Student Reengagement in an Alternative High School

Chantal Gauthier
cgauth27@uwo.ca

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Student Reengagement in an Alternative High School

Organizational Improvement Plan

Chantal Gauthier

August 29, 2019
Abstract

Alternative high schools have been an option for students who do not succeed in the regular system in the hopes that doing things differently would help these students graduate. This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) examines the situation of an alternative high school in a small French school board in Ontario. Student disengagement is reflected in poor attendance and impacts credit completion and graduation rates. Many solutions to improve engagement have been put forward with mitigated success. An analysis of the organizational readiness for change reveals that the organization feels the urgency of finding a solution to the problem. To prepare for the change, a leadership approach is elaborated by drawing mainly on Helgesen (1995) and Fullan’s (2014) work. This change intervention requires intensive planning as it involves a change in paradigms in order to have a lasting effect. By becoming a trauma-informed school, the alternative high school will not only become a safe haven for students, it will also instill a culture of collective efficacy and self-care for staff. It will provide opportunities for staff to develop positive relationships with students, which studies reveal is a strong factor in reengagement. A detailed plan to communicate has been elaborated. It is important to keep looking at the alternative high school with a critical lens to bring it to a level where it becomes a tool in fostering equity and social justice.

Keywords: reengagement, trauma-informed school, school resiliency, teacher-student relationship
Executive Summary

My experience as the principal of an alternative high school for teenagers expelled from their regular high school or who cannot function in a regular high school setting has had a profound impact on my development as an educator. It has been an incredible learning experience. It has forced me to reexamine my beliefs, it has pushed me to define my core values as a leader, but most importantly, it has allowed me to cross paths with bright, caring, questioning youths. In this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP), these students are defined as *at-promise*, rather than *at-risk* to reflect the school’s strength-based approach. This OIP aims at finding a solution to *at-promise* students’ disengagement as reflected by a high rate of absenteeism and low credit completion in a French alternative high school in Ontario, École Plein Soleil (a pseudonym).

Chapter 1 includes an analysis of the organization’s historical, political, economical, and cultural context. The alternative high school and the school board own a shared liberal vision that promotes values such as resiliency, equity, and social responsibility, which gives the alternative high school flexibility in program delivery and pedagogical practices and full support when putting in place new strategies. Previous initiatives that were not grounded in a theoretical framework have not been fully successful; it is therefore important to build a theory and research informed plan to reengage students. This plan is examined through Bolman and Deal’s (2013) *Four Frame Model* and Peter Senge’s (1990) *Learning Organizations Framework*. The *Readiness for Change Questionnaire* (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2016) and the *School Effectiveness Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a), reveal that the organization is ready for change.

Chapter 2 outlines the necessary steps in planning and developing the solution to the Problem of Practice. A leadership approach to change is elaborated based on Helgesen’s (1995)
Web of Inclusion and Fullan’s (2014) work on the principal as a leader. Helgesen’s view of
leading from the middle is a dynamic approach to leadership that promotes learning, fosters
creativity, develops leadership, and helps deal with complexity (1995). Combined with Fullan’s
(2014) view of the leader as being part of a system to build capacity, promote learning and move
people forward, it inspires the framework for leading the change process. The how-to change is
based on Cawsey et al. (2016) Change Path Model combined with elements of other change
theory models in order to keep a critical lens and make it more relevant to this Problem of
Practice. Nadler and Tushman’s Congruence Model and Quinn’s Competing Values Model are
used to do a critical organizational analysis. Three possible solutions emerge from this in-depth
analysis. Although all proposed solutions are strength-based and feasible, becoming a Trauma-
Informed School (TIS) is the chosen solution to reengage at-promise students at an alternative
high school.

Finally, Chapter 3 presents a clear plan for implementing trauma informed practices,
which will have a positive impact on the school climate and on students’ and staff’s well-being
(McItyre, Baker, & Overstreet, 2018). Elaborating a co-constructed plan is the first step in
creating an environment where students can strive and where teachers have the tools to develop
relationships and help reengage students. By establishing short, medium and long-term goals it
becomes possible to monitor the change (Cawsey et al., 2016), and communicate effectively
Helgesen, 1995; Fullan, 2014). The Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Model will be used for
effective change management.

Rooted in social justice this OIP requires a shift in culture and in power structures. Long-
term sustainability is ensured by engaging all stakeholders, giving students a voice, establishing
a wrap-around approach, and building collective-efficacy. Through this process, École Plein Soleil will be a hub where experts can collaboratively help at-promise students be successful.
Acknowledgements

The road leading to this doctorate adventure has been full of curves. After a motorcycle accident, my plans to do a PhD in French changed to applying to an EdD program in English. I had never studied or worked in English, so I figured it would be a good way to recuperate from a concussion, among other injuries.

The road through this doctorate adventure has been bumpy but mind opening. Without a compass, I would have gotten lost a long time ago. Thank you to all the wonderful professors at Western University, especially Dr. Keith, for guiding me and helping me stay focussed, and on track. You have also done a great job as a tour guide, pointing out interesting readings, research that could apply to my OIP, connections that I had not made.

Any trip is more enjoyable with travel companions. The K-12 crew has been an amazing team. Thank you for pushing me to keep up with you guys, and for enlightening me whether it was during group work, questioning, presentations, or peer reviewing.

Bringing the right baggage can make or break a trip. I am lucky enough to be surrounded with amazing people who helped me with their encouragements, their belief that I could do this, their help, their love, and their understanding. These are the only baggage required on such a trip. Marc-André and Marie-Ève, nothing makes me prouder than being your mother. You are my inspiration. Mom, Dad, Marc, Ali, and Tyler, you are the best. Thanks!

Finally, when undertaking such a long trip, you need fuel for your body, fuel for your mind, fuel for your heart. Carey your love has given me the energy to keep going. Thank you for listening through self-doubt, for rejoicing when I reached milestones, for being patient when I had my nose stuck in books, for wiping the tears when I got discouraged. I am so lucky to have you in my life and close to my heart. Thank you so much! What are we going to do with all this extra time?
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<td>CSDVDL</td>
<td>Conseil scolaire de District Ville des Lacs</td>
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<td>OIP</td>
<td>Organizational Improvement Plan</td>
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<td>PBIS</td>
<td>Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports</td>
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<td>Professional Learning Community</td>
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<td>S.M.A.R.T. goals</td>
<td>Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time specific goals</td>
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CHAPTER 1 – Introduction and Problem

Chapter 1 of this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) describes the problem of student disengagement in an alternative high school, by examining the context to better understand the problem. A leadership approach for organizational change is explored and the organization’s readiness for change is analyzed.

Organizational Context

History of the Alternative School

In the 1960’s researchers and practitioners realized the importance of adapting teaching strategies to the distinct needs of the learners. From this new vision, two initiatives were born: classes offering extra support for students and alternative schools seeking effective ways of meeting student’s needs (Moilanen, 1986; Raywid, 1999). At the time, these schools were often perceived in the community, as a last chance at obtaining a high school diploma (Moilanen, 1986) and as catering to a population of “losers” (Raywid, 1999). Over the years, more and more alternative programs have emerged in the hope of fulfilling one of these three goals: (1) changing the student; (2) changing the school; or (3) changing the education system (Raywid, 1999).

The alternative centre in this OIP accepted its first students more than 20 years ago. Originally located in one of the board’s high school buildings, the centre allowed students who were not able to succeed in a traditional school environment to continue their high school education in a non-traditional school environment with a more flexible schedule. Being a school within a school made differentiating instruction and regulation more difficult because students still had to follow the rules of the regular high school in which they were located (Moilanen, 1986). L’École Plein Soleil (a pseudonym) got its own name in 2003. In 2005, the school moved to a new location in the city’s downtown core. Finally, the school moved to a new address and
state-of-the-art facilities in 2018. This major investment is proof of the school board’scommitment and of the importance accorded to the alternative program. Rather than consideringÉcole Plein Soleil’s students as at-risk, the student are considered at-promise, the languagereflecting the cultural shift from changing the students to changing the school. L’École PleinSoleil has four full time teachers, three itinerant teachers, and three support staff membersincluding a social worker.

**History of the School Board**

Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees rights toeducation in the language of the minority. In 1996, Mike Harris’ Conservative governmentredesigned the school board system in Ontario. Ontario Minister of Education John Snobelenintroduced Bill 104, which provided for the creation of 72 district school boards including 12French-language school boards. In 1997, the new legislation made the Education Act consistentwith Section 23 of the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and jurisprudence thathad already confirmed the right of the francophone minority to manage its own system.

Le Conseil scolaire de District Ville des Lacs (CSDVDL, a pseudonym), was a result ofBill 104. Situated in Ontario, CSDVDL prides itself on promoting an environment thatrecognizes the uniqueness of each student. It also provides conditions that allow every student tosucceed and become resilient, autonomous, creative, socially conscious citizens (CSDVDL). Itsindicators for success are in line with the Ontario Ministry of Education’s priorities: (a) creditaccumulation; (b) graduation rates; (c) testing results; and (d) reduction of gap in grade average.Many policies put in place at the Ministry level are a reflection of conservatism: (a) mandatoryprovincial testing with published results, (b) the revision of the special education fundingformula that has brought budget cuts for small French school boards; (c) the revision of the
health education curriculum, and (d) the back to basic mathematic curriculum are a few examples. Despite these Ministry-level policies, the board continues to prioritize socially conscious and equitable practices. It adheres to a liberal philosophy of education and encourages individual freedom of thought and expression. It has been supportive of the efforts of École Plein Soleil’s staff to encourage attendance both with human and financial resources. While administrators have to follow governmental rules and regulations, eliminating inequities remains a priority for CSDVDL.

**Political, Economical, and Cultural Contexts**

The alternative high school discussed in this OIP is an attempt at differentiating learning for a certain student population. Students do not have a fixed schedule and thus do not access school transportation. Its inner-city location has the advantage of being easily accessible by public transit and the disadvantage of being in an area populated with people with addictions and victims of homelessness. This location puts students in a situation where they are surrounded by individuals partaking in the habits they are trying to break, such as drug use. Several times a day staff go outside to clean needles and ask people who are injecting themselves to leave the school premises, always handing them the information about where they can get help. French being a minority language in the province and city adds to the complexity of the problem. English is ubiquitous on the street and in popular culture. French becomes the language of learning which, for most of these students, has not been a positive experience. Furthermore, they do not use it enough, adding to the difficulty of completing their high school education. Part of the school board’s mission is promoting Franco Ontarian culture. Many of our students do not identify with this culture and feel marginalized and inadequate when speaking French. The complexity of the situation transcends French language acquisition as the question of culture and community
vitality is part of the school mandate. Grin and Moring (2002) consider three determinant factors for people to speak French, capacity, opportunity, and desirability. Creating these conditions adds to the challenge of teaching disengaged students. The fact that bilingualism is considered an asset for job opportunities is our main selling point, given that bilingualism increases earnings, job mobility, and job choice (Christofides & Swidinsky, 2010).

Through the years, the student population in our alternative high school has changed and expanded to accommodate students from a wider variety of backgrounds. Unfortunately, it is sometimes easier for regular high school administrators to refer students to École Plein Soleil than it is to provide individual educational opportunities. Laws such as O. Reg. 472/07 Behaviour, Discipline and Safety of Pupils and the resulting Policy Program Memoranda change the portrait of our student population. École Plein Soleil is responsible for dispensing the academic and non-academic educational components when a suspension exceeds twenty days. It is also the school for expulsions. With the influx of immigration in Canada, the school also welcomes students arriving from other countries in the middle of a semester. Additionally, the school provides the educational component of the children’s mental health unit of a local hospital and in two youth correctional facilities, and offers adult education. This wide array of students and needs means that school staff is often stretched, frequently confronted with heavy emotional burdens, and constantly required to multitask. Given the particularity of their mandate, teachers have more freedom when preparing and delivering instruction, the ultimate goal being to keep students engaged.

**Vision, Mission, Values, Purpose, and Goals**

Being unique allows our school more flexibility in program delivery and pedagogical practices. Defining the *alternative* part of our mandate opened interesting debates among staff
members. It was agreed that our students have complex needs and feel that it sometimes seems impossible to provide for these needs. Although help in accessing social, physical health, and mental health support is offered, our mandate is to provide an education that will lead to students obtaining their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). Robinson and Aronika (2016) state, “one of the reasons that so many students struggle in school is that they are not treated as the individuals they are” (p. 208). Based on these assumptions and on our work with Dr. Wayne Hammond and the Resiliency Initiative, we have established that all students have the potential and ability to succeed in a school environment that is nurturing, that offers interesting, challenging opportunities to learn and that builds on students’ strengths. The challenge lies in establishing and maintaining this environment and culture.

On any given day, our school’s attendance records reveal that an average of 30 out of 70 students registered, show up at school. Tuesdays have the highest attendance, and Thursdays and Fridays the lowest — possibly due to youth court day and the lead up to the weekend. Given that a high school course in Ontario consists of 110 hours, (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018) it becomes difficult for frequently absent students to accumulate credits and obtain their OSSD. Additionally, it is difficult for students who attend school sporadically to learn by building on previous knowledge and to become engaged in furthering their education. Improving attendance has been at the heart of our school improvement plan for the last two years. We have put in place strategies including: (a) free breakfast and lunch program; (b) extended hours; (c) modified schedules; (d) incentive programs; (e) free daycare; and (f) participation in dual credit programs. These have not produced the anticipated results. Evans, Thornton, and Usinger (2012) note that “many education leaders lack an understanding of the underlying theoretical structures associated with successful change” (p. 155). This has certainly been the case at École Plein
Soleil. In the past, change initiatives that were not grounded in a theoretical framework have not had a long-term impact.

**Leadership Approaches and Practices**

In such a context, school level leadership and structure, rather than board level, have the greatest impact on teaching and learning. Adaptive leadership, as defined by Northouse (2016) best describes École Plein Soleil’s leadership because “consistent with complexity theory, adaptive leadership is about leader behaviors that encourage learning, creativity and adaptation by followers in complex situations” (p. 292). Discovering Helgesen’s (2015) *Web of Inclusion* marked a turning point in my evolution as a leader.

*Figure 1. My understanding of a Web of Inclusion as defined by Helgesen (2015) Leading from the middle.*

Her idea of leading from the center represents a win-win situation. It allows for direct communication and it puts an emphasis on relationships while capitalizing on the female ability to scan and assess situations through radar vision, rather than the more specific laser vision associated with the male way of assessing a situation (Helgesen, 2015). She also believes that what you notice becomes what you value which evolves into a vision based on the story you tell yourself. Similarly, Bolman and Deal (2013) state, “understanding the complexity and variety of design possibilities can help create formal prototypes that work for, rather than against, both people and collective purposes” (p. 67). The *Web of Inclusion* has given me a leadership
framework that stresses accountability by clearly defining everyone’s responsibilities. Strategic clarity is the key to putting in place new initiatives and building capacity.

**Leadership Position and Lens Statement**

CSDVDL is people focussed. It has a holistic approach to education. This is evident in both the information made available on the board’s website and through all the activities promoted by the board such as mindfulness classes, talent development activities, board wide mini WE Day, and the availability of a health and wellness platform for all its employees. Developing resiliency, offering competency-based programs, building relationships with the community are crucial components of its mandate. Diversity, collaboration, inclusion, and growth are key words in the CSDVDL’s mission, vision, and value statement. It adheres to a liberal philosophy of education and encourages individual freedom of thought and expression. This one sentence translated from the web site sums it up, “Each school is a welcoming and safe environment that values self-improvement, resiliency and autonomy” (CSDVDL, 2019).

This mindset gives the principal of an alternative high school leeway when implementing board wide strategies. The school can offer a more personalized, differentiated approach for the students attending École Plein Soleil. Provincial policy, program memorandum, and accountability factors as prescribed by a neoliberal, results-focussed government where “the focus on state standards and accountability systems is driving local and policies in ways that are unprecedented” (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 11) have to be respected by l’École Plein Soleil. As different as the alternative school tries to be, it must still operate within the parameters of a day school program. Funding is affected if students do not attend school on a regular basis or if they do not have a full-time schedule. Staff must administer provincial tests and if students do not perform well it impacts the board’s results. Despite this,
having more autonomy gives the principal of the alternative high school the agency to adapt to the needs of the students whether it means opting out of some initiatives, giving staff more creative license, or putting forward new projects. An example is the yearly school improvement plan. While other schools have to generate specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time based goals (S.M.A.R.T.) with specific targets, the alternative high school focuses on defining a theory of action as described in the tool elaborated by the Center of Educational Leadership (University of Washington, 2014).

Having this autonomy comes with responsibilities. The school is accountable for students’ success; however, success is defined differently. School functioning is a strong measure of success and is evaluated by “factors related to school success [that] include active school engagement represented by good school attendance, completion of academic work, and participation in school events and activities” (Wisner, 2014, p. 627). Although École Plein Soleil is not compared to other schools, and obligated to reach specific benchmarks, the school has moral obligation to empower students through their social, mental, and academic struggles. It is tempting to find excuses and blame other organizations for not providing optimal conditions for success for these students however, several studies mention many factors for success that are directly related to what goes on in the school (DeWit, Karioja, & Rye, 2010; Klem & Connell, 2004; Libbey, 2004). Libbey (2004) identifies nine constructs related to school engagement: (a) academic engagement; (b) belonging; (c) discipline/fairness; (d) extracurricular activities; (e) liking school; (f) student voice; (g) peer relations; (h) safety; and (i) teacher support. In this research, teacher support is a recurring theme, and students’ relationships with the school are described in terms of relationships with teachers. None of these factors focus on environment,
poverty, or family involvement, leaving no room for the excuses that educators sometimes use when they cannot reach students (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

As principal of this school, finding my leadership approach meant reassessing my core values as an educator. I concluded that having integrity and being able to build trustworthy authentic relationships is key. Sinek, states that respect should be at the centre of all interventions as treating others with dignity, compassion and empathy is essential to building a successful team (Microsoft Research, 2016). I feel that having the willingness to make change happen gives stakeholders a sense of hope. There is no room for status quo and this sense of urgency drives me. Furthermore, as described by Fullan (2014) the willingness to be a lead learner is crucial in planning successful change that will help students learn and grow. Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) express my situation best, “there is still much to be learned about how leaders can successfully meet the educational needs of diverse student populations” (p. 11). The critical approach to education best reflects my belief that the only way to bring change to our society is by empowering individuals. Sinha (2016) examines the role of teachers as change leaders. According to him, different sociopolitical factors influence teaching and learning processes. Given that context, teachers have to become agents of social changes and teaching has to be transformed into a political act, “the teacher’s role should be seen to nurture diversity and not propagate a dominant identity” (Sinha, 2016, p. 305). Redefining the teacher’s role is likely the first step in making social justice and democracy inherent to our approaches. To bring equity in the world, it is essential to address centuries of marginalization experienced by specific groups such as the aboriginal community, the LGBTQ+ community, and women’s groups, to name a few. Students attending an alternative high school are often at the receiving end of these inequalities. The majority of students at École Plein Soleil
live below the poverty line; 15% self-identify as being First Nation, Metis or Inuit, 5% are part of a visible minority, 17% are openly part of the LGBTQ+ community, and three students are going through the gender-confirmation processes (École Plein Soleil, 2017). Discovering and understanding the key tenets of the critical approach gives a better understanding of the problem. Schools are part of social institutions and as such embrace societal values. Furthermore, they are government-funded. Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, and Martino (2017) have examined the impact of neoliberalism on defining equity in the Ontario public school system. They found that although the Ontario Ministry of Education has articulated two equity policies, Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards (1993), and Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009), the education system still perpetuates inequalities. One of the main reasons identified is the validation of these policies through high-stakes testing thus disregarding other factors such as distribution, opportunity and access.

Educators are a product of these institutions and as such, are not always conscious of these injustices. Their role as educators and as advocates for social justice is complex, one being just as important as the other (Cochran-Smith, Gleeson, & Mitchell, 2010). As a leader, it becomes my responsibility to re-examine the system for inequity or injustices with the staff to create an awareness of the importance of both roles. In this alternative high school setting, staff is divided in two factions. Half have a more conservative view of education. They believe in a curriculum based on traditions feeling that they are preparing students for the types of jobs available to them, hierarchy being one of the principles of this ideology (Gutek, 1997). The other half has a much more holistic approach, considering not just students’ academics but also developing pride in their identities as francophone individuals and building their sense of self-worth. This creates conflicts on different levels: lack of cohesion amongst team members, lack
of vision, lack of staff engagement. As a leader, it is easier for me to identify with the second group. I believe education is about developing free thinkers who will become lifelong learners who are capable of making changes happen in the world, through endeavors related to their interests and talents (Resiliency Initiatives, n.d.). Two lenses filter my vision of what education should be. My liberal understanding allows me to see the importance of having a student-centered pedagogy where the individual is at the center of the learning process. By adopting a critical approach, I see the importance of raising awareness about social issues (Hatch & Meller, 2009). Nganga and Kambutu (2009) state that “educators are required ethically to implement critical pedagogy because public schools are still charged with the responsibility of preparing productive and civic-minded citizens” (p. 192). Through a combination of formal instruction and informal discussions, the school has the important task of developing students who will be informed, responsible, and engaged citizens (Nganga & Kambutu, 2009). The respect of human rights and the recognition of the worth of individual dignity is at the core of democracy and I believe that maintaining these values is part of the school’s responsibilities.

In order to mitigate these differences of opinion in our staff, we have spent a year elaborating a common vision statement as well as revisiting our goals and values. This process opened interesting discussions and helped us understand each other’s point of view and core values. It has helped form cohesion among staff members setting the stage for making decisions as a group rather than top down. Allowing followers to develop their creativity fosters innovation at the organizational level (Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, & Senge, 2007). In that optic, I feel that nobody adheres to one strict style of leadership, and circumstances greatly affect practices. My personal philosophy of leadership and my dominant leadership style and practices have become more multidimensional. Leithwood et al. (2004) confirmed my belief that “we need to be
developing leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to choose from that repertoire as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery on one ‘ideal’ set of practices” (p. 10). I have developed my own toolkit of practices that help me navigate through the challenges of leadership. Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, and Senge (2007) elaborate four practices inherent to a strong leadership approach, rather than a specific type of leadership: (a) sensemaking; (b) relating; (c) visioning; and (d) inventing. These four components are key to fostering a culture of growth and innovation.

**Sensemaking**

It is important for leaders to understand the context they work in by talking to stakeholders and by gathering data (Ancona et al., 2007). Authentic leadership (Northouse, 2016), particularly Helgesen’s (1995) *Web of Inclusion* fits within this process. This type of leadership clearly defines responsibilities, stresses accountability, allows direct communication, and emphasizes relationships (Helgesen, 1995). Communication is key as it allows the leader to involve others in sensemaking as a continuous process (Ancona et al., 2007).

**Relating**

According to Ancona et al., (2007) the three key ways to build trusting relationships is through “inquiring, advocating, and connecting” (p. 96). Building a strong team is critical in a work environment that can be volatile because of the student’s life experiences. Not only is it important to build a relationship with staff, it is also crucial to connect with students. Ryan and Patrick (2001) found a concordance between teacher support, promoting interaction, mutual respect and setting goals. Their research emphasizes the importance of providing a positive context so that adolescents can strive. Feeling that their teachers care, has an impact on students’ confidence, behavior, and self-regulated learning. Klem and Connell (2004) add that supportive
interpersonal relationships affect academic attitudes and value, satisfaction in school, and engagement.

**Visioning**

Creating a vision, building trust, and motivating on an intellectual and inspirational level empowers followers (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Kouzes & Posner 2016; Northouse, 2016). Visioning can produce “the focus and energy needed to make change happen” (Ancona et al., 2007, p. 97). The fact that a transformational leader leads by example is important to the change models chosen for this OIP. Since the transformational approach to leadership “describes how leaders can initiate, develop and carry out significant changes in organization” (Northhouse, 2016, p. 175), it is consistent with the sense of urgency inherent in critical pedagogy (Groenke & Hatch, 2009). Researchers have also linked transformational leadership to creativity (Gusmusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Northouse, 2016; Zhou & Pan, 2015).

**Inventing**

Ancona et al., (2007) believe inventing is what transforms a vision into a reality. This is done by looking for a better way to get things done. Harris (2009) defines creativity as being essential to high performance. Passion is the essence of creativity, and is the motor that pushes people to innovate, make mistakes, and think differently. It is a mindset. Strong communities of practice, instilled with a high level of trust, will foster these creative leaders. Collaboration, interdependence, openness to new ideas are key to creative leadership (Harris, 2009). Furthermore, creativity is the tool that helps teachers keep students engaged. Creative leadership is more than “problem-solving,” it is also “problem-finding” (Stoll & Temperley, 2009). In the case of this OIP creativity will help foster an innovative way of engaging students.
Problem of Practice

The problem of practice examined in this OIP is the urgency of finding a solution to at-promise students’ disengagement in a French alternative high school in Ontario, as reflected by a high rate of absenteeism and low credit completion. It is important to find a solution to this problem by creating an environment where students’ academic and emotional needs are met, subsequently making them want to be in school. At present, a high rate of absenteeism is a problem at École Plein Soleil. It is an observable behavior similar to lack of participation or misbehaving in school. Absenteeism is both a symptom and a predictor of disengagement and as such, should be taken seriously. Research shows high costs of disengagement on a personal and societal level (Henry, 2007; Libbey, 2004; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). It is reasonable to say that school engagement is at the heart of school completion and school success. Henry (2007) testifies to the urgency of finding solutions to students’ absenteeism and lack of engagement by linking truancy to delinquent behavior. “Weak school bonds free adolescents from adhering to conventional norms that discourage problematic behavior” (Henry, 2007, p. 34) thus emphasizing the need to design interventions that will improve school engagement.

Defining key elements of this problem of practice helps understand the gaps between current practices and the desirable state by seeing the interrelatedness of those elements. When engagement and motivation are not considered interchangeable, engagement is believed to be a visible manifestation of motivation, linking the two terms. Ryan and Patrick (2001) regard motivation in term of academic and social abilities while engagement is perceived as self-regulated learning. Klem and Connell (2004) stress the importance of students experiencing caring and supportive relationships in school. They define two forms of engagement: ongoing engagement (e.g., behavioral, cognitive and emotional components) and reaction to challenge
(e.g., coping strategies when facing problems). Many conceive engagement as having three components: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Lovelace, Reschly, & Appleton, 2017; Roorda, Kooman, Split, & Oort, 2011). Skinner and Pitzer (2012) add a fourth component, psychological, because of the underlying energy and purpose of engagement. They define engagement as “both a malleable state that can be shaped by schools and a robust predictor of students’ learning, grades, achievement test scores, retention, and graduation” (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012, p. 21). There are three benefits to engagement, namely, protection from at-risk behaviors, protection from absenteeism, and condition for learning. Skinner and Pitzer (2012) go even further by establishing a relationship between students’ engagement and teachers’ engagement. When teachers perceive students’ disengagement as a personal flaw or as a bad reaction to their teaching, they can become more withdrawn and less motivated.

There are no set criteria to define disengaged students. Ryan and Patrick (2001) talk of a sense of not belonging in school. In opposition, the resilient student is one that perceives mistakes as part of the learning process and is a self-regulated learner who performs well academically (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). According to DeWit, Karioja, and Rye (2010) and Klem and Connell (2004), students become less engaged as they get older. This could be explained by the fact that not completing high school is the “culmination of a long process of disengagement from school” (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 77) influenced by many complex factors. Among these factors, poor school performance, absenteeism, teacher quality, and pertinence of academic experiences are closely linked to this problem of practice.

Finally, it is important to define teacher support. Characteristics such as caring, friendly, understanding, dedicated, and dependable are used to describe a supportive teacher. Such teachers promote interactions, mutual respect, and performance goals, “thus, teacher support
refers to the extent to which students believe teachers value and establish personal relationships with them” (Ryan & Patrick, 2001, p. 440). Libbey (2004) concludes that teacher support is the most common theme when looking at school engagement as, “young people who feel connected to school, that they belong, and that teachers are supportive and treat them fairly, do better” (p. 281). In this light, disengaged students are truly students at-promise. Interestingly, Roorda, Kooman, Spilt, and Oort (2011) suggest that empathy, openness, and warmth are the three variables most strongly associated with student outcomes. Teacher involvement becomes “the most important predictor of engagement” (Roorda, Kooman, Split, & Oort, 2011, p. 496) but unfortunately, “relationship with teachers tend to become less positive as students grow older” (Roorda et al., 2011, p. 516).

The connection established between disengagement, school motivation and teacher support brings to the conclusion that caring relationships and a collaborative learning culture is instrumental to student growth. It is essential that teachers develop positive connections with students because this has a positive impact on attendance and engagement. Programming should ensure staff and students have opportunities to connect. Collaborative learning offers a glimmer of hope for creating this safe environment where students strive. School must become a protective factor for at-risk youth to help counteract the effect of mental health issues, unstable lifestyles and substance abuse. By working together leaders, teachers, and support staff can create a rich, caring, creative, and stimulating environment to foster learning.

**Framing the Problem of Practice**

**Historical Overview**

Alternative schools are not a product of our generation. Publicly funded alternative high schools have been around for over a hundred years in North America (Bascia & Maton, 2016).
In this particular board, the alternative high school has been in operation since 2003. Its mandate has slowly changed as the profile of students has evolved. Initially it was a school for single mothers and students with behavior problems. In the last five years, there has been a shift in student population. A high percentage of youth suffer from anxiety, drug addictions or are completely disengaged and forced to be in school (École Plein Soleil, 2017). This coincides with Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer, and Joly’s (2006) findings that more and more students attending an alternative high school are either disinterested in school, have antisocial behaviors, or suffer from mental health issues. These authors concluded that “it has become very important for educational professionals to better understand why so many youths fail to complete their high school studies as the consequences of school dropout are very significant” (Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer, & Joly, 2006, p. 364). The following PESTE factor analysis helps identify the macro-environmental factors that have an impact on this PoP.

**PESTE Factor Analysis**

**Political perspective.** The Government of Ontario made providing a safe learning environment for students a priority with Bill 13, The Safe Schools Act (2012). Different documents support this law. *Supporting Minds: An educator’s guide to promoting students’ health and well-being* “provides educators with the information they need to support students with mental health and addiction problems through early recognition and effective classroom strategies” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 4). This supports the idea that teachers as front line workers have an important role to play in helping students. Furthermore, *Foundations for a Healthy School* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) recognizes four interconnected components to a healthy school environment: (a) curriculum, teaching and learning; (b) school and classroom leadership; (c) student engagement and social and physical environment; and
(d) home school and community partnerships. This makes schools accountable for student engagement.

**Economic perspective.** School board funding in Ontario is on a per-pupil basis. This is not different for alternative high schools. In order to receive full funding for students they need to have a full time schedule, which means at least three courses per semester. Students missing more than fifteen consecutive days of school must be referred to the attendance officer. If the attendance officer cannot reach the student, the school has to take him or her off the official register, thus losing funding for that student (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). This puts pressure on schools to make sure students are attending school on a regular basis.

**Social perspective.** Students who do not obtain their high school diploma are at higher risks of unemployment, welfare, and poverty (Campbell, 2015). Furthermore, Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) and Weerman (2010), establish a correlation between dropping out of school and delinquent behaviors. This is costly for the individual and for society.

**Technological perspective.** The Consortium d’apprentissage virtuel de langue française de l’Ontario (CAVLFO) is an organization governed by the twelve French school boards of Ontario. Its mandate is to develop and deliver online courses for students across the province. These courses are also available to individual schools to use in a hybrid mode. This gives the alternative high school flexibility in offering a wide range of courses. The second generation of these courses is modular and meets students’ needs while developing core competencies.

**Environmental perspective.** The alternative high school in this PoP has a new building with state of the art facilities. It is easily accessible by public transportation. Each class is designed with well-being in mind.
Bolman and Deal (2013) propose four perspectives from which leaders should approach a problem. This adds dimension to the factors already considered through the PESTE analysis. Examining this POP through these lens gives a better understanding of the situation.

**Bolman and Deal’s (2013) Four Frame Model**

This model provides a new perspective on the problem, educes additional information and helps frame different organizational issues.

**Structural framework.** This frame allows the leader to think strategically, evaluate the present conditions, and set goals. Structure being omnipresent in the school system, most staff members expect to have a set of rules and regulations to follow. They are comfortable in that structure and “seem to prefer clarity of expectations, roles and lines of authority” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 48). Given the nature of our school and the fact that it is the only alternative high school in the system, expectations are not clearly defined. The school board knows that we must function differently, but it has not defined what “differently” should look like. This explains why teachers tend to reproduce what is done in regular high school. Teachers do not easily adapt to the more personal approach, flexible schedules, and social mandate of the alternative high school, not truly understanding that alternative means “different from the usual or conventional: such as existing or functioning outside the established cultural, social or economic system” (Alternative, n.d.). Teachers must be prepared to enter this new structure and they need to be able to adapt their strategies to the needs of our students. Therefore, creating a culture of collaborative learning would create a sense of competency allowing teachers to think outside the box and feel safe in trying new ways of teaching. Working as a team would also help teachers relate more closely to the students and gain a better understanding of their individual stories.
**Political framework.** If used morally, this framework can be a powerful tool to elaborate a plan for success where everyone’s interests are protected. Schools are political arenas. They operate in a complex system. In relation to this PoP, it is important to understand the politics at play in school to better orchestrate interventions, alleviate competing factions and push forward new, well thought-out initiatives. Putting forward a new culture of collaborative learning requires political acumen, patience and social skills. Hammond (2010) stresses the importance of finding innovative solutions to keep students in school and stresses the importance of collaboration because “embracing the same philosophy of strength-based practice and development of staff skill sets that enable effective engagement, collaboration, facilitating and mentoring of complex risk children, youth, and their families” (p. 4). Depending on their personal lens, teachers perceive new initiatives and ‘at-risk’ students in different ways, and it is important to understand their values and biases to better handle resistance and work towards a common goal – student engagement.

**Symbolic framework.** This framework highlights the importance of creating meaning and purpose with symbols. It is relevant for this PoP since it is important to create a sense of belonging for the staff and students thus improving the quality of relationships and the satisfaction associated with being in school. Values, stories and rituals construct a culture of commitment, high morale and community spirit. Once again, a carefully structured collaborative learning team would allow staff to use and grow effective teaching strategies and develop a sense of belonging. The same is true for students. One of Ryan and Patrick’s (2001) criteria for being ‘at risk’ is a sense of not belonging in school. Perceived teacher support is a common aspect of student engagement as “teacher support refers to the extent to which students believe teachers value and establish personal relationships with them” (p. 440).
**Human resource framework.** Reframing the problem through this lens gives a different snapshot of the reality. As a leader, it is the principal’s responsibility to ensure staff’s well-being at the school level. Investing in teachers’ well-being through ongoing formal and informal learning and development is a winning strategy (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This goes hand in hand with transformational leadership and adaptive leadership. Creating a culture of collaborative learning is a way of offering support, building confidence, and maintaining morale. Teamwork promotes cooperation. Collaborative learning builds capacity and results in shared values and knowledge (Northouse, 2016).

**Peter Senge’s Learning Organizations**

Senge’s (1990) framework starts from the premise that “human beings are designed for learning” (p. 7). Unfortunately, from a very young age, competition and the need to perform kills this thirst for knowledge. This model recognizes that in order to strive and survive, organizations have to be able to change and adapt by being flexible, adaptive, and productive (Fillion, Koffi, & Ekionea, 2015). This model connects with the needs of at-promise students. Their joy of learning has been extinguished by not feeling understood, having too many challenges outside the school or not having their strengths valued or celebrated. Senge’s model has five components that can be adapted to this PoP (Evans, Thorton, & Usinger, 2012; Fillion et al., 2015).

**Personal mastery.** People are the force of any organization. In this PoP, teachers and students are the force. They have to be willing to learn and grow, and to find creative solutions to problems. Through collaborative learning, and goal-setting, teachers will be able to experiment and find strategies that will help students grow.
Shared vision. Evans et al. (2012) define a common vision as the “collective caring behind the organization” (p. 164). Caring is at the core of developing positive relationships. Improving students’ engagement has to become everyone’s goal.

Mental models. Everyone has a unique way of seeing the world and perceiving reality. It is important for the organizational and personal view to align in order to bring change. Professional dialogue in a safe environment will foster professional discussions.

Team learning. Senge establishes ideal conditions for team learning that can be created through collaborative learning. Teams should examine complex problems, team members must be interdependent, and different teams must be able to work together (Evans et al. 2012).

System thinking. This component is “the ability to see situations from a holistic perspective” (Evans et al., 2012, p. 165). For this OIP, building teacher-student relationships is complex and necessitates being examined through many different perspectives.

Examining the problem through these different frames allows key elements to emerge. The consequences of students not completing high school are serious on a personal and on a societal level. Human being are designed for learning and are the force that can guide the search for a solution to this PoP. It is therefore important to create a culture of learning and collaboration where teachers feel safe to do things differently and where students feel like they belong.

Questions Emerging from the Problem of Practice

Lines of Inquiry Stemming from the Main Problem

Examining the problem of practice from different angles and dissecting many of its facets raise questions. Is an alternative high school capable of adequately addressing the problems of at-promise students? Is it the best environment for them? Second, looking at the problem
through a critical lens makes me wonder how students can be involved in finding a solution to the problem of absenteeism and disengagement. How can we put in place structures that will allow them to voice their opinion and be a part of the change? Third, is staff ready for change? What strategies should be implemented to make sure everyone works towards a common goal with a shared-vision? Since literature shows that fostering positive teacher-student relationships is linked to stronger engagement (Henry, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004), how is it possible to create an environment and a school culture that stresses positive relationships? Finally, because relationships and engagement are closely linked, does the lack of student motivation influence teachers’ engagement? Bandura (1977) states that “expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences” (p.191). Working at École Plein Soleil in a tumultuous context can be destabilizing and lead to compassion fatigue. The problems students bring to school are complex and the solutions are often beyond the school’s realm of influence. Nevertheless, creating a safe environment where students can grow and learn is very rewarding. Developing self-efficacy will allow teachers to feel that their efforts are having a positive effect. They will be able to transfer this attitude to students. A culture of collaborative learning can lead to collective efficacy (Donohoo, 2017) because teachers’ beliefs influence students’ learning. If so, can building self and collective efficacy be part of the solution?

**Challenges Emerging from the Main Problem**

Although schools are held accountable for students’ success, many factors influence their results. While investigating the effect of transformational leadership on student engagement, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) came to the conclusion that “our understanding of school effects in
general, and leadership effects in particular, is unlikely to progress much further without systematically inquiry about how schools and families co-produce the full array of outcomes for which schools are responsible” (p. 126). This describes the complexity of this problem of practice. All stakeholders’ views, goals, and needs differ. As an example, students want to feel like teachers care and listen to them while teachers are preoccupied with teaching and making sure students complete their courses.

Teachers are not necessarily prepared to address the needs of underprivileged youth or marginalized students. They are not equipped to deal with the issues these teenagers bring to school. In the case of École Plein Soleil, none have grown up disadvantaged or have faced the hardships these youths have to deal with. It is therefore important to focus on increasing teacher’s capacity and feeling of self-efficacy. Being the only alternative high school limits the opportunities for professional development through professional learning community outside the school. The fact that it is a small staff, contributes to the difficulty of learning from colleagues. Teacher training is at the heart of building their confidence to effectively interact with students. Furthermore, professional development reflects a shift in society to having a thinking workforce (Collinson et al., 2009; Van der Heijden, Van Vuuren, Koij, & de Lange, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, disengagement does not start in high school. On top of the turmoil in their lives, disengaged students have long-standing attitudes and ingrained habits when it comes to attending school (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). It is important to find strategies that will break this cycle of sporadic attendance. It is essential to do things differently to help students get pass their disillusionment with school. This means fostering a creative environment where teachers and students are not afraid to experiment and find unconventional solutions. Building trust and making school a safe place is essential.
Finally, my own critical view could be a challenge as it has political undertones that could face resistance. Not everybody is ready to teach students to think critically, question the status quo, and challenge inequities. Considering the fact that “a desired outcome can only be established in the context of a specific social group seeking to resolve a specific issue” (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010, p. 8), it is important to pinpoint the changes that need to take place.

**Leadership-Focussed Vision for Change**

Through the implementation of this OIP, I hope to find a solution to student engagement and attendance at École Plein Soleil. Research supports that building relationships with students is a key factor in improving engagement and learning (Henry 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Skinner & Pritzer, 2012). It becomes therefore urgent to build a culture of caring and to put in place strategies that will foster these relationships. This change of culture would result in better attendance, improved student success, and increased teacher efficacy (Skinner & Pritzer, 2012).

As mentioned before, transformational leadership “aims to foster capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals on the part of leaders’ colleagues” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p. 113). Its framework is closely linked to the development of creativity (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009) which is essential when looking for innovative solutions to a problem. Bennis and Nanus (1985) identify different strategies used by transformational leaders; one of them being “creative deployment of self” (Northouse, 2016, p. 173). Creative leadership is a spinoff of transformational leadership that enables leaders to “[see], [think] and [do] things differently in order to improve the life chances of all students” (Stoll & Temperley, 2009, p.66). This is consistent with Ancona et al.’s (2007) praise of the “incomplete leader”.
Priorities for Change

Priorities become clear when looking at the PoP through these leadership lenses. Focusing on establishing relationships is the first step in creating a shared vision. It is important that all staff members work together at articulating this shared vision. This can only be done in a culture of trust and by building one-on-one relationships (Connelly & Ruark, 2010; Gumusluoglu & Islev, 2009; Kouzes & Pozner, 2016; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Northouse, 2016). Collaborative learning practices can become a powerful tool for creating this shared vision. Sharratt and Planche (2016) state as their first non-negotiable for collaborative learning “shared beliefs and understandings solidify purpose and sustain motivation” (p. 204). In the case of this OIP, all stakeholders must determine what engagement looks like and how it transpires in the school setting. Formal and informal leaders inspire people emotionally and intellectually not only with words but through their actions.

Since transformational leadership involves leading by example, it is essential for the leader to put in place the necessary conditions to foster staff members’ engagement and sense of self-efficacy. Working together makes tackling difficult challenges easier. Bandura (1977) concludes “the strength of people’s convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations” (p. 193). Applying this concept to a group means building a team that feels empowered through collective efficacy, which becomes a strong tool for change. Northouse (2016) states that followers “want to emulate transformational leaders because they learn to trust them and believe in the ideas for which they stand” (p. 176). Teachers who feel like they belong and want to be part of a collective mission will take time to connect with students and try to understand their individual situations.
Finally, the transformational leader will take time to create a school culture of acceptance and respect. As a social architect, the leader will shape and transform the school’s values (Northouse, 2016). This is very important in the context of this OIP where staff have to learn to work collaboratively to develop an environment permeated with empathy, compassion, and honesty. The school team will demonstrate acceptance of students’ individual differences and assign work based on their strengths. Building this student centered approach is at the heart of making school a safe place where students will want to be.

Drivers for Change

The first change driver is the urgency to do things differently. The school board has made major financial and human investments in this school. It is located in a newly renovated building with state-of-the-art facilities: a restaurant grade kitchen to offer cooking class, a modern science lab, a fully equipped workshop, a makerspace. Partnerships have been facilitated with different organizations that offer additional resources for the school: a registered nurse with addictions training visits weekly, a technical team supports the development of the makerspace program, youth parole officers and social workers meet their clients at school to make sure they attend. Fullan (2014) states “big changes can’t be initiated without some terrible sense of urgency, but once we leave the starting blocks, the need is to focus our efforts” (p. 21). The stage is set, actors are required to attend; it is time to find winning strategies to improve attendance and engagement. Part of this sense of urgency comes from the fact that the school has been overstaffed for the past three years. As the new conservative government has an agenda for cutting back, teachers are aware that the school could face cutbacks.

The second change driver is the work accomplished in the last three years to prepare the staff for change. Workshops, readings, and training sessions have been carefully chosen to plant
the seed that it is not only possible but also desirable to do things differently. Through education, the school team has become aware of the necessity to build a student-centered approach. New teachers have readily adopted this vision and are totally committed to creating a learning environment that develops competencies such as communication, creativity, and critical thinking. They engage with students and become coaches. Having a small group’s buy-in is a change driver. Workshops also helped align people to a common vision. Kotter (2000) emphasizes the importance of alignment as it empowers people by communicating a clear sense of direction through a common target. This creates a situation where “the probability is less that one person’s initiative will be stalled when it comes into conflict with someone else’s” (Kotter, 2000, p. 48).

This learning has been marked by the collaboration with a leading researcher in the field of resiliency. Through this partnership, we have established that all students have the potential and ability to succeed in a school environment that is nurturing and offers challenging and interesting opportunities to learn. Ongoing collaboration has resulted in creating a shared vision and realizing the importance of building relationships. Staff perception has been transformed and instead of looking for what is missing in students, they started looking at their strengths; stubborn became resilient, challenging became critical and social change oriented, unable to follow directives became creative. This created the mindset to offer a different learning environment and the desire to get to know our students better. This initiative also gave us a tool to measure students’ strengths and areas that need improvement in their resiliency profile.

The third change driver has been realizing the reality of what may happen if we do not succeed. The new building for the school has the advantage of being situated close to public
transportation and social service agencies. It has the disadvantage of being in an inner city location. The alleyway beside the school is a meeting place for drug users and a chosen spot for drug consumption. It is littered with needles and garbage. It smells of urine and vomit. You can feel the misery and the pain. Staff members who had never been exposed to addictions are confronted with daily involvement such as asking people to leave the school property, trying to help them by buying them coffee, calling social services to come and intervene when there are precarious situations. This has been a reality check for many. As a team, we have come to the realization that school might be the only hope for some of our students to avoid such fate.

**Organizational Change Readiness**

Shah, Irani, and Sharif (2017) state the importance of assessing people’s attitude and behavior towards change before trying to implement anything new. Some of the terms associated with readiness are “appropriateness,” “commitment,” “personal valance,” “self-efficacy,” and “trust” (Shah, Irani, & Sharif, 2017, p. 367). At the opposite end of the spectrum is resistance, corresponding to terms like “ineffective,” “insufficient planning,” “non-satisfaction,” and “uncertainty” (Shah et al., 2017, p. 367). This demonstrates the importance of evaluating organizational change readiness as it has a very strong impact on change implementation success. Shea, Jacobs, Esserman, Bruce, and Weiner (2014) look at change readiness as a multilevel construct that can be analyzed at the individual or at the supra-individual level. This OIP requires measuring change readiness at both levels. Since the alternative high school has a small staff and research has shown that teachers have the greatest impact on student success (Roorda et al., 2011; Skinner & Pritzer, 2012) it becomes important to assess change readiness at the individual level. Collaborative learning has been proven to have a major impact on collective efficacy, (DeWitt, 2018; Donohoo, 2017) thus emphasizing the need
to assess collective readiness. This is done by phrasing items in terms of group-reference (Shea, Jacobs, Esserman, Bruce, & Werner, 2014). The tools used to measure change readiness have items formulated to measure both type of readiness to get the best picture possible.

**Readiness for Change Questionnaire**

In the context of this OIP, Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols’ (2016) *Readiness for Change Questionnaire* gives a better understanding of the present state of the organization and heightens awareness of the need for change. This questionnaire evaluates six dimensions of readiness that paint a clearer picture of the dynamics at play in the school. Here is a brief analysis of the alternative high school.

- **Previous change experience.** The mood in the school is generally upbeat. Staff interact with each other and with students in a positive manner. In the last five years, change initiatives have had positive outcomes but that was not the case previously. Everyone remembers working long hours to change courses structure and delivery without having the proper tools and the time to do it. This left everyone frustrated and this example resurfaces every time change is mentioned.

- **Executive support.** The school board administration supports the change and is willing to invest human and financial resources. An action plan is in the development stage in order to have a comprehensive view of what we want to accomplish. We have realized that implementing change through trial and error has not worked for us. Furthermore, the whole school team is involved in developing this plan to keep everyone motivated.

- **Credible leadership and change champions.** As formal leader of the school, I see the necessity of changing the way things are done. Consequently, I have been able to recruit
informal leaders who share my beliefs and who are ready to champion the need for change. These informal leaders have credibility within the staff and are a positive influence.

**Openness to change.** The alternative high school scores the lowest on this dimension of change readiness. There are cliques in the school. One group in particular has a negative attitude towards change. The biggest problem is that this group does not voice its opinion openly; it pretends to agree with new initiatives in group settings while showing little engagement when it comes time to translate ideas into action. It is hard to have an honest conversation, to voice concerns or support, and to deal with conflict constructively. Fortunately, this represents a minority and most are ready to put the energy necessary to undertake change. Creating a space where everyone can voice their opinion whether or not it is favorable to change is a priority in order to build a culture of trust.

**Rewards for change.** Cawsey et al. (2016) describe rewards as being intrinsic as well as extrinsic. In this case, little thought has been given to an extrinsic reward system, because a school principal does not have the latitude to give tangible rewards such as pay raises and bonuses to employees. The only extrinsic reward is maintaining the current staffing since a decrease in attendance could mean cutbacks. Intrinsic motivation is fostered when people are recognized for bringing forward innovative ideas and are given the support needed to further their projects whether it is by attending workshops, being given time to further their project, or visiting an organization that is implementing a similar project.

**Measures for change and accountability.** Students’ attendance records, students’ retention, and credit completion represent initial measures of reengagement. *The Resiliency Questionnaire* (Onboard Initiatives, 2015) which measures students’ feelings of belonging and
receiving support from school, provides the most valuable data as it probes into students’ view of school as a protective factor.

**School Effectiveness Framework**

Elaborated by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013a), the *School Effectiveness Framework* assists schools in establishing priorities and elaborating school improvement plan. This tool is used at the beginning of each school year. It is designed to be used as a team thus giving the groups’ view of the situation rather than each individual’s perception. This framework evaluates six components of school effectiveness. Identifying areas that need improvement is a first step towards change readiness. Four of these components are relevant to student engagement.

**School and classroom leadership.** This component stresses the importance of establishing a professional learning culture. Decision-making is based on practices that have been established collaboratively. In the case of the alternative high school this translates to being able to work together to establish winning strategies that will help create a learning environment where students thrive. Acknowledging that there is work to be done in this regard means being ready to do things differently.

**Student engagement.** Taking a closer look at this component helped the school team realize this should be the first priority in the school improvement plan. Embracing this challenge has been the most important proof of school team readiness for change. The indicator that stood out the most was “positive peer, teacher, school and community relationships are evident and fostered through intentional strategies and activities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 24). The question remains, what are those intentional strategies and activities?
Curriculum, teaching and learning. This component was perceived as going hand in hand with school engagement. Relevant schoolwork, critical thinking opportunities, and creative activities are all tools that will allow students and teachers to learn together, engage in positive communication, and develop a positive relationship.

Home, school, and community partnerships. The resiliency questionnaire results indicate that many of our students lack family support and community connections. At-promise students need positive family and community relationships to get support throughout their studies. Building partnerships with home and community will enhance learning opportunities and well-being in students. Staff recognized this fact and made learning outside the school walls a priority hoping this would help students build stronger relationships and get more community support.

Figure 2. Determinants and outcomes of organizational readiness for change. Adapted from Shea, Jacobs, Esserman, Bruce, and Werner (2014).

Analyzing the organization readiness for change with the help of these two tools has helped create a sense of urgency. As illustrated in Figure 2, organizational readiness for change brings change commitment and change efficacy. This readiness to embrace change produces more change-related effort. This becomes the motor for planning and developing change.
Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 has examined the history and different perspectives of school reengagement for at-promise students. In an alternative high school, students’ disengagement, as reflected by a high rate of absenteeism, is a problem. Although the school board promotes a culture of caring and socially conscious equitable practices, it still has to adhere to the ministry’s policies, which are more a reflection of conservative values. Following the analysis of various factors, through the use of the PESTE Factor Analysis, Bolman and Deal’s (2013) Four Frame Model and Peter Senge’s (1990) Learning Organization Framework, possible solutions emerge. Establishing collaborative learning practices will help build the organization capacity. It is important to create a environment where teachers and students can build positive relationships. The urgency to do things differently, the initiatives already started and the stark reality of what will happen if students do not obtain their high school diploma are the main change drivers. A transformational approach to leadership means building a shared vision for change that is rooted in a readiness for change. It is essential to find creative solutions that will help students evolve from a current state of disengagement to the desired state of resiliency and school success. Chapter 2 will elaborate on planning and developing possible solutions.
CHAPTER 2 – Planning and Development

This chapter outlines a leadership approach to change and deepens the research done in Chapter 1. A framework for leading the change process is proposed. Nadler and Tushman’s (1999) Congruence Model and Quinn’s (1988) Competing Values Model are used to do a critical organizational analysis. This leads to the elaboration of possible solutions to address the PoP. These solutions are compared and the best one is chosen. Finally, the question of leadership ethics is examined and the role of an ethical leader is defined.

Leadership Approaches to Change

Leadership is a multidimensional, multi-layered concept that gets more evasive as I try to pinpoint it. Higgs and Rowland (2005) define leadership in terms of “shaping behaviour,” “framing change,” and “creating capacity” (p. 135). Examining leadership through these three factors gives an understanding of leadership that is applicable to this OIP. Drawing mainly on the work of Helgesen (1995) and Fullan (2014), I will elaborate on a leadership approach to change by clearly defining the leader’s and the stakeholders’ role and responsibilities. Since this is a complex problem, it is necessary to have a dynamic approach that will allow a common comprehension of the problem and the implementation of the desired change.

Shaping Behaviour

This aspect of leadership is defined as what leaders say or do: how they think about change, how they motivate others to follow (Higgs & Rowland, 2005). Helgesen’s Web of Inclusion is a dynamic model of leadership. It encourages communication, emphasizes the need for consensus while keeping a strong focus on a mission (Helgesen & Strasser, 2007). An organization is constructed as a web connected at a vast array of points. It facilitates communication at all levels by eliminating intermediaries. According to these authors, there are
four types of power: (a) the power of expertise; (b) the power of connections; (c) the power of personal authority; and (d) the power of position. Traditionally, leaders shape behaviours within the organization by using the power of position. Helgesen (1995) believes that it is important to let other types of power emerge. The power of connections is at the heart of this approach. By facilitating direct communication and by dissolving hierarchical barriers the leader is able to foster an environment where informal leaders can grow and bring new, original ideas to the table. It builds a sense of ownership. Recognition comes from people’s ideas and their originality rather than from their position. When dealing in complexity, encouraging creative solutions is important. Helgesen and Strasser (2007) also state that the Web of Inclusion allows a leader to lead successfully through “volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity” (para. 20). In an alternative high school, students bring the challenges of their personal lives to school. It is hard to predict how ready they are to engage in learning activities. Listening to their stories results in compassion fatigue and often fosters a feeling of helplessness in staff (Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, & Kincaid, 2009). This approach to leadership creates a support system for staff. The periphery of the web being permeable, it becomes possible to look beyond the school’s walls to create partnerships with the community and find solutions. The Web of Inclusion slowly allows the leader to build a sense of shared responsibility for student’s success.

Fullan (2014) underlines the importance for a leader to be part of a system. This is a very important element of my leadership approach to change. Defined as “to engage outside in order to increase learning within [the] school” (Fullan, 2014, p. 99), it emphasizes once again the need to remove the boundaries between the school and the outside world. Breaking the isolation teachers might feel when working in a school this unique is key to benefiting from learning about new innovative practices that can be adapted to help at-promise students.
Framing Change

Higgs and Rowland (2005) describe this factor in terms of determining where to start the change, elaborating a plan of action, and communicating that plan to the constituents effectively. Helgesen’s *Web of Inclusion* focusses on a strong mission. Its aim is to lead people with different values through consensus. In order to have people’s buy-in when planning a change, I feel it is important that everyone be consulted and involved from the starting point. Unity of effort shapes the adopted change strategies. This “structured permissiveness” (Helgesen, 1995, p. 6) allows people to discuss and elicit creative ideas. It becomes important as a leader to listen, ask the right questions and use the power of connections to plan the change. Consulting all stakeholders and considering everyone’s opinion aligns with the tenets of a social and critical view of the world. It is the first step in making the school a better and a fairer place to be.

According to Fullan (2014) “becoming a change agent” is one of the three keys to maximizing impact as a principal. A change leader must be able to move people forward under any circumstances. He identifies the following change drivers: (a) working collaboratively; (b) building capacity; (c) learning continuously; and (d) being part of a system. Any change effort should start with a commonly elaborated plan since “a crisis without a strategy is a recipe for random action and growing frustration” (Fullan, 2014, p. 23). This has been the case for this PoP. We have tried different strategies to reengage students but unfortunately, without a clear plan, our efforts have not been successful. Elaborating a clear OIP will help us concert our efforts and have a greater impact. It is important to focus on teamwork by building trust and partnerships. This in turn allows the leader to gain perspective and comprehend the processes that will bring change. Fullan refers to Kirtman’s (2013) seven leadership competencies.
Kirtman’s writing emphasizes the need for these competencies to be part of a vision for leadership through change. Three of Kirtman’s (2013) set of skills are particularly relevant to framing change: (a) “challenge the status quo” (p. 6); (b) “create a commonly owned plan for success” (p. 6); and (c) “have a high sense of urgency for change” (p. 7). By being more focussed on goals than rules, it is possible to bring change. Having a clear simple plan will help push change forward. This plan has to be flexible and adjusted throughout the change process. Stakeholders have to understand the plan and be willing and able to follow through. Finally, Kirtman (2013) states, “the top-down leaders that are hired to drive change do not create sustainable change and improvements” (p. 7) thus the importance of leading from the middle and building capacity to obtain continuous results.

Creating capacity

“Creating individual and organizational capabilities” (Higgs & Rowland, 2005, p. 135) is the foundation for effective change leadership. By working collaboratively, staff will develop strategies to make students’ school experience positive. According to Helgesen (1995), acquiring knowledge brings “sustainable long term development” (p. 167). It should be a continual process as change is continuous. The connections fostered by the Web of Inclusion facilitate capacity building. It becomes a fluid process where training is integrated to the work of everyday, mentoring supports learning, and redefining power enables the flow of new, innovative ideas (Helgesen, 1995).

Fullan (2014) believes the first role of a principal is leading learning, thus helping the group develop. Leading learning means engaging staff through a process of learning; it also entails learning alongside them “mobilizing the group to work in specific, intense, sustained ways on learning for all students” (Fullan, 2014, p. 67). Through learning together, the
organization’s efficacy level increases. Interactions and relationships pave the way to working collaboratively, to teachers learning from each other, and to developing their talents. Furthermore, by identifying specific goals, learning can focus on knowledge about strategies to create relationships with students and help reengage them. Staff at École Plein Soleil, can become experts at building resiliency and capacity in students because continuous learning and assessing is part of a culture of improvement.

Given Helgesen’s (1995) and Fullan’s (2014) research, an approach for leading change transpires. Leading change means developing a collaborative learning organization that works with a co-constructed plan. The plan for change is flexible and is everyone’s responsibility. Leading from the middle allows the leader to give people latitude in developing their competencies. Through effective communication, the leader becomes an integral part of collaboration and learning.

**Framework for Leading the Change Process**

In this section, I will address the *how-to* change by applying and comparing pertinent change theory models. Cawsey et al, (2016) *Change Path Model* (see Appendix A) is a viable framework for this OIP because it traces a clear roadmap to navigate through change. It will be the main framework used, however I will add elements from Mento, Jones, and Dirndorfer’s (2002) *Framework for Change* (see Appendix B), and Cochran-Smith’s (2010) *Theory of Teacher Education for Social Justice* (see Appendix C) to make it more relevant to this specific problem. The combination of these three models is an excellent fit for the need of collaboration and the social justice stance emanating from this PoP. The *Change Path Model* (Cawsey et al., 2016) is a four-step process applied to an organization in need of change. The change stages are: (a) awakening; (b) mobilization; (c) acceleration; and (d) institutionalization (Cawsey et al.,


The implementation of each of the Change Path Model stages will be elaborated in light of the importance of creating a rich, caring, creative, and stimulating environment to foster learning and reengage students. It is the main change model used while elements of other theories are grafted on. Mento et al.’s (2002) model based on storytelling, mind mapping and lesson learned, allows everyone to better understand the steps leading to the anticipated change. Cochran-Smith’s (2010) Theory of Teacher Education for Social Justice grounds the model and helps maintain a critical lens throughout the change process. Change is rooted in social justice and not centered on increasing profit making this model more appropriate to the change required in this OIP.

**Awakening**

The first step consists in identifying and confirming the need for change. It is important to understand what is going on in the organization and to have a grasp of the outside influences, as “the most powerful drivers for change tend to originate outside the organization” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 53). Examining relevant data creates a sense of urgency and a need for change. It helps get different stakeholders’ buy-in. On a political, school board level, student success as measured by provincial testing results, credit completion, and graduation rates, is closely examined. The government of Ontario has set an 85% graduation rate target. School boards are held accountable for reaching this target. Three times every school year, the school has to collect data on the number of students identified as being at risk of not graduating and the interventions or measures implemented to counter these risks and improve student outcomes. The school board, in collaboration with the school, is also responsible for developing a plan describing how re-engaged students are monitored and mentored, what new and innovative practices have had a positive impact during the year, and the difficulties associated with the re-
engagement process. Involving staff in this data collection and planning contributes to heightening their awareness of the need for change. It validates the urgency to break status quo. At the organizational level, relevant data includes attendance rates and the results from the resiliency questionnaire. This gives a more personal perspective on the problem as numbers become faces. Soft data and the stories students tell cannot be neglected. They are invaluable sources of information that bring meaning to data and allows school staff to have a thorough understanding of the stories behind the numbers.

Mento et al., (2002) distinguish between finding solutions to problems and leading a change effort. When solving a problem, the energy goes down as the problem becomes less pressing. Strategic change means leading “a change effort around ideas developed through creative tension” (Mento, Jones, & Dirndorfer, 2002, p. 49) so that “the energy for the change comes from one wants to create juxtaposed with the current reality” (Mento et al., 2002, p. 49). This is an important consideration when trying to elaborate a change strategy. New learning is created by intrinsic energy. These authors add another dimension to this step by evaluating the climate for change in terms of strengths, weaknesses, operation, and history. École Plein Soleil has survived many change initiatives that were more or less well prepared and that had mixed success. Mento et al. (2002) state “pattern of the past are often hard to break” (p. 50) so it is beneficial to use lessons learned from the past with the optic of not repeating the same mistakes instead of ignoring them. Staff equate trying new strategies to a lot of work with little results. It is therefore important at this stage to co-create an organizational vision that is feasible because “change occurs when there is an understanding of the need for change, the vision where the organization should go and a commitment to action” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 133). Once this strong vision is established, disseminating it through the organization conveys a strong message
that the leader cares enough about the different constituents to keep them well informed. The structure of the *Web of Inclusion* is ideal for communicating vital information.

**Mobilization**

This is a complex step. It entails assessing power and cultural dynamics, understanding the existing systems and structures, managing recipients of change, influencing stakeholders, and developing a change team (Cawsey et al., 2016). In an organization “individuals have power because of the position they hold, who they are…and who and what they know” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 187). This affects the organizational culture, the explicit and implicit values and beliefs as well as the underlying assumptions. Making the distinction between reality and perception keeps the focus on the vision. Power inequities is at the heart of Cochran-Smith’s (2010) *Theory of Teacher Education for Social Justice*. This model recognizes that teachers have a great influence on society through what they say and do not say, what they teach, how they act and react. Through education and professional development, this theory prepares teachers to help empower all learners by making sure they have access to knowledge that represents their perspectives and serves their interests. In the case of this OIP, raising teacher’s awareness of inequalities will enable them to put forward strategies to counter injustices. Teachers must become agents of change and this can be done through instilling them with a desire to obtain a socially just and equitable education system. They become responsible for providing “…rich and real learning opportunities for all students…for participation in a diverse democratic society” (Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 462). This influences the analysis of power structures but also the impact of change on the recipients.

École Plein Soleil fits the description of an organic organization as it is more flexible, there are few rules and procedures, and communication is informal (Cawsey et al., 2016).
however feel that as uncertainty caused by change and the need for information increases, the necessity of putting in place more formal structures for communication arises. Confusion about who does what and lack of awareness have been the downfall of previous change initiatives, fostering a resistance to change. It is therefore important for the change leader to minimize those negative effects by developing good communication channels, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and developing a strong, positive change team.

**Acceleration**

This important step involves “engag[ing] and empower[ing] others in support, planning and implementation of change” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 55). Skill, knowledge, and ability development are key elements. In the case of the OIP, this is done through the application of *The Theory of Teacher Education for Social Justice* (Cochran-Smith, 2010). Planning and implementing change requires a plan that is “rooted in a sophisticated understanding of how the organization works and what needs to be achieved” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 301). Collaborative planning allows people to take ownership of the plan, to make it a living document that grows and changes during its implementation. It is not the leader’s plan. It becomes everybody’s plan. In this perspective, once a solid plan has been elaborated, the leader must be able to step back and let constituents own the plan. Elaborating a communication strategy, facilitated by a *Web of Inclusion* structure, is essential.

At this stage, Mento et al.’s (2002) “step 6: prepare your target audience, the recipient of change” (p. 53) has to be included because the students’ well-being and engagement has to remain the focus. Their perspective of the change is crucial because “change is not possible unless, at the very least, the change recipients accept the change” (Mento et al., 2002, p. 53). It is important to seek their feedback and adjust the plan consequently because staff will resist
change if they do not feel it has a positive impact on students. This element of resistance to change is part of many change theories (Cawsey et al., 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Mento et al., 2010; Northouse, 2016).

Both Mento et al. (2010) and Cawsey et al. (2016) underline the importance of celebrating successes to keep motivation high. At École Plein Soleil, celebrating workplace milestones creates the momentum necessary to keep strategies moving forward. It should also be part of the plan to reengage students. Improvement and efforts should be recognized to keep students who are making efforts to reengage motivated. Celebrating victories and achievement of goals “must be built as part of the roadmap to success” (Mento et al., 2010, p. 55).

**Institutionalization**

This final step involves gauging progress, maintaining direction, and modifying the plan to get positive results. It is crucial to measure change and adapt the change plan strategically. These measurements should be well-thought out. *The Resiliency Questionnaire* and school attendance records are important data; they also represent measurements that “note small steps to the larger goal” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 346). Elaborating a diagnostic tool for identifying factors contributing to disengagement could also contribute to the success of the change plan. The use of a strategy map would also help ensure that energy and effort are well focussed. The strategy map described in Cawsey et al. (2016, p. 353) can improve communication and clarify the plan (see Appendix D). Stakeholders have a better understanding of what is done, why, and by who. It also clearly illustrates the cause-effect relationship of different elements of the change plan.

**Critical Organizational Analysis**

Congruent is defined as “similar to or in agreement with something, so that the two things can both exist or can be combined without problems” (Congruent, n.d.). Achieving
congruence at all levels of the organization requires identifying what needs to be changed. This is a dynamic process; it involves understanding the rules and regulations of the organization, acknowledging the informal culture, and aligning the vision with priorities and available resources. Two frameworks for diagnosing the organization will be used. Nadler and Tushman’s (1999) *Congruence Model* offers a complete picture of the interactions between the different components of an organization. Starting from the assumption “that while organizational change certainly unfolds across multiple levels – at some point, the majority, if not all – organizational change initiatives inherently involve change at the individual level” (Whelland-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p. 176), Quinn’s (1988) *Competing Values Model* will give a clear picture of this individual perspective.

**Nadler and Tushman’s (1999) Congruence Model**

This model enables the leader to diagnose the organization to see beyond the symptoms and address the true causes of the problem and the need for change. It helps make sense of the dynamics at play by addressing the complexity of organizational change.

*Figure 3. Nadler and Tushman’s (1999) Congruence Model*
This model is easily applied to the problem of students’ disengagement from school and the importance of creating an environment that helps develop relationships between teachers and students. The model is dynamic and takes into account the organization’s relationship with its environment. It comprises of four components: (a) inputs; (b) strategies; (c) transformation process; and (d) outputs.

**Inputs.** École Plein Soleil is part of a larger environment. This environment imposes demands and constraints on students and on the strategies the school can put in place. The Ontario Ministry of Education expects students to graduate and to be in school full time until the age of 18. This has a direct impact on funding and puts pressure on the school to reengage students. Furthermore, after fifteen days of absenteeism, a student is referred to the attendance officer. If the attendance officer cannot make contact with the students, the student has to be remove from the school’s registration records. At that point, funding for that student is cut. It remains the school’s responsibility to try to reengage that student (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018). Provincial testing is mandatory and the results are published. École Plein Soleil’s performance on those tests has an impact on CSDVDL’s results. Test preparation, although not always motivating for students, is part of school programming. Another demand of the environment is compliance with collective agreements. Teachers are assigned to the school according to seniority and not according to their affinities to work with students-at promise.

There is no interview process, no special qualification requirement. Other schools in the board have unrealistic expectations of École Plein Soleil. They often bypass the referral process and pressure students into changing schools instead of addressing their issues. This creates frustration on the part of École Plein Soleil’s staff who have to accommodate high needs students without the information to support them that a proper transition would entail. Fortunately, the
larger environment also creates opportunities for the school. CSDVDL’s strong belief in the importance of creating a differentiated environment where all students can grow results in continuing to prioritize socially conscious and equitable practices. New creative ideas are encouraged. Finding solutions to students’ lack of engagement is a collective challenge.

Resources is a second source of input. At this time, École Plein Soleil has ample material and human resources. CSDVDL recognizes the importance of doing things differently. The school’s new building provides for differentiated learning and many hands-on learning opportunities. Partnerships with the YMCA provide a physical education program that is offered within its facility. Many community organizations contribute to the school by providing funds for food and school supply. Social services agencies come to school to make it a one-stop shop. The school is very well staffed and teachers are specialist in their subjects. Support staff consists of a full time youth and child worker, a daycare worker, an attendance officer, a social worker, and an addictions nurse.

Finally, the organization’s history affects its ability to act. Mercer Delta Consulting (2004) state the importance of history in understanding “the crucial developments that shaped [the organization] over time—the strategic decisions, behavior of key leaders, responses to crises, and the evolution of values and beliefs” (p. 4). Historically alternative schools were perceived as a last chance at obtaining a high school diploma (Moilanen, 1986) and as catering to a population of “losers” (Raywid, 1999). Unfortunately, this still holds true for some parents and students as reflected in the Resiliency Questionnaire’s results, presented in Chapter 1. Attending the school may have a negative impact on some students’ self-esteem and self-worth.

Strategies. Nadler and Tushman (1999) redefined their model and added strategies that are applicable to the reality of the 21st century. Although a school is not a business these
categories can be applied to this PoP because “how an enterprise is organized will influence its focus and time horizons, either encouraging or restricting its people's ability to develop creative strategies” (Nadler & Tushman, 1999, p. 47). Thinking in terms of strategy helps refocus the school’s priorities. “Design structural divergence” (Nadler & Tushman, 1999, p. 53) represents the ability of the school as an organization to operate in the present while thinking about the future, constantly assessing how things are done. École Plein Soleil’s goal is to reach out to students-at promise, who for a myriad of reasons, are not succeeding in a regular high school. These students show signs of disengagement as reflected by their rate of absenteeism and their lack of motivation. The school’s unique way of reaching out to students is what distinguishes it from other schools. École Plein Soleil offers a flexible schedule, hybrid online courses, paid coop courses, a daycare, and one-on-one support. The state of the art facilities offer an open learning environment and a makerspace. However, beyond the physical layout, the atmosphere and the individual approach is what distinguishes the school. The actions required to remain relevant represent the present of the organization. In a constantly changing world, it is important to think ahead and adapt to changes. It is also important to “promote organization modularity” (Nadler & Tushman, 1999, p. 55). Literature reveals that creating positive student-teacher relationships has a strong impact on student engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Skinner & Pritzer, 2012). It is therefore important to prioritize this element of teaching for success. Offering engaging learning situations that promote the development of global competencies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017), and the development of caring student-staff connection is what will keep École Plein Soleil relevant. It is important to develop a streamlined process that emphasizes “learning, team-building, and ownership” (Nadler & Tushman, 1999, p. 56). Finally reaching “organizational congruence” (Nadler & Tushman,
1999, p. 58) where shared values and goals are at the heart of the organizational structure is what will distinguish successful organizations. In the case of École Plein Soleil, it is important to develop this sense of belonging through the adoption of a common mission.

**Transformation process.** Cawsey et al., (2016) describe the transformation process as “where the organization’s components are combined to produce the outputs” (p. 70). These outputs are described next.

**Work.** Working in a school, particularly teaching, requires sophisticated judgement as reflected by knowledge, practice and commitments. According to Cochran-Smith (2010) teachers have an obligation to be conscious of politics and systems that may reinforce power and privilege. Coming from the premise that teaching and learning are “inescapably political and ideological activities in that they inherently involve ideas, ideals, power, and access to learning and life opportunities” (Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 447), makes teaching a complex, highly sensitive job. This is particularly true in an alternative high school where many students come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers make daily choices that have a direct impact on students’ beliefs and outlook on life. It is important, through collaborative learning, to make teachers aware of this reality and to equip them with strategies to counterbalance inequities.

**The formal organization.** This represents the structures, systems, and processes that allow people to work with efficacy and efficiency (Cawsey et al., 2016). Opportunities for professional development are part of the structures that help direct people’s efforts. It is important to plan professional development and to think systematically about the impact it will have. Building capacity through a culture of collaborative learning sends the message that “the organization values the talent and expertise of its people, it creates leadership development strategies that grow internal capacity” (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 50). Developing staff capacity
has a positive impact on students. In her book’s preface Donohoo (2017) writes “educators with high efficacy show greater effort and persistence, a willingness to try new teaching approaches, and attend more closely to the needs of students” (p. xv). Attending to the needs of students’ is key in establishing a positive connection with teachers and transforming the school in a social environment that acts as a protective factor for youth-at promise. In this optic, it is important to shift focus from teaching to a greater understanding of what constitutes deep learning for students (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

The informal organization. This encompasses the informal way things are done, the beliefs, values, and informal leadership that are part of the organization’s culture (Cawsey et al., 2016). A few staff members have been at the school for a long time. These teachers have seen four principals and have managed to maintain status quo in the way they do things; they have a passive aggressive attitude towards change initiatives. They resist change without confrontation. They are very competent teachers that care deeply about their students. Change represents more work than gain. Newer teachers look up to them to learn the organizational culture. It becomes important to understand the dynamics and the forces to implement change initiatives strategically. Tools like the Stakeholder Analysis (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 199) would provide information as to which tactic would prove successful in understanding the key players and the culture of the school.

People. Staff and students represent the most important element of the transformation process. The formal leader might establish the vision for change, but other stakeholders have the skills, knowledge, and informal leadership to make it a reality (Cawsey et al., 2016). As a leader at École Plein Soleil, it is important to build relationships with people and to seek continual feedback. Being a lead learner, allows the principal to work alongside staff to understand the
data and the literature about student disengagement. Fullan and Quinn (2016) express this in terms of push and pull strategies. For the purpose of this OIP push strategies would be acknowledging that students can do better and “eliminating the excuses based on student background and circumstances” (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 33). Creating opportunity for collaborative inquiry where the principal participates as a learner would be a pull strategy. This is crucial in establishing a culture of growth and efficacy. At this point of the analysis, it is important to note that some themes are recurrent as they pertain to people. These are: collaboration, communication, efficacy, and learning.

**Outputs.** Since “what gets measured is what gets done”, (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 72) identifying what needs to be tracked is an important step. The external environment being dynamic, it is important to keep measuring how the school performs and how the people within the organization feel and react to change initiatives. The school’s performance rests on the alignment of work, people, informal organization, and formal organization. Fullan & Quinn (2016) talk about “coherence” and define coherence making as “a continuous process of making and remaking meaning in your own mind and in your culture” (p. 3). They see two components to effective change in an educational setting: quality of idea and of the process. This defines the importance of all the components meshing to present a coherent ‘whole’.

**Quinn’s (1988) Competing Values Model**

I have chosen this model to get a better understanding of the reaction to change at an individual perspective. Gaining an insight in where stakeholders stand will give me a glimpse at the values that underlie their position. It will also help me adapt my leadership skills to the organization’s needs by developing “the competencies needed and design systems to reinforce those skill behaviors” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 82).
This model has been used by CSDVDL to assess the organization and plan change. All employees of the board are familiar with this model. Each school has determined its dominant quadrant of operation. At École Plein Soleil, the ‘Human Resources View’ came out as the dominant zone of operation. This is not surprising given the school’s mandate to work closely with students and groups. It is interesting to note that on an individual level some teachers were situated in the ‘Open Systems View’ or the ‘Internal Process View’. This reflects the need to understand each quadrant and to attend to all four. This framework “provides both a framework that bridges individual and organizational levels of analysis and a framework to understand competing value paradigms in organizations” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 83).

This framework allows me to start with a theory that is known and understood by staff, to show the relevance of the change initiative for their professional life, and to concentrate on problem solving to foster new learning. Starting from this premise it becomes possible to bring forward possible solutions to address the PoP.

**Possible Solutions to Address PoP**

Student re-engagement is a complex problem that can be approached from multiple perspectives and have multiple solutions. Finding the right solution is elusive. Three possible solutions will...
be examined each focusing on different key players—the students, the staff, and the school as an organization.

**Student-Focussed: Establishing a Wraparound Approach**

Students in an alternative high school have a history of not achieving their full potential. Low socioeconomic factors, mental health issues, family background, and lack of community support are out of the school’s realm of influence risk factors for lack of motivation (Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roland, 2007; Greenberg et al., 2003; Laursen, 2000). Schools however have an impact on academic achievement, fostering a safe environment, and building authentic relationships (Ferguson et al., 2005; Greenberg et al. 2003).

The first solution involves developing an approach where individualized strategies and services are put in place according to each student’s needs. It is important to “enhance student’s connection to school through caring, engaging classroom practices” (Greenberg et al., 2003, p. 466). Furthermore, a survey of disengaged French speaking Ontarians reveals that individualized learning programs where a caring adult takes the student’s needs in consideration have the biggest impact on school resiliency (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The first step is establishing a mentoring system where each student showing signs of disengagement such as truancy and failure, is matched with a staff member. Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro (2002) stress the importance of having a natural mentor. This non-parental significant adult can have a strong impact by providing support for the adolescent. It is important that this pairing be based on mutual affinity or on a pre-existing connection because it plays a vital role in creating “higher levels of school attachment and school efficacy” (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002, p. 236).
Effective mentorship needs to encompass key elements without being too prescriptive. In order to build authentic relationships, it must be strength-based which means focussing on the students’ assets rather than on deficits (Fergusson et al., 2005; Laursen, 2000). The mentoring relationship must provide a safe learning environment while maintaining high and achievable academic and social goals (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Greenberg et al., 2003). Focussing on establishing goals and making students accountable for these goals is therefore part of the equation. It provides youth with opportunities for decision making which is key to building a higher level of school engagement (Fergusson et al., 2005). The student and mentor meet weekly to set and review goals and to decide what the next step will be. Mentors make a point of doing a daily check-in with the students. They become the service coordinator for the youth. In creating this student-focussed dynamic, the school team, including the social worker, the special education specialist, the attendance officer, the mental health and addiction nurse, the principal, the parents, the mentoring teacher, and the student meet every six to eight weeks to ensure the student is receiving the required support. The mentors can also help students build their pathway to success by choosing the right credit options whether it is regular classes, online courses, coop placements, or dual-credit courses. Eber, Nelson, and Miles (1997) determined that “classroom settings seem logical places to concentrate intervention resources and personnel for integrated planning and service delivery” (p. 539). This opens the door to involving community-based services and making the school a hub for service delivery. Gradually, the school team could include social workers, caseworkers, probation officers, mental health personnel among others.

This approach does not necessitate a large financial investment but it requires using human resources differently and reaching out to the community. A tool, such as an electronic
portfolio, should be developed to keep track of the goals and the achievements of students. This solution is consistent with the *Change Path Model* adopted. The “Mobilization” step would require more energy because it entails redefining the role of teachers and helping them become agents of change. At this point, staff would need training in how to create this caring relationship and to implement a strength-based approach that is non-judgemental and caring.

**Teacher-Focussed: Building Collective Efficacy**

This solution stems from the work of Bandura (1977) who defined self-efficacy and proposed ways of increasing self-efficacy. Starting from the premise that people live their lives in contact with others, he continued his research and in 1993 and elaborated the concept of collective efficacy described as “people’s shared beliefs in their collective power to produce desired results” (Bandura 2000, p. 75). This definition has been the one adopted in subsequent research (DeWitt 2018; Donohoo, 2017; Goddard, 2002; Hoy, Sweetland & Smith 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). In an alternative school setting, it is important that teachers believe they can make a difference and be willing to persist when faced with challenges (Goddard, 2001; Hoy et al., 2002). Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) refer to collective teacher efficacy as “the collective perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities” (p. 189). Given this strong impact, developing collective teacher efficacy is a way of empowering teachers, fostering productive teacher behaviors, and improving students’ outcomes. A strong sense of collective efficacy should address communication issues between different stakeholders, help overcome negative perceptions about students, and resolve staff conflict. According to Bandura (2000), developing collective-efficacy follows the same processes as building self-efficacy: (a) mastery experience; (b) vicarious experience; (c) social
persuasion; and (d) affective state. Bandura (2000) found that the benefit outweighs the effort involved as it:

- influences the types of futures they seek to achieve through collective action, how well they use their resources
- how much effort they put into their group endeavor, their staying power when collective efforts fail to produce quick results or meet forcible opposition, and their vulnerability to the discouragement that can beset people taking on tough social problems. (p. 76)

Staff at École Plein Soleil deal with tough social problems such as homelessness, addictions, and mental health issues, daily. As caregivers, teachers often want to fix problems, but the ones our students bring to school are often overwhelming and without easy or obvious solutions. Building collective efficacy empowers staff to remain resilient and find creative solutions through interdependent efforts.

Mastery experiences represent the successes and failures staff face as a group (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). The school leader is responsible for providing resources and time so that staff feel empowered to explore different strategies based on results and data (Hoy et al., 2002). Teachers have to feel involved and leaders must “provide opportunities for shared leadership by affording others the power to make decisions” (Donohoo, 2017, p. 40). Helgesen’s *Web of Inclusion*, can facilitate such cooperation by encouraging risk-taking, communication, and creative thinking. Scheduling time for collaborative learning through dynamic professional learning communities (PLC) and teamwork promotes this process of learning together. Donohoo (2017) explores enhancing collective efficacy through professional learning such as teacher networks and collaborative inquiry. Fullan’s (2014) view of the principal as an agent promoting learning is consistent with this solution. The leader taking part in this learning process promotes
developing collective efficacy through vicarious experience. This solution brings little extra costs as the school already has a budget for professional development and PLCs.

Vicarious experience represents models of how skills are applied (Hoy et al., 2002). Mentoring programs and team teaching are strategies that allow teachers to learn from others’ expertise. Similarly, peer coaching as described by Donohoo (2017) encourages teachers to co-plan, converse, co-analyze, and co-reflect. To be successful this approach has to be anchored in a culture of respect and trust.

When creating a strong sense of collective efficacy for teachers, verbal persuasion represents talks, workshops, professional development opportunities and positive feedback (Hoy et al. 2002). Each year, teachers in Ontario have to elaborate an Annual Learning Plan. This could be the starting point for providing opportunities for development that are geared to the teacher’s needs, thus building self-efficacy which in turn will impact collective efficacy. A culture of sharing information would allow teachers that participate in any type of professional development to come back to school and present the information to peers. This would help build team spirit and create a culture of learning together.

Finally, the school as a collective has to adapt and cope with difficulties. This ability to confront and interpret challenges is defined as learning through emotions (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) recognize “the task of developing high levels of collective efficacy is difficult but not impossible” (p. 89). Public accountability, responsibility for student success and having minimum control over the workplace are identified as contributing factors to these difficulties. It becomes imperative to create a school climate that is a safe space for collaboration. DeWitt (2018) illustrates “the need for leaders and teachers to establish an inclusive and safe school climate because no one can be a productive member of a
collaborative group if he or she feels unsafe in school” (p. 43). This is particularly important at École Plein Soleil where staff is divided in their perception of what the school should be like and how best to address students’ needs. The third solution evolved from this lack of consensus.

**Organization-Focussed: Becoming a Trauma Informed School**

Trauma and violence are part of everyday life. Statistics show that 2/3 of students under the age of 17 (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016) and 76.1% of Canadians (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017) have experienced at least one traumatic event. Many students at École Plein Soleil have been exposed to stress and trauma such as maltreatment, violence, bullying, and aggression. According to Mendelson, Tandon, O’Bennan, Leaf, and Ialongo (2015) this can “negatively impact emotion regulation and executive functioning, increasing likelihood of school problems” (p. 140). There is a strong correlation between these negative experiences, school functioning, and dropout rates. We are only beginning to realize the widespread prevalence and the consequences of trauma on students (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). It is interesting to note the increase in research in this area in the last five years.

Many researchers identify the school as an ideal setting for implementing trauma sensitive practices (Martin et al., 2017; Mendelson, Tandon, O’Bennan, Leaf, & Ialongo, 2015). Bath (2008) states, “much of the healing from trauma can take place in non-clinical settings” (p. 17), school being one of the settings which is possible to transform into a safe place. It becomes urgent to create educational environments that are responsive to the needs of these students and adopt supportive strategies. Becoming a “trauma informed school” involves training staff to recognize the impact of trauma and its effect on students’ reactions and behaviors (Martin et al., 2017). Finally, Bath (2008) identifies developing relationships as a “critical ingredient in healing and growth” (p. 19).
Literature generally agrees on the steps to becoming a trauma-informed school however, it “involves a shift in culture, practice, and theoretical framework” (Martin et al., p. 963). It has to be a whole school approach. Dorado, Martinez, McArthur, and Leibovitz (2016) elaborate a multi-tiered framework. Tier 1 involves changing school culture to make it a safe place for all students and staff. The second tier of intervention is defined as “capacity building with school staff to facilitate the incorporation of trauma-informed lens into the development of support for…students” (Dorado, Marinez, McArthur, & Leibovitz, 2016, p. 163). This is in line with Cochran-Smith’s (2010) *Theory of Teacher Education for Social Justice*, which focusses on knowledge as a tool to become informed advocates and agents of change. Tier 3 focuses on finding the right resources for students suffering from trauma. Record-Lemon and Buchanan (2017) describe five steps to putting in place trauma-informed strategies: (a) developing strategies for trauma assessment; (b) offering trauma support for staff and students; (c) specific program implementation; (d) regular program evaluation; and (e) specific trauma interventions for higher-risk students. Overstreet and Chafouleas (2016) state that recognizing the signs of traumatic exposure and responding with evidence-based practices adds up to creating a positive environment. Martin et al. (2017) note the importance of establishing procedures for responding to student’s disclosure of traumatic experience. Such occurrence can leave staff at loss. It is also important to be able to refer students to clinical care as needed.

Many resources are available to train staff to use this lens when interacting with students. Different organizations offer training. This would be the major cost of implementing this solution. It would be important to choose a quality program that not only offers staff training but also provides continuous support. This program should offer self-care training for staff (Martin et al., 2017). Finally, research supports the need for having a trauma specialist
involved. CSDVDL has a social worker qualified in trauma intervention. She is a strong advocate of this approach and would be happy to provide the necessary support.

Martin et al., (2017) believe that the principal’s barriers to this solution would be gaining teachers’ and administration’s support. It would therefore be important to make sure that this initiative is not perceived as additional work. There are social and academic benefits to this approach such as decreased symptoms of trauma, improvement in emotion regulation, and academic competences (Martin et al., 2017).

**Recommended Solution**

All proposed solution are strength-based and feasible. The following table facilitates the comparison between possible solutions.

Table 1

*Comparison of Possible Solutions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student-Focussed: Establishing a Wraparound Approach</th>
<th>Teacher-Focussed: Building Collective Efficacy</th>
<th>Organization-Focussed: Becoming a Trauma Informed School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required resources</td>
<td>-Time allocated to form mentors and for mentors to interact with students -Information about how to be a good mentor -Time to connect with the community agencies</td>
<td>-Time for collaborative inquiry and PLCs -Resources for growth and improving practices -Information about collective efficacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Benefits          | -Technology to create an electronic portfolio | -Cost of workshops and professional development activities | -Information about the program | -Getting the school board approval
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|                   | -Easy to implement                          | -Creates a strong team                                    | -Staff and students have a voice | -Takes care of the needs of students and staff
|                   | -Helps create a relationship with a significant adult | -High collective efficacy means higher expectations and better results for students | -Teachers do not give up easily when faced with challenging students | -According to Maslow’s needs’ theory, learning cannot take place unless basic needs are met
|                   | -Strength-based                             |                                                          |                             |                                    |
|                   | -Students can have a voice                  |                                                          |                             |                                    |
|                   |                                                |                                                          |                             |                                    |
| Drawbacks         | -Not all staff members are at the stage of being able to be mentors | -Does not give students a voice                           | -Requires a change of culture and teachers’ buy-in | -School board administration has to approve
|                   | -Not all students have a natural connection with an adult in the school | -Requires a change of culture                            |                             |                                    |
|                   |                                                |                                                          |                             |                                    |
| Link with PoP     | -Research show that positive teacher-student relationships help student retention | -Creating a more cohesive team and better program could help students reengagement | -Becoming a trauma informed school helps develop protective factors for students and |                                    |
At this time, becoming a *Trauma Informed School* would be phase one in a plan to reengage students in an alternative high school. It is a new innovative approach, supported by research. It offers a glimmer of hope for students who have suffered traumatic experiences that have left sequels that affect their behaviors and their learning. It also provides a caring environment and self-help strategies for staff who often experience traumas vicariously through students. Dorado et al., (2016) conclude, “if not addressed, trauma-related difficulties can put students at greater risk for school dropout” (p. 164). It is not an easy solution to implement but it offers an opportunity to promote healing and growth. Once a culture of responding appropriately to trauma is established, the other two solutions could be implemented because they are embedded in creating a trauma informed school. It would only require widening our scope and adding to the existing solution. Being better equipped to deal with trauma would have an impact on teacher’s self-efficacy. Working collaboratively to establish this culture would have a positive impact on collective-efficacy. Similarly, building positive relationships being part of becoming a *Trauma Informed School*, the wraparound approach could be a useful tool in finding the right help for students.

**Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change Issues**

Burnes (2009) writes, “an organization’s ethics is embedded in its culture and its culture is reflected in its ethics” (p. 361). This underlines the importance of analyzing the ethical repercussions of any new initiative. The implementation of this solution requires all stakeholders to learn new rules, values, and skills. Transforming the school culture requires a well-planned approach that takes the three type of ethics described by Strarratt (1991, 1996) (as cited in
Ehrich, Harris, Klenowski, Smeed, & Spina, 2015) into consideration: (a) an ethic of care; (b) an ethic of justice; and (c) an ethic of critique. Furthermore, the values that transpire within the school have to be a reflection of this new way of doing things. When preparing for change, it is important to question and imagine the consequences or the impact of this change. The main goals should be to empower, respect, and support students and staff.

**An Ethic of Care**

A belief that human relationships are at the centre of all interventions and that “all voices are heard and valued” (Ehrich et al., 2015, p. 199) guides this practice. Noddings (1988) talks of a relational ethic, which focuses “on the human beings involved in the situation under consideration and their relations to each other” (p. 218). Finding the appropriate form of caring for each relationship is essential (Noddings, 1988). Becoming a trauma informed school means establishing procedures to identify students that have been victims of a traumatic experience. Given the nature of the topic, it is important to address every situation with respect and confidentiality. Staff need to have the proper training to be able to recognize the signs, engage with students and have an empathic attitude that will promote a relationship of care. Only professional trainers can guide the staff. By including a self-care component, this solution also takes into consideration the voices of staff. Anyone could have been a victim of trauma and staff have to be able to recognize when and how to get help. When dealing with trauma issues, triggers can be unexpected as they are related to sights, sounds, touches, smells, or tastes associated with the traumatic event (Mendelson et al., 2015). Communication is very important for everyone involved thus the importance of creating a Web of Inclusion that facilitates interactions between stakeholders. Students can ask and get support as required. They are active participants in accessing the care program they need. Although they have been victims of trauma,
they are empowered through this approach. Not only do staff interact with students in a caring way, they need to have time to provide students with opportunities for caring. This is done through modelling, dialogue and practice (Noddings, 1988). By taking care of the well-being of students, École Plein Soleil becomes a school of opportunities. Students will carry the coping strategies they develop for the rest of their lives, enabling them to reach their potential.

An Ethic of Justice

Instilling a culture of care and equity brings justice. The two are closely related. An ethic of justice is “concerned with fair and equitable treatment of people” (Ehrich et al., 2015, p. 200). In the context of this OIP, an ethic of justice is demonstrated by making resources and services accessible to all students. It is important to facilitate the access to community services when a student requires the help. Financial and personal resources have to be allocated to best serve students’ needs. Another aspect of justice is that all school-based interventions have to be non-judgemental. This also adds an element of accountability. All school staff have to work together to “provide a particular type of environment that enables students to develop into fully functioning fair and just human beings” (Ehrich et al., 2015, p. 205). This means that the school’s mandate has to be larger than transmitting knowledge. Significant adults have to be just, equitable, and caring when interacting with students. By developing the skills necessary to interact positively, teachers feel more confident when facing difficult situations, which builds their sense of efficacy and promotes an inclusive culture of collaboration.

An Ethic of Critique

This applies to the leaders who must “reflect on current policies/practices that they may uncover injustice or exploitation that is embedded in social structures” (Erich et al., 2015,
To change the school culture, the principal has to be able to question the system. École Plein Soleil’s mandate is not the same as other high school’s purpose. Some board-wide initiatives are very demanding on staff’s time and energy. To bring change, the principal has to assess the importance of adhering to certain projects and be willing to take a stand and choose not to promote those activities in the school. This reflects an ethic of care regarding staff’s well-being. It is also a leader’s role to challenge and question teacher practice (Ehrich et al., 2015). As lead learner, the principal is part of this culture of collaborative learning and PLCs. By asking the right questions, the leader can initiate conversations that will help staff grow, and stimulate thoughts that will lead to improvement. Status quo is not an option.

**The Leader’s Role**

To remain ethical through organizational change, the leader has to empower people and build relationships. Northouse (2016) elaborates a guide to ethical issues that can be applied to any type of leadership because “in regard to leadership ethics is concerned with what leaders do and who leaders are” (p. 330). In transforming the school into a trauma informed organization, the principal has to be concerned with the interests of others and be sensitive to their reactions to change. Change sometimes brings resistance. The leader must take time to question, reassure and help people get involved. Nobody should be coerced in accepting change. The principles of ethical leadership as defined in Northouse (2016) should be applied throughout the change process: (a) respect others; (b) serve others; (c) show justice; (d) manifest honesty; and (e) build communities. These values represent the map and the tools to put into action the necessary changes to reengage students and transform the school into a safe haven.
Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 focused on defining a leadership approach and a framework for leading the change process that are coherent and are a reflection of the values and reality of the organization. By defining leadership in terms of shaping behaviour, framing change, and creating capacity, the role of the leader in this change process becomes evident. The leader has to be aware of how she thinks about change and how she motivates others. Furthermore, a flexible, co-constructed plan for change and a strong plan for communicating have to be elaborated. The leader has to be able to put in place strategies that will help others learn and grow. This chapter established a framework for change by combining different models. The main advantage of combining model is arriving with a model that is easy to follow, that takes into consideration the reality of the school and that is the reflection of a critical lens. Finally, different solution proposals were explored: one student-focused, one teacher-focused, and one organization focused. Ethical considerations and the leader’s role in becoming a trauma-informed school were analyzed in preparation for the next chapter, which focuses on the implementation, evaluation, and communication of the plan for change.
CHAPTER 3 – Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication

Chapter 1 introduced a problem of practice. The historic, political, economical, and cultural context was elaborated to better frame this problem of practice. In Chapter 2, a leadership approach to change and a framework for leading the change process were elaborated. Different solutions to the problem of practice were examined and one was chosen. Chapter 3 develops a plan for implementing, monitoring, and communicating the organizational change thus elaborating a viable and ethical solution to the problem of practice.

Change Implementation Plan

The previous chapter examined different solutions to students’ disengagement. The selected solution for this PoP is becoming a *Trauma Informed School* (TIS). Although it represents a complete shift in school culture, this approach will set the stage for the school to become a safe-place where positive relationships are developed and where students succeed. As outlined through this chapter, a culture shift is made possible by building the capacity of school personnel to put in place trauma-informed strategies when interacting with students (Perry & Daniels, 2016). Paccione-Dyslewski (2016) states that “trauma-informed care is an organizational, structural, and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to all kinds of trauma” (p. 8). Studies show that implementing trauma-informed practices in the school setting can have a positive impact on school climate and on both students’ and staff’s well-being (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet & Santos, 2015; McIntyre, Baker & Overstreet, 2018; Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016).

This solution fits my own leadership capabilities within the organization. As principal of École Plein Soleil, I have the agency to bring this change in culture providing that the change implementation plan incorporates and respects different stakeholders’ voice. By building a
collaborative learning organization that works with a co-constructed plan, *at-promise* students will be able to reach their potential.

**Brief Outline of the Proposed Change**

Recent research demonstrates a direct relationship between toxic stress, disengagement and educational failure (McIntyre et al., 2018; Paccione-Dyszlewski, 2016; Phifer & Hull, 2016). Listening to the stories of students at École Plein Soleil has made me aware of the fact that many of them have lived through traumatic life experiences. Failing to recognize the symptoms of trauma induced distress and to implement trauma-informed approaches means that these students are not getting the help they need to heal and thrive. Most literature proposes a three-tier model to becoming a TIS (Dorado et al., 2016). As demonstrated in the following diagram, the school does not pretend to be able to heal trauma. The priority is to create a safe supportive climate and a community of care where teachers and mental health professionals work together to empower students (Morton & Berardi, 2017).

![Figure 5. Three tier intervention model. Adapted from Morton & Berardi, 2017](image)

At the school level, this approach is best summed up by Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, and Santos’s (2016) four R’s which include: (a) “*realization* about trauma and its effects”; (b) “*recognition* of the signs of trauma”; (c) “*response* that appropriately embraces trauma
understanding”; and (d) “resist practices that could inadvertently re-traumatize” (p. 148). This awareness of trauma and its effects also allows recognizing the signs of compassion fatigue that often come with working with our students. Research show that trauma helpers are at risk of feeling secondary traumatic stress (Martin et al., 2017; Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016).

Goals and Priorities of the Planned Change

The objective of this OIP is to address absenteeism in an alternative high school for student at-promise. So far, it has been established that developing caring relationships and a collaborative learning culture is instrumental to student growth. Becoming a TIS creates an environment where students feel understood and where teachers have the tools and the skills to create a positive school climate and help reengage students. These goals are coherent with the leadership approach elaborated in Chapter 2, which takes into consideration Higgs and Rowland’s (2005) definition of leadership in which the leader needs to shape behavior, frame change and create capacity.

Shaping behavior. Communication is the most important aspect of creating a new culture and implanting best practices for dealing with students impacted by trauma. Staff need to realize the impact of trauma on students, and learn new ways of interacting with students. Through professional development, mentoring, and building collective efficacy a caring school climate and a belief that their efforts can have a positive impact will grow. DeWitt (2018) states that “leadership is about finding improved methods to enhance learning that all stakeholders engage in, which is central to a collaborative school climate” (p. 94). The power of connection is at the heart of this approach and according to Bath (2008), it is one of the pillars for healing.

Framing change. It is essential to involve staff in elaborating a vision and a strong mission for change to create a sense of urgency (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Realizing that this
shift can influence students’ outcome and improve their own well-being is key. Conditions must be created for staff members to take ownership of the change and bring it to life. It is therefore important to take into consideration Fullan and Quinn’s (2016) change drivers at play which involves promoting collaborative work, building capacity, learning continuously, and being part of a system.

**Creating capacity.** The last goal is to develop a collaborative learning organization that can adapt to change, integrate new information and implement trauma-informed strategies. Austin and Harkins (2008) describe knowledge acquisition, distribution, and interpretation as well as organizational memory as steps to organizational learning. Their study supports “the premise that empowerment, openness, team member dialogue, supportive risk-taking environments, appreciative inquiry, and distributed leadership facilitate learning” (Austin & Harkins, 2008, p. 108). In the case of this OIP, it becomes the foundation for effective change implementation.

**Fit within the Context of the Overall Organizational Strategy**

Given CSDVDL’s strong belief in the importance of creating a differentiated environment where all students can grow, getting the board support for this initiative would be relatively easy if based on a well-defined plan. Most of the required resources are already available. The board employs a social worker trained in trauma intervention and the school’s child and youth worker is a certified mindfulness coach, mindfulness being a good strategy when dealing with trauma (Mendelson et al., 2015). The proposed plan is very similar in structure with the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model that is already implemented in many of CSDVDL schools and with which half the staff at École Plein Soleil are familiar. PBIS offers a training program in trauma-informed practices (PBIS, 2019). Of all the
models for training examined, this would be the easiest to adopt because it is specifically designed for schools, it is research-based, and it offers several practical tools to facilitate its implementation (PBIS, 2019). Part of the philosophy of the PBIS model is that it requires the buy-in of 80% of the staff to be implemented successfully. In order to avoid resistance and gain support, the final decision should be made in collaboration with the change implementation lead team. Consulting this team also aligns with my values as a leader. School climate is already a component of the school’s improvement plan and it is part of the school’s culture for teachers to focus on the school’s improvement plan when elaborating their annual learning plan. The Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016) proposes a conceptual framework for ongoing professional learning that can be the foundation for fostering a new culture. Professional development and growth means learning through, practice, research, self-directed learning, and collaboration (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016). Figure 6 illustrates how professional development is important to becoming a TIS.

![Figure 6. Professional learning and becoming a trauma informed school. This illustrates my understanding of all the elements of professional learning that should be included in a plan to becoming a trauma informed school.](image)
As the only alternative school in the board, École Plein Soleil already has a distinct mandate. The student population with whom we intervene has different needs. We are expected to do things differently because these students have not been able to succeed in a regular high school setting. It would therefore be possible to focus on the transformation process of equipping teachers with strategies to deal with trauma and build relationships with students. At this stage, the change can be implemented at the school level without disrupting any other structures.

Benefits and Responsibilities of all Stakeholders

The main stakeholders in implementing this change are staff members, particularly teachers, students, the school leader, community agencies, and, when possible, parents. All stakeholders have responsibilities in creating a culture of understanding and compassion. All stakeholders can benefit from becoming a TIS.

Staff members (including administration). First and foremost, a shift in school culture to becoming trauma informed requires that “school personnel…make a commitment to incorporate a trauma-informed approach into the school environment” (Martin et al., 2017, p. 961). All school staff need to be involved in the reflection process. By becoming aware of trauma and its impact on students and on self, staff can recognize the symptoms of trauma and integrate knowledge about trauma in their practice. Once everyone commits to the change implementation, it is possible to provide a secure, warm environment where positive relationships with students are established. Learning together allows staff to gain self and collective efficacy, and to develop strategies to avoid compassion fatigue.

Students. It is important for students to learn about how stress impacts behavior and how they can learn how to advocate for their own needs (Phifer & Hull, 2016). Traumatized
youth will strive and learn in a TIS environment. The school setting becomes more welcoming as it contributes to reducing the negative impact of trauma (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016).

**Lead team.** This team includes the social worker trained in trauma intervention, the child and youth worker, the principal and any interested staff members. The lead team has the responsibility of planning the change by defining the vision, goals and the implementation steps (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). The lead team will choose a model for offering professional development and will offer support throughout the process. By empowering a school team, leadership opportunities arise and creative solutions can emerge.

**School leader.** The school principal is a lead learner (Fullan, 2014). As such, the lead learner is part of a strong team and builds collective efficacy. Furthermore, the school leader must foster a safe environment characterized by open communication that nurtures multidisciplinary collaboration (Morton & Berardi, 2018). Finally, the school leader is responsible to “maintain an ongoing education plan for teachers” (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016, p. 500).

**Board mental health team.** This team involvement will be critical in teacher training and plan implementation. Their trauma-informed expertise will be the foundation for mentoring and coaching. They will also offer counseling or referral for students at the second tier of intervention.

**Community partners.** School being a natural hub for youth to attend, collaborating with school personnel allows community partners to reach out to more trauma victims. They are also responsible for the care program of students at the third tier of intervention.

**Parents.** Most parents at École Plein Soleil are not involved in their children’s school life. The majority of students do not live at home and are not in regular contact with their
parents. Many students are over the age of 18 or have withdrawn from parental control (École Plein Soleil, 2017). In their longitudinal study of high school dropouts, Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, and Carlson (2000) found that parents’ lack of involvement in 6th grade was a strong predictor of dropping out of high school. This is consistent with the reality of our students.

Gaining awareness can result in better parental response to some of the students’ issues. It can also foster better communication with the school. A trauma-informed approach should show deep empathy for families. Parents can become allies. They have information about their children that the school does not have.

**Managing the Transition**

Cawsey et al. (2016) define transition management as “making certain that both the change project and the continuing operations is successful” (p. 328). This is done by establishing clear “benchmarks, standards, and responsibilities for the change” (Cawsey et al. 2016, p. 328). Managing change requires insuring good communication throughout the process, making sure goals and benchmarks are met, and taking time to celebrate success and to recognize everyone’s contribution. Figure 7 illustrates the change model adopted in chapter two, which is adapted from Cawsey, Deszca and Ingols (2016).
Figure 7. Change process for becoming a trauma informed school. Adapted from Change Path Model (Cawsey, Deszca & Ingols, 2016), Framework for Change (Mento, Jones & Dirndorfer, 2012), Theory of Teacher Education for Social Justice (Cochran-Smith, 2010)

A successful transition means understanding stakeholders, empowering people, determining supports and resources, identifying potential implementation issues, identifying goals, and acknowledging limitations.

**Understanding stakeholders’ reaction to change.** Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) state that stakeholders will either sincerely embrace change, passively resist change, or aggressively try to undermine it. It is important to take the time to communicate with different stakeholders, to answer their questions, and to alleviate stress in order to move the change forward. It is important for everyone to be able to voice concerns. By taking these concerns into consideration, the change leader can adjust the plan of action along the way. Cawsey et al. (2016) state that “for successful change management and implementations, there needs to be engagement and open conversation, especially in the face of resistance” (p. 228). Helgesen’s Web of Inclusion and leading from the middle is key to optimal communication. This form of leadership stresses accountability, clearly defines responsibilities, allows direct communication,
and emphasizes this relationship, thus creating a safe environment where people can take risks. It is important for the leader to listen and ask the right question to better understand the situation and apply the right strategies to push change forward. Once a shared vision is developed, building collective efficacy through group discussions and collaborative learning allows understanding stakeholders’ reaction to change. According to Kotter and Schlesinger (2008), education, participation and facilitation are methods for managing resistance. These elements are all an intrinsic part of the plan for becoming a TIS.

**Coworkers as change leaders.** As elaborated earlier, the lead team has a crucial role to play in implementing the proposed change. Informal leaders within the school willing to embrace change will influence those around them. Cawsey et al. (2016) explain this reaction to change by the fact that “their relationships are bound together by norms, roles, and shared obligations and experiences” (p. 237). Building a strong cohesive team where staff can take initiative, own the change process, and eliminate ambivalence requires building safe and trusting relationships among stakeholders. It is worth the investment, as it will allow everyone to deal effectively with the change.

**Other support and resources.** Many online resources, programs and videos are available to educate and inform school personnel, students, and parents. Wiest-Stevenson and Lee (2016) provide a list of resources with a description. The fact that most programs focus on developing school personnel capacity and are designed to be delivered by school staff helps to increase school-based knowledge and skills (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). School board mental health professionals and community professionals trained in mental health and trauma can offer additional support.
Potential implementation issues. The biggest implementation issue would be ensuring a culture of respect and making sure all interventions are rooted in ethics that value students’ rights and build their capacity to become advocate for their own rights. Mental health and trauma are sensitive topics and it is important not to define students by their experience with trauma but by their strengths and their resiliency (Resiliency Initiatives, n.d.). Moving from knowledge to implementation might be difficult because TIS is a new concept. Very little Canadian resources exist, no longitudinal studies supports the short-term findings about TIS. Furthermore, it is important that this change is not viewed as a fad instead of a viable solution to a pressing problem. Another danger is that trauma-informed approaches become a set of tools instead of a “paradigm shift with its attendant content domain foundational to helping children” (Morton & Berardi, 2018, p. 489). Finally, competing teacher responsibilities could become an issue. That is why it is crucial that the change be a part of our school improvement plan and that all our activities be prioritized through a trauma-informed lens. All these issues can be addressed by communicating expectations clearly and by consulting stakeholders on a regular basis to ensure the perception of the change are in line with the goals. A good communication plan, as elaborated further in this chapter, is vital to the success of becoming a TIS.

Short, medium and long-term goals. The following table illustrates the short, medium and long-term goals of implementing trauma-informed practices in the school setting. Once again, taking time to celebrate successes as goals are met, is crucial to keeping the momentum and accelerating progress.
Table 2

*Short, Medium and Long-Term Goals for Becoming a Trauma Informed School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short-term goals</th>
<th>Medium-term goals</th>
<th>Long-term goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- collect data</td>
<td>-all staff is capable of</td>
<td>-established trauma-informed practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-create mission, vision</td>
<td>-identifying symptoms of trauma</td>
<td>-collaboration with schoolboard and community mental health specialists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-“create a common understanding of trauma and its impact” (McIntyre, Baker &amp; Overstreet, 2018, p.4)</td>
<td>-using a common language when talking to and about students</td>
<td>-safe environment for students and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-become aware of own reaction to vicarious trauma</td>
<td>(i.e., Asking “what happened” instead of “what is wrong”)</td>
<td>-solid relationships between students and staff (e.g., connections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-choose a professional learning model and build</td>
<td>-care coordination with community specialists</td>
<td>-school reengagement for students at-potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-consensus for the adopted approach</td>
<td>-establishing a comprehensive and coordinated approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-elaborate a professional development plan</td>
<td>-staff will respond to own needs with self-care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-instill a culture of weekly meetings to discuss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implementation of trauma-informed practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limitations.** While a TIS is a vital part of helping students heal and become active learners “more research is needed for a district-wide and ultimately a community-wide approach
to comprehensively address the traumatic events of a society” (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016, p. 502). In their literature review Record-Lemon and Buchanan (2017) found a lack of research regarding trauma-informed schools in Canada. Even though the context of trauma might be similar across the world, the direct application of the findings to the Canadian education system might be difficult. Most of the research on TIS that I have read is very recent, within the last three years (McIntyre et al., 2018; Morton & Berardi, 2017; Phifer & Hull, 2016). With this field of study being emergent, there is a lack of tools to measure the impact of becoming a trauma-informed school.

**Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation**

Key to success of any change implementation is monitoring and evaluating the change process. This gives invaluable information as to stakeholders reactions, the progress made and how the plan should be refined. Cawsey et al. (2016) reinforce this concept, “measurements and control processes can play a critical role in guiding change and integrating the initiatives and efforts of all parties” (p. 339). It is through measuring and monitoring that expected outcomes are clarified and accountability is enhanced. The original PoP being students’ reengagement in an alternative high school, it is important to measure the successful implementation of becoming a trauma informed school but also the impact that this solution has on students’ reengagement. Using a strategy map, as described in Chapter 2, helps plan the change and remain focussed throughout the process.

**Connections with PDSA Model**

Donnelly and Kirk (2015) Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) model is used for effective change management. Change is broken down into milestones that are attainable and measurable. This structured approach to change allows to test the change on a small-scale thus building on
what is learned as the change initiative is gradually implemented. It is important that the plan remains flexible and adjusted throughout the PDSA cycles. As stakeholders realize the change initiative is positive, they will become more confident and show less resistance to change (NICHQ, n.d).

Donnelly and Kirk (2015) clearly state the benefits of using the PDSA framework as it “ensures that you do not drift from the initial objectives, that you have actual achievable measurements that are valid and will show improvement if improvement is realised” (p. 281). This model consist of four steps that allows the change to be implemented successfully. The first step is planning the change. The second step involves trying out the change, often on a small scale. The third step is collecting data and analyzing the results. The final steps is tweaking the change model from what was learned (ACT Academy, n.d.).

The Plan stage having been elaborated in details in the first section of this chapter, I will concentrate on the Do, Study, Act stages and make connections with the selected leadership approaches as I answer the three essentials questions: (a) “What are we trying to accomplish?”; (b) “How will we know if the change is an improvement? What measure of success will we use?”; and (c) “What changes can we make that will result in improvement? (The change concepts to be tested) ” (ACT Academy, p. 2). The PDSA model will be used sequentially throughout the change implementation to reflect the fact that each cycle requires a period of reflection, careful study, and adjustment to the plan.

Figure 8. Sequential PDSA cycles. Adapted from ACT Academy, n.d.
What are we trying to accomplish?. By becoming a TIS we hope to create a safe environment for staff and students. This change has to be clearly defined and broken into milestones that are attainable and understood by all stakeholders in order to become a part of reality. Everyone involved has to understand the process by which change will be implemented to gain perspective and understand what the expectations are. Gaining knowledge is empowering. Clearly defining what trauma is and describing its impact on learning allows school personnel and students to have a clearer understanding of the dynamics at play. Following the plan should establish a trauma-informed school culture that promotes healing, connecting, and improving learning outcomes for students-at promise.

How will we know if the change is an improvement? What measure of success will we use?. The first measure of improvement is recognition of the benefits to trauma-informed approaches by all stakeholders. Having a common language and a common mission will allow to gradually bring a sustainable change in early identification of symptoms, varied levels of support offered to students and ultimately better attendance and increased engagement in school. The school will become a protection factor for students, staff members, and families of students impacted by traumatic experiences. The school “will respond to the needs of trauma-exposed students by integrating effective practices, programs, and procedures into all aspects of the organization and culture” (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016, p. 2).

What changes can we make that will result in improvement?. The plan has to be flexible and adjusted throughout the change process. Since continuous learning and assessing is part of a culture of improvement, what needs to be changed will be determined on qualitative and quantitative data collected at different intervals. The quality of the information, the implemented strategies, and the communication process elaborated with other professionals will evolve with
Through learning together, the organization collective-efficacy will grow and school staff will become experts at building resiliency and capacity in students.

Tools

The first measure used allows the leader to set the stage for the change initiative. The results from the *Organizational Readiness for Change Test* – discussed in Chapter 1 – indicates the work that has to be done before starting the change initiative. Once the leader has taken steps to increase readiness, change planning can begin. With a Trauma-Informed School being a recent approach to empowering students and staff and creating a safe environment for everyone, very few tools for monitoring their implementation have been developed and there is a “lack of standard implementation guidelines for trauma informed education systems” (Chafouleas et al., 2016, p. 158). It is unrealistic to expect to be able to develop such tools for measuring our progress through this change implementation. This is why it becomes important to examine the data that is already available and extract relevant information for each step of the PDSA cycle. Chafouleas et al. (2016) describe three aspects of the change implementation that should be measured—knowledge, fidelity, and outcomes.

**Knowledge.** The first step of the plan involves creating a sense of urgency by making people aware of the impact of trauma on school learning. Furthermore, it aims at raising the level of understanding as to what trauma symptoms look like and how our reaction to these symptoms can affect students. By establishing consensus around core trauma knowledge, we hope to develop a common language, a common experience, a common vision. Believing that as a team, we have the information and the ability to implement the change builds collective efficacy. Knowledge is acquired by having a day of professional development at the beginning of the year and through different workshops during the school year. The social worker
specialized in trauma can also answer questions and add to this knowledge base through mentoring and debriefing sessions. Staff must also be informed of the established procedure for referring students to the schoolboard team. In order to create relationships with community agencies, staff must become aware of what services are available even if it is not their responsibility to link students with those services. On a leadership level, the principal can be a lead learner in this acquisition of knowledge, thus helping the whole group develop (Fullan, 2014). Helgesen (1995) also attaches great importance to the acquisition of knowledge. According to her, training should be an integral part of the organizational culture as a tool to promote the exchange of new innovative ideas.

This is probably the easiest component to measure and monitor. A pre/post test can measure the knowledge acquired through different professional learning activity. The language used when talking about students, trauma, and different issues is a reflection of this acquisition of knowledge. Regular walkthroughs with specific look-fors will inform about the alignment of knowledge and how it transcends into practice. Because knowledge has to transpire in every day practices, Martin et al. (2015) suggest preparing a survey as to:

- examine the extent to which program delivery staff and other school staff report increased understanding of trauma and its impact on health, heightened awareness of the traumatic experiences of students, increased sensitivity and respect for students, self-examination of how staff inadvertently contribute to re-traumatizing students and what it means to be trauma-informed. (p. 964)

In the case of this OIP, one-on-one interviews with staff members twice per year, would allow to collect valuable information in regards to the knowledge acquired. Changes can be redefined based on the findings from these interviews.
Fidelity. This element refers to the consistency with which the change is implemented and whether or not it ends up being just a fad. Dudar, Scott, and Scott (2017) note the importance of considering teacher’s perspective about change because “teachers are the key stakeholders upon whom change implementation efforts rest as it is their actions that can make or break a change initiative” (p. 48). It would be critical to provide an outlet for staff to verbalise how they feel during the change process, where they can express any reluctance they might feel. It is important to create a safe climate for expressing and addressing any type of concern in a non-judgemental way. The focus is growth and support. This would help align the change process to the stakeholders’ needs and illuminate challenges so that the implementation plan can be readjusted to counter these difficulties (Perry & Daniels, 2016). The belief that a change leader should develop a collaborative learning team that works with a co-constructed plan fits with this approach. The flexibility of the change plan is reflected by the regular discussions that allow the plan to be adapted to the stakeholders needs. Helgesen’s philosophy of leading from the middle allows the leader to listen, ask the right questions and work collaboratively. Bi-monthly informal debriefing meetings allow the lead team to collect information on an ongoing basis and to understand the feelings of stakeholders. Fidelity can also be measured by the regularity with which staff communicate with the school board support team and by how often they refer students to the support team.

Dudar et al. (2017), discuss Guskey’s Model of Teacher Change, which directly links gains in students’ learning outcome to change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes. Based on this premise, data related to students’ outcomes would not only provide a good measure of the impact of the change plan on reengagement, it would also contribute to motivating teachers to persevere
with the implementation plan. Data such as attendance, credit completion and graduation rate should therefore be examined.

**Outcomes.** Outcomes represent the last measure of change implementation effectiveness. From a leadership point of view, it is important to foster an environment where positive change and innovative ideas can grow. Because outcomes are a shared responsibility, it is necessary to instill a climate of cooperation. The outcomes have to be clearly defined and communicated to all stakeholders. Goal attainment are milestones that should be measured and celebrated whether they are short, medium, or long term. This allows to measure the impact of becoming a trauma-informed school on student reengagement. Although no standardize measure of measuring the impact of a trauma-informed school base intervention exits, consulting data already gathered by the school board for other purposes can be useful in assessing the impact of the change on different stakeholders’ outcome. Each year, as part of its students’ well-being initiative, the CSDVDL administers the *Onboard Spring Resiliency Survey* (see Figure 9) to all grade 5-12 students. Schools receive the data for their students. A section of the survey is about school climate. It is possible to monitor students’ results from year to year. Improvement on the school section of the resiliency survey could be linked to the successful implementation of the change plan. In addition, weaknesses in different areas could reveal needs that should be addressed.
The last tool for evaluating outcome is the *School Climate Survey* that is mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education at least every two years. Although this survey is anonymous, it is filled by students, school staff, and parents. CSDVDL schools receive data classified by categories of respondents. It is therefore possible to have a general idea of the change impact on students, school staff and parents.

**Self-care.** Staff awareness of their own needs and of the importance of balancing work, leisure, and rest is an important aspect of becoming a trauma-informed school. Martin et al. (2017) also mention the powerful impact of having connections with others as an element of well-being and self-care. Once again, I have not found tools specifically designed to evaluate self-care. Listening and creating a safe climate where people are free to voice their opinions and concerns will allow to gauge people’s well-being and notice if signs of vicarious trauma arise. All staff members having the knowledge about being a trauma-informed schools, a raised awareness of symptoms of compassion fatigue will permeate the organization. Since September, CSDVDL has enrolled all of its employees in the *Sprout Program* (Sprout, n.d.). This program

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**Figure 9.** Onboard Resiliency Framework. Source: Resiliency Initiatives (n.d.)
is an online corporate wellness platform. Everyone wishing to participate, gets a weekly report on their wellness level, advices for self-care, and fun challenges to a better lifestyle. This is a powerful tool to enable each staff member to take care of herself or himself.

Both Fullan (2016) and Helgesen (1995) stress the importance for a leader to communicate effectively. A plan to communicate the need for change and the change process has to be developed. Effective communication ensures transparency, maintains a solid team, facilitates innovation, and builds relationships. That is the most powerful tool when implementing change. The measure of communication is directly related to the measure of success.

**Plan to communicate the Need for Change and the Change Process**

To implement this change successfully, it is important to establish clear and transparent communication throughout the change process. This section focusses on why communication is important in successfully becoming a trauma informed school and how change will be communicated to different stakeholders. Researchers believe that effective communication is at the core of reaching set goals and that poor communication often leads to failure (Barrett, 2002; Elving, 2005; Klein, 1996; Lewis, 2007). Elving (2005) states, “poorly managed change communication results in rumors and resistance to change, exaggerating the negative aspects of the change” (p. 129), thus emphasizing the importance of elaborating a clear communication plan. He proposes a conceptual model where the two main aims of communicating are to inform and to create a community (Elving, 2005). This is consistent with the leadership approach described in this OIP.

Helgesen’s (1995) *Web of Inclusion* allows direct communication within the organization and with community services. Information is passed on quickly and the web like
structure allows the leader to lead from the middle thus emphasizing relationships. It facilitates the creation of a shared vision and stresses the importance of team learning and collective efficacy. The “power of connections” (Helgesen, 1995, p. 31) which values different stakeholders’ input and ideas is essential in building this sense of community. Similarly, Fullan’s (2014) third key to effective leadership is becoming a change agent. “Building trust through clear communications and expectations” (Fullan, 2014, p. 130) is an important aspect of becoming a change agent as it entails that the leader will take time to listen and will ensure that the messages are clear and that conflicts are dealt with. Once again, these strategies allow for communicating to inform and for creating a sense of community within the organization and with external stakeholders. Removing boundaries by communicating effectively is about sending a clear and transparent message and relationship building (Elving, 2005). Barrett (2002) makes a strong point when asserting “effective employee communication is the glue that holds the organization together, and during major changes, that glue becomes even more critical” (p. 231). The first step to effective communication is creating awareness of the need for change.

**Plan for Building Awareness of the Need for Change within the Organization**

Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993) stress the importance of creating readiness for the organizational change. As a change leader, it becomes my responsibility to understand how I can influence the different stakeholders’ readiness for change. The message communicated is two-fold. First, it is important to make everyone aware of the discrepancy between the present state and the desired state. Secondly, the leader must send the message that the organization possesses the individual and collective efficacy to make the change a reality (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993).
The message. In the case of this OIP it is important to create the belief that at-promise students’ school engagement can be greatly improved by creating a safe environment where they can connect with staff. Becoming a trauma-informed school will give us the strategies to understand the impact of trauma, to recognize the signs and to respond appropriately therefore creating an environment for healing. At this time, students are disengaged as reflected by sporadic attendance patterns, poor credit accumulation, and low graduation rates. As described in Chapter 1, obtaining an OSSD greatly improves the students’ chance in life. It is therefore important to put in place conditions for success. Creating a trauma sensitive environment is beneficial to students and staff (Chafoualeas et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017; Mendelson et al., 2015).

The second part of the message should “build the target’s confidence that it has the capability to correct the discrepancy” (Armenakis et al., 1993). By building self and collective efficacy, it becomes possible to create the need for becoming a trauma informed school and the belief that it is a desired state that we as individuals and as a group have the ability to attain.

Readiness and urgency for change. According to Armenakis et al., (1993), “by combining readiness and urgency, various combinations of change conditions can be hypothesized” (p. 692). As previously discussed, the Readiness for Change Questionnaire (Cawsey et al., 2016) and the School Effectiveness Framework (Ministry of Education, 2013) have revealed that existing organization conditions show a high readiness for change. Staff is aware of the need for change. Student engagement has been a priority in the school improvement plan for the last three years. The majority of staff members is willing to undertake change. As part of the plan to communicate the need for change, it might be necessary to initiate challenging conversations when “negative information can result in defensive reactions, like
denial, flight, or withdrawal” (Armenakis et al., 1993, p. 685). The Ontario Principal’s Council (2011) developed a framework for engaging in such conversations to address issues and resistance to change. By creating a safe process to address misunderstanding and disagreement, the school leader can “negotiate the challenging conversations that are woven into the fabric of all effective schools” (The Ontario Principal’s Council, 2011, p. 119). Figure 10 helps understand *The Critical Path* that will be adopted to deal with misunderstanding as part of the plan for communicating change. Smet, Vander Elst, Griep, and DeWitte (2016) established that “organizations should invest in realistic communication, meaning that they should provide frequent, honest, and relevant information about change” (p. 642). Furthermore, teachers’ concerns should be addressed and there should be opportunities for people to disagree or raise questions (Smet, Vander Elst, Griep, & DeWitte, 2016).

**Figure 10.** Process for effective communication. Adapted from Ontario’s Principals’ Council, 2011, p. 32-34.

This OIP represents finding a solution to an urgent problem as students’ outcomes are at stake. It is important to create a sense of urgency and to implement a communication plan that takes into account the need to use efficient strategies. This results in a “high readiness / high
urgency” (Armenakis et al., 1993, p. 694) situation therefore persuasive communication is the best tool for building awareness of the need for change.

**Persuasive communication.** According to Armenakis et al. (1993), “persuasive communication is primarily a source of explicit information regarding discrepancy and efficacy” (p. 688). In this case, oral persuasive communication would be the best choice for preparing staff and students for implementing the change process because it allows the change leader to deliver a personal message, to listen for cues as to people’s receptiveness to the message and to give immediate feedback. The main objective is to communicate the need to adopt a trauma informed approach and to emphasize the belief that through our collective efforts this will become a reality. Once there is a staff buy-in for becoming a trauma informed school, it is important to clearly communicate path of change, milestones and wins.

**Strategies to Communicate Clearly**

Positive outcomes of implementing change are achieved through transparent and honest communication at different stages of the plan. Klein (1996) elaborates six key principles for effective organizational communication: (a) “redundancy of message and medium”; (b) “face-to-face communication is more effective”; (c) “line authority is an effective communication channel”; (d) “the supervisor is a key communicator”; (e) “the use of opinion leaders”; and (f) “personally relevant information is better retained” (p. 34-36). These key principles will be the basis for choosing how and what to communicate at the different stages of Cawsey et al. (2016) *Change Path Model.*

**Awakening.** Communication at this stage encompasses the strategies elaborated to identify and confirm the need for change. Staff should be involved in every step of this process to fully understand what becoming a trauma informed school entails. The change leader should
be available to answer questions and provide additional information when required. It is also
important to communicate the plan to the school board to get the necessary financial and human
resources. The social worker with a trauma specialization and the principal are the main change
agents at this point. They prepare and convey the message for change. Face-to-face
communication is chosen as it “clarifies ambiguities, and increases the probability that the sender
and receiver are connecting appropriately” (Klein, 1996, p. 35).

**Mobilization.** Communication at this stage is crucial as it necessitates managing
recipients of change, influencing stakeholders and developing a change team (Cawsey et al.,
2016). Through education and professional development, staff at École Plein Soleil will gain
knowledge about becoming a trauma informed school and will build collective efficacy by
developing strategies to empower learners by creating a culture of understanding and
compassion. Self-care is also addressed at this stage as it is an important aspect of avoiding
vicarious trauma (Dorado et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017). Furthermore, learning about
secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma, addresses personal concerns and makes the
information about trauma more apt to be retained. Another effective strategy would be to have
“past” students who are willing to share their stories, come and address staff and students. As the
approach is established and success stories emerge, it would reinforce the importance of
maintaining trauma-informed practices. Once again, face-to-face communication is preferred.
Written material is also distributed during professional development activities. Teachers are
trained to become agents of change. As a change leader, the principal is a lead learner as
described by Fullan (2014). With the help of the social worker this allows me to foster a culture
of collaboration, to be a key communicator (Klein, 1996), to answer questions as they arise, and
to build relationships. Common language and practices are established. Milestones are set. A
strong, positive change team is developed. Key messages are repeated in the weekly newsletter to staff because “repetition of the message through more than one medium increases people’s memory of the message” (Klein, 1996, p. 34).

Information is spread to other stakeholders during the mobilization stage. The change team starts informing students about what trauma is, and what the effects and signs of trauma are. This is done through information sessions, workshops, and messages posted throughout the school. Once again, redundancy of message insures that the message is received and understood. Communication with community partners is initiated through face-to-face meetings. Community partners are invited to attend an information session to gain a better understanding of their possible contribution to making the school trauma-informed. Opinion leaders and key community players establish a partnership and a communication plan.

**Acceleration.** At this point, all staff members have the knowledge to recognize the signs of trauma and to respond appropriately. It is time to put that knowledge into practice. Communication consists in reminders of what has been learned, school team discussions around certain students that require additional help, coaching to improve skills, and debriefing after particular hard situations. Short weekly meetings give everyone the chance to share and celebrate success stories. Being trauma sensitive remains at the forefront of all interventions.

Students understand trauma and are able to recognize some of the triggers. A common trauma informed vocabulary is used to communicate effectively. Mindfulness and meditation sessions are offered and students participate on a voluntary basis. These activities are advertised at school and on the school’s Facebook™ page as “the use of several media is more effective than the use of just one” (Klein, 1996, p. 34).
Meetings with community agencies are scheduled regularly and a referral protocol is developed to facilitate communication. Bringing everyone together allows us to pool our resources and to understand what everyone has to offer and which services are best to address specific problems. The school is the center of communication. Once again, face-to-face communication is preferred but technology such as Google Meet™ or Skype™ is used to facilitate bringing key players together. Mendelson et al. (2015) believe “schools are a natural setting for prevention efforts, given their considerable influence on youth development” (p. 142). École Plein Soleil becomes the nerve center facilitating access to services for students suffering from the aftermath of traumatic events.

**Institutionalization.** Cawsey et al. (2016) refer to this stage as “confirming the change phase” (p. 322). Celebrating successes is an important step that is often undervalued (Cawsey et al., 2016; Klein, 1996). Because this stage involves assessing the change implementation it is important to take time to consider different stakeholders opinion and understanding of the change initiatives. Different questionnaires and surveys are elaborated to hear everyone’s opinion and perception of the new trauma-informed environment. Questions such as: Is the change having a positive impact on school climate?; Do staff members feel empowered by the strategies they have learned?; Are partnerships with community agencies well established?; need to be answered. This allows for the “information flow to be multidirectional, continuous and concrete so that people can become comfortable in the fact that they have reasonably full understanding of the personal implications of the change” (Klein, 1996, p.42). At every stage of the change implementation process, it is important to choose communication strategies strategically.
Communication Strategy Choices

Lewis (2007) explores four dimensions of communication strategy choices: (a) “positive versus balanced message;” (b) “dissemination versus input focus;” (c) “targeted message versus blanket message;” and (d) “discrepancy focus versus efficacy focus” (pp. 187-189). These strategies are examined to “base predictions about change implementation and the responses to it” (Lewis, 2007, p. 187). The change leader’s perception of the change situation and of the forces at play will influence the mix of communication strategies that will be chosen.

Positive versus balanced messages. As a change leader I would opt for presenting a more balanced message that presents the advantages of becoming a trauma informed school while acknowledging the possible negative aspects that stakeholders might raise. Honesty and facts have a greater impact in getting teachers’ buy-in than concentrating only on positive aspects. Furthermore, the process elaborated to have courageous conversation allows for maintaining a healthy work environment when dealing with disagreements.

Dissemination focus versus input focus. A participatory approach to implementation is important when communicating with staff and community agencies as it “is beneficial in lowering resistance or improving compliance with the change initiatives” (Lewis, 2007, p. 188). Stakeholders are more likely to feel good about the change if they feel like they have a certain amount of control (Klein, 1996). At the beginning of the change implementation, students and parents need to be informed of the change. Students’ input will be solicited at the acceleration and institutionalization stages.

Targeted message versus blanket message. Because consensus seeking is an important part of the change implementation process, it is important to customize the messages to specific stakeholders. This allows for a personal approach, which reflects the caring
environment that we are trying to create for students. Although it is possible to incorporate messages intended for one group with communication for another group, the depth of the communication will vary greatly from one stakeholder to the other because their concerns, the necessary implication, and the desired implication in the change process vary greatly.

**Discrepancy focus versus efficacy focus.** The last dimension of communication goes hand in hand with Armenakis et al.’s (1993) message that articulates the discrepancy between the present state and the desired state and confirms the stakeholders’ ability to implement the change. I feel it is important to keep a balance between those two foci in order to create the sense of urgency required to prepare the change implementation.

The elements of the communication plan described in this chapter will have a great impact on how the message is received and change program outcomes. By building awareness for change, carefully selecting communication strategies and planning the different communications, it will be possible to bring authenticity to the change implementation and to successfully create a trauma-informed culture at École Plein Soleil.

**Conclusion**

**Next Steps**

This OIP proposes that by becoming trauma-informed the alternative high school will be able to reengage students *at-promise* thus improving their chances of graduating from high school and leading a better life (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Rooted in social justice, this plan requires a shift in culture and in power structures. To have a lasting impact it requires developing new paradigms (Morton & Berardi, 2018). Once the change plan is implemented, key issues have to remain at the forefront of all our interventions to insure long-term sustainability. These
issues include engaging all stakeholders, giving students a voice, establishing a wraparound approach for students, and building collective efficacy.

Communication being at the heart of this OIP, it is important to open transparent and honest channels of communication. An important element in creating this type of environment is creating forums where all stakeholders can be heard such as information sessions, newsletters, and surveys. This continuous input will shape the school culture. Building a trauma informed school with the help of community agencies means constant dialogue to synchronize our interventions and adjust our plan. It is important to have conversations about inequities and to evaluate our partnerships to foster a caring learning environment (Paccione-Dyszlewski, 2016).

Once all staff members are familiar with implementing trauma informed strategies, it will become important that student voice become stronger. École Plein Soleil is their school. The program offered should reflect their needs and their interests. Learning opportunities should include dual-credit opportunities, community-connected experiential learning, and co-op programs in order to create an individualized pathway that will help students achieve their learning goals.

Establishing a wraparound approach for students is one of the proposed solutions for this OIP. It would be a viable next step to increase students’ sense of belonging, school motivation and resiliency (Greenberg et al., 2003). One of the components of this approach is to establish a mentoring system. This non-parental significant adult would coordinate services for the youth and build an authentic relationship based on students’ needs. It was initially proposed that a staff member become a mentor. Since creating a trauma informed approach has opened the school to the community, it would be interesting to consider looking for mentors outside the
school. By expanding the pool of possible mentors, chances of finding someone a student can relate to are higher.

Finally, it is important to build a culture of collective efficacy to sustain motivation and create an environment of constant learning for staff members. Teachers’ belief that as a group they can make a difference will provide the necessary support to sustain the implemented change (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Once again, communication is key. Through professional dialogue, staff will expand their strategies, new teachers will have the opportunity to adopt trauma informed practices, and self-care will remain an important component of our school culture. As described in Chapter 2, empowering teachers by developing collective efficacy will create a rich, caring, creative and stimulating environment.

**Future Considerations**

In looking in the future, it is imperative to build a culture of continuous learning and constant improvement. The staff at École Plein Soleil, will be considered experts in the field as they keep improving their practice through research. Strategies and policies that are applied will have to be research based. It is important to keep looking at the alternative high school with a critical lens to bring it to a level where it becomes a tool in fostering equity and social justice.

École Plein Soleil will become a flagship school. Through implementing trauma informed strategies, staff will succeed in creating an environment where students feel supported and safe. Student voice will have an impact on the next steps taken to make the school a model for alternative high schools in Ontario. Furthermore, students will be inspired to tackle social justice issues becoming survivors of trauma and not victims. As relationships with community agencies grow and awareness is build outside the school, École Plein Soleil, will be a hub where experts can collaboratively help students *at-promise* reach their full potential. It will represent an
alternative to disengagement. Through hope and empowerment, these students will find their passion and lead a productive life.
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Appendix A

The Change Path Model

### Awakening

1. Identify a need for change and confirm the problems or opportunities that incite the need for change through collection of data.
2. Articulate the gap in performance between the present and the envisioned future state and spread awareness of the data and the gap throughout the organization.
3. Develop a powerful vision for change.
4. Disseminate the vision for the change and why it’s needed through multiple communication channels.

### Mobilization

1. Make sense of the desired change through formal systems and structures and leverage those systems to reach the change vision.
2. Assess power and cultural dynamics at play and put them to work to better understand the dynamics and build coalitions and support to realize the change.
3. Communicate the need for change organization-wide and manage change recipients and various stakeholders as they react to and move the change forward.
4. Leverage change agent personality, knowledge, skills and abilities, and related assets.

### Acceleration

1. Continue to systematically reach out to engage and empower others in support, planning, and implementation of the change. Help them develop needed new knowledge, skills, abilities, and ways of thinking that will support the change.
2. Use appropriate tools and techniques to build momentum, accelerate and consolidate progress.
3. Manage the transition, celebrate small wins and the achievement of milestones along the larger, more difficult path of change.

### Institutionalization

1. Track the change periodically and through multiple balanced measures to help assess what is needed, gauge progress toward the goal and to make modifications as needed and mitigate risk.
2. Develop and deploy new structures, systems, processes and knowledge, skills and abilities, as needed, to bring life to the change and new stability to the transformed organization.

# Appendix B

## A Framework for Change

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Thinking and It’s Context</strong></td>
<td>Here we are concerned with idea generation using creative thinking techniques as well as developing and nurturing ideas through our networks.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Define the Change Initiative</strong></td>
<td>The concern here is with identifying the roles of strategists, implementors, and recipients, and analyzing the organization and its need for change.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Evaluate the Climate for Change</strong></td>
<td>Here we consider the stress on the organization and past history of success or failure with change.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Develop a Change Plan</strong></td>
<td>In this step one considers the power dynamics in the organization and the complicated interdependencies involved in crafting an implementation plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5. Find and Cultivate a Sponsor</strong></td>
<td>A powerful sponsor can facilitate driving the change process due to their extensive resources and considerable powers of influence through established organizational networks.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6. Prepare the Target Audience</strong></td>
<td>We now try to understand and learn from change resistors. We build on the energy and consider different tactics to deal with differential levels of support for the change effort.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7. Create the Cultural Fit Making the Change Last</strong></td>
<td>Just as a farmer needs to know which crops to plant where and when for a fertile yield, the change manager needs to consider changes in organization design factors such as structure, measurement systems, reward systems, and development systems that are needed to help the change “take” and thrive in a supportive environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8. Change Leader Teams and Teamwork Planning</strong></td>
<td>Just as a forest requires a carefully developed ecosystem of plans and animals working in harmony, our change efforts requires teams carefully chosen whose members are committed, competent, and who share a common goal, like a super bowl winning football team as opposed to an all star team.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9. Small Wins and Motivation</strong></td>
<td>Just as ribbons and medals are bestowed on members of the armed forces for commendable behavior, so to are we concerned about rewarding progress toward intermediate milestones along the change journey.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10. Constantly and Strategically Communicate the Change</strong></td>
<td>In the same way that a teacher clarifies expectations, explains successful learning strategies, and listens to student concerns, change implementors act in a similar fashion. They explain, listen to and work with change recipients to prepare them for the impending change.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11. Measuring Progress of the Change Effort</strong></td>
<td>Just as a scientist needs to carefully and precisely measure ingredients in chemical experiments, change implementors must take great pains to ensure that change measures have fidelity while assessing progress towards the change, with a focus on tangible accomplishments, as opposed to measures of activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12. Integrate Lessons Learned</strong></td>
<td>Just as the knowledge of the universe and of space exploration is built on the contributions of knowledge passed on through the millennia, so to must be our efforts to capture and diffuse knowledge gained in change efforts be carefully and systematically captured, gathered and diffused so that learning is continuous and the same mistakes are not repeated again.</td>
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Appendix C

Theory of Teacher Education for Social Justice

Appendix D

Strategy Map

Source: Adapted from Cawsey et al., 2016. Retrieved from https://www.cgma.org/resources/tools/essential-tools/strategy-mapping.html