact verbal persuasion has on SE (Bandura, 1997).

Finally, physiological feedback or emotional arousal plays a part in constructing SE and CE. A positive mood enhances perceived efficacy, whereas a negative mood diminishes it. District conditions, one of which is district culture, may have an affect on the mood of the district. For example, a district that is making positive improvements and progress in the area of life-chances for its students is more likely to radiate more positive feeling. If measures such as school completion rates and general satisfaction are on the rise in a school/district, it is likely that this will enhance perceived efficacy (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008), which, in turn, may further reinforce a positive tone in schools (Bandura, 1997).

To successfully instill efficacy beliefs, Bandura (1997) prescribes a multi-pronged approach including, “raising performers’ beliefs in their abilities to acquire the skills, modeling the requisite skills, structuring activities in masterable steps that ensure a high

level of initial success, and providing explicit feedback of continued progress” (1997, p.105). This not dissimilar to the way coaches and classroom teachers structure effective teaching and learning. District Administrators might also successfully instil and enhance SE in their formal leaders using such an approach. Bandura’s prescribed approach informs the recommendations I have made in chapter five.

A district where collaboration is the norm, provides conditions which are conducive to modeling, providing opportunities for success in manageable chunks and providing feedback that is truly constructive. In these kinds of conditions, district administrators, principals and vice-principals can serve as efficacy builders for each other. In the realm of leadership, skilled efficacy builders are recognizable because they measure individual improvement over comparing improvements with others; they provide opportunities for success in leadership; they don’t put new leaders in situations where there is a high risk of failure before they are ready; they tailor activities to build capacity; and they recognize strengths and weaknesses. In the same way that improving schools ought to make sure that classroom teachers are skilled efficacy builders, so improving districts must ensure leaders are also skilled efficacy builders.

IV. The literature provides justification for the study

There isn’t enough done yet. Research concerning the impact of leadership on student learning can be costly, time consuming and difficult to do. This may account for the dearth of research in the area (Harris, 2004). Viviane Robinson (2008b) did a comprehensive meta-analysis of current research that links educational leadership to its core purpose of supporting teaching and learning. Robinson’s work builds upon the work of Hallinger and Heck (1998), who did a similar analysis of all the research done on

educational leadership between 1980 and 1995. Where Hallinger and Heck focused on summarizing the research linking leadership to learning, Robinson's work advances the field by identifying leadership behaviours that are the most influential on learning. Additionally, she found loose threads in the research and notes, "connections need to be substantially strengthened if leadership literature is to deliver more reliable and more useful insights into the particular leadership practices that create the conditions that enable teachers to make a bigger difference to their students" (2008b, p. 22). System structures and supports that create conditions for leaders to more effectively lead are worth examination, which requires a meaningful coming together of both theory and practice.

Leadership has been examined from diverse theoretical perspectives, within a number of disciplines such as public administration, political science, labor studies and educational administration. General analysis of leadership is useful to some extent, but educational leadership studies must delve more deeply into everyday practice in order to grasp the ways in which leadership really impacts student learning. That learning matters is uncontested, so it follows that potential positive influences on student learning, such as leadership, deserve both study and development. The necessity of leadership for learning raises the following questions: How do we best go about supporting leaders to positively influence and improve student learning? How do we measure the effectiveness of efforts to do just that?

For benefits to leaders and society. There are a number of benefits to be gained from my research not the least of which is a positive contribution to leadership praxis in British Columbia's school districts. Self-reflection on leadership praxis may enhance

professional growth and development for participants, which in turn may enhance LSE and LCE. In similar and larger scale studies, project evaluation has provided data to support this claim. Kenneth Leithwood's major research and leadership development project in Ontario schools "Leading Student Achievement" (LSA) found that those who participated "believed they benefited from their project experiences and that they had become much more focused on teaching and learning in their schools" (in press, p. 9). Reflection on the way one leads helps develop a critical awareness of the impact of one's leadership actions.

Knowledge generated by studies on leadership and learning, and by more reflective leadership practice both benefit society. Most often, the participants in leadership and learning research are educators. Their participation benefits the communities in which they work. As practitioner-participants reflect on leadership and learning, they are more likely to make positive leadership contributions to the systems in which they practice. Leithwood's LSA project offers the verification for this claim, by noting that "substantial increases in leaders' uses of evidence to make decisions about literacy and numeracy instruction and to set targets for improvements in these areas of the curriculum" (in press, p. 9) occurred as a result of the research. Data-literate leaders are an essential feature of improving schools.

To learn how leaders make a difference. My study enhances the leadership and learning knowledge base. Much is theorized about the impact leadership has on student learning, but very little data has actually been gathered. Specifically, my research adds to what is known about how districts can and do support leaders' belief that they can do the job they are required to. Enhancing leaders' belief that they can do the work is linked to

improving performance of leadership behaviours. The behaviours are indirectly linked to better student learning. Because it is beyond the scope of this project to directly access student learning, I used a composite of leadership behaviours, recognized in the field by a number of experts (Daresh, 2001; Fullan, 1997; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood & Levin, 2005; Leithwood & Massey in press; Robinson, 2008b) as part of exemplary practice. The composite of behaviours provided the pathway to assess the supports that districts provide to enhance LSE and LCE. I based my study on the premise that, as others have shown (for example, Leithwood, forthcoming; Robinson, 2008b), these key leadership behaviours impact student learning. I measured LSE and LCE via these behaviours. Since it has been shown that where self-efficacy and collective efficacy are stronger, behaviours are more adequately performed, I supposed that the stronger the self-efficacy and collective efficacy for these behaviours, the greater the impact on student learning.

Contributions to knowledge on leadership and learning are especially important for practitioners. Since the impacts of leadership on student learning are largely indirect, especially at the district level, leaders need accurate and reliable information about how, and to what extent, their behaviours and the system structures they build impact student learning. Leithwood sums it up thus, “to improve student learning means spending considerable effort helping leaders better understand those components of their schools [and districts] which mediate their influence on student achievement” (in press, p. 15). District features that influence LSE and LCE are such components. If the greater purpose of leaders’ work, and district leadership support, is to improve student learning, then *all* leaders must be provided with opportunities to learn about the impacts they make.

V. From leadership to learning

Indirect and significant. Research substantiates an indirect connection between leadership and learning. A leader's work and relationships are mediated by a variety of factors, so it is worthwhile examining the connection between leadership and learning in the context of capacity building and school improvement. Leadership plays an important role in school improvement. Leaders are positioned to have an exponential impact because they influence staff, who in turn, bring those influences to bear on many students, parents and other members of the school community. Leithwood & Massey (in press) identify a number of factors in schools that directly impact student learning such as building school community, improving teacher instruction, more effective use of instructional time and strengthening teachers' collective efficacy. School leaders play a key role in influencing these factors. In turn, district leadership and systems play a part in improving schools by fostering the behaviours and skills that leaders need to influence the factors that directly influence learning.

To undertake a study that explicitly links leadership and learning by direct measurement of student learning is a monumental task, and one that could not be properly accomplished without considerable expense of time and money. Fortunately, researchers such as Robinson and Leithwood have paved the way for a less costly, less time consuming approach to connect leadership and learning. Robinson (2008b), through meta-analysis, has established a strong, indirect, link between certain leadership behaviours and student learning. Through the LSA project about leadership and learning across Ontario schools, Leithwood (forthcoming) and Leithwood & Massey(in press) provide the teeth for this approach by empirically examining the frequency of leadership behaviours, similar to those identified by Robinson. They do so by examining leadership

behaviours in concert with improvements in standardized student achievement. Their research confirms that the frequency, of certain leadership behaviours, is proportional to the level of achievement in schools. My study depends on this relationship.

There is sufficient support for the claim that the greater the frequency of effective leadership behaviours, the stronger their influence on learning (Kaplan et al., 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Mulford, 2005). Based on this body of research, it is reasonable to examine leadership self and collective efficacy as factors in determining the frequency of effective leadership behaviours. Also, district supports for these behaviours are worth examining as an acceptable indicator of whether or not districts maximally enhance LSE and LCE.

How is the link made? Leadership behaviours and roles do not have as much direct (person to person) affect on students and their learning as the behaviours of teachers, parents and peers. However, because of various things leaders do to set tone; establish school culture; and influence teachers, student body, and school community, their indirect impact can be quite significant. Leadership has a direct impact on the quality of resources—including staffing; the school culture; and the learning and professional development of staff or capacity building. These have a direct, day-to-day, impact on student learning. So while the path from leader to students is often indirect, the leader can have a profound influence on learning by keeping the path well-tended. It is also useful to consider the interactions between leaders and the staff, students, and school community, since it is through these interactions that leaders exercise an effect on student learning.

Wahlstrom and Seashore-Louis (2008) did an extensive quantitative analysis of surveys gathered from 4165 teachers in 138 schools in the United States. The surveys were part of a larger project: “Learning from Leadership” (p. 469). The premise of the study was that due to the direct relationship between instruction and student achievement, determining the influences on instruction would give insights to link these influences indirectly to student achievement. Other characteristics of teachers (such as race, gender, and professional age) were also measured to determine if they tempered the effects of these possible influences. The researchers examined two key principal leadership behaviours: principal trust and shared leadership. Based on teacher perception, principal trust and shared leadership were found to have a significant effect on classroom instruction. The researchers also looked at teacher-to-teacher relationships via Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) and again there were key factors such as reflective dialogue—professional conversation between teachers; a sense of collective responsibility for improving instruction; opportunities to see other teachers teaching—deprivatized practice; and having shared norms, which all had some significance for classroom instruction. The actions of formal school leaders can significantly influence any or all of these factors. It is worth noting, that even when a leader’s influence is indirect it is still important if it affects what happens instructionally in the classroom.

The quality of classroom instruction has a strong direct impact on student achievement (Lovat & Clement, 2008; Reynolds, Hargreaves & Blackstone, 1980; Seashore-Louis & Marks, 1998). Also, parental/family influence on student learning is significant (Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). Teachers, programs and parents have a central, direct influence on student achievement. Strong relationships with parents and

teachers provide a good route to reach many students. School leaders, who ensure the key adults in a student's life are providing the best possible learning opportunities synchronously, fulfill an important networking role in school improvement.

VI. SE and CE linked to Effective Leadership

Effective leadership models. Traditional views of the school principal as sole decision maker in charge of facilities, staffing, voicing orders from on high may still persist in some schools and districts, but the traditional model is definitely changing. Many educators see educational leadership as something much more complex. Kenneth Leithwood (*forthcoming*) has developed an innovative leadership infrastructure for building organizational capacity to improve student learning. The model consists of the Leading Student Achievement (LSA) triad, which he describes as tri-level collaborative leadership. It is a combination of instructional and distributed leadership. Leithwood considers it a pivotal component of large scale instructional and school achievement improvement in Ontario schools.

The Ontario provincial government has provided considerable funding to bring about school-wide change. Leithwood has been charged with the task of implementing linked leadership development and learning initiatives. He has described the vision of the project as “principals collaborating in both district-level principal learning teams and school-level professional learning communities for the purpose of improving instructional practice and student achievement” (p. 5). LSA is the common ground between Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) in schools, Principal Learning Teams (PLT's) in districts and the Provincial level steering team. The principal is the individual linked to LSA in all three realms.

To develop a model linking PLC's and achievement in collaborative schools, Michael Fullan turned to the work of Newmann & Wehlage (1995 in Fullan, 1999) and Louis & Kruse (1995 in Fullan, 1999) who studied the restructuring of schools for bringing about improvement. The model is a Venn diagram, of sorts, with two overlapping spheres: one contains assessment of learning, and the other pedagogical practice. Fullan posits that in collaborative schools the realm of the PLC is where the spheres overlap. If Leithwood's model or Fullan's, for that matter, are effective in improving schools (see Seashore-Louis & Marks, 1998 for work to support the links Fullan draws), then it is worthwhile to consider whether districts are providing the necessary infrastructure to support leaders within these types of frameworks. It would also be useful to test these models in exemplary districts. One criteria for identifying exemplary districts might be the strength of LSE and LCE.

The face of leadership in schools and districts. Effective school leadership today is data-literate, grounded in student learning, and carried out through working relationships within complex systems. School leaders capable of implementing such complex leadership models must be well supported to ensure sustainable leadership. Key provisions must come from the district, which has the power to build, embed, and enhance structures within the system to support school leaders in what they do. Often, effective school systems incorporate aspects of a number of leadership models. Components such as teacher leadership, shared or distributed leadership, instructional leadership, and coaching and mentoring are sustained across the district from boardroom to classroom.

Most of the work of school leaders revolves around working relationships.

Relationships with teaching faculty and staff, relationships with students and relationships between leaders from district administrators to principals to vice-principals figure heavily in all that school leaders do. For principals and vice-principals relationships matter in staff development, and setting school culture, school structure, and school direction. In each of these domains, the actions of school leaders affect their relationships. Work relationships can have an important impact on SE, particularly in the areas of verbal persuasion and shared meaning (Jaina, 2008). Jaina makes the claim that, “leaders who are a catalyst for the development of a trusting, supportive relationship that provides subordinates and peers with considerable autonomy and where a broad range of issues are discussed, provide a sound relationship basis for their own and others self-efficacy beliefs” (2008, p. 204). This description of an efficacy building leader has implications for district culture. It is important to ask, does district culture encourage this kind of leadership?

It is important to distinguish between management and leadership in schools. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Hopkins & Harris (2006) provide a useful distinction by suggesting that management is about maintaining organizational stability, whereas leadership is about improvement. While both effective management and leadership are necessary, I build on the distinction and use it to show the relation between leadership and learning. Learning is a key factor in both self and organizational improvement, and a key factor in optimal learning is perceived self and collective efficacy as they apply to each context. SE and CE, as significant factors in effective learning, are part of the bridge between leadership and school improvement. If leadership is about improvement then it can be linked to SE and CE through learning.

There is too much at stake for schools to sit idle, waiting for that rare leader, with all the right stuff, to appear on the doorstep. By acknowledging that effective leadership can be learned and that learning is enhanced by strengthening SE and CE, educators take control of leadership in schools. They exercise responsibility for fixing failing systems and where this happens, systems exhibit a high degree of collective efficacy. Learning to lead school improvement becomes the job of many who share a belief in the system's capacity. A belief that becomes sustainable when the desired results are seen not just in increased frequency of effective leadership behaviours, but also in improved life-chances for *all* students.

VII. LSE and LCE linked to student learning

Self-efficacy is of interest for the insight it provides and the exploration it allows of the links between what people think, how they act and how successfully they perform. Several studies have looked at SE in relation to occupations and the workplace, although few have been done in schools and most of these have been studies of teacher efficacy. The workplace studies show that higher SE is linked to higher task performance ratings, increased job tenure (Lent & Hackett, 1987; Yeo & Neal, 2006), improved behavioural outcomes and increased chance of goal attainment (Amit, Popper, Gal, Miskal-Sinai & Lisak, 2006).

A specific link exists between high SE and greater persistence in the face of adversity. Principals and vice-principals often face adverse situations, which have an impact on school and classroom conditions. The ability to persist when needed and to resolve situations effectively has an important effect on the learning conditions. School and classroom conditions are among the biggest factors that impact student learning.

Better school leader performances result in better school and classroom conditions and therefore better learning. It is safe to say, better leaders means better learners.

VIII. District features: Impact on LSE and LCE

Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) examined district conditions and district leadership to determine the impact on LSE and LCE. They found district conditions and leadership affected both, but the impact was greater on LCE than LSE. Of the factors tested, they found that a district focus on student learning, instruction, and the culture of the district, had the strongest influence, on LCE and LSE. Interestingly, they also determined that district investment in instructional leadership training had little impact on leader efficacy. The researchers suggest that investment in training of this kind may actually carry more symbolic weight than its actual impact on schools. I pick up on this chapter four.

Finally, the researchers examined a number of moderators (personal or organizational factors) in relation to LCE and LSE. They found that personal characteristics (eg. gender, race etc.) had little influence on leader efficacy whereas organizational characteristics did. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) attribute considerable significance to their study because it quantitatively contributes to a body of research that is primarily qualitative. Leader efficacy most strongly influences school conditions, which, in turn, influence classroom conditions. Classroom conditions directly impact student learning. I used the district conditions identified by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) as a way to bring together common themes in my research findings. More detail on district conditions is provided in chapter four, section III emerging themes.

IX. Gaps in the research

There is a dearth of research linking the behaviour and performance of effective

leaders to any kind of internal state. Prominent researchers in the field of educational leadership, such as Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins, have given a nod to the significance of the leader's internal state in effective leading, while at the same time noting "The empirical evidence linking any leader's internal state to their use of effective leadership practice... although growing, is not yet extensive" (2006). What can be measured most easily is the behaviour that is exhibited. I sought to fill in some of these gaps. Based on the tenets of Social Cognitive Theory and the connections between SE, CE and performance, I hoped to determine what works when it comes to district support for enhancing SE and CE. This was examined with an eye to promoting optimal, effective leadership performance.

Most of the research done in this area is either only quantitative or qualitative. The mixed method approach I used provided both types of data. It enriches the body of qualitative research, which conveys the human and context dependent aspects of leadership and learning. At the same time, it provides a numeric index of leader efficacy based on the behaviours most prevalent in situations of effective school leadership, which adds to the body of quantitative research. Perhaps together these contributions add a splash of colour and help paint a more hopeful future for schools through leadership and learning.

Chapter 3 Methodology: Mixed methods case study

I. Research questions and a snapshot of the case

My inquiry began with the following research questions: what are the strengths of LSE and LCE in the district? What district supports are in place for enhancing LSE and LCE for school leaders? And what further supports do school leaders need to enhance LSE and LCE? I measured LSE and LCE, and determined what supports the district already had in place. From there, I developed a list of recommendations for the district describing supports that might further enhance LSE and LCE. I used a case study approach because it afforded the opportunity to obtain information using a variety of methods (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). I combined quantitative and qualitative information gathering to provide a richer picture of LSE, LCE and district supports. To some extent, the case study approach limited my ability to generalize the findings to other districts (Creswell, 2008). Limitations of the method are described fully in chapter four.

I used a bounded case study restricted to one school district in the province of British Columbia. My reason for choosing this district over others was primarily one of convenience. Because of its location, I had reasonable access to people and information within the district. I wanted to develop a rich picture of the district, so face-to-face interaction was an essential component of the research. In-depth information from a single district generated good questions and has laid the groundwork for more extensive future research on district supports for LSE and LCE. Future research is described in detail in chapter five. In all, the case included descriptive information from district documents, interview data from an interview with associate superintendents, and survey data of principals and vice-principals in the district.

District demographics. The district under study enrolls students across a broad

demographic spectrum including urban, semi-urban and suburban settings. Equally as varied is the socio-economic range served by the district, which includes the full gamut from high to low-income families. As of 2009, 22 schools in the district received Community LINK funding support. Community LINK (Learning Includes Nutrition and Knowledge) or similar lunch programs are often used by researchers as indicators of schools with higher than usual numbers of vulnerable students¹. The district reports that 11% of families in the 2008-2009 enrolment were designated low-income families. This represents a significantly higher number than many other districts in the province but is still slightly below the provincial average which was 13.3% for the same time period (BC Stats, 2008). To provide a fuller picture of the district, it is worth noting that it ranks 6 out of 56 other school districts for the highest housing costs, 14 out of 56 for the highest number of serious violent crime offences and 21 out of 56 for the highest number of children receiving income assistance (Aboriginal children living on reserve not included in this statistic) (BC Stats, 2008).

District structure. The district was reconfigured in 2002 so that it consists of elementary schools (kindergarten to grade 5), middle schools (grade 6 to 8) and high schools (grade 9 to 12). In terms of leadership, each elementary school is staffed by a principal and a vice-principal as are the middle schools. The high schools are staffed by a principal and two vice-principals. In many cases the principals and vice-principals also maintain a partial role as classroom teachers. This occurs to the greatest extent for vice-

¹ “For the purpose of the CommunityLINK policy, the term “vulnerable students” means those students who may be at risk in terms of academic achievement and social functioning. These students primarily come from less affluent socio-economic backgrounds. In determining which students may be vulnerable, school districts may consider: low income measures; involvement with the provincial social service ministries and related agencies; community socio-economic demographics; information obtained through community mapping; and other relevant information including staff observation and self-identification.” (Community LINK, 2006)

principals in elementary schools. The schools operate as family groups associated with each of the high schools. Each family consists of one high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools. Two of the associate superintendents are each responsible for two of the families and a third associate superintendent is responsible for three families. There are 7 families within the district and a number of other programs also led by school and district principals, including those for distributed learning, hospital instruction, and continuing education.

Comparison to the province. The district is not unlike a number of other districts in the province in terms of administrative and teaching staff make-up. It has faced drops in enrolment every year since 1996 and continues to forecast a decline in enrolment. Declining enrolment affects service and structures across districts. From 61 districts reporting, 27 experienced a cut in the number of administrators from the 2007/08 school year to the 2008/9 school year. The district under study was among these. For 2005/06 to 2008/09 the province showed an upward trend in numbers of department heads and teachers with administrative duties. There was also a slight decline in classroom teachers, a downward trend in numbers of principals and a slight change in numbers of vice-principals characterized by a spike in 2007/08 but a drop the following year (BC Ministry of Education, 2008). The district under study compares fairly consistently with provincial trends.

School Leaders. The school leaders surveyed all currently work in schools and programs in the district. They include high, middle and elementary school principals and vice-principals. Some teach in the classroom as well as lead, but in many cases, particularly for principals, the greater percentage of their work assignment is that of

school leader. Nineteen males and 23 females responded and all but one were of white European descent. The responding principals had more years of experience in formal leadership than the responding vice-principals. Figure 1 shows the spread of experience for the 16 principals who responded to the survey. Figure 2 shows the same spread, but for the 24 vice-principals.

The district also has four head administrators responsible for education at the district level—the superintendent and three associate superintendents. The superintendent provided direct approval for the study and permission to interview two of the associate superintendents. The interview data was analysed in the same way that the district documents and the open ended portions of the surveys were analysed. The common themes were linked using Leithwood and Jantzi’s (2008) district conditions that had the greatest impact on LSE and LCE.

Figure 1 Principals’ years of experience in formal school leadership

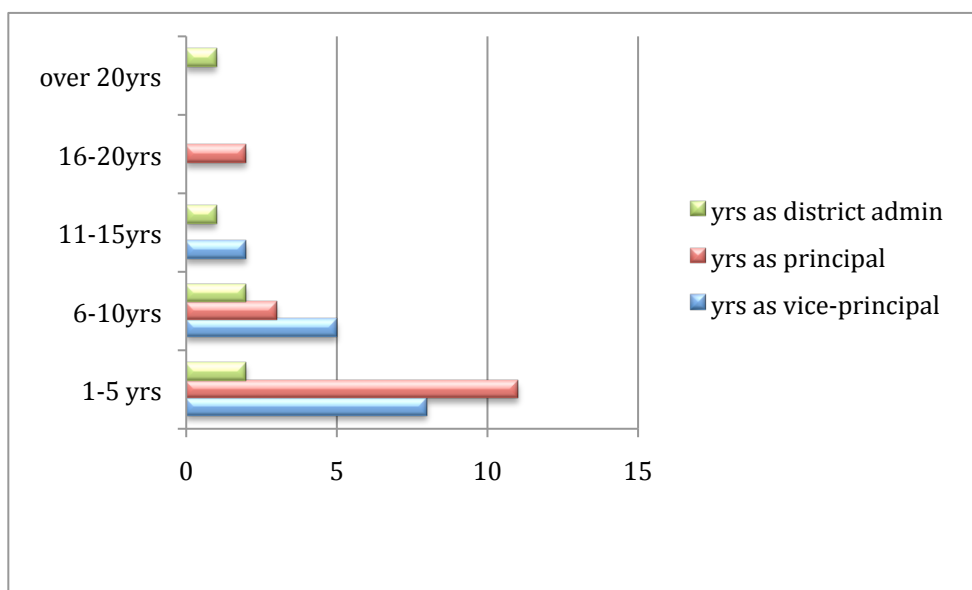
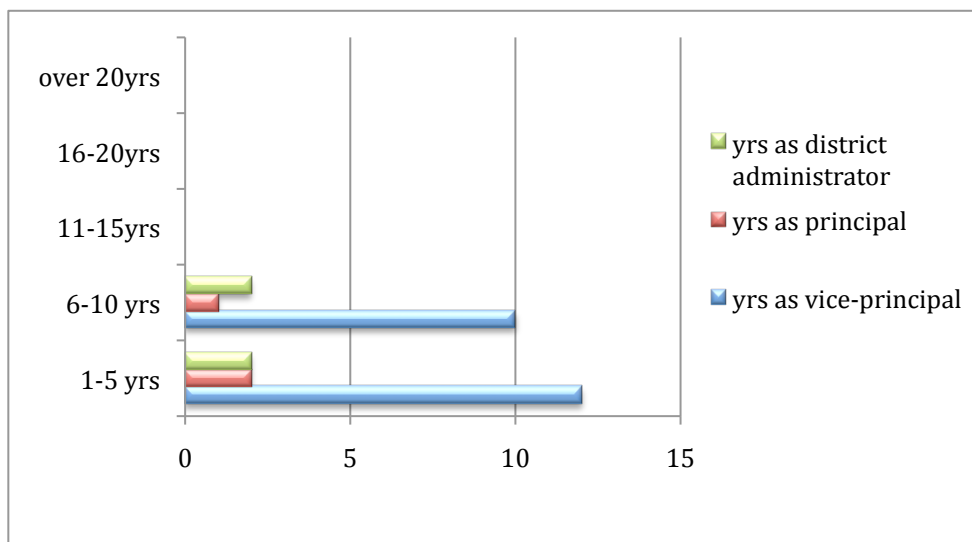


Figure 2 Vice-Principals' years of experience in formal school leadership



II. Mixed methods data collection: Document analysis, interview, survey and workshop

Mixed method. I combined document analysis, interview, and survey to obtain as broad a picture of the district supports for LSE and LCE. Data collection occurred over a relatively short time frame from January 2010 to March 2010. I used documents available on the district website including a government review of the district, district publications, and meeting minutes to establish a picture of the district on paper. I conducted a face to face interview with district administrators and I surveyed the principals and vice-principals in the district. I also offered an option for further study that would have involved an arts-based research workshop with formal leaders. This has now been proposed for future further study of leadership and learning in the district. Each of these sources of information is described in more detail below. The entire process involved formal application to the district and the District Superintendent granted permission.

A mixed method design provided the most satisfactory means to complete the case study. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used and information

gathered from both styles was intertwined to reveal a complex and rich district fabric. Quantitative and qualitative findings from the document analysis, open-ended portions of the survey and interview data will be used to guide the development of a program for a future workshop. Quantitative information generated by the survey was statistically analysed and provided an index of LSE and LCE within the district.

There is support in the research community for a mixed methods case study approach. According to Sieber (1973 in Creswell 2008), “since the 1930’s educational and social science investigators have combined research methods of data collection in their studies” (p. 553). The process of integrating more than one kind of data, known as triangulation in research, provides a more reliable picture of the findings. As Creswell (2008) notes “this improvement in inquiries ... come[s] from blending the strengths of one type of method and neutralizing the weaknesses of the other” (p. 553). The qualitative information gathered in this study provided a descriptive context for examining strength of LSE and LCE, while the quantitative data increased confidence about reporting levels of LSE and LCE across the district.

The mixed method design allowed for data collection in multiple stages and at multiple levels. Three stages of data collection occurred—the document analysis, interview and survey. All three stages occurred concurrently between January 2010 and March 2010. There were two levels of data collection. The district served as one level where district documents and associate superintendent input provided the data. Schools served as a second level where the survey of principals and vice-principals was the data source.

One of the challenges of triangulation mixed methods designs is in how to integrate the qualitative and quantitative data. In this study data sets were examined individually and then compared to find ways the data converged, and places where the data was inconsistent or complementary. Further integration of quantitative and qualitative results is proposed for future research where school-leader participants will be engaged in posing explanations, interpretations and further fleshing out of the findings from this case study via an arts-based workshop. The workshop is explained in more detail below.

Document Analysis. Several documents were analyzed to find common leadership and learning themes across the district. The documents were also reviewed to find links with both the survey and interview results. Several common themes were identified with respect to student learning. These themes and the evidence associated with them gave an overall picture of district conditions. Documents analysed included the District Accountability Contract, the District Achievement Contract (2009/10), the Superintendents Report on Achievement, Board Meeting Minutes and Budget Documents. All documents reviewed were available publicly on-line.

Interview with District Administrators. Three Associate Superintendents work together with the District Superintendent on all matters of Educational significance in the district. I interviewed two Associate Superintendents to get their perspective on leadership and learning in the district (see Appendix A for a copy of the interview questions). We met for one hour at the district office. The interview was recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed to sift out common themes. Relevant parts have been incorporated into the analysis section of this report. I refer to these leaders as both

associate superintendents and district administrators when incorporating their comments.

Survey. The purpose of the survey was threefold. First, I wanted to gather demographic information for the formal school leaders. Second, I wanted to measure the strength of principal and vice-principal LSE and LCE. And third, I wanted to give school leaders an opportunity to provide anonymous open-ended commentary on many aspects of leadership and learning in the district.

I developed the survey specifically for this study (see Appendix B for a sample of the survey questions). The main components are a demographics section to obtain general information about the leaders in the district; a quantitative section designed to measure LSE and LCE; and a qualitative section with open-ended question section on leadership, leadership supports and learning in the district. The survey was field-tested by 22 graduate students in the field of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies (EPLS) at the University of Victoria (UVic). This sample of graduate students was well suited to do the field-test. They have been doing course-work in educational leadership and some are aspiring school leaders, so they brought a critical, informed eye to the survey. One change to the survey was made following the field-test. The LSE and LCE measurement elements were scored on a scale from 0 to 10 rather than 1 to 11 as initially set up to allow for correct statistical analysis of responses.

All school principals and vice-principals in the district (105 formal leaders in total) were invited via e-mail to participate in an on-line survey entitled “Leader’s belief in their Leadership Capabilities”. Of the 105 invitations, 10 consistently came back as delivery failures and I was unable to obtain accurate addresses to reach these 10 leaders, therefore the total number of invitations successfully sent was 95. The e-mail contained a

live link to the survey. On three occasions school leaders were invited to respond to the survey. Of the 95 formal school leaders invited to participate, 42 responded to the survey, giving a 44% response rate. Although some respondents did not complete the final open-ended section of the survey, all respondents completed the demographics section and 32 respondents completed the measure of LSE and LCE. All responses were retained as part of the final sample. The statistical analysis, including the test for reliability done on the measure of LSE and LCE, was based on having obtained 32 complete responses. Survey fatigue may have been a factor in reducing the number of respondents for the open-ended section. The qualitative responses were included in the analysis of emerging themes.

Reliability of the Survey. Reliability for the measure of LSE and LCE was established from a number of angles. First, the items used for testing were based on previously reliable instruments used by other researchers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Shaw, McGregor, Nicholson, Baldwin & Brophy, 2009). The items on Leithwood & Jantzi's instrument for measuring LCE were obtained from a pool of 400 items that each researcher had previously found to be reliable. It is these items which I included to test for LCE. With respect to LSE I based my items on those reliably developed to measure frequency of leadership behaviours by Shaw et al. (2009). These researchers ensured the reliability of their instruments by surveying colleagues of the respondents and checking for consistency between survey results.

Once the instrument was developed, a cursory check on reliability was done through the field-test. Each response to the field-test was non-statistically examined for consistency of responses within a given element. Individual responders showed very little deviation in their responses within each grouping. Also, there was a definite cluster of

responses for each item across the responders, which would have been expected given that the field-testers were all graduate students in leadership studies at the same university and the demographics obtained showed them to be a fairly homogeneous group compared to the general population.

The most important reliability check was done on the actual survey responses. Responses were tested statistically for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha (α). In this test, the closer α is to 1, the greater the internal reliability. This is determined by comparing the variance of item responses with the variance in the sums for each item. Leadership elements used to test for LSE including setting school direction, setting district direction, attention to administrative support, influence on staff development, influence on school culture, attention to curriculum and instruction, and attention to school structure were found to be highly reliable ($\alpha \geq .85$, see Table 1). The items for testing LCE were also shown to be highly reliable ($\alpha = .94$, see Table 2). The number of test items also affects reliability. It is generally accepted that with more test items comes greater reliability.

Table 1 Internal reliability for each leadership element used to test for LSE
(based on Cronbach's Alpha and number of test items)

| Leadership Elements to determine LSE | Number of test items | Cronbach's Alpha (α) |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Setting School Direction | 5 | 1.00 |
| Setting District Direction | 3 | 1.00 |
| Attention to Administrative Support | 12 | .96 |
| Influence on Staff Development | 14 | .95 |
| Influence on School Culture | 8 | .93 |
| Attention to Curriculum and Instruction | 9 | .92 |
| Attention to School Structure | 4 | .85 |
| Attention to School-Community Relations | 2 | .27 |

Table 2 Internal reliability for overall LSE and LCE
(based on Cronbach's Alpha and number of test items).

| Leadership Elements | Number of test items | Cronbach's Alpha (α) | |
|----------------------|----------------------|---|--|
| Test for LCE | 5 | .94 | |
| Overall Test for LSE | 55 | With school community relationships items | Without school community relationships items |
| | | .83 | .84 |

Attention to school community relations, one of the elements used to test for LSE was found to have very low internal reliability ($\alpha = .27$, see Table 1). In re-examining this portion of the instrument, I believe there are two contributing factors. Only two items were used for this element which does not bode well for reliability. Also, the items seem to ask about two different aspects of the leadership element, so there is a possibility of misinterpretation by some respondents. I decided to retain the element in the overall test for LSE despite the low internal reliability for two reasons. I ran a statistical check on the overall internal reliability of the LSE test both with and without the items for school community relationships. The difference in Cronbach's alpha is very small (see Table 2). Since School-Community Relationships are an important aspect of effective school leadership and I have obtained considerable qualitative data in this area, I feel it is worthwhile to maintain it as part of the instrument. In future, this part of the instrument could be substantially refined by clarifying the existing two items and by adding more items that describe leadership behaviours associated with supporting school community relationships. In fact, the qualitative data collected in this study might be useful to generate test items more suited to measuring LSE for school community relationships.

Validity of the survey. Both content and construct validity were checked on the test for LSE and LCE. To ensure that the instrument's items represented the best possible selection of questions to test for LSE and LCE, several measures were carefully undertaken. Individual elements were based on and modified from those used in two other surveys. The measure of LCE was based on the work of experts in the field of leadership and school improvement. Leithwood & Jantzi (2008) tested LCE for groups of school leaders as part of a much bigger questionnaire and the elements they used were adapted to this survey with minimal change.

The measure of LSE was also based on the work of experts in the field of leadership and learning (for example Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Robinson, 2008b) and also that of researchers familiar with the British Columbia school leadership context (Shaw et al., 2009). A recent study by Shaw et al. (2009) provided questions on the frequency of effective school leader behaviours from which many of the items for my survey were developed. Shaw et al. field-tested their instrument, and also based their items on those developed by other experts in the field of leadership and school improvement (Kenneth Leithwood for example). The leadership elements or domains, through which LSE was measured, were established using Vivian Robinson's comprehensive 2008 meta-analysis of studies linking school leadership to learning. I modified the test items for each element such that they measured a leader's belief in his/her ability to carry out effective behaviours, rather than the actual frequency of behaviours.

Leaders were asked to rank their belief in their ability to carry out specified leadership behaviours using an interval scale from 0 to 10. Respondents marked the zero

end of the scale for behaviours they were not at all certain they could do. The scale progressed in whole numbers with higher values representing greater belief in ability to do. A value of five was qualified by the description “moderately certain I can do” and the value ten was assigned for behaviours the respondent believed s/he was entirely certain s/he could do.

Basing the elements on surveys that were previously valid was the first step in ensuring the content validity of this instrument. In addition, the structure of the survey was carefully set up to follow the numerous recommendations of Bandura, and the work of a number of notable researchers in the areas of both teacher efficacy and the newer area of school leader efficacy. Bandura (1997), has done some of the most extensive research and original theoretical work in this area. He has developed well-tested instruments. His survey guidelines provide the basis for the development of my survey, which I adapted to fit the specific context of formal school leadership.² The format of the test was conventional and derived from SE theory and methodology. I used a high number of task items (55) to test LSE in particular. The content was developed from

² The survey was developed following the guidelines for instrument development outlined extensively by Albert Bandura in his seminal work on self-efficacy, “Self-efficacy: The exercise of self-control” (1997). Typical rating scales are for strength of belief from 0 to 100 points or 0 to 10 points. While the 0 to 100 scale allows for more distinction between participants, I chose a 0 to 10 scale to keep the survey and data analysis more manageable. The questions were phrased to ascertain participant’s beliefs about leadership behaviours they “can” or “cannot” do. The phrasing ensured questions were measuring beliefs about capability rather than intention to do as would be measured with phrases using the verb “will”. Several items were included for each domain as this helps to identify upper limits of efficacy, helps distinguish between participants and also gives better predictive value than a single item test (Bandura, 1997). Several items of varying task difficulty were included to give a more representative result for each domain, since the efficacy strength scores were averaged for the items within each domain. The survey instructions emphasized the safeguards for maintaining anonymity, since participants would be more inclined to respond accurately if they trusted that confidentiality would be maintained. To this end, the instructions also emphasized the importance of frank and honest responses.

other related research work, since there was no pre-existing instrument reliably suited to testing the constructs I wanted to measure. I based this inference on the extensive search and analysis of available instruments undertaken by Leithwood & Jantzi (2008) for their research. Furthermore, I field-tested the instrument with 22 graduate students in educational leadership studies at the University of Victoria in order to ensure content validity. No changes in content were made following the field-test.

I also checked for construct validity using non-statistical procedures. Interpreting self and collective efficacy scores in terms of values is a valid and long accepted practice. It is common for researchers to equate high scores with strong SE. This survey relies on this accepted practice and uses it in the context of school leadership. For example, it is valid to say that high LSE scores indicate that the respondent has a strong belief in his/her ability to lead in schools. That LSE and LCE scores can be put to good use for this study is further support of the instrument's content validity. High scores were used to indicate that supports for LSE and LCE described in the qualitative data were adequate, and lower scores were used to identify areas where the district needs to provide greater support for LSE and LCE. Finally, construct validity was checked by reviewing the extensive qualitative data obtained. I concluded that LSE and LCE scores were indeed useful for fleshing out a fuller picture of leadership in the district, and they were consistent with the qualitative information obtained.

Workshop. School leaders were invited, using the survey, to participate in an arts-based research workshop. My intent with the workshop was two-fold. I hoped to offer school leaders an opportunity to explore the survey results and use them as a stepping stone for expressing their needs around district supports for LSE and LCE. I also hoped

to provide the chance for school leaders to come together to give deeper meaning to the measures obtained from the survey. Finally, workshop input from principals and vice-principals might have further informed recommendations to the district.

The workshop was intended to take an arts-based format. I hoped that an alternate form of delivery would provide, along with the other methods, a means of obtaining a more fully developed picture of leadership and leadership supports in the district. Only three survey respondents signed up. I believe it is a worthwhile method for obtaining information and constructing a course of action for enhancing LSE and LCE, but due to such a small response, the timing has been reconsidered. The three respondents were contacted and invited to be part of a workshop proposed for a future date.

I believe the lack of response to the workshop stems from a few factors. It is less likely that school leaders lack interest in exploring LSE and LCE (response to the fairly extensive survey was strong), than that they lack time to participate. In addition to the time-consuming work of school leadership, which has probably only increased in recent years, this district offers a wide variety of in-house professional learning opportunities. School leaders desire, and are expected, to take an active role in these, especially where they want their staff to be involved. Additionally, there may be some scepticism with respect to arts-based research methods. These are still relatively new ways to gather information and generate ideas that may not be well known in the district. Greater interest in the workshop would likely be generated if it were offered via existing district structures.

When mixed methods case study research is done and shared, it serves several purposes. It may foster greater mental clarity on an issue or case by exploring it through

multiple lenses. It can provide a splash of imaginative stimulus or a thread to weave a tapestry of questions. It may tell the story of a community, including both questions and answers. If presented publicly it may even impact those not directly involved in the case. My defence, for a multi-method case study approach, is to say that since the purpose of educational research is to make the lives of students better, it makes sense to use all the available tools. I feel quite confident that the disparate ways of knowing used here served a common purpose.

III. Ethical Considerations

I adhered to the University of Victoria protocols with respect to ethics. My study followed the tri-council guidelines for work with human participants and ethics approval was obtained from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board under protocol number 10-036. I incorporated ethical protocols in place in the district as well. The well-being of participants was of foremost importance throughout the entire process from data gathering to analysis to dissemination of findings.

Chapter 4 Findings and analysis: Emerging themes, challenges and limitations

I. Structure

This chapter provides a more detailed description of leadership and learning in the district. The measures of LSE and LCE are reported and statistically analysed³. Common themes from all sources of data are teased out and described using the framework of high-impact district conditions identified by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008). Limitations of the study are identified, and leadership and learning challenges faced by the district are described.

II. Strength of LSE and LCE

All respondents considered. The measures for LSE And LCE were obtained by averaging the item response values. This is a standard way to determine self and collective efficacy scores. In addition to calculating the mean ($\text{mean}_{(\text{LSE})} = 8.43$ and

³ I have applied the terms “high” and “low”, to describe LSE and LCE in a manner of best fit to the scale. Best fit was based on the way the survey questions were framed. Participants were asked to used a scale from 0 to 10 to rate their leadership efficacy and in addition were given further assistance in the instructions which directed them to use “0 for behaviours you believe you currently CANNOT DO. 5 for behaviours you believe you are MODERATELY CERTAIN you can do [and]10 for behaviours you believe you are CERTAIN you can do”. I used 5 as the dividing line between high and low, and feel reasonably justified in having done so, since this is a scale with equal intervals. Values below 5 represented low leader efficacy and values above 5 represented high leader efficacy. This assignment was done in order to speak meaningfully of the scores.

I am not able to compare these scores to previous measures of LSE and LCE since this is the first use of this test, and it was prepared specifically for this case. Within the district those leaders who held higher leadership positions (principals compared to vice-principals) more often scored 10 when rating their capability for each leadership item than did vice-principals. Principals most frequently scored 10 on 49 out of 60 items, whereas vice-principals scored 10 most frequently on only 19 of 60 items. The role specific results compare to the overall response in that 10 was the most frequent score for 32 out of 60 responses. Further study would provide greater confidence in the use of the terms high and low to describe LSE and LCE. Studies such as this one conducted in similar districts might, through comparison, yield stronger benchmarks for the terms.

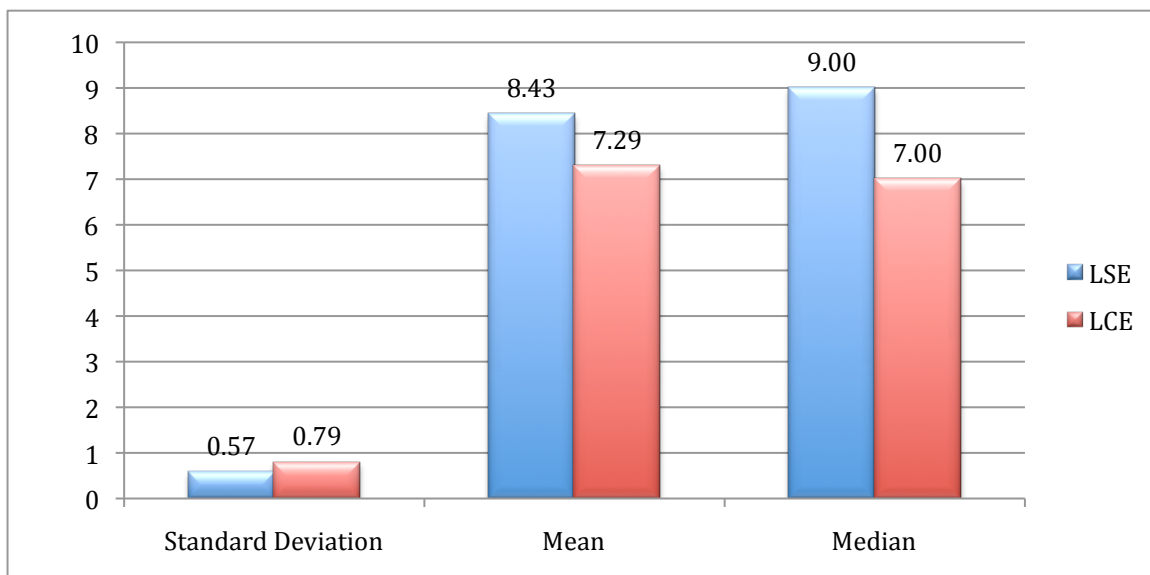
mean_(LCE) = 7.29), the standard deviation and median scores were also determined (See Table 3). Based on a scale of 0 to 10, both LSE and LCE are high in this district. Figure 3 provides a comparison of both constructs using standard deviation, mean and median. Both the mean and median were greater for LSE than LCE and the standard deviation was greater for LCE than LSE.

Findings from all data sources show a consistent positive trajectory for this district. High results for LSE and LCE indicate the district is healthy with respect to leader's belief in their capabilities. School leaders have healthier SE than CE. The difference is not surprising given that the antecedents for these constructs are also slightly different. LSE is more dependent on individual characteristics. LCE is more dependent on district conditions so the district stands to have the greatest impact on LCE. District administrators and school leaders described the way the district is structured, the numerous available programs and open communication between leaders as supports. Given what they said, it was not surprising that LSE and LCE measured high. The qualitative results are reported fully in a later section on emerging themes and district conditions.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for LSE and LCE measures (all respondents)

| Leader Efficacy | Standard Deviation | Average | Median |
|-----------------|--------------------|---------|--------|
| LSE | .57 | 8.43 | 9.00 |
| LCE | .79 | 7.29 | 7.00 |

Figure 3 Comparison of LSE and LCE (all respondents)



Responses filtered according to role. LSE and LCE measures were filtered according to role so that differences between principals and vice-principals could be assessed. On average, principals measured higher than vice-principals for both LSE and LCE. Principals scored above the overall average for both constructs and vice-principals scored below the overall average. Descriptive statistics of principal and vice-principal SE are included in table 4. Figure 4 shows a comparison of LSE for the group of school leaders as a whole compared to principals and vice-principals alone. Figure 5 shows the same comparison, but for LCE rather than LSE. Figure 6 provides a comparison of LSE to LCE for both principals and vice-principals. Both principals and vice-principals scored higher with respect to LSE than LCE, and the spread in scores between LSE and LCE is greater for the principals than for the vice-principals.

It is not surprising that principals scored higher than vice-principals for both LSE and LCE. Greater experience often brings increased belief in one's own ability. Of the formal school leaders who responded in this district, the principals collectively had more

experience in formal leadership roles compared to the vice-principals (see figures 1 and 2 in chapter 3). Additionally, the principals tended to have more years of education and training, which also plays a role in increasing efficacy. These findings favour targeted supports for vice-principals to enhance LSE and LCE. Specific supports should be aimed at vice-principals to ensure they feel equally confident about their leadership role as principals. Principals make ideal mentors for vice-principals. They are likely to provide LSE and LCE enhancing support through modeling and vicarious experience and are also poised to provide constructive feedback. Principal to vice-principal mentoring between families might be a useful way to promote collaboration and sharing of best practices across the district.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics for LSE and LCE (responses filtered by role)

| Leader Efficacy | Mean | | | Median | | | Standard Deviation | | |
|-----------------|------|-------|------|--------|------|------|--------------------|------|------|
| | All | Ppal* | Vpal | All | Ppal | Vpal | All | Ppal | Vpal |
| LSE | 8.43 | 8.81 | 8.03 | 9.00 | 9.00 | 8.00 | .57 | .56 | .66 |
| LCE | 7.29 | 7.49 | 7.16 | 7.00 | 8.00 | 8.00 | .79 | .64 | .89 |

*Ppal means principal and Vpal means vice-principal.

Figure 4 Leader self-efficacy (LSE) filtered by role

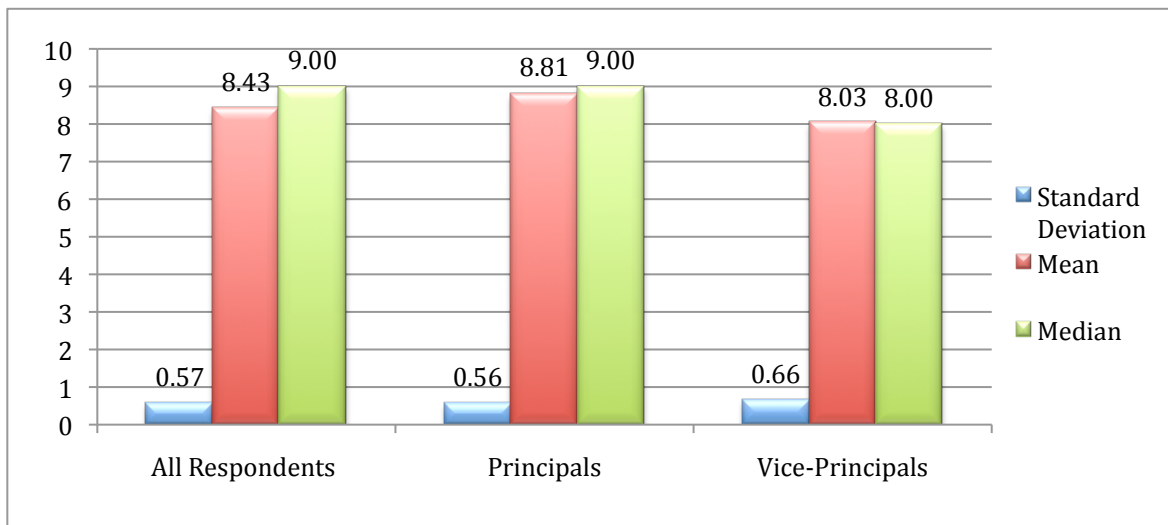


Figure 5 Leader collective efficacy (LCE) filtered by role

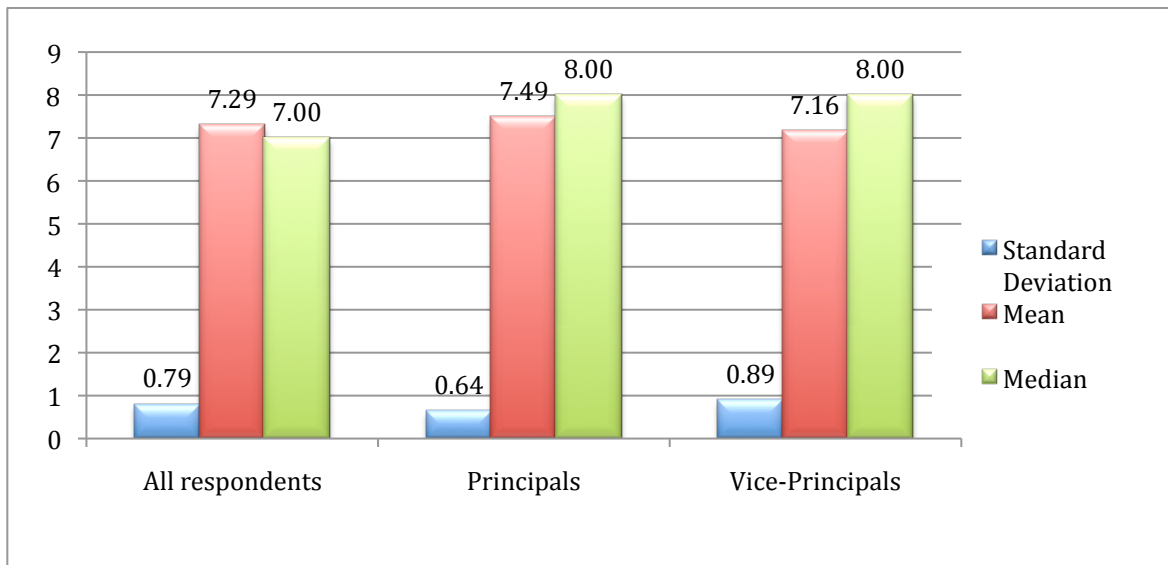
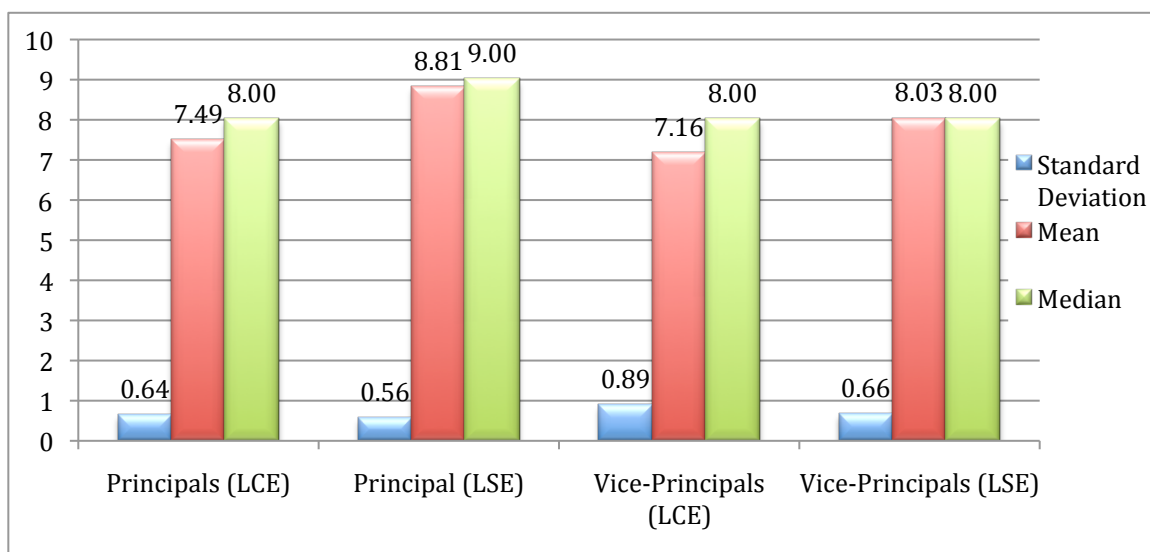


Figure 6 Comparison of LSE to LCE for principals and vice-principals



Responses filtered according to gender. Table 5 provides the descriptive statistics for the measures of LSE and LCE filtered by gender. Figure 7 shows the LSE measures by gender in comparison to the group as a whole. Figure 8 shows the LCE measures by gender in comparison to the group as a whole. Finally, Figure 9 shows a comparison of LSE to LCE for both male and female school leaders. Twenty-three female leaders, 12 of whom were vice-principals, and nineteen male leaders, 12 of whom were also vice-principals, responded to the survey.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics for LSE and LCE (responses filtered by gender)

| Leader Efficacy | Mean | | | Median | | | Standard Deviation | | |
|-----------------|------|------|------|--------|------|------|--------------------|-----|------|
| | All | F | M | All | F | M | All | F | M |
| LSE | 8.43 | 8.54 | 8.22 | 9.00 | 9.00 | 9.00 | .57 | .69 | .51 |
| LCE | 7.29 | 6.94 | 7.74 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 8.00 | .79 | .58 | 1.07 |

Figure 7 Leader self-efficacy (LSE) filtered by gender

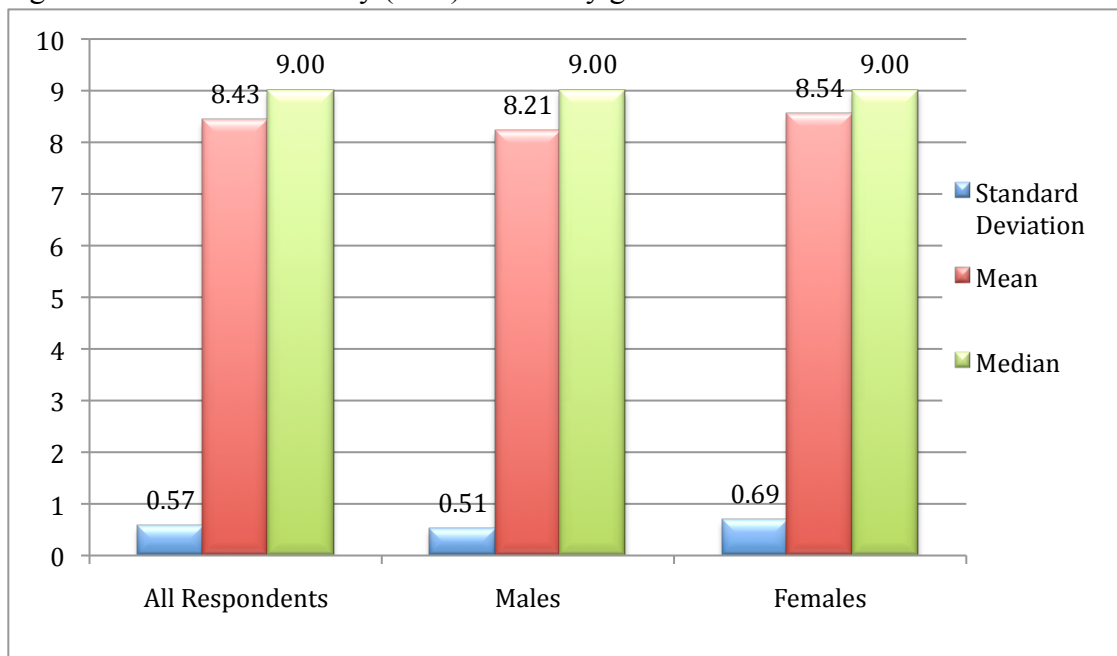


Figure 8 Leader collective efficacy (LCE) filtered by gender

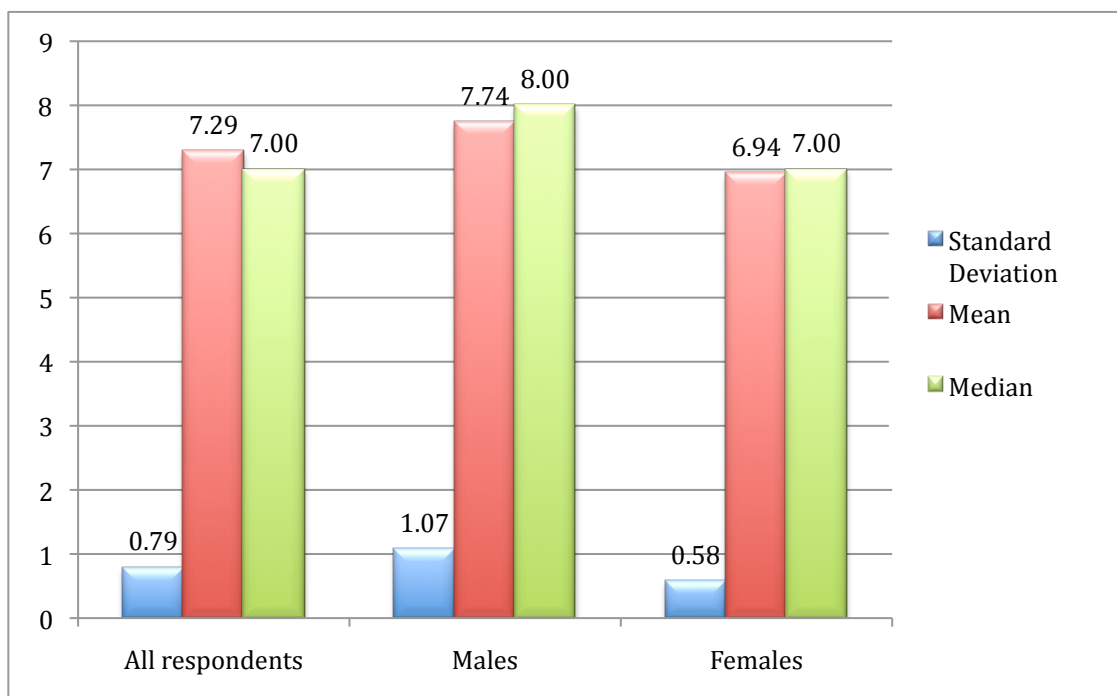
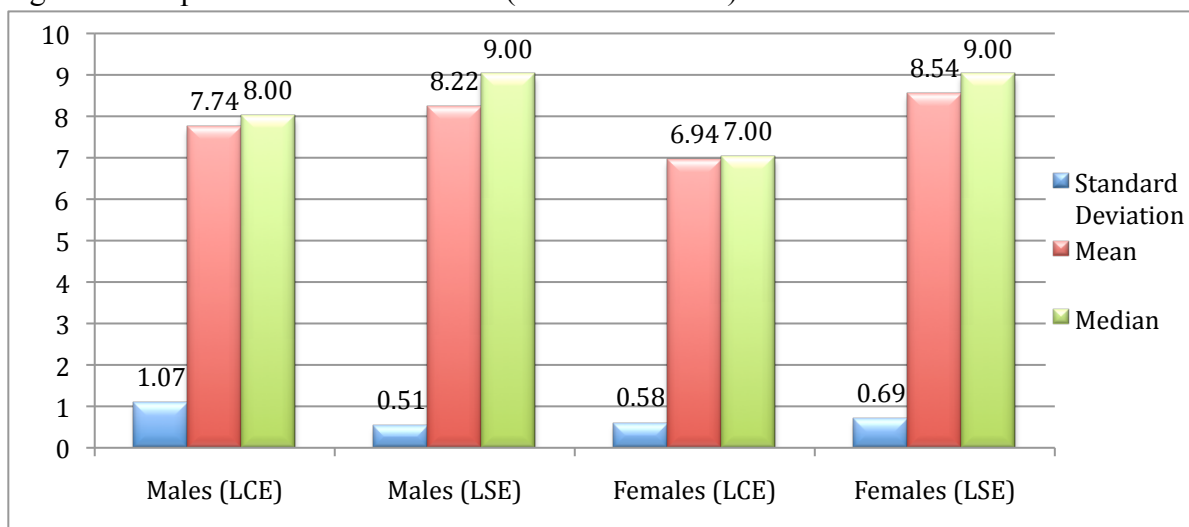


Figure 9 Comparison of LSE and LCE (male and female)



LSE and LCE measures were filtered according to gender to allow for comparison of the constructs. On average female leaders measured higher for LSE than male leaders, but lower for LCE than male leaders. Female leaders scored above the overall average for LSE, but below the overall average for LCE. The opposite was true of male leaders. They scored below the overall average for LSE and above average for LCE. The spread in scores between LSE and LCE was greater for female leaders than for male leaders.

The differences in LSE and LCE between male and female leaders are difficult to explain without further investigation. There may be some significance to the fact that LCE was lower for females than males, especially since LCE is most strongly affected by district conditions. A specific item, developing a mission and vision for the district, stands out in the domain of setting district direction. It is interesting to note that female school leaders' mean score for this item was 5.26 compared to 4.43 for the male school leaders. Also, scores for the item were much more spread out for the female leaders ranging from 0 to 10 and including most possibilities, whereas scores for male leaders were spread out from 0, but 7 was the highest score. It may be worth asking whether

female school leaders view their role at the district level differently compared to the male leaders. Also, the district may do well to find ways to enhance LCE for female leaders; however, it is also important not to read too much into this data without further investigation because interaction between characteristics may be at play in these results. Gender issues were not mentioned in any of the school leader's open ended responses, nor did district administrators identify concerns with respect to gender and leadership.

LSE by leadership domain. Eight leadership domains were used to group test items for LSE. These domains represent groups of leadership behaviours that have been shown to impact student learning. The domains were scored using the mean for each group of test items. These means as well as standard deviation, median and mode are reported in table 6.

Table 6 Descriptive statistics for leadership domains contributing to LSE

| Leadership Elements to determine LSE | Mean | Standard Deviation | Median | Mode |
|---|------|--------------------|--------|------|
| Setting School Direction | 8.88 | .46 | 9 | 10 |
| Setting District Direction | 7.22 | 2.00 | 8 | 10 |
| Influence on School Culture | 8.73 | .37 | 9 | 10 |
| Influence on Staff Development | 8.76 | .55 | 9 | 10 |
| Attention to School Structure | 8.99 | .16 | 9 | 9 |
| Attention to Curriculum and Instruction | 8.28 | .50 | 7 | 10 |
| Attention to School-Community Relations | 8.47 | .07 | 8 | 10 |
| Attention to Administrative Support | 8.11 | .75 | 9 | 10 |

It is important not to assign too much significance to any of the 55 individual items on the measure for LSE. However, there are a few scores that stand out. The lowest mean (7.22) and highest standard deviation (2.00) were obtained for the leadership element "setting district direction". Within this element, scores were especially low (mean = 4.91) for the item "rate the extent to which you are able to develop a mission and vision for the district". For the same element, leaders rated belief in their ability to both

support and communicate district goals much higher (mean = 8.33 and 8.42 respectively). School leaders may not see as much of their role in developing district mission and vision as in communicating and supporting it. The standard deviation at 2.00 was higher than standard deviations for all other elements. School leaders showed considerable variation in their beliefs about their ability to set district direction. Both interview and qualitative survey data show that the district administrators set district direction with input from school leaders. School leaders are expected to use district mission and vision as a guide for setting school direction. LSE for “setting school direction” had the second highest score (mean = 8.88) of all elements measured.

LCE by item. LCE was measured using five items and the descriptive statistics for each item are reported in table 7. The LCE item scores were all on the top half of the scale, but were not as high as LSE. The standard deviation was high for each set of responses ($SD \geq 2.00$). The greater spread of responses suggests much more inconsistency in beliefs about collective efficacy than self-efficacy.

Table 7 Descriptive statistics for each leadership element used to measure LCE

| Leadership Elements to determine LCE | Average | Standard Deviation | Median | Mode |
|---|---------|--------------------|--------|------|
| School staffs in our district have the knowledge and skill they need to improve student learning. | 7.06 | 2.17 | 7 | 8 |
| In our district, continuous improvement is viewed by most staff as a necessary part of every job. | 6.47 | 2.41 | 7 | 7 |
| In our district, problems are viewed as issues to be solved, not as barriers to action. | 6.81 | 2.56 | 7 | 7 |
| Central district staff communicate a belief in the capacity of teachers to teach even the most difficult students. | 7.66 | 2.61 | 8 | 10 |
| Central district staff communicate a belief in the capacity of Principals and Vice-Principals to lead in even the most difficult schools. | 8.47 | 2.28 | 9 | 10 |

When examining the items used to measure LCE it may be useful to draw attention to the lower score (mean = 6.47) obtained for the item “in our district, continuous improvement is viewed, by most staff, as a necessary part of every job”. Picking up on this phrase about continuous improvement, district documents and district administrators stress that continuous improvement is an integral part of the district mission and vision. In open-ended survey responses, principals and vice-principals expressed some concern that not all staff “buy-in” to this view. School leaders described positive experiences with staff, who embraced learning initiatives and were motivated to improve. Many tended to see their roles in influencing change or making improvements as ones where the leader models “energy and enthusiasm for learning”, and at the same time works with staff, who “buy-in”, in hope that others will eventually “buy-in” too. Leaders also described creating safe, positive learning spaces for students and staff.

Open-ended responses indicated district-union relations may be a factor in sustaining continuous improvement. One respondent noted that managing change within his/her school was “challenging with [the] current Union climate”. Other respondents identified “union thinking” and “union pressure, [an] ‘us vs. them’ mentality” and “union contracts that limit our ability to build school staffs who believe in growth and development” as inhibitors to effective leadership. Still another respondent drew attention to teacher autonomy, a recent political “hot potato” for teachers, the union and districts in the province, saying that, “Teacher Autonomy has too often been used by a minority of teachers to remain constant in their teaching practice. This can be a limiting factor on the ability of the staff to move forward creating positive change”. Continuous improvement is more than just something to hope for, it is a necessity when student learning is at stake.

School leaders expressed a desire to take up a position learner at the center of decision making and relationships across the district.

III. Emerging Themes

Leithwood through multiple studies with a number of colleagues (Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Jantzi, 2008; Levin, 2005; Massey, in press) has done extensive research on leadership in schools. The Leithwood & Jantzi study (2008) specifically measured the factors within districts that have an impact on LSE and LCE. They identified key characteristics of districts that positively influence both LCE and LSE. Overall they found district factors to have a greater impact on LCE than LSE. District leadership had a primarily indirect impact on LSE and LCE and mainly contributed by influencing and setting district conditions. To keep a tight focus on the district supports examined in this case study I accepted the premise that district leadership and district conditions, more directly influence LCE and LSE. I used the district conditions of highest impact, as identified by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), as a framework to examine emerging themes.

Leithwood and Jantzi are leading researchers in the field of school leadership, their work is respected internationally. On this basis, it seemed reasonable to use their thorough groundwork as a backdrop to my analysis. Narrowing the analysis to a manageable size, I chose the 8 high impact district conditions they identified, as the lens through which to analyze the district. The more the district attended to and provided positive conditions within these 8 realms, the greater the district contribution to enhancing LSE and LCE.

School leaders in the district measured high for both LSE and LCE, so I was not surprised to find most of the district conditions more than adequately addressed in this

case. The 8 conditions in order of greatest to least impact, on LSE and LCE, are district concern for student achievement and instructional quality; district culture; targeted and phased focus on improvement; new approaches to board-district and district-school relations; district emphasis on teamwork and professional community; use of data across the district; district investment in instructional leadership (both at district and school level); and district sponsored, job-embedded pro-D for teachers.

Student achievement and quality instruction. Fairly strong evidence exists that the district is deeply concerned with student achievement. The District Achievement Contract is a detailed document developed collaboratively within the district. School Planning Councils (SPC's) provide significant input to the document via their school growth plans, which are written in consultation with each school community. This district has a process set up so that information is gathered from schools, submitted to associate superintendents for use by the Achievement Contract Advisory Committee. This committee includes a cross-section of representatives from various district stakeholders. District documents also show the process allows room for ongoing feedback from schools and various other groups before final submission to the Board. The district plainly states that continual improvement in student achievement is a guiding force behind this document.

Student achievement is a focal point for the District Achievement Contract. Each of the contract's three goals are student-centered and directly connected to student learning and success. A number of school leaders identified the importance of not only protecting instructional time, but cherishing it as a key component of improving student learning. Associate superintendents emphasized the centrality of student learning to

district focus. In fact, when asked about the district philosophy on assessment, their response highlighted student-centered assessment for learning and the use of assessment to help students grow.

It's assessment where students have a very clear picture of how they're being assessed, the criteria that are used to assess them and that they're critical players in what's going on, so they better understand where they're moving towards...I think if you talk to any principal in our district they would say that assessment for learning is something that our district has wholeheartedly embraced and embedded.

Several school leaders also mentioned the importance of refining assessment practices to improve student learning.

School leader responses on achievement testing, a somewhat provocative assessment practice, were quite varied. One leader suggested that "the real discussion is currently the validity of standardized testing as a method for measuring achievement". Most leader responses referred only to Foundation Skills Assessment or FSA's as the form of standardized achievement testing. Some leaders expressed positive comments about FSA's, another acknowledged FSA's as a political "hot potato" and some seemed to suggest they were more of a hindrance to improvement than a help. One leader suggested that changing teaching approaches would bring the biggest improvements in achievement testing. S/he noted "We focus on reading and our reading scores soar; our writing drops, etc. I would like to focus on more general strategies (analysis, synthesis, interpretation, persuasion etc.) with the hope that [by] creating strong independent and thoughtful learners, our test results will improve in all areas". This suggests more broad

spectrum interest in improving achievement than just raising scores.

Associate superintendents described several areas where the district is attending to the quality of instruction. One such project is the “Learning Connections Initiative” where teachers learn from expert teachers and practically apply their learning immediately in the classroom. This initiative is student-centered with a focus on identifying vulnerable students and carefully tracking their progress. Targeting vulnerable learners and expert teachers sharing with colleagues are examples of best instructional practice.

Many school leaders drew attention to the “Learning Connections Initiative” as a workplace innovation created to improve teaching and student learning. Other innovation examples include the addition of district learning initiatives teachers whose role is to support other classroom teachers to improve teaching practice. One principal described learning rounds and district grants given to school teams for learning and assessment innovations. Several school leaders pointed out that the district provides funding for 0.100 FTE literacy/numeracy support teachers in each school. These examples are all district wide innovations accessible to teachers and leaders across the district. District administrators stressed the importance of a team approach, meaning that they require a school administrator to participate in each of these initiatives in the school. These initiatives are also described in several district documents as part of the district’s focus on improving instruction.

In addition to the District Achievement Contract, the Accountability Contract is a promise to stakeholders of district focus on continuous improvement in student learning. The document emphasizes two key achievement measures—narrowing the achievement

gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and attainment of a Dogwood for high school credit completion. Additionally a district review was completed in 2008 by a report team made up of representatives from school leadership around the province and from the Ministry of Education. Improving school completion rates was a key recommendation of the review with special attention to improving the rate for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students were identified as especially vulnerable, so the district has developed further agreements to specifically address achievement for this group.

District culture. A significant force in any district is the pervading culture. It is conveyed by members of the district community through attitudes and behaviours recognized as characteristic of the district. District leaders play a significant role in establishing district culture and/or revamping it if need be. One way this is done is through setting and communicating goals. The district under study has established three clearly written goals in the District Achievement Contract. All members of the district community have access to these goals on-line. They are conveyed in the Superintendent's message and in other official district documents such as the "Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement". Associate superintendents expressed confidence that district goals were clearly communicated with "one voice" to schools. Part of the process for the development of the district's achievement contract calls for School Planning Councils (SPC's) to attend carefully to alignment between school goals and district goals before implementation of the achievement contract each September. Feedback is sought around goal setting and the document refers to the invitation to have "district-wide conversations". At the school level, the School Based Team is involved in goal setting for schools and their "focus is to assist and support individual students and school

initiatives”.

District Culture is also established, communicated and maintained through school and community relations. When asked to tell about the factors that enable them to be the leaders they want to be, many principals and vice-principals mentioned the supportive school community. One vice-principal gave an especially detailed list, including a “supportive principal; open/caring and professional teachers; enthusiastic/helpful parent community; positive/motivated children; [and a] well managed work site”. Parents are deeply involved in this district, the District Review Report points out that “ongoing parent involvement is embedded in district culture”. The relationship with the Aboriginal community continues to improve in this district and “activities such as school- and district-based celebrations and dinners are promoting positive relationships with the Aboriginal communities. There is evidence of continued efforts to build relationships and collaborate with the [local Aboriginal]⁴ nations”. Voiced explicitly in the district’s Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, there is emphasis on creating a circle of connectedness to support Aboriginal learners. The circle includes board members, district administrators, school leaders, Aboriginal learners and their parents. The district also has a special agreement in place with the union local to fast-track hiring of educators who identify as aboriginal. The district involves parents in the development of district and school plans. Also, community partnerships exist with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Native Friendship Centre, Parks and Recreation, the local college and the Lions club to name a few.

A unique example of community partnering exists in two of the district’s middle

⁴ The names of the Aboriginal Nations have been omitted to maintain the anonymity of the district under study.

schools. The school-municipal partnership is a share “community space project”. Space is shared within community and school structures, so that the needs of both the school and larger community can be met. This district is also involved in cross-district collaboration. Three districts that are geographically close work together on initiatives such as the Program Alternatives for Substance use Suspension program (PASS) in conjunction with the local health authority. Some tri-district Professional Development also occurs.

Survey respondents conveyed a tone of positive collegiality within the district. Ten of 24 respondents (nearly 50%) identified teachers and other staff as having significantly contributed to their success in their role as school leader. The same number said other school leaders, including district administrators and teacher leaders, contributed to their success. Additionally, school leaders identified the community and trusting relationships as important factors in enabling them to lead effectively. With so much reference to the important role of others in leaders’ success, I was impressed that not only collegiality, but also collaboration was of great importance to the leaders in the district. I deal with the theme of collaboration later in this section.

School Improvement. Most school districts make a claim to pursuing improvement, but Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found it is not just enough to be improving, improvement must be well defined and carried out in identifiable stages. The targets for improvement must include both specific areas of the curriculum and lower achieving schools. Goal #1 of the “District Achievement Contract”, “to improve learning and achievement in Literacy and Numeracy by specifically targeting support to schools with the highest needs based on CommunityLink, Early Development (EDI) and Foundation Skills Assessment results”, meets Leithwood and Jantzi’s (2008) target

requirements by specifying literacy, numeracy and vulnerable learners. The Associate Superintendents pointed out that schools with more vulnerable students had been targeted for improvement and more resources made available to them. When asked about success for vulnerable students in the district, one district administrator replied that improving success “at all levels [is] a preoccupation” within the district.

As described earlier, Aboriginal students are the focus of concentrated efforts to improve achievement. The need was identified based on current, substantially lower school completion rates for Aboriginal students compared to non-Aboriginal students. This is directly addressed by Goal #2 of the District Achievement Contract, which “is to increase the success of Aboriginal students from Kindergarten to grade 12”. A more detailed commitment to enhancing the life-chances of Aboriginal students is articulated in the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement now in its fourth year.

Increasing overall school completion rates is the target for Goal #3 of the District Achievement Contract. In addition to differences between Aboriginal student and non-Aboriginal student completion rates, the district has identified a significant discrepancy between completion rates for girls and boys. Narrowing the significant gap by raising completion rates for girls, is a district-wide goal. District administrators described the district’s dedication to this goal. “We have a district principal whose focus is on improving school completion...we see a lot of her and are working a lot with her and are questioning her and she’s questioning us on what can we do within schools to provide support structures. It’s really hard... and it comes down to one kid at a time”.

Board, district, school relations. As a researcher outside the district, it is a little more difficult to assess the balance between district and school control. Most indicators

show that the district strives for a balance. When asked about shared or distributed leadership, the associate superintendents responded, saying that “our district models shared leadership and shared decision making, so virtually every big and small decision we’re making, we’re making collaboratively with other people... We will work with groups that involve people in formal leadership as well as informal leadership”. I was given a strong impression that modeling shared leadership meant not only passing on leadership opportunities to others in the district, but also sharing leadership amongst themselves (superintendent and three associate superintendents). In their own words, “It’s the way we work and in my opinion it’s the only way to work because we mentor each other, we coach each other, we give each other advice, we listen and we debate”. Two administrators interviewed together and seemed entirely comfortable picking up and discussing ideas, each from the other. That’s not to say that this district is without a formal power structure. It was clear that leaders know their place and their role within the district. The associate superintendents were adamant, “so within all of that there is the four of us, [but] make no mistake, we know who the superintendent is...I mean really, we operate as a foursome, but certainly [he’s our boss] there’s no question”.

A few school leaders commented on the decentralized structure of the district, suggesting that this made targeted collaboration difficult. The words “family of schools” did not appear in the survey responses. Further questioning might reveal whether this was of any significance, or whether it was simply coincidental. Certainly, district administrators had much to say about the “family of schools” model.

The formal leadership structure of the district allows for individuals and groups to lead at various times. The associate superintendents were particularly enthusiastic to

share about the “family of schools”—a structure evolving from the district’s 2002 reconfiguration. They describe it like this,

We have seven families each built around our secondary schools.

This is a really neat layer [in the district] because it is the secondary, middle and elementary schools all getting together and doing their work together and getting tight connections...it’s evolved...and we’ve [the district administrators] lost the leadership of that to be honest...we attend...just like everyone else...a host school hosts it...and different people lead in those circumstances.

The associate superintendents used a positive tone to describe the shared leadership and how it has been entrusted over time from the district to each family. They felt the leadership now was generating even more positive results out of reconfiguration than had originally been anticipated, and seemed at ease with the devolution of power.

The associate superintendents described shared decision-making with principals. They felt an important factor was where the balance of leadership appeared. If the issue or problem to be dealt with was specific to a school then the principal and vice-principal should be central in leading towards a solution. “We want the leadership to be clearly with our folks and sometimes we really help in coaching it through.” If it was more of a district issue, then the leadership shifted.

Due to time constraints, I did not get the opportunity to ask the district administrators about the balance of control that exists between the board, the district and schools. I examined both policy and Board Meeting minutes to gather some idea of how this control is balanced. Board policy on authority with respect to decision-making has

been in its current form since 1992. The policy specifically outlines the responsibilities for decision making from teachers to formal school leaders to district administrators to Board of Trustees. The impetus for the policy was to bring about a balance between centralized and decentralized decision making. It distinguishes centralized from decentralized decisions. Centralized decisions are those that “provide the direction and standard of operation for the District”, whereas decentralized decisions are those that “provide the functional direction for the learning environment and conditions in each school”. All decisions are made in accordance with “Board Policy and regulations...contractual obligations and the District’s standards of operation”. Principals and teachers are the major decentralized decision makers. Board policy supports decision making that gives schools the educational autonomy “they require to develop strong learning environments responsive to the needs of their communities within the direction of the District’s beliefs and mission statements”. This was echoed in the data I collected from district administrators, and school leaders. One principal specifically identified “autonomy to support the needs of the learners and staff in ways that are unique to our school” as an important factor that allowed him/her to be an effective leader.

Board Meeting minutes are publicly available online. There are two types of regular meetings. Facilities and management aspects of the district are dealt with at Regular Operations Policy and Planning committee meetings . Issues such as instruction are dealt with at Regular Education Policy Development meetings held monthly and attended by Board members, District Administrators, school leaders, teachers, union representatives and parents, depending on issues at hand. For example, the District Learning Initiatives team, staffed by teachers in the district, recently presented

information to the Board on what differentiated instruction looks like in the district. These meetings have been a forum for reporting on the progress of assessment for learning projects funded by the district. They are also the forum through which principals propose course and program changes. For example, motions were carried at a recent meeting to approve a locally developed course in marine biology and a school lacrosse academy. I examined minutes for numerous meetings and it became evident that this forum is an important means for communication between teachers/principals, District Administrators and Board members. The Board also publicly acknowledges contributions of district stakeholders including principals and vice-principals via the district website.

Team work and professional community. Research shows that collaboration, and opportunities for it within schools and between schools, sets up a culture that supports effective leadership behaviours. District leaders who set out to build a culture of collaboration may be able to enhance leader efficacy in a significant way. Building collaborative culture is likely to include refining assessment and instructional methods in the classroom, and trying new approaches to leadership and ways of communicating between and within stakeholder groups. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found that collaboration through team work and professional learning communities had a significant impact on leader efficacy, and in particular LCE. The district I studied had a number of structural features to enable some degree of collaboration. For example, the family of schools structure, described earlier, is meant to encourage collaboration of educators from K to 12 for schools within the same family. Leaders within a family meet monthly to discuss issues of educational importance for their schools. Monthly meetings are run for all K to 12 principals. District administrators stress that these are not business

meetings. “They’re meetings where we look at student learning and we look at best practice. Our theme this year is 21st Century Learning and so that is the thread through each of these meetings”. School leaders also meet regularly in grade groupings. The principals and vice-principals at Elementary (Kindergarten to grade 5) schools meet to discuss learning as do middle school (grades 6-8) and high school (grades 9-12) principals and vice-principals. And again district administrators stress that these are not the business meetings for the district, but rather the focus is on learning and best educational practice.

Mentorship and coaching figure strongly in districts with collaborative cultures. Formal mentorship exists for those teachers in the District who are proactive about seeking it. The “Teacher Helping Teacher” program is funded through the joint district-union professional development fund for teachers. It is a “mentorship program which encourages a teacher with experience in a particular teaching area to mentor another teacher interested in gaining skills in that area”. This is a formal teacher mentoring program with a requirement for reporting out. Similarly district leadership mentoring programs exist for leaders selected by the district to be part of the District Educational Administration Pool (DEAP). Potential vice-principals have opportunities for group mentorship alongside vice-principals as part of the DEAP. Monthly meetings are run by a principal to address topics generated by the group, and these include “everything from budget to discipline to culture to labour issues” (interview with associate superintendents, February 2010). The same type of mentorship exists for vice-principals applying for the principalship.

What does collaboration look like for school leaders? Many of the leaders, who

responded to a question about the extent to which they are able to facilitate student learning, seem to be working collaboratively and using efficacy building strategies as part of this practice. To create a positive learning environment many school leaders mentioned that modeling was key. They saw their own positive attitudes as central to achieving positive learning environments. This is significant for workplace relationships, which, in turn, are significant for creating a culture of collaboration.

School leaders expressed particular interest in collaboration when it came generating enthusiasm for a shared vision of the school. Most responses referred to at least one of the following approaches: leading by example, developing trusting relationships, creating a shared vision together, building in celebrations of success and leading collaboratively. Eight of 22 leader responses identified collaboration as the key way to develop and implement school vision. The following are representative of responses in this section “I am proud of the work we have done, and I believe that having a common vision and sense of mission is a hallmark of our school staff” and “I believe that teachers who work collaboratively, with ‘real’ work; generate their own success and subsequently, enthusiasm for shared vision”. It is evident that explicit collaboration is successfully generating enthusiasm for the school vision for these leaders.

Successful collaboration was not quite as evident in the area of student learning. School leader responses on the extent to which they were able to facilitate student learning gave two general impressions. Teachers and leaders are doing well individually in this realm. Leaders expressed confidence in ability to be successful with the individual aspects of leading student learning. They also expressed a high degree of respect for the work done by teachers and school staff. They seemed pleased, positive and maybe even

satisfied that individuals were moving student learning forward. At the same time, leaders expressed a desire to see more shared practice to improve student learning. It was not uncommon to read a comment positive in tone, followed by one such as “I wish we could move to a place of honing our practice together, and take learning to a higher level collectively. Sadly, I believe lack of collegial collaboration is systemic within this very decentralized district”. Many leaders seemed to be saying that they wanted more collaborative practice to occur and are trying to build in the time and structures to support this.

Another school leader captured this concern about building collaborative district culture by writing,

I don't think we are very good at discussing our own practices and results among staff. Staff to student and staff to community connections are of an extraordinarily high quality. Staff to staff, and staff to admin relationships are still rather guarded or 'tentative' at best. Interestingly, I believe this mirrors my experiences of my relationship as a school-based vice-principal to our district level senior administrators—cohesive when we are talking about individual students, but guarded and tentative when looking at our adult professional relationships.

A pervasive theme among principals and vice-principals was that they appreciated the hard work of so many of their staff, who support the school vision and create positive classroom and school conditions, but reservations exist also.

Teamwork and having a professional learning community are important for

managing change—a constant feature of improving schools. Many school leaders expressed a desire for more open communication between staff about their own learning and reflection. School leaders described several strategies for managing change. Embracing change and getting as much as possible from it seemed to be a prevailing desire. Some leaders referred to taking control of the change, others to reflecting on changes constructively and also to appreciating positive change even when it is unexpected. Several comments acknowledged the difficulty that change can bring, while at the same time viewing it more as an opportunity than a barrier. According to one leader, “change is also exciting and can produce new energy for creativity in some people. It keeps the work interesting”! In fact, many leaders expressed a high degree of efficacy with respect to coping with and responding to changes.

Principals and vice-principals identified a number of requirements for effectively managing change. To be data literate and base changes on sound information was important, as was having enough time to implement changes. Adequate resources to handle change, and adequate guidance from District Administrators were also mentioned. For principals and vice-principals, trustful relationships between stakeholders were required in order to steer a school in the desired direction. The need for better district-union relations was highlighted. District-union relations were mentioned in a number of responses on the survey. I address the issue in more detail later in this chapter and the next.

Use of data. The way districts use data, generated within schools or across the district, is a factor influencing LSE and LCE. In response to questions on facilitating and improving student learning, a few school leaders mentioned data, but it was not clear in

what way the data would be generated or used. This district collects its own data from a variety of sources including research done by teachers/leaders within the district as well as provincial data from standardized tests and provincial exams. In addition, many researchers from accredited institutions apply to do research within the district. It is the district's policy to have access to the research.

District administrators emphasized the importance of data to advance improvement in student achievement. They mentioned hearing frequent refrains of “show me, prove it, show me that things are getting better” as a way to illustrate the importance of evidence gathering. The District Achievement Contract contains a wide range of data used to establish student levels of achievement, determine whether improvement is occurring, and also to measure the success of learning initiatives. The document has an extensive appendix with a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data on district initiatives. Other district documents also show pockets of data use, consisting of information collection, analysis and response.

Data literate decision-making is modeled at the district level. The “District Review Report” points out that district priorities are identified based on evidence and that monitoring progress and adjusting as needed are both part of usual practice. The report recommends that the district build a systematic research and evaluation process. Some systematic research is being done in the district, and the ALART⁵ grant projects are good evidence of this. Also some research is done in conjunction with accredited institutions. It is not clear that there is an overarching systematic process for compiling data, or analyzing and sharing it with all those whose decisions should be informed by it. This

⁵ ALART stands for Assessment for Learning Action Research Teams

likely exists, but other than data contained as document appendices, I did not come across it in my research. The District Review report recommended the district support schools in using school-based evidence for improvement. Assessment is a ready data source as well as a key vehicle for change and improvement in schools. The ALART grants are one example of district supports that have been implemented and are providing school based evidence.

Most data collected in the district is focused on students and teachers. A wide range of performance indicator data is available, but I did not find data on leader performance outcomes. Systematic use of data collection on leadership might further inform decision-making on programs and supports for leaders.

Instructional leadership. The impact of district investment in instructional leadership is unexpected. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found it was not so much the resultant capacity building that investment in instructional leadership brought, but more its message. A district invested in instructional leadership shows unequivocally that instruction matters. The investment may be linked more to enhancing district culture than direct capacity building.

This district runs its own leadership training through the District Education Administration Pool (DEAP). This pool of leaders is involved in regular meetings, some of which address instructional issues. The district expects teachers applying to the DEAP have at least started a master's degree. The emphasis is both on education and experience, which suggests the district supports the view that many leadership skills are acquirable. When asked about their views on leadership as either an acquired skill or an inherent ability, district administrators were in agreement that leadership was both. They said,

We're gonna tell you that both are essential ingredients. We are looking for leaders however they could emerge. It's most often people who are doing things...[and] showing within their school a desire, and a flare, and an interest and then are being nurtured by their formal leaders...you have to have some of [it] within you and from there it can be enhanced and taken in all kinds of directions.

They seemed to be saying that given some degree of innate propensity for leadership, a person might acquire leadership skills through learning.

Views on leadership are important when considering ways to enhance SE. Verbal persuasion and feedback are most effective when focussed on aspects of leadership that are acquirable. An appraisal about how far a leader has come and what s/he needs to do to improve is more likely to enhance SE if it is focused on aspects of leadership that both the leader and appraiser see as acquirable. Since inherent features are not acquirable through learning or practice, feedback, given about components of leadership considered inherent by leader and appraiser, is not likely to enhance SE. If the leader does not inherently possess the 'feature' then no amount of learning and practice will render it so.

Verbal persuasion and feedback are critical aspects of performance appraisal. The district's systematic process for principal and vice-principal appraisal was described in some detail by the associate superintendents. Using consistent criteria, principals and vice-principals are appraised every five years after their first year in the role. Associate Superintendents complete principal appraisals and principals complete vice-principal appraisals.

Principal appraisals include feedback from a cross section of people involved in

the school including parents, teachers, and other staff. The principal is involved in the process all the way through. Electronic surveys are used by principal and District Administrator together to develop interview questions for a random sample of the school community. A draft report based on e-survey, and interview data is shared with the principal before a final draft is sent to the Board.

The process is similar for vice-principals. The district runs yearly training for vice-principals and their supervisors (the principals) who are up for appraisal. The district administrators see this as an important part of the vice-principal appraisal for both parties. The workshop “guides the process”. Other than the workshop on process, district administrators did not describe learning opportunities generated by the process. Further investigation is necessary to determine how leader learning is linked to performance appraisal. Embedded reflection and learning shows the school community that improvement is valued by all members—including the leaders.

LSE was not as high in the domain of curriculum and instruction as in some other domains. However, qualitative data provided by school leaders indicated that even if they were not as confident about instructional leadership, many still saw it as an essential part of their role. When asked how to motivate teachers, common responses described spending time in the classroom, trying out new practices and supporting teachers who are taking informed risks. Modeling new instructional strategies, sharing enthusiasm for learning, and mentoring the risk takers on staff were all mentioned as ways to motivate teachers. This coincides with Leithwood and Jantzi’s (2008) finding that investing in instructional leadership has as much to do with district culture (motivation) as with the actual methods being learned. One might presume that

instructional leadership would be even more effective where both the message that instruction matters and benefits from methods learned complement each other.

District sponsored, job-embedded teacher professional development. I decided to examine both teacher and school leader professional development offerings here since in a collaborative district, teachers and leaders work side by side for professional development. Also, it is worth considering professional development for leaders, since where one program is strong, the other is likely to be so as well.

Professional development for principals and vice-principals is funded in two ways. Each leader has a personal budget over which they have considerable spending latitude. A joint professional development budget, which is co-managed by the district and principals/vice-principals also exists. Use of the second fund is more prescriptive since it is intended to support collaborative professional development ventures as well as individual ones. Principals and vice-principals have considerable leeway in the district in determining the topics for professional development days, and they are fully involved in developing itinerary that aligns with district goals. District Administrators describe it thus,

There's a bunch of different ways we're providing leadership support for people and they have a big say in what direction that goes, every step of the way...more than anything we consider that they're the key people in running our schools and making sure that the focus is on improved student learning—that's our fixation.

School leaders agreed. One principal summed up the opportunities for professional development by saying,

This district has a strong support system for Professional development, there are monthly offerings, weekly offerings, funds set aside for larger events. We are hugely into PLC's and there are several to choose from in this district. There are district funds I can access as well as my own personal pro-d funds.

All sources of data indicate a strong program of leadership professional development exists in the district.

Generally for teachers, district sponsored professional development is teaching and learning that is aligned with a district's goals. Districts may provide teachers with time embedded in the work-week to plan and participate in professional development activities. Districts may also provide support by making facilities available to teachers and by providing resources such as workshop presenters and reading material. Some direct support may also come in the form of facilitation through dedicated personnel responsible for providing professional development.

The district under study makes available many professional development opportunities for teachers. A number are teacher developed and facilitated by the district. The district and teacher union local share a joint professional development fund. Teachers in the district may apply for funds prior to the opportunity. Funding depends on the type of opportunity and the needs of other teachers in the district. In some cases, it covers costs such as registration and travel and in others it pays for teacher replacement. Job-embedded professional development is provided through teacher release time which is part of some initiatives. Funded activities vary, ranging from conferences, to teacher as researcher experiences, to teacher as mentor experiences, to professional book clubs.

Credit courses from accredited institutions may also be funded up to a maximum amount. This district has a staff of educators dedicated to professional development and responsible for “Learning Initiatives” in the district. Related to the district’s goals around improving achievement for Aboriginal students, the district accountability contract singles out staff development with a specific focus on improving delivery to Aboriginal students.

Besides the Learning Initiatives team, the district has begun offering grants to teacher teams for research in their own schools. District Administrators describe the grants, “We did something **really** bright a couple of years ago...we started something called ALART grants, assessment for learning action research grants”. Schools are allowed to spend the money any way they want, including professional development, in support of a research project focused on assessment for learning. The project must be team based including an administrator from the school. In describing the success of the program, district administrators were excited to relay an anecdote about a recent gathering of grant holders,

We had 80 teachers [and leaders] at a meeting last week after school.

It’s just wild what’s going on, and basically we’re getting the hell out of the way and they run with some very cool stuff...and when teachers get going that’s where the sky’s the limit and [they are] giving examples that are unbelievable.

ALART grants were highlighted by school leaders as a recent positive learning and professional development initiative in the district.

Probably the most familiar form of professional development is professional

development days embedded in the school year. These are regulated through the collective agreement between teachers and the province. There are four school-based days where teachers participate in professional development directed by the school. Two district/provincial based days are considered autonomous and teachers are free to choose the activities they will participate in. School-based days also allow self-directed professional development where there is mutual agreement between the teacher and his/her principal.

School leaders may also try to work within district structures to job-embed professional development for teachers. District programs such as “Learning Connections”, which involve school leaders provide this kind of professional development. Many principals and vice-principals mentioned finding ways to support teacher learning on the job.

I am in and out of classrooms all the time so I know what is going on.

I make sure to give time to improving student learning discussions at staff meetings. I encourage collaboration by structuring time for teachers to work together.

This was a fairly representative comment. School leaders commonly provided release time for teachers to participate in professional development opportunities, but many expressed a desire to be able to offer more. This district is not unique in that time and financial constraints put limits on professional development and challenge leaders. These concerns are discussed in the next section.

IV Limitations and challenges

It is important to keep in mind that the nature of case study research makes it

context dependent. The study was time-limited and captures only a momentary image of leadership in the district. I looked back at recent years in only a minimal way, and will not pretend to have captured a moving picture of the district. Although beyond the scope of this Master's thesis, it might be informative to track the progress of various programs and structures in place to support leadership and measure LSE and LCE again at some later date. This would establish quantitative support for the qualitative data showing the district is on an improving course for leadership and learning.

A strong indicator, that this district is an improving one, is that it's leaders do not deny the challenges it faces. They willingly expressed concern about certain aspects of leadership where more support is needed or where they felt hindered. Not surprisingly, in the current economic and political climate, the most pervasive of these challenges were labor and political issues, as well as insufficient funds and time to lead as effectively as desired.

School leaders identified difficulties with the "mechanistic" approach of the union as a key factor in hindering their ability to lead the way they wanted. A reflection of this may be the low SE score (mean = 6.61) on the item "mediate political demands on the school" within the leadership element "attention to administrative support". I pick up on this in more detail in chapter 5 recommendation five.

Budgetary restraints continue to challenge the district in the face of continued declining enrolment. Leadership has not been exempt from cuts. The 2009/10 annual Budget Presentation showed among other cuts an administrative staff reduction with a dollar value of \$236,849 and district leaders stated that "reductions in administration will reduce our ability for long term and strategic planning as well as increase the burden on

remaining staff”. It seems the burden may already be felt. Within the leadership element “attention to Administrative Support”, the item “acquire and provide adequate financial and material resources” had the second lowest score (mean = 6.47 on a scale of 0 to 10) of all items on the measure of LSE.

Generalizing to the Provincial Level. It is tempting to take findings from this case study and apply them to districts across the province. After all, districts in the province operate under the same School Act. The bulk of teachers are trained in the same university programs and belong to the same provincial union. Teachers and districts are governed by the same provincial labor contract. Province-wide standardized testing occurs, and districts are answerable to the same governmental bodies across the province. Even district leadership structure, at its most basic, with Superintendent at the head of each district supported by Associate Superintendents at the district level, and Principals and Vice-principals at the school level is standard across the province. Yet, I take caution in making a direct comparison to other districts. While there are surface similarities, this is not a “cookie cutter” district and nor are the others in the province. Supports successfully in place in this district, may not be the best for other districts. It would be an unfortunate misuse of the information to take the mostly positive findings and expect other districts to mirror them. However, use of the findings as support for building a district culture of continuous improvement in learning would not be rash.

Improving districts benefit from examining the features of other improving districts. The district under study has many supports in place to enhance leader efficacy, and these may prove useful starting points for other districts hoping to enhance their own leader efficacy as a means of improving student learning. For example, a “family of

schools” configuration successfully promotes collaboration within this district and may be useful in other similar districts, but not without accounting for district-specific factors. The configuration may be successful when schools are geographically close together, but in some districts distance between schools may render the configuration cumbersome. Appropriate adaptation must always be considered when comparisons are made.

So while it is tempting to paint broad brush strokes from these findings, districts do so at the peril of their own unique canvas. No district context is ever exactly alike, nor are districts static. The most important work of the district involves human relationships and is by nature dynamic. Handled carefully though, some generalizations may be made. In the sage words of one principal respondent, it is important to strive to “cherish instructional time, support learners who need flexibility and alternative learning environments, establish and communicate high standards of achievement [and] enjoy working with kids and communicate [that] enjoyment to them”. This may be said for any district where improving the life-chances of students is the most important endeavour.

Chapter 5 Recommendations, Further Study, and Conclusion

Doing mixed method case study research has provided me with a very rich learning experience. My research contributes to the field of leadership and learning in a couple of significant ways. The process of developing a survey instrument that was both reliable and valid was worthwhile. The resulting instrument will be a useful tool for researchers interested in measuring LSE and LCE in the school context. Although I used the instrument to measure these constructs for formal leaders, it could easily be adapted to measure LSE and LCE for individuals in less formal leadership positions. The study also provided a chance for reflection for the participants. Some survey participants indicated that participating in the research afforded a welcome opportunity to reflect on their own leadership practice. The survey itself was constructed so that participants would be reminded of the leadership behaviors which current research identifies as significant for improving learning. Reflective leadership practice is itself an important contributor to improving schools. Together both the qualitative and quantitative information I obtained provide a full picture of the district and a strong foundation for further research of LSE, LCE, leadership, district conditions and their impact on learning.

I. Recommendations for the district

Recommendation one. The district espouses a shared leadership model and a collaborative culture. This may not be at first evident to the outsider or even to the new insider. It is mostly in delving deep into the goings on of the district that it becomes evident how much there is to support the claim of shared leadership. Many aspects of leadership development while implicit in much that is being done, are not explicitly

named or described in the district documentation. For example the goals identified in current achievement and accountability contracts do not explicitly identify leadership development as an area of focus. It may be that historically this was an explicit area of focus in the district.

I recommend that the district be more public about the supports it provides for its leaders. Leaders within the district seem informed about opportunities and supports; however, the district stands to gain by making its profile more public with respect to leadership. Not only would this ensure a knowledge of and access to supports and programs for current leaders, but it might also serve as a means for attracting potential new leaders who view leadership development as a keystone piece in bringing about continuous improvement in learning. Perhaps even more important, a model district has a responsibility to be public about what it does. Lead educators in lead districts develop the professional lexicon of teaching, leading and learning, which enables reflection, discussion, action and improvement—all of which enhance LSE and LCE. An exemplary district that publicly shares what it is doing for, by, and with its leaders to improve learning, contributes vocabulary which improves the fluency of educators. Building the public language of leadership and learning moves improving life-chances of students out of the abstract and into practice.

Recommendation two. There are many ongoing programs in the district that contribute to the district's goal of continuous improvement. A number of forward thinking practices, tied to teaching, such as coaching, mentoring, learning rounds and workshops were identified within the framework of these programs or initiatives. There are numerous opportunities for informal coaching and mentoring, and several sources

described a common theme of “phone any district leader anytime if you have a question”, but it was less clear what formal collaboration between leaders looks like. I recommend that the district consider finding more ways for principals and vice-principals to be exposed to each other’s daily work.

The professional development fund does allow for leaders shadowing leaders within schools, but I suspect that many leaders find it difficult to pull themselves away from their own schools to take advantage of such vicarious experience that enhances both LSE and LCE. In fact, when asked to describe factors that inhibit them from being the leaders they want to be, one of the three most consistent responses was lack of time. Video recording of leader work may provide more time efficient opportunities to analyze and improve performance. Leaders who have the means to specific aspects of the leadership role would be gathering explicit evidence upon which to self-reflect and improve. Additionally, leaders might share these records of leadership experience with other principals/vice-principals at their own convenience. Of course, this suggestion is not made lightly. Video recording comes with its own set of difficulties. Issues of resources, privacy, and trust would be important factors to consider prior to embarking on such a practice.

Recommendation three. The district presents a strong collection of data on both students and teachers when it comes to achievement initiatives in the district. However, I was unable to find specific data on leadership, leader performance outcomes, or LSE/LCE. While there is no question that leadership development is occurring, the district would benefit from explicitly tracking leadership data about such factors as leader confidence to carry out behaviours that have high impact on student learning. Although

district leaders and school leaders expressed an understanding of the significant impact leadership has on learning, I could not locate systematic tracking of this type of data. If characteristics such as the strength of LSE and LCE are measured and tracked, then data-literate decisions can be made to improve leadership performance. Also a systematic approach in this area would assist the district in better understanding when and how improvement is happening. It would add to the teaching and learning data being collected.

It is evident that improving student learning is foremost on the minds of educators in this district. However, the district might take better advantage of the contribution which leadership makes to student learning. By explicitly tracking the development of its leaders and their confidence and belief in their ability to carry out their work, the district would be generating a collection of data to further inform leadership development.

This recommendation is linked to the first one. Tracking leadership data systematically means it is available for analysis and sharing. Sharing leadership data may contribute to continuous improvement in learning across the province. The data could be collected in conjunction with other districts, so that resources, expertise and information are pooled and used to benefit leadership development around the province. Creating a culture of collaboration across the province is no easy task, but we see examples of successful connections such as the Network of Performance Based Schools in practice already.

Recommendation four. One of the recommendations of the District Review Report from 2008 was for the leadership of the school families to build an even broader communication base with parents to ensure successful transitions and progression from

elementary to middle to high school. If a school family has been particularly successful in meeting this recommendation, an opportunity for vicarious learning exists for leaders from other school families. Invitations to leaders to observe effective school family leading provide an opportunity to enhance LCE. Successful family leaders might be invited to share their practice with other families. Facilitating cross family sharing between leaders could enhance collaborative district culture. Ensuring that it is straightforward for family leaders to meet, collaborate and share family information potentially provides a space for all four influences on LSE and LCE to be utilized.

Recommendation five. When asked about factors that inhibit them from being the leaders they want to be, 50% of school leaders identified politics and/or poor relations with the union. Formal school leaders expressed concern about being hampered by “union contracts that limit our ability to build school staffs who believe in growth and development” and by a perceived “lack of real authority”. Empowering leaders means ensuring they have all the information they need to be successful decision makers. This must be an ongoing process where district-union relations are concerned. Especially since this aspect of a leader’s work may change fairly rapidly, and s/he may have only intermittent experience. Enriched training in labor issues especially contracts, labor law, bargaining and grievances would be a wise approach to enhance LSE and LCE. It would be a worthwhile experience for all school leaders to participate in some aspect of the bargaining or grievance procedures to remove the mystery that sometimes surrounds these processes. Watching seasoned administrators handle labor situations vicariously builds confidence in leaders about how to make good decisions in a union environment. Even though school leaders may not be directly involved in these processes, an

opportunity to see the processes happening and to understand them better ensures greater confidence when it comes to decision making related to labor issues and areas under the governance of the contract.

II. Further Study

In some ways this case study may have opened up more questions than it has answered. As a preliminary and cursory kind of study it sets the stage for a variety of further research possibilities. I developed a set of useful tools and a framework for study of LSE, LCE and district supports that could be used in many districts across the province. Assessment of LSE and LCE and leader supports in districts across the province would provide useful data about how best to support leadership development in the province. Leadership development programs might make use of a province-wide picture of LSE and LCE to create an awareness of the kinds of conditions and leadership that enhance leader efficacy. Upon returning to the district setting, newly educated leaders might translate this awareness into making positive changes for themselves and their colleagues.

All too often, leadership training for credentials is detached from leadership training and experiences within the workplace. It is in the interest of both accredited institutions and school districts to work in conjunction with each other when developing leader capacity. With this in mind, districts might benefit from measuring LSE and LCE of principals and vice-principals before and after training. Districts might find it both efficient and effective to pursue partnerships with educational leadership programs if there is a link between the program of choice and enhanced leader efficacy. Also, governments may consider the value of funding programs, which are enhancing leader

efficacy with the expectation that more efficacious leaders in turn, produce more efficacious districts.

There are a number of considerations that future research might address and in continuing the case study and for case studies of other districts. Because the survey measured leader's beliefs, it would be useful to externally check the actual link to the frequency of effective leadership behaviours enacted. Other researchers have connected leader efficacy to leader performance, but a context specific check on this would improve reliability. A two-pronged approach to measuring the actual frequency of effective leadership behaviours would include principal and vice-principal self-reporting via survey, and colleague observations also reported via survey. Consistency between LSE and LCE measures and the frequency with which corresponding behaviours are exhibited, confirmed through self and colleague reporting, would lend greater significance to the measure of LSE and LCE. Measurement of LSE and LCE with the same sample after specific initiatives, intended to enhance LSE and LCE, have been undertaken by the district would be informative. The ultimate aim, in all of these measures, would be to tie them in to improving life-chances for students.

I did not measure LSE and LCE for the district administrators, but future research might make these measurements along with measures of LSE and LCE for principals and vice-principals. A comparison of measures for district and school administrators might answer the question: do the strengths of LSE and LCE for district administrators correlate with the strengths of the same constructs for their school leaders?

Although comparisons from one district to another might be potentially faulty, it would be useful to compare whether district conditions and supports are necessarily the

same where LSE and LCE are high. Similarly, one might ask is there any pattern to district conditions where LSE and LCE are less than adequate?

Many teachers spend the bulk of their teaching career working in the same district. It is also true that many of the formal school leaders within a district have also been its classroom teachers. It would be useful for districts to measure the strength of LSE and LCE in leaders who have also been long-standing teachers within the district and compare those to LSE and LCE for leaders who come from outside the district. This raises questions about whether district supports for leader efficacy have an impact before a person reaches a formal role such as vice-principal or principal. Other areas of exploration exist around LSE, LCE and shared leadership—especially teacher leadership since principals and vice-principals are always teachers first.

More and more teacher leaders are being recognized as an integral part of school leadership. Further research in the area of LSE and LCE might measure these constructs for teacher leaders, and assess the supports that are available both within schools and across districts to enhance LSE and LCE for teacher leaders. Research like this would be particularly timely given the surge in distributed leadership that seems to have taken many schools and districts by storm in recent years. Recent research indicates that both shared leadership and teacher leaders, as part of a shared leadership system, have much to contribute in the way of improving schools (Harris, 2004; Harris & Muijs, 2003).

It was beyond the scope of this research to identify survey respondents in terms of the type of school in which they work. Some survey comments from this study suggested the possibility of differences from elementary to middle to high school leadership in terms of LSE, LCE and their supports. These differences appeared specifically with

respect to how change is managed and the ease with which instructional leadership is implemented. It would be useful to find out if there is a correlation between differences in LSE /LCE and differences in school type. This raises related questions such as the following: Do districts spread their most efficacious leaders out across the district? Are these leaders more often placed in “difficult to lead” schools and what kind of an affect does this have on LSE and LCE? Could or should LSE and LCE be used as factors in making the best possible leader placements?

III. Conclusion

The district under study has a lot going for it. It is located in arguably one of the most beautiful and popular cities in the province. The climate is temperate and agreeable. The city itself is large enough to offer many amenities, while at the same time having few of the disadvantages associated with larger metropolitan areas. The district area draws families from around the nation for employment in government, tourism and the military. It is also home to a large university, which produces a steady stream of teachers ready for both classroom instruction and formal leadership. In addition to strong interest in formal leadership within the district, district administrators have told me they routinely attract interest for formal leadership positions from outside the district. As a result, competition for employment is intense and the district finds itself in the enviable position of being able to select from the cream of the crop.

This sounds like an ideal scenario, but heavy competition for employment potentially breeds an attitude of indifference on the part of an employer. However, such complacency is not the case in this district. Despite all the inherent extras it has going for it, which might allow for a passive approach to leadership and only minimal attention to

capacity building; the evidence reveals a district actively working to enhance leader efficacy and in turn, improve the life-chances of students. In 2008, the District Review Team described the district, saying “there is a sense of optimistic dissatisfaction, optimism and justifiable pride with emerging improvements and dissatisfaction with the status quo, knowing that improvement for each student is not yet a reality”. With a such a ready supply of teachers and leaders, this district could be content and simply let things take their course, but it does not.

For efficacious teachers and leaders, it is this healthy dissatisfaction coupled with a sense of pride that makes this district an appealing place to work. As a body, the district models a key factor necessary for learning—the desire for continuous improvement. Teachers work hard to provide supports for students to reflect on their own learning and bring about improvement. Principals and Vice-Principals work hard to do the same for their teachers. While this can be devastatingly hard work at times, it is made easier when supported by the district. A highly functioning district with respect to leader efficacy is one that does not accept the existing state of affairs, and in so doing, takes responsibility for providing the structures and supports for its people to move beyond status quo—whatever that might be.

Well known educator and researcher, Elliot Eisner, reminds us, “the aim of research is not to advance the careers of researchers, but to make a difference in the lives of students” (2005, p. 21). It seems to me, a parallel may be drawn with school leadership and improving the life-chances of students. Districts build more sustainable leadership that is up to this task, by providing supports that enhance leader efficacy. Where supports are in place, stakeholders attend to the nuances of each other’s voices and rhythms, so

that the song of each student rises in hopeful crescendo (Becker, 1994; Fremeaux & Ramsden, 2007; Kinsella, 2007). The district in question supports such transformative leadership praxis.

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Appendix A: Interview questions for associate superintendents

1. Please give a “big picture” description of school leadership in your district?
2. What are the nature of the district supports that enable you to continue to grow and develop as a leader?
3. Please describe your interactions with colleagues with respect to teaching and learning.
4. Please describe an example of an improved practice you have made this past year that will impact Principal/Vice-Principal leadership in the district? student learning?
5. Describe your views on leadership: inherent capacity or acquirable skill?
6. Describe your role with respect to leadership development in the district.
7. If you could do anything in the district to enhance leader’s belief in their ability to lead, what would it be?
8. Describe the district culture. How and to what degree are you able to contribute to it?
9. Describe your professional learning over the past year. What experiences have impacted your practice and how?
10. How and to what extent have you enabled the professional learning and development of colleague(s) during this past year?
11. What are the challenges Principals and Vice-Principals experience as leaders in district schools? How do you try and ameliorate these challenges within the structure of the district?
12. What processes do you promote in enabling Principals and Vice-Principals to establish mission and vision commitment in their schools?
13. Describe practices you promote in order for Principals and Vice-Principals to engage in continual learning?
14. How and to what extent are you able to help Principals and Vice-Principals engage in and practice shared decision-making and leadership approaches?
15. What approaches or strategies are promoted in the district to ensure that all Principals and Vice-Principals are able to make a positive contribution to school culture?
16. What do Principals and Vice-Principals in the district learn about supporting and helping less successful colleagues in their workplaces?
17. What roles do you promote Principals and Vice-Principals to play with respect to the professional learning and development of others in the district?
18. Are there needs that your Principals and Vice-Principals have over and beyond those that can be addressed by the district?
19. How and to what degree have the role, actions and direction proposed by the school board helped or hindered your work to support your formal school leaders?

Appendix B: Survey of Formal School Leaders



**University
of Victoria**

I. LEADER'S CAPABILITY BELIEFS SURVEY

You have been selected by your district as a good candidate to help me with my research on leaders capability beliefs and how they influence student learning. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my survey. I seek to measure how efficacious you believe yourself to be in your role as formal school leader.

This survey is being sent to you because you are in a formal leadership role within your district and I hope you will help me develop a clearer picture of leadership practices in the workplace.

The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Many of the questions rely only on you selecting appropriate responses, although from time to time you will be asked to provide short written answers as well. Please do your best to answer all questions. I appreciate some questions may not apply and anticipate you would check Not Applicable for those statements.

The survey is completely anonymous and all data is stored and compiled without any indication of who has or has not completed the survey.

By completing and submitting the survey your free and informed consent is implied and indicates that you understand the conditions of participation in this study.

While the survey is completely anonymous, I'd like to collect a bit of demographic data. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability:

Please include the 5 digit code from the top right of your introductory letter.

1. Gender

- Male
 Female
 Other

2. Ethnicity

- Aboriginal
 African Canadian
 Asian (including Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese)
 Caribbean
 Caucasian, European descent
 Indo-Canadian
 Métis
 South Asian
 Other (please specify)

3. Highest level of education I have completed

- Undergraduate Degree
 Master's Degree
 Doctorate Degree
 Professional Certificate in a Field Other than Education
 Other (please specify)

4. Years of experience in the field of education; please count your years as a teacher as well as your years as an administrator

| | Years of Experience | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | 0 | 1-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | Above 20 |
| Years as an elementary teacher | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Years as an middle school teacher | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Years as a high school teacher | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Years as a vice principal | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Years as a principal | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Years as a district administrator | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

5. Current position: I am...

- A Vice-Principal
 A Principal
 A district-based administrator
 Other (please specify)

II. PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Please reflect on your professional learning and development activities over the last 12 months.

1. I am engaged in professional learning and development...

_____ Hours per month _____ Hours per year

2. Describe the nature of your personal professional learning and development experiences over the past 12 months:

3. Describe the nature and extent of the support you receive in continuing your professional learning and development:

4. I'd also like to know how you would describe the purposes or goals you are working to achieve in your school and at the district level. Please list in the box below.

8. Consider your role along with your colleagues in the district who also hold formal leadership positions. To what extent would you agree that...

| | Don't Agree at all.....Agree Fully | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 59. School staffs in our district have the knowledge and skill they need to improve student learning | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 60. In our district, continuous improvement is viewed by most staff as a necessary part of every job | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 61. In our district, problems are viewed as issues to be solved, not as barriers to action. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 62. Central district staff communicates a belief in the capacity of teachers to teach even the most difficult students. | | | | | | | | | | | |

IV. Written Response

- 63. Describe the extent to which you are able to motivate your teachers.**
- 64. Describe the extent to which you are able to generate enthusiasm for a shared vision of the school.**
- 65. Describe the extent to which you are able to manage change in your school.**
- 66. Describe the extent to which you are able to create a positive learning environment in your school.**
- 67. Describe the extent to which you are able to facilitate student learning in your school.**
- 68. Describe the extent to which you are able to raise achievement on standardized tests in your school.**
- 69. Describe some specific examples of workplace conditions in your school (or school district) that have been created to improve teaching and student learning.**

70. Describe the factors in your school that you believe enable you to be the leader you believe you can be.
71. Describe supports, which are not currently available in your school, which you believe would enable you to be the leader you want to be.
72. Describe the factors in your school that inhibit you from being the leader you believe you can be.
73. What needs to happen in your school to improve the learning of all students?
74. Please write one or two metaphors that capture your belief about your capability to lead and/or about the capability of the leaders in your district to lead collectively.
75. I am interested in developing a deeper understanding of leaders' self and collective efficacy (belief in one's capability to lead) in the district. I would like to hold a **workshop for leaders** interested in further exploring district supports to enhance leaders' self and collective efficacy.

Please note that the data you have provided will continue to remain **anonymous** as no identifying features are used in compiling results for the survey. **To further ensure anonymity**, I have provided a second postage paid envelope so that you may return this last page of the survey separately if you so desire.

Please check the box that applies and include contact information if you are interested in participating further.

- Yes, I would be interested in participating in a workshop.
- No, I would not be interested in participating in a workshop.

If you answered yes to workshop participation, please provide your name, e-mail and phone number below.

Name: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.