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# Empowering Women Principals to Find Joy: Nurturing Mental Health and Wellbeing

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**Abstract**

Women are overrepresented as education workers (education assistants, early childhood educators, and teachers) and underrepresented as educational leaders (administrators, superintendents). A problem of practice exists where unrealistic demands, increased workload, diminished support, and a lack of recognition of gender differences have contributed to a decline in mental health and wellness of administrators.

This Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) considers conceptual and theoretical frameworks, literature review, change frameworks, and evaluation mechanisms to arrive at an equity-focused solution that supports mental health and wellbeing while promoting joy. A blended transformative and authentic leadership approach is applied to a critical feminist stance that is underpinned with a social justice lens, ethic of care, and appreciative position. A logic model that considers inputs such as individual and organizational readiness, PESTL, and gap analysis is applied to a blended change model that considers appreciative inquiry theory and change path model. Current literature, relevant qualitative, and quantitative data are considered with a view to deconstructing the current systems in place with a view to valuing and creating a more just and equitable system.

A preferred solution is suggested that recognizes gender differences, identifies barriers that exist, prioritizes mental health, and creates system opportunities for women administrators to support one another and share common experiences. The preferred solution has the potential to build community, improve wellbeing, and provide opportunities to find joy.

*Keywords*: Appreciative inquiry, critical feminist theory, equity, ethic of care, women administrators, K-12

**Executive Summary**

This Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) has a strong moral and ethical purpose that addresses the current inequities that exist for women administrators in the Call to Belong School Board (CTBSB; a pseudonym). The CTBSB is a publicly funded mid-size board in the province of Ontario. A priority of the school board continues to be a commitment to mental health and wellness for all. This commitment is demonstrated through the CTBSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) (CTBSB, 2023) goal that staff experience a positive, healthy, and inclusive workplace. A critical feminist theory (Blackmore, 2013; Wood, 2021) approach that considers tenants of feminist leadership (Batliwala, 2010; Freire, 1998; Wakefield, 2017), transformative leadership (Freire, 1998; Shields, 2010, 2016, 2018, 2022) and authentic leadership (Corveli et al., 2017; Duigan, 2014) theories are used to guide me to look for hope and opportunities to institute real change by evoking this DiP.

For the last twenty-five years in Ontario, there has been an increase in the number of women administrators, although the percentage of women in educational leadership still is much smaller than the percentage of women who work in education (OME, 2020). COVID-19 highlighted the complexities of the various roles women have that contribute to the challenges that exist for women in educational leadership. Currently, the CTBSB has few mechanisms in place to acknowledge, identify, and support the needs of women administrators. Both 2022 and 2023 data results from the Guarding Mind at Work (GM@W) survey indicate that less than half of the principals described their wellbeing as excellent or good (CTBSB; 2023, 2024). Of serious concern were workload management, balance, psychological protection, psychological support, and organizational culture. Currently, there is a lack of awareness and support that acknowledges the gender differences and biases that exist.

The Problem of Practice (PoP) explored in this DiP seeks to highlight the barriers that exist for women administrators. This exploration is done by creating awareness, challenging the status quo, considering antiquated policies, and highlighting the gaps that exist. These gaps include lack of resources, professional development, and awareness. Women administrators also have additional pressures and considerations compared to their male colleagues. These pressures include most women waiting until they are older to apply for leadership positions, the unpaid work that women do inside of the home, the systemic policies that do not recognize women, lack of role models, limited mentorship opportunities, and pay inequity that continues to exist (Bascia & Young 2001; Chase & Bell 1990; Eagly & Carli 2007; Harris 2020; Helterbran & Reig, 2004; Riehl & Byrd 1997; Sperandio 2015).

I will use my theoretical, leadership, organizational, and contextual knowledge to devise a plan that seeks change within the CTBSB organization. A goal of this DiP is to recommend a solution that may be foundational to recruiting, recognizing, and retaining women administrators while nurturing their mental health and wellbeing. I am committed to conscientization (Freire, 1970, 1998; Lopez, 2016, 2021). I seek to identify the assets and perspectives that women administrators contribute to the organization while at the same time ensuring that their wellbeing is supported and nurtured so that they may find joy.

Chapter 1 of this DiP will describe the complex problem within the organizational context. The first chapter continues to identify and frame the PoP and gives insight as to why change is urgently needed. Wakefield's (2017) transformative and feminist leadership approaches, authenticity, theoretical frameworks, leadership agency, and positionality will be considered along with a vision for change. The envisioned future state ensures that equity actions remain a priority and moments of joy are connected to wellbeing. The vision for change will focus on an organizational culture change that creates the conditions for all

individuals to learn and develop (Fullan, 2019). One of the greatest challenges is to consider

my position, ability, and reflexivity to be a change initiator, leader, and participant.

Chapter 2 will outline a leadership approach that considers the voices of all. Three

proposed solutions, change readiness, ethics, and a blended change model will be considered

in relation to potential solutions. The blended change model intertwines Cooperrider's (2005)

appreciative inquiry and Deszca et al.'s (2020) change path model. The model includes

awakening, mobilizing, creating a plan, and institutionalizing. A key feature of the initial

stage of the blended change model analyzes individual and organizational readiness for

change (Armenakis et al., 2007; Wang, 2020). Chapter 2 concludes with a rationale for the

selection of most appropriate solution: establishing an affinity/employee support group for

female administrators.

The third and final chapter will detail the change implementation plan. Next, a

knowledge mobilization process of connecting research to policy and practice will be

depicted (Malik, 2020). From there a monitoring and evaluating framework utilizing critical

appreciative inquiry is articulated. A communication process that includes opportunities for

Deming's 2018 Plan-Do-Study-Act to be incorporated in detailed will be included. Finally,

there will be attention to the next steps and future considerations.

As a female principal, I come to this DiP with hopefulness and appreciation. I do not

want to focus on the flaws that exist within the organization. I am inspired by the words of

Saint Catherine of Siena "be who God wants you to be and you will set the world on fire."

This DiP is intended to guide third-order transformative change (Bartunek & Moch, 1987;

Barbuto, 2022) within the CTBSB. I long to amplify the female voice and listen to

experiences of females with a view to identify the social transformations and policy

adjustments necessary for gender equality (Ispa-Landa et al., 2019) and gender equity. The

intention is to create a more equitable system that supports all female administrators' mental

health and wellbeing. Greater principal efficacy and wellbeing will lead to greater student success and staff satisfaction. An unintended bonus of my work is that I was rediscovered that joy is connected to gratitude. Joy is not only a feeling, but it is also an attitude. It is not always constant; it comes to us when we least expect it.

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# Acknowledgement

I love being a principal. To me, teaching is a vocation, as opposed to an occupation. Leading Catholic education at my current school with amazing staff and community brings me joy. There are still barriers that exist for women in education. Unfortunately, I have experienced some of these barriers by way of micro aggression, lack of understanding, and systemic transgressions. A wise woman once said in education, we do not always value education. By sharing this Dissertation-in-Practice and opening discussions for potential solutions I strive to change this.

I want to thank my cohort; we have worked together supporting and encouraging one another. Thank you to my critical friends. This journey has been long and difficult. I am so appreciative that each of you were with me to guide, support, and check in. Thank you to Erin and Shailau who picked up the phone when I called looking for support and confirmation. Lindsay and Phillip, I have grown from working with you both. I am blessed that our shared faith serves as a root for our friendship. I am happy to be on the Catholic education journey with you both. I was blessed to start this journey under the leadership of Dr. Katina Pollock. Thank you to Dr. Dianne Yee, Dr. Erin Keith, Dr. Philipa Meyers, and Yvonne Fuller, at Western University who I worked with throughout this journey. Special appreciation to Dr. Scott Lowrey who cared to take the time to invest in his students.

I am thankful to the women leaders who have come before me. We need to continue what they started. I am blessed and fortunate to work and learn with twelve strong Catholic women leaders-the LEAP group. You hold a special place in my heart, and I am thankful for your support and encouragement. From the senior team, JM, JR, KP, and LG, you model faith, compassion, integrity, and grace. Each of you are not afraid to be present, offer support, and guidance, for this I am grateful. To my Cool Chicks, you demonstrate to me the importance of caring female relationships.

My dearest friends DB, MB, RD, CK, & SBW thank you for always being in my corner. I salute the fabulous women (DC, GL, NS, TR, TM, LS, & JW) who have co-created mentorship opportunities with me. I am grateful for all that I have learned with you. Thank you to DR, SM, TC and EC you helped me navigate one of the biggest challenges. I appreciate your support. Finally, I am so fortunate to have amazing colleagues, students, and the families in the amazing rural school who supported and encouraged me. I am humbled to be the leader of such a fabulous community.

I know that my dad is proud of his two daughters becoming Doctors. He taught me that it is more important to be kind than to be important. I am grateful for my son Aidan, his compassion for others, his strong work ethic, and grit to go after what he wants. Keep pursuing your dreams. I am thankful to my husband Scott. I do not say it enough. Your patience and understanding are truly appreciated. I could not have done this without you.

I hope to always inspire women leaders to life-long learners, that can accomplish extraordinary achievements that will make a positive impact on the world. I have deep gratitude to my ancestors who were mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters, and cousins. Your struggles have shaped who I am. I love the incredible women in my life; caring Cape Breton mother Willena, her love for her family is so beautiful. I cannot wait to play board games with my brilliant sister Dr. Kimmy, your time and care when reviewing my work is appreciated. Finally, I dedicate this work to the most important woman in my life, my amazing daughter Alexandra. I hope to always encourage you to be strong and resilient. You challenge me, you listen, and you stand up for what is right and just. I strive to be more like you.

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## List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AI | Appreciative Inquiry |
| BIPOC | Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour |
| CFT | Critical Feminist Theory |
| CPM | Change Path Model |
| CTBSB | Called to Belong School Board |
| DiP | Dissertation-in-Practice |
| FOS | Family of Schools |
| GM@W | Guarding Minds at Work Survey |
| GSN | Grant for Student Needs |
| HR | Human Resources |
| JEDI | Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion |
| KMb | Change Mobilization Plan |
| LEAP | Leaders Empowering Amazing People |
| MYSP | Multi Year Strategic Plan |
| OLF | Ontario Leadership Framework |
| OLS | Ontario Leadership Strategy |
| OME | Ministry of Education Ontario |
| PDSA | Plan-Do-Study-Act |
| PESTL | Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal |
| PPM | Policy and Procedures Memorandum |
| SCT | Social Cognitive Theory |
| 2SLGTBQI+ | Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersect and additional people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities |

**Definitions**

**Conscientization:** a form of activism that provides a way for educational leaders to develop agency, act and build capacity on important issues about equity, diversity, and social justice (Freire, 1970, 1998; Lopez, 2016, 2021).

**Female:** denoting the sex that typically has the capacity to bear offspring or produce eggs.

**Gendered**: a bias towards one particular sex or gender.

**Leadership**: a process that involves social influence and typically occurs within a group context and entails goal attainment (Northouse, 2022).

**Neoliberalism**: a political and economic philosophy that emphasizes free trade, deregulation, globalization, and a reduction in economic regulation.

**Positionality**: where someone is situated in relation to their social identities.

**Self-Awareness**: having a clear perception of your personality, including strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, beliefs, motivation, and emotions.

**Self-Efficacy**: the belief in one's ability to influence events that effect one's life and control over the way these events are experienced (Bandura, 1986).

**Social Capital:** the networks of relationships amongst people.

**Transformational Leadership**: a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems.

**Transformative Leadership**: begins with questions about justice and democracy. It critiques the inequitable practices and offers the promise of a better life lived in common with others (Freire, 1998; Shields, 2010, 2016, 2018, 2022).

**Wellbeing**: that positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social, and physical needs are being met (OME, 2016).

**Woman:** an adult who lives and identifies as female though they may have been said to have a different sex (biological category that is determined genetically) at birth.

**Chapter 1: Empowering Women Principals**

This Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) is devised through a critical feminist theory

perspective that considers the representation, challenges, and experiences faced by women

principals in a neoliberal Ontario school system. Gender identity is a topic that is very personal

and individual. For this discussion, the terms 'woman/women' are used to describe an adult who

lives and identifies as female though they may have been said to have a different sex at birth. For

this DiP 'female' and 'woman/women' are used interchangeable to identify administrators who

identify as an adult woman. Critical feminist theory (CFT) considers diversity, equity, and

inclusion as it promotes gender equity and social justice (Blackmore, 2013; Wood, 2021). I will

use gender as a focus of analysis, looking at policies and procedures that have excluded,

devalued, or undermined concerns for women. I long to amplify the female voice and listen to

experiences of females with a view to identify the social transformations and policy adjustments

necessary for gender equality (Ispa-Landa et al., 2019). With a critical feminist theory

foundation, I aim to create awareness and opportunity to challenge existing practices with a

desire for change. I am cognizant that most of the scholarship related to feminist epistemologies

in educational leadership thus far remains unconsciously White, straight, abled, male, and not

intersectional with other identities (Capper, 2019).

This chapter begins with a close look at my positionality, position, and lens statement to

determine the epistemological framework through which this problem of practice will be viewed.

Next, the organizational context will be reviewed, and the problem of practice will be considered

and framed while determining some guiding questions. Finally, the chapter will conclude with

the leadership vision for change in terms of the current and future state.

## Leadership Positionality, Position, and Lens

My lived experience and relationships with other women administrators have led me to be an advocate for mental health and wellbeing. Recently, I have received accreditation as a recognized professional mental health associate in Ontario. I have a moral imperative as a woman leader to encourage a social critique of how policies and practices are done and what is acceptable. My goal is to reconnect with my purpose and to find joy in the work that I do. It is crucial that all voices are heard. It is important to identify and recognize how my leadership positionality, position, and lens contribute or limit my involvement for this DiP.

### Leadership Positionality

I identify as a White, cis gender, middle class woman. I see myself as a mother, sister, daughter, friend, teacher, researcher, volunteer, student, and leader. As a principal of a rural school in Ontario, I feel like my voice is heard by those with whom I work directly. Yet, my input is not always sought at the system level. I am collaborative in nature and intentionally seek out the voices of all, especially equity seeking staff members. As a woman leader, I experience that the needs of women are often overlooked, discouraged, not solicited, and not supported by the senior team. As effective school leaders are key to high-performing schools and healthy school environments, work intensification, and lack of support not only threaten school leader recruitment and retention, but also the wellbeing and performance of both staff and students (Pollock, 2017). I have experienced working in isolation, working at schools that have significant needs, having increased demands, and working at schools where there is limited support. As a mentor and an experienced administrator, I will use my positionality to create awareness in hopes of change being implemented.

My positionality is centered upon being a woman leader, working as the sole

administrator in an elementary school. One way this positionality is supported is by our family of schools grouping, as there are other women leaders and our voices may be heard. I pride myself on being an authentic leader whose opinion is valued and sought by others. I continue to work on my own self-awareness and continue to develop my leadership skills. I co-created an informal affinity group that consists of 12 like-minded women administrators. There is a group chat appropriately named LEAP, which stands for 'leaders empowering amazing people.' This group has provided me with mental health support and with this support, I am able to find some aspects of joy in my role as principal. Together, we ask questions, share stories, consult, and push each other's thinking forward. I reach out to the group when I am looking to talk operational items through or reaffirm what I believe. This informal grouping highlights the impact and value that a formalized affinity grouping and mentorship programs could have in serving the wants and needs of women principals.

Leadership requires a commitment to learning, growing, and reflection. I long for systemic improvements to recognize women principals. I strive to have a positive, asset-based approach. I see myself as a constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978) and a research scholar (Apple, 2019). I believe that we construct the knowledge that we experience. As a leader, I know the importance of being a lifelong learner. I strive for intellectual humility to deepen my understanding so that I can apply what I learn.

**Leadership Position**

My background and lived experiences contribute significantly to the leadership approach and lens that I bring. Many different leadership theories have shaped my ideas. I am particularly guided by feminist leadership (Batliwala, 2010; Freire, 1998; Wakefield, 2017), transformative leadership (Freire, 1998; Shields, 2010, 2016, 2018, 2022) and authentic leadership (Corveli et

al., 2017; Duigan, 2014). Figure 1 illustrates the blended leadership approach through a critical

feminist theoretical lens. These leadership approaches will be used to address this problem of

practice in a blended leadership approach that will guide me to be true to what I believe, while

considering common good for all. The blended leadership approach encompasses who I am and

who I want to be as a leader. As a faith-filled woman leader I am moved by my moral

imperative, equity considerations, and desire for justice. As a leader in Ontario, I am greatly

influenced by the Ontario Leadership Framework (OME, 2013) that is transformational in nature.

My lived experiences have led me be to the leader that I am today. I must engage in an ongoing

process to build my own capacity so that I may support others to challenge some of the inequities

embedded in schools (Lopez, 2016, 2021). These approaches will be revisited again in Chapter 2.

**Figure 1**

*Blended Leadership Approach Through a Theoretical Lens*
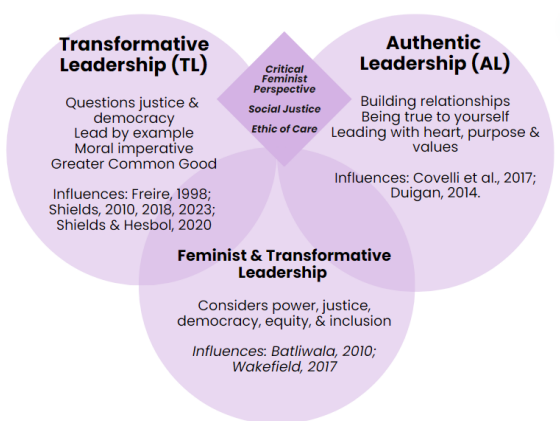


*Note.* This diagram illustrates the blend of feminist, transformative, and authentic leadership

approaches.

As a principal, I connect with the five features of an authentic leader (Covelli et al.,

2017). These features include leading with purpose, leading with values, leading with heart, leading by cultivating long term relationships, and leading by demonstrating excellence through self-discipline. The staff, students, and families that I work with know and value that the way I lead is consistent with these authentic leadership approaches. This consistency is especially true when faced with difficult decisions. Administrators peering through a liberal lens would strive to have a collaborative team approach to reach what Ciulla (2020) would consider 'authentic empowerment.' This empowerment strives to create a safe, harmonious environment that fosters a community's sense of efficacy, dignity, and responsibility. To me, being an authentic leader is demonstrated when I value the professionalism of the colleagues in the school, I am true to myself, and put the needs of the students at the centre of decision.

Transformative leadership (Freire, 1998; Shields, 2010, 2018; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Wakefield, 2017) looks to support a change in individuals and systems. There is a consideration of the moral imperative and achievement for the greater common good. Justice and democracy are central. I identify where there are gaps within the school and district. I dream of an ideal state where social justice is a priority. I do not want to live in a world that is negative and disagreeable. A step further is to consider a feminist perspective which will be infused into my blended leadership approach.

> Women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources, and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilize others (especially other women) around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic, and political transformation for equality and the realization of human rights for all. (Batliwala, 2010. p. 14)

I do not want to focus on what is wrong. I want to look for the opportunities and the hope that exist to be built upon. My goal is to focus on how greater principal efficacy will lead to greater student success and staff satisfaction. It is not through experiences that we learn but through the reflection on those experiences.

My experience as a parent of a daughter who struggled to be accepted (by many) as she focused on mathematics and sciences demonstrated to me that there needs to be a shift in understanding gender. There needs to be role models and mentors for women in science, technology, engineering, math, and leadership. As a principal, I aspire to be a role model, support female pedagogy in nontraditional areas, organize clubs, and activities that promote and educate young women on all opportunities that may be available to them. My focus on supporting female leaders does not negate or diminish that I am keenly aware that there are other equity seeking groups in need of attention.

The need for growth through a transformative notion is what drives many of my actions. I seek collaboration with others. I maintain high standards and know that the status quo is not good enough. I am comfortable with challenging inequities and always look for opportunities to hear the voices of those who are unheard. I have high expectations for myself, the staff, and the students.

## Leadership Lens

Within a critical paradigm, I must conduct a critical reflection on unjust systems and their structure, deconstruct them, and advocate for a more just social system. By using a feminist epistemological lens (Longino, 2017), I am committed to Lopez's (2016, 2021) development of Freire's (1998) notion of conscientization: a form of activism that focuses on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice.

I acknowledge my own biases in beliefs and how they apply to my leadership. I align my beliefs and actions with Villegas and Lucas (2002) who suggest there is a particular set of skills and dispositions that culturally responsive leaders have. I firmly believe Theoharis' (2008) notion that social justice leadership is a calling, not a position for which you apply. I lead with an ethic of care (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2017). The ethic of care places a heavy emphasis on the value of people and making decisions that are best for improving the quality of people (Wood & Hilton, 2012). I am guided by my moral imperative to guide ethical decision-making (Fullan, 2003; Shapiro & Stefkovich 2017).

I appreciate how critical theories in education are about questioning how our educational system can best offer education to all people. I align with leadership through a lens that considers the notions of a feminist critique that is asset-based, considering gender, social constructs, power, and social justice. The critique includes a consideration for the different needs that women leaders encounter. I value and prioritize equity and social justice. I strive to live out Theoharis' (2007) definition of social justice leadership where the principals advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions.

Capper (2019) suggests that either a person possesses power or does not; a person is either an oppressor or a member of an oppressed group. A challenge with this suggestion is that people may not be aware of their positionality. When considering change implementation, it is imperative that there is some form of awareness. In the context of this problem under review, this awareness would take the form of an awareness amongst administrators and the senior team of the challenges that women individuals face need to be prioritized and realized. I believe that the main tasks of education are to conduct a critical reflection on unjust systems and their

structure, deconstruct them, and advocate for a more just social system. Khalifa (2018) goes as far as to suggest that leaders may become accomplices of oppression if they remain passive. The critical paradigm fits best with my problem of practice. It aims not only to understand behaviours in societies but to change these behaviours.

Policies such as the Ontario Leadership Framework (OME, 2013) need to continually be revisited with an aim to be inclusive of all voices. Doan and Jaber (2021) consider the need for an overhaul of policies as the perspective is not inclusive of women or other equity-seeking administrators. As a leader, I must consider what happens to the achievement and sense of belonging amongst historically and currently marginalized individuals when culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is centered on systemic improvement processes. Status quo and past practice are the demise of a culturally responsive approach. As we consider the needs of those within the organization, we must consider the context.

## Organizational Context

In March 2020, a genuine crisis commenced. The COVID-19 pandemic caused yet another shift in the role of the principal. Those who saw themselves as instructional leaders and relationship builders were compelled to facilitate school shutdown, pivot from synchronous to asynchronous, facilitate in-person learning, manage school operating policies/regulations, support safe environments, and keep hope alive (Harris, 2020). Post COVID-19, the negative spiral continues. The People for Education (2022b) executive summary suggests that principals reported an overwhelming lack of support on all fronts including administration, funding, safety resources, and communication from the government. This lack of support has greatly undermined principals' capacity to do their jobs.

Within the Called to Belong School Board (CTBSB, a pseudonym) there is a major adjustment in leadership, renewed interest in governance, and an opportunity for change. We live in a very demanding time. School administrators are working longer hours, with most averaging 55 hours per week (Phillips & Sen, 2011; Riley, 2017; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). There is incredible pressure (politically, from families, and from ourselves) to meet expectations, support, and improve student learning. Research has shown that work intensification can have a negative impact on principals' wellbeing (Armstrong, 2014; Phillips & Sen, 2011; Pollock et al., 2020; Riley, 2017; Wang & Hauseman, 2018).

The CTBSB maintains that a healthy and safe workplace promotes psychological wellbeing of the staff. The board works to prevent harm to employee psychological health due to negligent, reckless, or intentional acts. Collecting this data is a priority in the CTBSB's three-year Pastoral Plan that is included in the Multi Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) (CTBSB, 2023). In 2021, workplace census was distributed in response to Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (OME, 2017) and the Ontario Ministry of Education PPM 165 (OME, 2021). The goal of this census was to assess diversity of the organization, identify gaps in representation, and to develop strategies to ensure there is an equitable and healthy environment for all staff regardless of one's background or status (CTBSB, 2022).

School principals are becoming increasingly more responsible for leading and implementing change initiatives. Netolicky (2020) discusses that in a time of crisis, leaders must act swiftly and with foresight but also with careful consideration of options, consequences, and side effects of action taken. She continues to purport that self-care and consideration must be the main priority of concern for all school leaders. There is a need to deconstruct the current systems in place to revisit with a view to creating a more just and equitable system. In 2023, the CTBSB

employees were invited to complete the Guarding Minds at Work Survey (GM@W) (CTBSB, 2024) for the second time. The GM@W survey is a free evidence-based tool designed to assess 13 dimensions of psychological health and safety in the workplace. This tool was developed in 2009 and it is intended for employers to assess and address psychological factors that have an impact on the health and organizational culture of the organization (Samra et al., 2022). The results of the survey will be discussed later.

**Organizational Structure**

The Ministry of Education (OME) oversees government policy, curriculum planning, direction, funding, and policies related to public education. The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) works within the parameters included in the Education Act (R.S.O., 1990) to set the standards, regulations, and licensing for teachers. There are no current provincial requirements for supporting or mentoring administrators, although there are provincially mandated requirements for mentorship of new teachers (OME, 2018). Opportunities for administrator support and mentorship are currently only at the board level. The senior team has prioritized this initiative, although it is in its infancy. I believe there needs to be a collective shift and true commitment, at the board level, that considers the needs of the unheard and underrepresented. Since the CTBSB was established, there have been fewer than 15 women. There has not been a single administrator go on maternity leave or give birth while acting as an elementary principal, although one elementary administrator did access parental leave. Women are the overwhelming minority in senior leadership positions. The percentage of senior positions held by women are not proportionate to the percentage of women administrators.

There needs to be an acknowledgement of what is going well and what needs to change. For example, the majority of CTBSB trustees are new to the role. The inexperience is a struggle

because they lack context and insight. There needs to be relationship building within the group and training for the new role. A new director was hired within the last three years. The director of education is committed to awakening the organization. They have sought the input from stakeholders and tries to be present in the schools. They are asking questions and actively listening. I see glimpses of the promise of a vision to move us forward. As part of my desire to see change, I have approached the director and the superintendent about being a voice at the table for reviewing the GM@W report (CTBSB, 2024) and the revamping of a mentorship program. Being able to provide feedback about the report continues to be a dream of mine that has not come to fruition.

One of the greatest concerns that I have is the top-down nature of the organization. There is no clear plan for aspects of any organizational culture to improve opportunities for women administrators of CTBSB that has been shared with the women administrators. The board's census and GM@W survey shows that there needs to be improvements, which will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. A readiness and culture survey would help to inform future changes and opportunities for improving workplace culture. Helen Kelly's 2023 work highlights strategies for preventing burnout, managing stress, and improving wellbeing. Kelly has created tools to assess workplace culture (Kelly, 2023).  She has also created a survey to assess school leader wellbeing that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

**Challenges to Equity**

Women are often overrepresented as education workers (education assistants, early childhood educators, and teachers) and underrepresented as educational leaders. Sperandio (2015) found that there may be barriers to women's experiences in educational leadership. These may be categorized as internal and external barriers. Included in internal barriers are women

leaders' perception of their ability to advance, family/work balance, and individual agency. External barriers include a lack of access to mentorship, hiring practices, power structures, and gender-based stereotyping (Bascia & Young 2001; Chase & Bell 1990; Eagly & Carli 2007; Harris 2020; Riehl & Byrd 1997; Sperandio 2015).

Helterbran and Reig (2004) also identified barriers that women in educational leadership face. The barriers cited include the following: little encouragement to assume leadership roles, lack of women role models, perceived need to be 'better qualified,' the belief that women cannot discipline older male students, resentment of males working for females, educator preference for male principals, reluctance to relocate, long hours, the belief that women lack the desire for power, and difference between male and female leadership styles (p. 12). These barriers will be addressed again later as a part of the preferred solution and evaluation plan.

In the book *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg (2013), it is suggested that women need to advocate for what they need and want. Women often need to 'lean in' despite some internal obstacles that women leaders face when aging or/and juggling family and career. Leaning in allows and supports for the questioning of the status quo, encourages self-reflection, facilitates the opportunity to build trust among women, and emphasizes shared values, beliefs, and experiences of women. At the core of the problem of practice is the importance of leaning in and developing self-esteem, self-efficacy, relationship building, and creating a sense of belonging to support women principal mental health and wellness. It is important to frame the DiP through its impact on culture, women administrator wellness, and the subsequent impact on student success. As more women are in leadership roles, the institutionalized process and supports need to evolve.

I view the problem of practice through a critical feminist (Blackmore, 2013; Wood, 2021) perspective that is rooted in social justice. Women as school leaders need to develop positive

self-esteem, despite the systemic neoliberal desire to maintain the status quo. Principals in Ontario are guided by the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) (OME, 2013). This framework was originally established in 2006 and then further developed by Dr. Kenneth Leithwood in 2012. The OLF (OME, 2013) indicates that "effective leadership has emerged as one of the critical foundations needed to sustain and enhance system-wide improvement" (p. 2). The framework has evolved to now include Personal Leadership Resources (OME, 2013). These resources are categorized as psychological, cognitive, and social (including emotional). What the leadership framework does not address is potential differences for women. The inclusion or consideration of the voices of the equity seeking members may start to address what Santovec (2013) suggests is the relationship between emotional and spiritual intelligence for a woman leader.

The district community is full of people who have the desire and ability to be leaders. Informal reports indicate that many individuals are discerning leadership and have taken the principals qualification course, yet they do not apply for administrator positions. In the 2020 Ontario College of Teachers Annual Report, there was a reported 11,109 members with principal qualifications: 6,870 female members and 4, 319 male members. This representation of qualifications delineation by gender is not consistent with the current representation of females as administrators in Ontario. A consideration of how we are recruiting female administrators should be prioritized. Most people come into education to work with children, improve conditions, keep hope alive, and ultimately find joy and satisfaction in their work. A further consideration about how we retain and ensure wellbeing and efficacy of the principals needs to be prioritized to support and nurture one of our greatest assets, the administrators.

**Problem of Practice**

There is a crisis when it comes to wellbeing in educational leadership. In Ontario, many school principals are struggling to manage their wellbeing. Fifty-one percent of principals reported that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that their recent levels of stress at work feel manageable (People for Education, 2022b). Work intensification is a true struggle (Pollock, 2017; Wang et al., 2018). Professional and personal boundaries are blurred. The resulting effects of burnout and lack of agency need to be considered with a view to aiding and supporting principals (Pollock, 2017, Pollock et al., 2020). A problem of practice exists within the Call to Belong School Board where unrealistic demands, increased workload, diminished support, and a lack of recognition of gender differences have contributed to a decline in mental health and wellbeing of women administrators.

**Framing the Problem of Practice**

The research into understanding the problem is rooted in critical feminist perspectives. Fuller (2022) suggests that feminist theory looks at the inclusion of women and their experience in knowledge producing. Feminist work is centered around equity, diversity, and inclusion for women and girls in a more socially just world, which is of particular importance when trying to dissipate the neoliberal (Lipton, 2020), colonial politics that exist. In Ontario, we saw a huge shift in 2018 with the majority election of the Progressive Conservative government. The political focus in the province was less on the individual and more on corporations. In 2022, Premier Ford has continued his mandate of putting the corporations first. The focus continues to be healthcare, housing, energy, and transportation. Sadly, education has not been a priority.

**Culture - Relationships and Belonging**

The research herein discusses that despite decades of working toward equity, women in positions of educational leadership continue to be equity seeking. Chase and Martin (2021) also found that women in positions of K-12 leadership often were impacted by gender and racialized microaggressions, imposter phenomena, finding their own voice, and a lack of mentorship. One of the earliest second wave feminist theorists, Carol Gillian (1982) looked deeper at the ethics of care by connecting the activity of thought to the activity of care. She further made a connection that the activity of care is tied to relationship and ensuring that we are calling others to belong and be included. Starratt (2005) would say that educational leaders must consider their own ethics while contemplating the dignity of those they serve. Hefferman et al. (2022) continued to look at the ethics of care as a feminine attribute and the ethics of justice viewed as masculine. Echoing the earlier feminist work, the research of Ispa-Landa et al. (2019) showed that White women principals want to establish themselves as emotionally supportive leaders; however, over time these woman principals needed to adopt to a more directive (not emotional) approach to protect themselves from burnout.

Promoting wellbeing requires commitment and attention towards a positive culture at all levels within the organization and the interconnected systems. The insight herein discusses that despite decades of working toward equity, women in positions of educational leadership continue to be equity seeking.  It is necessary to create a safe environment for all that fosters a person's sense of belonging, efficacy, dignity, and responsibility. The mission and vision of the CTBSB are inclusive, positive, and focused. Within the CTBSB MYSP there is a systemic desire for all stakeholders to belong. Now there needs to be a study of the data as it applies to the current state along with action to bring this to fruition.

**Internal Data**

We need to look at school effectiveness frameworks, school improvement plans, and the culture of the school to consider educational change and needs. The CTBSB created a Treatment of Staff Policy Statement (TSPS) (CTBSB, 2018). The policy mandates that the CEO shall not cause or allow conditions, procedures, actions, or decisions that are unclear, unsafe, or unhealthy or arbitrarily inequitable. Further, without limiting the scope of the foregoing, the TSPS states that the CEO shall not cause conditions to exist that adversely impact on staff morale and performance nor discriminate against anyone for non-disruptive expression of dissent (CTBSB, 2008). Unfortunately, what the policy does not overtly allow for is a mechanism for rectifying any transgressions under this policy.

In 2022 and 2023, all employees of the CTBSB were invited to complete the Guarding Minds at Work survey (GM@W). This free workplace survey was distributed in response to Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017) and the Ontario Ministry of Education PPM 165 (OME, 2021). Both 2022 and 2023 data results from the survey indicate that less than half of the principals described their wellbeing as excellent or good (CTBSB, 2022, 2024). Of serious concern were workload management, balance, psychological protection, psychological support, and organizational culture. These results are not in keeping with one of the goals for the board's MYSP (CTBSB, 2022) that staff experience a positive, healthy, and inclusive workplace. As a result of my lived and vicarious experiences, self-awareness, and insight, the time has come for change initiators (including myself) to step forward to lead change.

The survey aligns with the Ministry of Education Equity Action Plan (OME, 2021) and is collected under the Anti-Racism Act (S.O. 2017). The goal of collecting the data is to implement strategies that support staff diversity, eliminate barriers for staff, support equitable recruitment,

promotion, retention policies, guide professional development, training, success planning, inform system policies procedures and programs, and ultimately strive for a workforce that reflects our student population (CTBSB, 2023). Both 2022 and 2023 data results from the survey indicate that less than half of the principals described their wellbeing as excellent or good. These results are not in keeping with one of the goals for the board's MYSP (CTBSB, 2022) that staff experience a positive, healthy, and inclusive workplace. Figure 2 represents the GM@W survey results for 2022. The results indicate that for all staff there are significant concerns around the culture, workload management, balance, psychological protection, and psychological support.

**Figure 2**

*GM@W Mean Score by Psychosocial Factor*



*Note.* Adapted from the results of the CTBSB evidence-based GM@W (CTBSB, 2022) survey designed to assess health and safety in the workplace.

I long for systemic improvements to support, mentor, and guide women administrators. McMullen and Dryburgh (2011) suggest that workplaces are not gender neutral, which is certainly true at the CTBSB. A missing piece of the GM@W survey data (CTBSB, 20222, 2024) is the acknowledgment of gender. It should be noted that the survey allowed for identification of

gender, but the analysis and reporting of the data was not specified by gender. Many of the

leadership theories were shaped within a gendered system for men by men (Watson, 2016).

These results solidify the need for change. Further, the survey results will be used to inform,

monitor, evaluate, and plan the implementation of a solution.

**External Data**

The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) oversees the curriculum. This oversight

includes mandatory expectations, optional teaching supports, and policies related to student

achievement. The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) sets the standards, regulations, and

licensing for teachers and administrators. The OME funds schools on a per-pupil basis, under the

yearly Grants for Students' Needs (GSNs) and any additional grants. All funding is data-based,

from areas including a branch of the ministry, the Education Quality and Accountability Office

(EQAO) standardized student assessments, credit accumulation, and graduation rates.

In 2008, the Ontario provincial government introduced the Reach Every Student:

Energizing Ontario Education Plan (OME, 2008). This plan included Ontario Leadership

Strategy (OLS) (OME, 2012), which was intended as a reaffirmation of the commitment to the

role of the principal and a deeper dive into leadership strategies. This commitment was

established to attract capable educators to become principals and to help them develop into the

best possible instructional leaders. Key components of the 2008 OLS include mentoring for all

newly appointed principals and vice-principals in their first two years of practice, performance

appraisal of principals and vice-principals, promotion of the Ontario Leadership Framework

(OME, 2013), succession planning, and talent development to ensure the best possible leadership

for the future. This plan has the potential to be useful, although there is no check and balance to

ensure that it is being utilized, nor adhered to. Unfortunately, the Ontario government withdrew the funding and commitment to the OLS.

Supporting wellbeing became a part a renewed vision for education, particularly since 2009 when promoting wellbeing became a responsibility of every school board due to amendments in the Education Act (2009). There are four key components at the foundation of the wellbeing strategy. These include positive mental health, safe and accepting schools, healthy schools and equity and inclusive education. Keeping in mind the external data, the research shows that the school and system leaders play an important role in supporting students. The leaders must feel supported themselves to support the community. It is imperative to make a connection to the internal data, specifically the organizational and individual wellbeing to support a culture of wellbeing for all. While looking at the data, it is also important to consider other factors that impact the organization, including political, economic, social, technical, and legal factors.

**PESTL Factor Analysis**

In the CTBSB, many administrators are not satisfied, the workload is intensifying, the work/home balance is off-kilter, and systemic policies are outdated and poorly managed. There is incredible pressure to meet provincial expectations, support the whole community, and improve student learning. In the People for Education report (2022b), principals said that an overwhelming lack of support has undermined their capacity to do their jobs. Ironically, the work that needs to be done to improve student wellbeing and mental health is seemingly having an adverse effect on principals. In addition to history and resources, external environmental factors play a role in influencing what organizations choose to do.

*Political Factors*

In Ontario, we have a provincial government that continues to battle with advocates for education. Class sizes are increasing, funding is decreasing, and required programs are ever changing. Wang et al. (2018) purport that principals' work intensification affects their job satisfaction:

> As a result of work intensification, motivating factors, such as workplace challenges, recognition from the employer, and work demand: and maintenance factors such as external policy influence, organization support, principals' relationships with teachers, superintendents, and unions are having a significant impact on principals' job satisfaction. These factors affect the extent to which they can contribute effectively to improving student achievement and school performance. (p. 1)

The Ontario Ministry of Education has partnered with the Ontario Mental Health Association (OMHA) to support mental health and wellness initiatives. These initiatives prioritize students and to a lesser degree staff, yet there is little mention of administrators.

*Economic Factors*

The Ministry of Education funds schools on a per-pupil basis. Funding is data-based and there may be other grants that may be added to the funding. These grants may include special education, English or French language support, transportation, and learning opportunities. The funding is not designed to be equal rather it is meant to provide equal opportunities for all. There is limited funding for principal professional development from the CTBSB and almost no funds to provide coverage if the principal is away from the building. As aforementioned there was funding for leadership development from the province through the Ontario Leadership Strategy (2012), but this was revoked and now the responsibility remains with each individual board.

*Social Factors*

Women holding positions of leadership are often characterized and viewed by others as negative when compared to their male counterpart (Doan & Jaber, 2021). Many women administrators have the additional challenges of work/home balance, including childcare and family responsibilities. Within the CTBSB, administrators are creating social groups to learn from and lean on to support one another.

There were some key findings from the 2021–2022 Annual Ontario School Survey (People for Education, 2022a). More than half of school principals reported not having the resources necessary to support the mental health and wellbeing of their students and staff. More than half of school principals felt that their recent levels of stress at work were unmanageable. Only 58% of schools in Ontario reported having a vice-principal. A vice-principal was much more likely to be reported at a secondary school (91%) than an elementary school (51%). At the CTBSB, most elementary principals who work with vice principals are male.

Many principals work in isolation and lack the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues on a regular basis (Bauer et al., 2017). Many leaders work in these silos without any significant support from district leaders. As a result, there is a great deal of leadership discussion amongst principals working in isolation pertaining to operating protocols, lack of staff, increased work hours, work refusal, difficult parents, addressing student violence, school culture, opposition to authority, and challenges with staff. Without the collaboration of the administrators and senior team, awareness and change are seemingly difficult to achieve.

Social capital (originally attributed to Bourdieu, 1986) is prominent in other industries, although there is little research in the field of education, particularly within the leadership. Beausaert et al.'s (2021) work takes a focused look at the phenomenon of social capital as it

applies to the wellbeing of the school principal. In Chapter 2, proposed solutions will consider the importance of belonging and relationships. Beausaert et al.'s (2021) work reaffirms that school principals' tasks have become increasingly complex, and there is an increase in accountability (p. 405).

Finally, the culture of the organization must be considered. The organizational culture comes through in the values, mission statement, and goals of the board. The promotion of a positive culture within the organization should impact the decisions made about human resources, policy, and budget. A misalignment of the culture of the organization with the core values will lead to negative outcomes. Anecdotal evidence from colleagues within the school board revealed that administrators identified having different needs, experiences, and perspectives based on their gender.

*Technological Factors*

As effective school leaders are key to high-performing schools and healthy school environments, work intensification not only threatens school leader recruitment and retention but also the wellbeing and performance of both staff and students (Pollock, 2017). Part of the work intensification for administrators is that administrators struggle to disconnect from technology. As of December 2, 2021, under the Employment Standards Act (2000) there is a new policy in Ontario that provides employees (associated with an employer that employs 25 or more employees) with a written policy pertaining to the right to disconnect. Unfortunately, this does not apply to administrators as they are deemed managerial. Another technological factor that contributes to work intensification is that there are new computer systems that we need to learn and adopt to the new technology.

*Legal Factors*

A major concern is the consideration of gender pay gap. In the ranking of countries, Canada has the eighth worst gender pay gap. The gender pay gap refers to the difference in average earnings of people based on gender. There is a 16.1% difference between annual median earnings of women and men relative to the annual median earnings of men (OECD, 2022). In 2018 the Ontario Principals' Council and the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) commenced a Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario application, alleging discrimination based on gender. The applicants argue that the wage gap between elementary and secondary panels is based on historical systemic discrimination. The source of this discrimination is the association that working with young children of elementary school age is 'women's work' (OPC, 2023). The parties are currently awaiting the Tribunal's decision.

Upon considering the data and relative factors a clear vision for change must be established to show how the future is different from the status quo. Fullan (2003) suggests that change knowledge really does matter, ignore it at your peril. I agree with Shapiro and Stefkovich (2017) as they support a critical approach where the decision-makers and leadership have an obligation and need to be guided by the ethics of the profession. The leadership approach must also include a willingness to incorporate all involved, not just the loudest voices.

## Leadership-Focused Vision for Change

The leadership vision will align with my purpose, my authenticity, my commitment to social justice, and desire for equity for all. As a critical leader I am driven by my moral compass that challenges the school board to develop policies that are accepting, inclusive, necessary for some but good for all. It is imperative that I maintain positivity and an asset-based approach that recognizes the strengths already within our organization. There needs to be a consideration of

social capital and building relationships (Veronese et al., 2018). While considering the

inequalities that exist with gender, there also must be an acknowledgement of other equity

seeking groups. There is a desire and a need to improve the CTBSB. To do so, there needs to be

a focus on equity, opportunity, and change.

**Why Change?**

There is a need for a deep look at the culture of the organization coupled with systemic

policy advancements. There needs to be a collective shift, at the board level, that considers the

wellbeing needs of all, including the unheard and underrepresented. Education change tends to

look at school effectiveness and school improvement data. The consideration of school culture,

and general wellness needs to be placed at the forefront. Figure 3 represents the state of the

American teachers, principals, and other working adults as it applies to wellbeing.

**Figure 3**

*Wellbeing of Teachers, Principals, and Working Adults in January 2022*
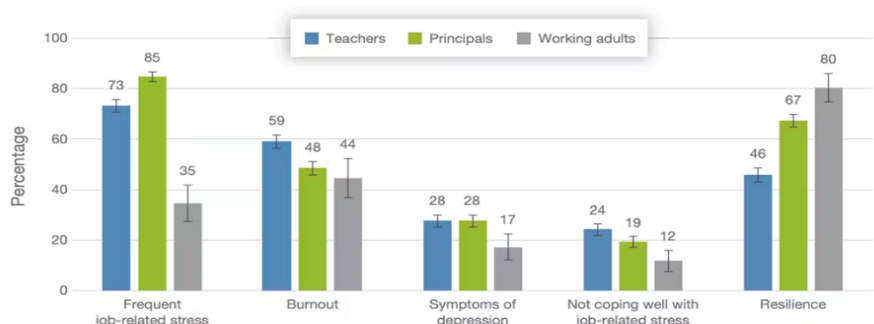


*Note.* Adapted from Doan, S., et al., (2022). State of the American teacher and state of the

American principal surveys: 2022 technical documentation and survey results.

The data is broken down to look at job-related stress, burnout, symptoms of depression, coping,

and resilience. Compared to other working adults, the teachers, and the principals fared poor.

The representation from America would not be substantially different to the experiences of Canadian teachers and principals.

**Implications for Leadership**

The implications for leadership include the concept of gendered and collective efficacy (Donohoo et al., 2018). As aforementioned, some woman principals are creating informal affinity groups to learn from and lean on one another. In essence, they are creating their own social capital and building professional relationships. Cook (2020) looked at the experiences of two woman leaders in New Zealand and their struggles with turning around a challenging school using Dewey's Theory of Experiences (Dewey, 1938) as a lens. The work highlights the personal and wellbeing costs that many women in educational leadership face. This approach to research and understanding is worthy of future consideration. Pullen and Vachhani (2021) suggest that females are continually disadvantaged and scrutinized by years of systemic discrimination in theory and reality. Further, if females are only considered in relation or comparison to males then they will continue to be undermined.

Principals can be critical change agents at the micro-level. Recent statistics show that there is a shortage of people who want to take up the call for education leadership. Studies in Australia have shown that principals are 55% more likely to report a mental health injury than any other school staff (State of Victoria, 2017). Principal support systems and networks have been identified as important mechanisms that can reduce negative aspects and increase confidence (Hefferman, 2021; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Surgrue, 2015).

As effective school leaders are key to high-performing schools and healthy school environments, work intensification not only threatens school leader recruitment and retention but also the wellbeing and performance of both staff and students (Pollock, 2017). I prefer to focus

on the district so that the benefits will be felt by the individual schools and ultimately improve student learning outcomes and wellbeing. Leadership at the meso level involves the senior team, superintendents, and the director of education. They are critical players in the hope for a change from the status quo. There must be conditions for change that allow individuals including the administrators at the micro level to feel supported. An unintentional outcome of this DiP is that there will be commentary from the male colleagues who do not always recognize the needs and voices of their woman counterparts. By drawing attention to the problem there could be unease for all.

In the CTBSB there is work to be done to eliminate systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, and other barriers that exist. There are mandatory professional development opportunities around racism and supporting equity seeking individuals. Recently, there has been a creation of two affinity groupings (2SLGBTQI+ and BIPOC) for staff.  Next, there needs to be a particular focus and concerted effort to look at the assets and needs of woman leaders. The consideration of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory (SCT) sheds light on the dynamic of how women in relationships can call each other to belong, support, and learn. To understand where one is going, one needs to create priorities, plan, continue to monitor, and check in along the way.

**Priorities for Change**

My lived and vicarious experiences, self-awareness, and insight tells me that the time has come for change initiators (including myself) to step forward to lead change. There needs to be a focus on the people affected by the change, as opposed to only the change itself. To be effective, a model for creating organizational change needs to put behavioural change before culture change. Change needs to be embedded into the culture with a thorough consideration of culture

throughout the change process.

Organizational culture is a major determinant of the success or failure of any change initiative. As a result of the over-representation of male administrators and senior leaders that is paradigmatic of many educational institutions, there needs to be a consideration of the voices and needs of the unheard and underrepresented. A clear vision must be established to show how the future differs from the status quo. I agree with Kotter (2012) who says that the vision for change must be imaginable, desirable, feasible, focused, flexible, and communicable.

## Guiding Questions Emerging from the Problem of Practice

The problem of practice addressed by this DiP poses many questions and opportunities for learning. Questions arise about equity, the wellness of administrators, and the inclusion of the voices that have been silenced.

### Guiding Question #1 - Awareness

Is there an awareness at the micro, meso, and macro levels about the current state of leader wellbeing for women administrators with the CTBSB? The information compiled from the Guarding Minds at Work survey would suggest that there should be an awareness. Kelly's (2022) School Leader Wellbeing Framework could be used to further foster this awareness. The framework has six stages. These include laying foundations, educating stakeholders, gaining insights, setting goals, planning and implementing interventions, and evaluating interventions and tracking progress (p. 105). This simple framework may be used to create an awareness and provide a system of evaluating the effectiveness of change.

### Guiding Question #2 - Opportunities

Would increasing mentorship opportunities and creating affinity grouping improve a sense of belonging and in turn increase mental health and wellness? The current CTBSB

mentorship program has changed several times, and the criteria continue to fluctuate. For true change to happen there needs to be systemic policy advancements including the addition of opportunities to share and belong and opportunities to support the implementation of fluctuating initiatives. There needs to be a collective shift, at the board level, that considers the needs of the unheard. We need to look deeply at the policies and practices that are out of date and do not reflect our needs today.  I will be the change agent. The change initiators would be the administrators, trustees, public lobby groups, and senior team members. As a principal and a mental health advocate, I see myself having the capacity and ability to be the change initiator, but it must be with a clear vision and plan. This will take time and thought.

Hauseman (2018) maintains that it is essential that administrators need to be able to talk about their work and how they are feeling to effectively manage their emotions in a positive manner (p. 230). Developing positive self-esteem and believing in oneself is crucial, and as demonstrated by Baumeister and Vohs (2018), it directly correlates to desirable outcomes. Relationships are built on trust and respect. It is necessary to create a safe environment, within the system, that fosters a person's sense of belonging, efficacy, dignity, and responsibility. To facilitate any district initiative, the principal needs to build relationships and arguably prioritize their school community.

**Guiding Question #3 – Inclusion and Belonging**

How can the voices of those who are not traditionally at the table be heard? Would a change in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OME, 2013) and the reinvestment of the Ontario Leadership Strategy to include all benefit equity seeking groups? A question that needs to be considered is around the specific needs of the women administrators. How are they being addressed? How are they not being addressed? I agree with Shapiro and Stefkovich (2017) as

they support the critical approach that decision-makers have an obligation and need to be guided by the ethics of the profession where leaders are driven by their own moral compass that may challenge school boards to develop policies that are accepting, inclusive, necessary for some but good for all. Education needs to serve the whole person: the heart, head, and hands. There needs to be what Buchannan and Chapman (2014) describe as developing the whole person. Figure 4 shows a comparison and rating of the ability of each of the three possible solutions to address the guiding questions posed.

**Figure 4**

*Comparison of the Three Suggested Solutions with the Guiding Questions*



| Possible Solutions (3) | Guiding Questions | | | | | KEY | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | #1 Awareness of Concern | #2 Voices Heard | #3 Belonging with Mentorship | #4 Belonging with Affinity Grouping | | Addressing Guiding Questions | |
| #1-MOE | | | | | | Poor | Well |
| #2-Mentor | | | | | | | |
| #3-Affinity | | | | | | | |
| Status Quo | | | | | | | |

*Note.* This figure demonstrates the likelihood of each of the possible solutions of addressing the guiding questions posed.

## Envisioned Future State

It is not lost on me that an administrator's wellbeing is a critical component of student success. My problem of practice aligns and is consistent with current ministry and board commitments to mental health and wellness. Some programs exist that are meant to consider the mental health and wellness of all staff, but what exists is not enough (Everett, 2020). There needs to be specific wellness and wellbeing checks on administrators that are as important as a

completed enrolment report or school improvement plan. Within the CTBSB, mentoring and

supporting administrators are virtually absent once they are appointed.  Through informal

conversations, I know that there is a longing for more. Kotter (2012) notion of seeing and feeling

will result in change speaks to me.  I continue to work in the role of principal because I do

believe that things can get better.

<div style="text-align: center;">**The Gap Between the Present and Proposed Future State**</div>

A common leadership error is failing to establish a compelling vision for the entire

change initiative. Without a clear vision, a concerted effort can quickly become meaningless.

This simple solution (of a clear vison) is rooted in complex thought and research. Within a

critical paradigm, I must conduct a critical reflection on unjust systems and their structure,

deconstruct them, and advocate for the ideal future of a socially just system. A gap currently

exists where the voices of many are unheard and the systems currently in place do not support

the administrators. There needs to be an amplification of the voices of minorities, challenges to

gender stereotypes, a celebration of differences, and appreciation for the gifts of all. The status

quo needs to be challenged, and a social critique is imperative. A feminist epistemology suggests

that an educator take a stand on an issue, overtly identify their own epistemological position,

recognize the partiality and contradictions within the position, and then engage in self-

interrogation of that position (Capper, 2019). What appears to be simple may be difficult

because it upsets the status quo. There is an additional challenge where many administrators and

some of the senior team do not recognize there is a problem.

Kelly's (2022) work focuses on preventing burnout, managing stress, and improving

wellbeing for school leaders. Kelly (2022) suggests that only one third of leaders felt that they

were receiving appropriate mental health support. She claims that there needs to be awareness

raising, social support (mentoring, coaching, and networking) along with a culture change. These supports may also be identified as the gaps that exist between the current and ideal state.

A critical component that is currently missing for many women leaders is joy. Merriam Webster dictionary defines hoy as a feeling of great pleasure or happiness that comes from success, good fortune, or a sense of wellbeing. I know that the job of a principal has changed dramatically over recent years, but why has the feeling of joy towards our jobs been negated as a direct result of the diminished mental health and wellness. I believe that Brene Brown is correct when she suggests that there is no joy without gratitude. While doing the hard work to support mental health and wellness I need to look for opportunities to be grateful. My authentic leadership approach lends perfectly to being true and honest with myself. I believe in the 13th century poet, theologian and mystic Rumi's notion that when you do things from your soul you will feel a river moving, this is where you find joy (Kheiriyeh, 2024).

## Chapter 1 Conclusion

Chapter 1 outlines the background for the DiP. It justifies the problem of practice and outlines my positionality and position to initiative change. There is an important consideration to the questions that are guiding the creation of the frameworks for change and possible solutions. The next chapter of this DiP will look at possible solutions and strategies to support women administrators.

**Chapter 2: Planning and Development**

In the first chapter of this Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) the context of the Call to Belong School Board (CTBSB) is explained to further understand the problem of practice. I strive to make the envisioned future state for the woman leaders of CTBSB a reality. Through careful planning and development, I will lead an initiative that will support the board's strategic goal that staff experience a positive healthy and inclusive work environment. I aspire to develop and facilitate a culture of leaders that actively shares and supports one another. Chapter 2 will reaffirm my leadership approach to change, considerations for change and possible solutions. I will also identify the preferred change initiative. I am looking at this problem of practice through the critique of a critical paradigm (Apple, 2019; Freire, 1970, 1998). The critical paradigm considers postmodernism, neo-Marxism, and feminism.

I appreciate how critical theories in education are about questioning how our educational system can best offer education to all people. I value and prioritize a feminist approach that considers the social relation of gender and power in leadership (Blackmore, 2013). I believe that the main tasks of education are to conduct a critical reflection on unjust systems and their structure, deconstruct them, and advocate for a more just social system. I became an administrator because I want to celebrate teaching, leading, and learning; this is where I find joy in my vocation.

**Model for Change**

I think that it is recalcitrant to consider the model for change as a one-off event with a defined beginning. After careful consideration I created a blended change model to allow for optimal results. As our organization develops and culture improves, a blended model that considers David Cooperrider's (2005) appreciative inquiry (AI) and Deszca et al.'s (2020)

change path model (CPM) are appropriate to consider. This asset-based stance would be in keeping with the critical feminist theoretical underpinnings. I truly believe that our organization is seeking vision while at the same time straddling between identifying the need for change and gap analysis. The proposed model is not without limitations. As a research scholar using a blended approach as a model of change, I am called to go from being issue focused to inquiry focused. The inclusion of this model is necessary because it combines process and prescription. I will also assess the change readiness as a part of the initial stages. I will determine the organization's readiness for change by assessing gaps such as the work, people, and structures in the organization. Figure 5 represents the blended change model. A key component is that this model allows for all participants to give voice prior to the first stage.

**Figure 5**

*Blended Change Model*



*Note*. This is a blended change model which combines the elements of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, 2005) and change path model (Deszca et al., 2020). It is not linear and relies on communication throughout.

The asset-based model is dependent on a culture of curiosity, with a view to a better future. Appreciative inquiry (AI) involves four distinct stages: discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Cooperrider et al., 2005). AI looks to the strengths that already exist. It focuses on what is best both internally and externally to drive the vision of the preferred future. The AI theoretical model looks to appreciation, inquiry, and wholeness. It is incumbent on participation from all voices; it is truly a whole systems approach.

An essential part of the change path model (Deszca et al., 2020) is ongoing review and communication through updates and a feedback loop. At each model stage, there should be a communication and monitoring component. This would start with the initial stage of awakening/discovering, I will need to identify the gaps between the current situation and the desired state. Part of what will inform this initial stage is feedback and readiness feasibility from the stakeholders. For this to be successful there needs to be a shared understanding of the culture of the organization. The results of the Guarding Minds survey (CTBSB, 2022) allow the change-initiators and change-makers an opportunity to get a glimpse of the current culture that needs to change. As a principal and a mental health advocate, I see myself as someone who can introduce ideas to the change initiators, but it must be with a clear vision and plan. The Director of Education is committed to awakening the organization. I see glimpses of the promise of a better future. This will take time and thought. I will need to rely on leading with authenticity and integrity.

This model for creating organizational change puts behavioural change before culture change but ensures that change is embedded in the culture with a thorough consideration of culture throughout the process. Cooperrider (2005) maintains that if members of an organization look at the strengths and positive attributes of the organization they will discover more of the

same. As a leader, I need to look for opportunities for joy. There are many good and just actions happening within the CTBSB. This will be revisited in Chapter 3.

**Leadership Approach to Change**

Within the CTBSB there has been a major adjustment in leadership, renewed interest in governance, and an opportunity for change. In March 2020, a genuine crisis commenced. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a shift in the role of the principal. Those who saw themselves as instructional leaders and relationship builders were compelled to facilitate school shutdown; pivot from synchronous, asynchronous, and in-person learning; manage school operating policies/regulations; support safe environments; and keep hope alive. The concern about principal wellness started long before the pandemic. The pandemic brought the importance of mental health and wellness to the forefront. In Ontario in 2018 a major political shift saw the Progressive Conservative party come into power. Many policies and initiatives from this government have left the public with a belief that the government does not respect educators. The role of the principal has changed from what it was 10 years ago, and it is imperative that we consider what this role as lead learner and leader should be today.

Since COVID-19, Harris and Jones (2020) suggest that education leaders have an important role to ensure all learners will see better days. The principal is important for leading the instructional program, building relationships, reducing absenteeism, staff retention, dealing with disciplinary matters, and securing accountability within the school. Leithwood et al. (2020) continue to suggest that the role of the principal is important to student success. It is second only to that of the classroom teacher. School leadership influences the features of the organization, which positively influence the quality of the teaching and learning. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation,

ability, and working conditions (p. 10). I look to the tenants of culturally responsive and transformative leadership to guide me. I am guided by Gospel values. I have learned that if I am not well my state may have a negative impact on the culture of the school. If I am at my best then that positivity and joy transcends to the staff, the students, and the greater school community.

As the sole administrator and lead learner of the Building Bridges School (a pseudonym), I put the needs of students first. I know the value and impact of my position. I want to lead with joy, passion, and purpose. Leithwood (2004) suggests that the role of the principal is important to student success; it is second only to that of the classroom teacher. How the principal approaches leadership directly affects the outcomes of the entire school. The principal is important for leading the instructional program, building relationships, reducing absenteeism, staff retention, dealing with disciplinary matters and securing accountability within the school.

I am guided by a blend of an authentic (Corvelli et al., 2017; Duignan, 2014, 2020), feminist (Batliwala, 2010; Wakefield, 2017) and transformative (Freire, 1998; Shields, 2018, 2022, Shields & Hesbol, 2020) leadership approach. This blend of views and leadership approaches is foundational to my positionality and position to guide change. As a feminist leader, I aspire to better know myself, be open minded, ask questions, show vulnerability, and act with humility.

An authentic leadership approach is at the heart of the work that I am doing. Simon Sinek's (2011) work challenges leaders to consider their 'why.' My 'why' is driven by who I am and how I want to see others treated. I value the dignity of the person. As a woman, I have experienced many difficult situations throughout my life due to my gender. I know the value of appreciating the female gender. I embrace the gifts. A major component of authentic leadership

is the understanding of self. Self-awareness refers to personal insights (Northouse, 2022). Self-awareness includes reflecting upon your emotions, identity, core values, goals, and truly understanding who you are (Northouse, 2022). A criticism of authentic leadership is whether psychological capacities should be included. For me, the inclusion of psychological capacities is a major reason why I connect with this approach.

In addition to the chosen blended leadership approach, as a leader in Ontario, I believe that Leithwood et al.'s (2020) transformational leadership approaches are important to consider. I aspire to live out Leithwood et al.'s (2020) six dimensions for transformational educational leadership. These include building school vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, symbolizing professional practices and values, demonstrating high-performance expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood et al., 2020; Salleh, 2013). Transformational leadership seeks to generate second-order change effects, which is why I needed to create a combination of leadership approaches that would generate third order change (Bartunek & Moch, 1987; Barbuto, 2022). Third order change would result in a fundamental shift in the system that would affect the structure, beliefs, and assumptions. Third order change that is a result of an organizational culture change is what is required for this DiP to be successful.

Research contends that leaders may be unsuccessful in change initiatives because they miss connecting the planned change with an appropriate theory (Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Kotter, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). As a female elementary principal, I have direct knowledge of the experiences of others. Principals are retiring early, and experienced principals are returning to the classrooms as teachers. There is a great deal of talk pertaining to operating protocols, lack of staff, work refusal, difficult parents, increased work hours, opposition to authority, and

challenges with staff. I know all too well the toll and the joy that the job of an administrator can bring. I am fortunate to have a group of like-minded administrators to rely on for support and guidance.

My problem of practice recognizes Deszca et al.'s, (2020) idea that for permanent change, new structures and roles are needed, and new points of balance or homeostasis developed. The CTBSB is awakening from a crisis. There are new roles being created, a new body of governance, and a genuine commitment to systemic change and improvement. The district needs to consider and be committed to change to facilitate and support any deviation from the status quo (Leithwood et al., 2020). With effort towards collaboration between the senior team of district leaders and the administrators, this change is possible.

My leadership vision for change and approach involves critical feminist consideration. Specifically, I would like to employ the following strategies for building transformative and feminist leadership:

- modelling feminist purpose and principles,

- inspiring shared vision based on personal and collective reflexivity,

- empowering and enabling others to act,

- challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power,

- encouraging the integration of the heart, mind, and body (Wakefield, 2017, p. 10).

Healthy administrators will lead healthy schools. Healthy schools will support and result in student success. I believe that success is possible, but there must be more than just a wish. There needs to be a leadership approach to lead the change process that will result in improved administrator wellness and satisfaction.

**Framework for Leading the Change Process**

Currently, the CTBSB is in a state of crisis when it comes to wellbeing in educational leadership. In a recent informal poll at CTBSB, less than half of the principals described their wellbeing as excellent or good. Currently, many administrators within the CTBSB are unwell. The mental health aspects of school leadership need to be reexamined from a system level. The effects of burnout and lack of agency need to be considered with a view to aiding and supporting women leaders. Principals have become an easily replaceable commodity. There is a lack of mentorship, capacity building, trust, support, and joy for those in principal leadership. Administrators are asked to lead and deliver initiatives that they are not versed in. Through informal conversations and anecdotal gatherings, I am aware that some administrators have experienced trauma, lack of professional development opportunities, work intensification, harassment, and burnout, and they are often left to fend for themselves. Many principals feel unsupported and alone.

I believe that as a principal I have the most impact at the micro level (Building Bridges School). I believe that it is imperative for me to have a critical approach, yet a firm stance on ethics to help guide my ethical decision-making (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2017). I am deeply guided by my Catholic faith and the ethics of care (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). The ethic of care places a heavy emphasis on the value of people and making decisions that are best for improving the quality of people (Wood & Hilton, 2012). For example, recently we have had several critical and traumatic episodes happen to staff and student families. I prioritize connections by facilitating pastoral care, social work, and financial support.

At the meso level (CTBSB and Administrators Association) I have less impact than I do at the micro level, but still my voice is valued, and I sit on many committees. Here it is critical

that I am guided by the ethic of profession (including the Ontario College of Teachers Professional Standards) and ethic of community. As a leader who serves in many capacities within of our system, I strive to build community. I consider the common good and I am guided by the Catholic social teaching of the dignity of the person. I prioritize and demonstrate this by supporting my colleagues, sharing resources, and collaborating on system wide initiatives.

I concur with Longino (2017) when she suggests that feminist epistemology is both a paradox and a necessary lens. I am deeply committed to what Freire (1970, 1998) coined as conscientization. This concept involves critically looking at the causes of oppression by looking at the social reality through reflection and action. Ann Lopez (2016) further purports that conscientization is a form of activism, that provides a way for educational leaders to theorize their work, develop agency, act, and build schoolwide capacity on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice. The DiP is devised through a critical and feminist theory perspective that considers the representation, challenges, and experiences faced by women in educational leadership (Torrence et al., 2017). We are currently riding a fourth wave of feminism (Peay, 2005) that is said to have begun around 2012. This wave encompasses empowering women, taking action, and social justice. Fuller (2022) suggests that this fourth wave feminist activism is intended to be fueled by and promote joy. I hope in this case it does.

**Discover and Awakening**

The blended change model needs to start with discovering and awakening. This involves creating a sense of urgency, looking at existing assets and analyzing various forms of data. As a school principal my positionality may be viewed to outsiders as limited to impact system change. As I learn and gain experience, I continue to consider where my passion lies and where my position can afford me the opportunity for change. I absolutely see the crisis, I feel the stress and

pressure, and I am committed to being part of a culture change. As I walk through the framework for leading, I see that it is possible to position myself as a change initiator.

Many proposed change initiatives fail because of the lack of preparation. Together with the blended change model I will consider the organizational readiness by using a PESTL (political, economic, social, technological and legal) analysis, existing assets, Wang's (2020) conceptual framework, and street data (Safir & Dugan, 2021) as necessary components to appropriately inform change.

As leader, I must fulfill my duty to address social justice (Gélinas-Proulx & Shields, 2022) by integrating the ethic of community (Furman, 2004). There needs to be careful consideration of the plight of all equity-seeking individuals/groups, although my positionality and lived experiences will focus on women-identifying leaders. The focus is on woman leaders as the population is growing as elementary administrators, yet there is still room for improvement regarding recruitment, recognition, retention, and wellbeing. I am critical of the status quo, and I believe in challenging oppression, constraints, and breaking down barriers that have been created by neoliberal ideas (Lipton, 2020), conservative mandates, and systemic oppression.

Doan and Jaber (2021) note that women must demonstrate considerable skills that show toughness and competitiveness, but when they do so these leadership behaviours are viewed negatively. This double standard can lead to a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. It is not lost on me that an administrator's wellbeing is a critical component of success for all. My problem of practice aligns and is consistent with current provincial ministry (OME, 2017) and board commitments to mental health and wellbeing. In Ontario there is a multi-year strategy that is rooted in research and evidence (School Mental Health Strategy, 2022-2025). As well, the

CTBSB has embraced the provincial directives and prioritized mental health and wellbeing for students and staff, but what exists is not enough. There need to be specific wellness and wellbeing checks on administrators that are as important as a completed enrolment report or school improvement plan. The lack of relationship building, support, and principals working in isolation is weighing on the mental health and wellness of administrators. Within the CTBSB's organizational change plan, building relationships by developing trust and creating leadership development opportunities (focusing on the whole person) have been developed as priorities.

An important, often not considered, way to assess organizational culture and readiness for change is informally. Consideration of informal conversations and street data (Safir & Dugan, 2021) is often ignored, because it lacks the numbers or the quantitative data. A step in the right direction is that our leadership teams meet monthly in family of schools (FOS), and they are discussing and discerning on Safir and Dugan's work *Street Data*. Street data is the qualitative and experiential data that emerges when we are looking for it. The work guides us to not only to look at the quantitative data in front of us, but also the qualitative data that may not be easily measured.

Dugan's work challenges us to focus on the assets in front of us to look at what is going well. It looks at the root causes of inequities and the potential to transform learning and reshape the adult culture. *Street Data* (Safir & Dugan, 2021) provides a useful framework that includes a discussion of holism, awareness, antiracism, deep learning, agency, coherence, symmetry, vulnerability, and warm demander. This framework offers an opportunity for courageous conversations that challenge the status quo. Street data is meant to be a paradigm for today's society that considers equity, pedagogy, and school transformation in what matters most, our lived experiences. Street data is asset based and builds upon culturally responsive tenants. It

reminds us that not all things which we value are measurable through data and numbers. Analyzing various forms of data gives us a view towards the readiness for change.

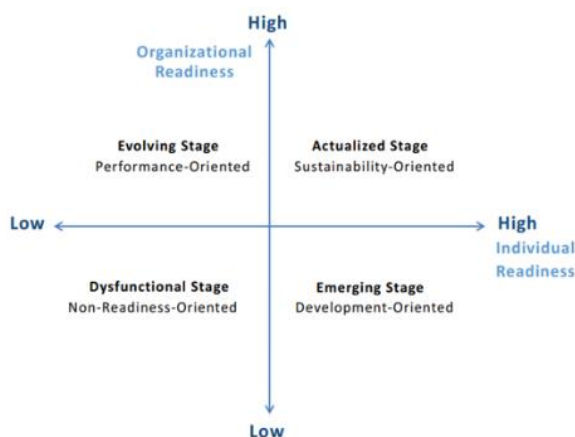*Readiness for Organizational Change*

Many factors influence readiness for change. When looking to disrupt the status quo and challenge issues of equity, social justice, and ethics, the readiness of the organization and the individuals within the organization need to be considered. Organizational change refers to deliberate and planned change initiatives to improve organizational performance or development in a changing context (Wang, 2020). Readiness for change looks at the ability and willingness to undergo and effectively work through change. Readiness for change is one of the most important aspects of change itself (Armenakis et al., 2007).

As I prepare for the impending change initiative, the initial stage of the blended change model looks at individual and system readiness for change. Figure 6 represents Wang's (2020) systems readiness for change conceptual framework. This framework considers both the individual (micro level) and organizational system (macro level) readiness for change. It does not consider the provincial system (meso level). The framework is rooted in international research that considers Global and System Educational Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2016) and the whole system improvement and large-scale educational change (Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). It is important that change readiness assessments are considered to help identify possible areas that may require attention. A well prepared and clear understanding of readiness of individuals involved and the CTBSB's organizational readiness for change will help to guide the change process. The proposed conceptual framework looks at a transformative process, which supports leadership that is demonstrated through actions and leadership structure through input, throughout, and output (Wang, 2020). This framework of readiness (individual, organization, and

system) within the change plan is relevant and necessary to include. For instance, the system level (CTBSB) of readiness for change depends on both individual readiness for change and organization readiness for change.

**Figure 6**

*Conceptual Framework of System Readiness for Change*



*Note.* <u>Adapted from Wang, 2020</u>. The conceptual framework identifies the correlation between the individual and organizational readiness for change.

There are four key parts or constructs in this readiness model that need to be applied at both organizational and individual levels: change efficacy, change commitment, change valence, and leadership. Change efficacy refers to the capabilities to execute and organize the courses of action involved in the implementation of change. Change commitment refers to the resolve to pursue the courses of action involved in the change process. Change valence, resulting from disparate reasons, can be a determinant of change commitment (Bandura, 1986; Weiner, 2009). There needs to be a collective shift, at the board level (meso), that considers the needs of the

unheard and underrepresented. For this to be successful a coalition needs to be established. There needs to be a shared understanding of the desired vision and the culture of the organization.

**Dream and Mobilize**

I embrace Shields' (2020) renewed understanding of the transformative leadership approach as it begins with questions around justice and equity. It challenges inequitable practices and looks to improve the common good. It will encourage change in individuals and systems. As a respected leader in an elementary school, I am concerned about leading the instructional program and school effectiveness. It is my moral imperative, and I am guided by ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2017) to strive to make my school the best that it can be. The reason that I am a teacher and an administrator is because I care about and for others. Joe Sanfelippo's 2022 book *Lead from Where You Are* reminds us that it is the job of the leader to help the collective see a common goal and eliminate the barriers that get in the way. The proposed vision should inspire and move in a positive direction. It looks at positive change and supports equity.

While considering the blended change model herein, there needs to be a shared understanding of the organizational culture. There needs to be a consideration of those whose voices are not heard. The model for creating organizational change puts behavioural change in alignment with culture change but ensures that change is embedded in the culture with a thorough consideration of culture throughout the process.

*Organizational Culture*

Organizational culture is a major determinant of the success or failure of any change initiative. As a result of the over-representation of male administrators and senior leaders that is paradigmatic of many educational institutions, there needs to be a consideration of the needs of the unheard and underrepresented female voice. The dream and mobilize component of the

blended change model requires that a clear vision must be established to show how the future differs from the status quo.

The CTBSB has a vision for their organizational culture. They wish to ensure that their school leaders, educators, staff, and students remain committed to creating and sustaining environments that support an equitable and inclusive educational system. The Equity Action Plan 2023-2025 (CTBSB, 2023) aligns with the Ontario Education Equity Action Plan (2017) and the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Equity Action plan focuses on four key areas: school and classroom practices, leadership, governance, and human resources practices, data collection, integration, reporting and organizational culture change. Within the action plan there is a consideration of equity action items that may contribute to a necessary organizational culture change. These specific actions will be discussed in the solutions and next steps sections. The concern about the equity actions is that there is no clear policy or plan in which to ensure that they happen. There is also not a monitoring or evaluation system in place to review and revise.

I will be the change leader. The intended change is aligned with my agency as a systems principal, so long as there is a commitment from the senior team and director to listen to the data that is presented and the voices of the female administrators. I am member of the provincial Mental Health Professional Association. I am a woman principal, mentor, and committee member (CRRP, Mental Health & Wellness, Equity). I am an active participant in our family of schools (FOS) and elementary administrator association member (EAA). Consistent with Deszca et al.'s (2020) work, as a change agent, I am willing to take the initiative. I am focused on the outcome (but careful of the process). I want to keep hope alive so that I can find my joy in the job that I love. In addition to being the change leader, I would also be a change initiator, along with other administrators, aspiring administrators, and senior team. The implementers are

me and other like-minded administrators who step up to be leaders within the organization. The change facilitators would be the senior team and association leaders. As a principal and a mental health advocate, I see myself as someone who can introduce ideas to the other change initiators, but it must be with a clear vision and plan. I have faith that the new director of education is committed to awakening the organization.

Consistent with a transformative leadership approach that includes a culturally responsive leadership commitment (Khalifa, 2018), I reflect and acknowledge my own biases in beliefs and how they apply to my leadership. I align my beliefs and actions with what Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest is a particular set of skills and dispositions that culturally responsive leaders have. These skills involve having a sociocultural conscience, high expectations, a desire to make a difference, a constructivist approach, deep knowledge of their students and supporting culturally responsive teaching practice. A culturally responsive leadership approach considers whose voices are and are not heard. As a culturally responsive leader, I need to be aware of what is happening day to day in the schools. While preparing for change, I need to be aware of the lived experiences of our community. The GM@W survey results (CTBSB, 2023a) along with a consideration of the implementation of the recommendations would allow the change-initiator and change-makers an opportunity to truly understand the culture to change.

**Design and Acceleration**

The next sequential stage of the blended change model is to design and accelerate the process. This is done by taking action, creating a plan ensuring all voices are heard, and looking for wins. To see the desired state, the CTBSB must prioritize the administrator's health and wellbeing, while acknowledging the impact the leaders have on the students. I will consider the guiding questions, gap analysis, and ethics.

In recent years, senior manager of equity services and equity systems navigator positions were created, a stakeholder census was conducted, learning sessions for administrators around EDI (anti-black racism and supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students) were offered, and affinity groupings for individuals who are equity seeking were created. These improvements signify that the CTBSB senior team and the current director of education are committed to change and improving the culture of the organization. These actions demonstrate that there has been some effort for equity seeking groups, although there has been little to no effort and planning pertaining to gender. Figure 7 is an adaptation of the publicly available CTBSB Organizational Culture Change – Equity Actions monograph. There is a mention of mentor/support programs for women administrators and other racialized colleagues and leaders but the program for women administrators has yet to transpire. The blended change model should help to guide this change.

**Figure 7**

*CTBSB Organizational Culture Change – Equity Actions*
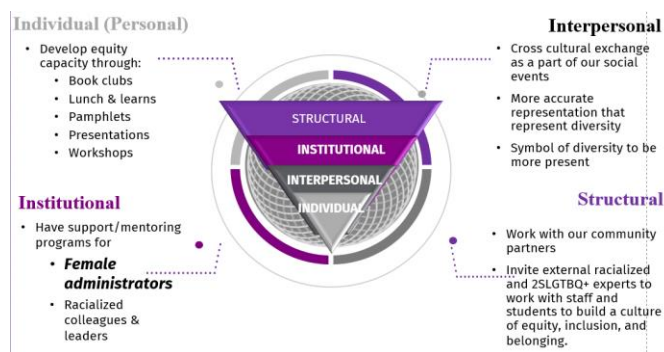


*Note.* Adapted from the publicly available Equity Plan 2023-2025 (CTBSB, 2023). The figure depicts the various equity actions suggested for organizational culture change.

Khalifa (2018) goes as far as to suggest that leaders may become accomplices of oppression if they remain passive. Educators and the leadership need to continue to be

learners. My DiP recognizes that for permanent change, new structures and roles are needed and new points of balance or homeostasis developed  (Deszca et al., 2020). The CTBSB is awakening from a crisis. New roles are being created along with a new body of governance and a genuine commitment to systemic change and improvement. The district needs to consider and be committed to third-order change to facilitate and support any deviation from the status quo. Third order change focuses on striving to be your best self and meet your potential. This change involves informing multiple stakeholders and involving them in looking at opportunities for optimal conditions (Bartuto, 2022). I suggest that third order change is required as I believe that the change needed must not only be a shift in what is currently happening (second order), it needs to be a shift in how we relate and understand the sociocultural system that exists. There needs to be an understanding of the differences that exists. There needs to be a consideration of the ethic of care (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2017) and the ethic of community (Furman, 2004).

**Destiny and Institutionalization**

I will use gender as a focus of analysis, looking at policies and procedures that have excluded, devalued, or undermined concerns of women (Blackmore, 2013). I long to amplify female voices and listen to female experiences with a view to identify the social transformations and policy adjustments necessary for gender equity and equality. Using a critical feminist (Blackmore, 2013; Wood, 2021) stance as an anchor should create awareness and opportunity to challenge existing practices with a desire for change.

*Leadership Ethics in Organizational Change*

At the CTBSB and within each of the individual schools, the decision-makers have an obligation and need to be guided by the ethics of the profession. Leaders are driven by their own moral compass that may challenge school boards to develop policies that are accepting,

inclusive, and necessary for some but good for all. Education needs to serve the whole person: the head, heart, and hands. There needs to be what Buchannan and Chapman (2014) describe as developing the whole person. There needs to be a particular focus and concerted effort to look to the assets and needs of women leaders. Within the CTBSB there needs to be a particular focus and concerted effort to look to the assets and needs of women leaders. What we currently have is what Ryan and Rothmans (2007) would suggest are imperfect social institutions. These are imperfect because they are created by humans.

I constantly consider my moral imperative (Fullan, 2003) and I am guided by Gospel values. Being a Catholic servant leader is central to who I am. I want to find, nurture, and celebrate joy. I believe that everyone is capable of learning when barriers are removed and replaced with opportunities. I am committed to making the truth and reconciliation recommendations real in my learning. I relate to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) radical humanist paradigm; I look to the positive and hope that there is something better ahead. Having a culturally reflective and responsive approach is what grounds me. Seeing my experiences as a new woman administrator during a pandemic, a mother, a student and working within a broken system that clings to systemically problematic policies have caused me to pause. A culturally responsive leadership lens considers whose voices are heard and those that are silenced (Campos et al., 2020).

Challenges of work intensification directly impact administrators' ethic of profession, mental health, and wellness (Pollock, 2017). Administrators are being asked to do more with less. Research tells us that the role of the principal has changed drastically. Perna (2022) maintains that education is heading towards a crisis of epic proportions. Many administrators are considering leaving the occupation due to stress of having to be constantly available and the

public scrutiny. In Ontario, we have a provincial government that continues to battle with advocates for education. Class sizes are increasing and the funding is decreasing. Wang et al. (2018) argued that principals' work intensification affects their job satisfaction:

> As a result of work intensification, motivating factors, such as workplace challenges, recognition from the employer, and work demand: and maintenance factors such as external policy influence, organization support, principals' relationships with teachers, superintendents, and unions are having a significant impact on principals' job satisfaction. These factors affect the extent to which they can contribute effectively to improving student achievement and school performance. (p.1)

I must consider my positionality and the factors that may lead to work intensification for school administrators. For example, is the work intensification at the school, district, or provincial level? Are there structures or resources in place to support the administrators? Can policies or procedures impact the mental health and wellness of administrators?

I appreciate how critical theories in education are about questioning how our educational system can best offer education to all people (Freire, 1998). I value and prioritize equity and social justice. I believe that the main tasks of education within a critical paradigm are to conduct a critical reflection on unjust systems and their structure, deconstruct them, and advocate for a more just social system. In Ontario, educators are guided by ethical standards for the profession that include care, respect, trust, and integrity (OCT, n.d.). These standards are easily connected to the ethic of care that is required for the desired state to transpire. Through reflection, evaluation, and monitoring of the plan, I hope to close the gap between the current state and the desired, with a commitment to ethics, our moral imperative, social justice, and equity.

**Possible Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice**

Supporting women administrators' mental health and wellness is a simple idea, yet complex to understand, articulate, and see change. The problem of practice is viewed through what Apple (2019) would identify as the lens of a critical scholar-activist. The intentional focus on power, inequities, oppression, and marginalization distinguishes critical theory from the structural-functional epistemology and the interpretivist epistemology (Capper, 2019). I am deeply committed to social justice, and I continue to consider the politics and power that are in play. When considering the three possible solutions I will ensure that equity, equality, and social justice issues are central to my work. Kotter (2015) maintains that culture only truly changes when a new way has succeeded over time, and it is inherent in the organizational process. Thus, it is imperative that the preferred solution is one that can last within the organizational context.

In 2019-2020, statistics for the province of Ontario show that women made up 81.9% of the elementary teachers, yet only 67.8% of the elementary school administrators. In secondary, women make up 57.9% of the teachers, yet only 53% of the administrators. Nationally, in Canadian schools, women make up 58% of the principal positions (Statistics Canada, 2016), yet women make up 75% of all elementary and secondary teaching positions (Statistics Canada, 2016). Some of the barriers to women representation in leadership that matches the representation in teaching may be lack of networking opportunities (Diez Gutierrez, 2016) or the lack of mentorship (McGee, 2010). Robinson et al. (2020) found similar connections when they studied possible supportive context for Indigenous women educational leaders in their study on supportive context for Indigenous women educational leaders. While considering possible solutions, the idea that we need to find the joy should be considered.

Women have experienced overt gender discrimination (Coleman, 2007) and covert gender discrimination (Diez Gutierrez, 2016; Wyland, 2016). School administrators are meant to be socially remarkable people; they are like the engines of a train, as they are the primary factors for school success (Döş & Savas, 2015). Effective school principals should have a strong understanding of school reform. They should be able to improve the school vision, and make changes to educational programs (Martineau, 2012). Research out of Kenya shows that there are six barriers for females to overcome to be successful in education leadership. These barriers are family obligations, cultural beliefs, lack of networking, low expectation of success, lack of role models, and lack of mentors (Mwebi & Lazaridou, 2008). Many of these barriers are still realized within the CTBSB.

In 2021 the staff of the CTBSB were invited to complete a workplace census (CTBSB, 2022). The census is an anonymous gathering of staff demographic data in hopes of making relevant, evidence-based decisions within the board. The census aligns with the Ministry of Education Equity Action Plan (OME, 2021) and is collected under the Anti-Racism Act (S.O. 2017). The goal of collecting the data is so that strategies are implemented to support staff diversity, eliminate barriers for staff, support equitable recruitment, promotion, and retention policies, guide professional development, training, and success planning, inform system policies procedures and programs, and ultimately strive for a workforce that reflects our student population (CTBSB, 2023). Informal data gauged through conversations indicate that these concerns are consistent and amplified for women administrators. Recommendations from the census included distributing Guarding Minds at Work (GM@W) survey.

Figure 8 represents each of the three proposed solutions. Consideration has been given regarding the potential for success and my ability to be involved in the necessary change initiatives.

**Figure 8**

*Possible Solutions*



*Note*. Three possible solutions and ethical considerations as they apply to Problem of Practice.

I have contemplated the likelihood for the solution to commence and the potential impact on student success and administrator wellbeing. How this will be determined needs further study. As the sole administrator and lead learner of the Building Bridges School, I put the needs of students first. I know the value and impact of my position. As an administrator that is relatively new to the role, I pray that there are better days ahead. I believe that success is possible, and this will result in improved administrator wellness and satisfaction. Healthy administrators will lead healthy schools. Healthy schools will support and result in student success.

**Possible Solution 1: OME to Reinstate Funding for Leadership Development**

The demands placed on the ever-changing role and expectations for administrators have resulted in a state of crisis when it comes to wellbeing in educational leadership. Work intensification is a true struggle (Pollock, 2017). Professional/personal boundaries are blurred.

The resulting effects of burnout and lack of agency need to be considered with a view to aiding and supporting leaders. Leithwood et al. (2020) reconfirm that leadership is second only to teaching about the impact on student outcomes. In Ontario, we administrators are guided by out-of-date Ontario Leadership Framework (OME, 2013) and the Principal Qualification course. This proposed solution would see provincially mandated and financially sponsored programs to support new administrators. For a short time, the provincial government designated monies through the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OME, 2012) to further develop our leaders.

I believe that this solution would struggle at the first stage (and arguably the most crucial) of the blended change model. A concern with this potential solution is that there is no sense of urgency or a desire for change within the Ministry of Education. In April of 2023, all the provincial administrator's associations penned a letter to all school districts. It outlined the concerns facing administrators and some possible suggestions for resolve. It would appear as though the Minister of Education has many other priorities and concerns, as the letter has not been addressed. The solution involving increased funding for leadership development would happen at the macro level. This solution, if chosen, would result in a first order change. There would be continued dissatisfaction for current administrators. For the solution I have limited agency. The decisions that are made and the priorities selected are not within my realm. As leaders in education, we are compelled to comply with the decisions from the government that often have little input from those directly involved.

**Possible Solution 2: Association/Board Level Affinity Groupings for Administrators**

A possible solution to the presented problem of practice is the formal creation and facilitation of affinity or resource groupings for administrators. There is currently newly created affinity groupings within the CTBSB for any 2SLGTBQI+ and BIPOC identifying staff. This

model could be expanded to include an affinity grouping for women administrators. Hauseman (2018) maintains that it is essential that administrators need to be able to talk about their work and how they are feeling to effectively manage their emotions in a positive manner (p. 230). Developing positive self-esteem and believing in oneself is crucial, and as demonstrated by Baumeister and Vohs (2018), it directly correlates to desirable outcomes. I long for systemic improvements to recognize female administrators. This solution may start to address what Santovec (2013) suggests is the relationship between emotional and spiritual intelligence for a female leader. This simple solution is rooted in complex thought and research. What appears to be simple may be difficult because it upsets the status quo.

Robinson et al. (2020) considered the benefits of networking for women. For many women, opportunity to gather with other women may provide an experience in a positive environment where women can rely on one another for support. Relationships are built on trust and respect. It is necessary to create a safe environment, within the system, that fosters a person's sense of belonging, efficacy, dignity, and responsibility. To facilitate any district initiative, the principal needs to build relationships and arguably prioritize their community.

The proposed affinity grouping program creation relies on utilizing our most valuable resources, our own people. In essence, improved woman administrator wellness will lead to more equitable school, student and staff opportunities, and outcomes. This solution can develop a sense of urgency and build a core coalition. This solution, if selected, has the capacity to create third order change. This solution does a great job of giving voice to the silenced, but it lacks when it comes to policy creation, governance, and longevity of the change. I believe that this solution could struggle at the final stage of change implementation plan. The limitation will

come when the coalition attempts to have their strategic vision and preferred state align with policies.

**Possible Solution 3: CTBSB Mentorship Program**

The current mentorship program has changed several times, and the criteria continue to fluctuate. Within the CTBSB, mentoring and supporting administrators are virtually absent after the first two years of appointment. For true change to happen there needs to be systemic policy advancements including the addition of mentorship opportunities. Calling something a mentorship program does not make it so.

There needs to be a collective shift, at the board level, that considers the needs of the unheard. We need to look deeply at the policies and practices that are outdated and do not reflect our needs today. There is a lack of mentorship/support for many women in principal leadership. The current program only allows for new administrators to be allocated programming and a board selected mentor. Many administrators, including myself, have advocated for what they need. Their needs include a mentorship program that goes beyond the two years of a new administrator, removes the notion that mentors must change each year, and provides more input as to who is paired as mentees/mentors. The input from current administrators has not been considered. A common leadership error is failing to establish a compelling vision for the change. There appears to be no vision from the senior team that differs from the current stance.

In the 2015 Future of Principalship in Canada Research Report, one of the recommendations to move forward is to implement mentorship programs. In this recommendation, it is said that mentorship programs may foster leadership development and assist with feelings of isolation that may come along with carrying the leadership burden alone. The lack of mentorship supports has merged as a reason for the lack of administrators staying in

the role (McGee, 2010; Mwebi & Lazaridou, 2008; Sherman et al., 2008). In turn, the lack of mentorship supports also creates a lack of role models (Robinson et al., 2020). Harris (2020) suggests that mentorship programs for women may be a tool to address gender inequality at work.

This solution would be temporary in nature and lacks the provincial resources that were once available. The CTBSB is currently committed to a mentorship program for new administrators. This proposed solution would go beyond and align the mentorship program with a vision that is rooted in research of what is effective. This solution would transpire and create change at the meso level (board), yet hopefully also impact the micro (individual schools) level.

**Concluding Thoughts on Solutions**

For the CTBSB the organization plan is under development. Change is all around this board, although I do not think that any change theory or processes have been considered. As aforementioned, I believe that the CTBSB and the current director of education are committed to change. The Equity Plan (CTBSB, 2023) is a step toward this plan. The senior team are committed on paper to wanting more. The challenge appears that they lack the buy in from the administrator leaders in the school buildings. Informal discussions indicate that the current professional development being offered is mandated, with no input as to what the administrators believe they need to learn. Again, the dissemination of information is very top down and leaders are struggling with constantly being spoken at.

The director has articulated that they want the leaders to see the person, the leader, not just the 'suit.' He wants to hear what is happening, but often we are caught up in wanting to impress rather than telling him the reality. I wonder why this is the case. Are administrators afraid of disappointing? Is there no clear vision of what the future could hold? Is there a fear of

not being supported? Is there a concern that there is nothing that can be done? Unfortunately, the status quo does not have a clear vision that encompasses the feedback from all the administrators. There is a true lack of understanding and a plan to consider the wellness of female administrators. If none of these solutions are selected, it would result in first order change, essentially status quo remains.

**Resources & Gaps**

Information (acknowledging there is a problem), time and money are the resources required to address this problem of practice. It is imperative that I carefully consider which resources are required for each of the proposed solutions. Figure 9 represents an outline of the evaluation of resources that would be required for each of the proposed solutions. Both the solution pertaining to mentorship and affinity groupings require the same time, human, and fiscal resources. It could be argued that one of the many reasons the Ministry of Education would not commit to programs that would benefit leaders in education is because of financial costs.

**Figure 9**

*Evaluation of Resources Required for Each Solution*

| Possible Solutions (3) | Resources Required | | | | KEY | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Time | Human | Fiscal | | Resources Required | |
| #1-MOE | | | | | High | Low |
| #2-Mentor | | | | | | |
| #3-Affinity | | | | | | |
| Status Quo | | | | | | |

*Note.* Visual representation of the resources required for each of the proposed solutions.

While contemplating that which would become the preferred solution, it is important to consider gaps. Figure 10 represents the correlation between the structural, human, political, and

symbolic resource gaps as they apply to the possible solutions. Again, both the mentorship and affinity grouping solutions came out similar. They would both significantly address the identified gaps well. Obviously, status quo would not address gaps in a manner that is required and that is why there is a need for change.

**Figure 10**

*Evaluation of Possible Solutions with Potential to Address Specific Gaps*

| Possible Solutions (3) | Specific Resource Gaps | | | | KEY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Gap 1 Structural | Gap 2 Human | Gap 3 Political | Gap 4 Symbolic | Potential to Address Gaps |
| #1-MOE | 🟥 | 🟥 | 🟧 | 🟥 | Poor ▮▮▮▮ Well |
| #2-Mentor | 🟩 | 🟩 | 🟩 | 🟩 | |
| #3-Affinity | 🟩 | 🟩 | 🟩 | 🟩 | |
| Status Quo | 🟥 | 🟥 | 🟥 | 🟥 | |

*Note.* Visual representation of the evu>lation of the potential of each of the proposed solutions to address specific resource gaps.

The consideration of ethics is a necessary part of any change process. Northouse (2022) suggests that ethics are about how the leader behaves and their actions. While considering the preferred solution, I considered the ethic of justice, ethic of critique, ethic of care. Figure 11 represents the evaluation of possible solutions with a consideration of ethics. The figue demonstrates how only the proposed solution of creating affinitiy groupings considered all of the ethics under review. Ethics is imperative to our work in education. Ethics is aligned with my authentic leadership lens. This factor weighs heavily on what will become the preferred solution.

**Figure 11**

*Evaluation of Possible Solution in Consideration of Ethics*

| Possible Solutions (3) | Ethic of Justice (rules of law; equity, fairness, and justice; equality focus) | Ethic of Critique (moral problems caused by ethic of justice, barriers to fairness, equity focus) | Ethic of Care (compassion-oriented) | Ethic of Profession (profession's guiding values) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| #1-MOE | Red | Red | Red | Yellow |
| #2-Mentor | Orange | Orange | Yellow | Green |
| #3-Affinity | Green | Green | Green | Green |
| Status Quo | Red | Orange | Red | Yellow |

KEY — Consideration of Ethics: Poor (Red) — Orange — Yellow — Well (Green)

*Note.* Visual representation of the evaluation of the potential of each of the proposed solutions to address a consideration of various ethics.

## Comparing and Contrasting Solutions

When looking at the evaluation of the proposed solutions, the four Ps of feminist leadership diamond, which include power, politics & purpose, principles, and practice (Batliwala, 2010), will be considered. Figure 12 demonstrates that a careful review of the resources required, ethical considerations, likelihood of support, and ability to facilitate the consideration of all voices leads me to the preferred solution. My preferred solution is to create affinity grouping for equity seeking administrators. This solution focuses on implementation at the meso level (CTBSB/EPA) so that benefits will impact the micro level (individual administrators in their schools). The proposed preferred solution allows for multiple individuals to give voice before the first stage. If administrators are going to promote and support wellness and mental health, they themselves need to be well.

**Figure 12**

*Feminist Leadership Diamond, Possible Solutions, and Considerations*

**Possible Solutions and Considerations**

| Solutions | Resources | Ethical Considerations | Supports Principal Well Being | Considers all Voices |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ministry of Education Re-investment | Nil | Profession | yes | no |
| Affinity Group For Equity Seeking Administrators | Human Financial | Justice Profession Care | yes | yes |
| Mentor Program For all Administrator | Human Financial | Profession Care | yes | potentially |
| Status Quo | Human Financial | Profession | no | potentially |
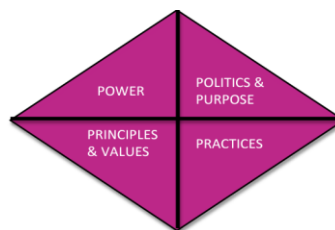
*Note.* Feminist leadership diamond is adapted from Batliwala (2010). The diamond is used to consider the best possible solutions.

## Chapter 2 Conclusion

Consistent with my constructivist approach (Vygotsky, 1978) to education and learning, I believe that the selected solution would allow for learning to be actively created. This preferred solution would be consistent with a third order change. Third order change goes beyond thinking within our existing schema. It involves a change in the organization that may create more equitable practices (McDowell, 2022). This solution would transpire and create change at the meso level (board), yet hopefully also impact the micro (individual schools) level.

This chapter focused on the key areas for the organizational improvement plan to succeed. These include the blended change model for leading change, organizational readiness, solutions, and ethics. A decision is made regarding the preferred solution. The next chapter will look at the implementation and evaluation of the preferred solution. Key areas will be discussed. These areas include a change implementation plan, a knowledge mobilization plan and a monitoring and evaluating framework utilizing appreciative inquiry. As well, a communication

process includes opportunities for Deming's 2018 Plan-Do-Study-Act to be incorporated. Next, I will look at ways of evaluating change that include Kelly's 2022 School Leader Wellbeing Survey (SLWS). This school leader-focused survey focuses on school leader experiences, workplace culture and mental health awareness and support. Finally, I will conclude with my personal narrative, next steps, and future considerations.

## Chapter 3: Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication

Chapters 1 and 2 of this Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) introduce a leadership problem of practice. Within the problem of practice, I identify that women administrators' mental health and wellness need to be recognized and supported. In Chapter 2, I look at the leadership approach to change and the importance of ethics. I propose, compare, and contrast solutions. The selected solution involves an identification and acknowledgement around gender parity in formal leadership roles and a change in professional learning opportunities that align with the school board's strategic goal, mission, and vision (CTBSB, 2023). The gaps between the ideal and current state are confirmed by a PESTL and data analysis. Senge et al. (2019) identify the space between the current state and the desired state as creative tension. In Chapter 3, I will identify how conscientization will underpin a change implementation plan (CIP). The implementation, communication, monitoring, and evaluation plans are each connected to the framework for leading change. This chapter will conclude with next steps and future considerations.

## Change Implementation Plan

There are two types of change, episodic and continuous. I believe that the pandemic provided us with an excellent example of episodic change that came in fast and furious when we may not have expected it. The way that we have always operated is not working and meeting the needs to support students and staff today. There needs to be a focus on all the people affected by change, as opposed to only the change itself. The change implementation plan (CIP) is led through a critical feminist lens (Batliwala, 2010; Watson, 2016) with consideration of social justice (Gélinas-Proulx & Shields, 2022; Theoharis, 2008). The CTBSB overall vision is that all students will experience success and belonging. The intended change, when implemented, will result in policies and programs that support the mental health and wellness for women administrators. Central to the DiP is that all voices are recognized and heard. We are now in the

middle of the multi-year strategic plan (CTBSB, 2022) and equity action plan (CTBSB, 2023). This DiP provides an opportunity to enact change and support one of the key goals (staff experience a positive, healthy, and inclusive workplace) that has yet to be fully achieved.

Organizational change needs to be planned, continual, intentional, with an ongoing process directed at helping people, to improve the organization at both formal and informal levels to succeed (Deszca et al., 2020). I truly believe that the senior leadership of our organization is committed to equity practices, and they want to live out the vision (belonging and success), yet there is a lack of a commitment and coherence from some individuals. Within change management, there are three types of change: the types of directive change are transitional, developmental, and transformative (Deszca et al., 2020). The transformative change implementation sought herein will require support, resources, and time from the senior team, superintendents, mental health lead, equity officers, and administrators. My positionality as a school principal limits my ability to implement the transformative change, although it is not impossible. I am committed to conscientization as a form of activism that provides a way for educational leaders to develop agency, act, and build capacity on important issues about equity, diversity, and social justice (Lopez, 2016).

The proposed change plan includes creating a sense of urgency, building trust, and awakening the organization. To ignite the change and name the urgency, already existing coalitions need to identify and consider the problem of practice. Without a purpose, the initial work has been done through the informal groupings mentioned in Chapter 1. These groupings include the LEAP (leaders empowering amazing people), the family of school's administrators (FOS), and the elementary principal association (EPA). Administrators have suggested through surveys from their association that the current professional development model does not always

connect with their needs. How governance plays out and identifying the change participants within the organization are important. The change plan is limited to the acceptance and engagement of the senior staff. If the senior staff are unwilling to implement the change, then I will focus on the local principal association. While there may be push back around the change plan, it is an imperative missing part of the strategic plan goal. Figure 13 depicts elements of a change implementation plan (CIP). The CIP will clearly outline the implementation tasks, knowledge building, social processes, artifacts, actions, and timelines.

**Figure 13**

*Elements of the Change Implementation Plan (CIP)*

| Adapted Change Model Stage | Implementation Tasks | Knowledge Building | Social Process | Artifacts & Actions | Timeline |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Discover & Awaken | Analyze Readiness for Change | Knowledge Creation *Awareness & Self Efficacy | Build & Improve Relationships | MYSP, GM@W Survey Workplace Census Street Data Culture Assessment | Summer/ Fall Year 1 |
| Dream & Mobilize | Build a Coalition | Knowledge Sharing | Consider Moral Purpose Sharing knowledge | Organizational & Individual Readiness Needs Assessment | Winter/Spring Year 1 |
| Design & Acceleration | Create a Plan & Take Action | Knowledge Construction | Encourage Active Participation | Affinity Grouping Agenda & Professional Development Plan | Spring/Summer Year 1 |
| Destiny & Institutionalize | Adjust, Improve, Maintain & Measure Change | Knowledge Creation | Coherence | Plan-Do-Study-Act Monitoring & Evaluation | Ongoing |

*Note*. The steps in this plan should not be considered sequential nor linear. The table is a detailed summary capturing the multiple detailed aspects of the CIP.

To implement the desired change, as a change initiator and leader of change I will initially connect with the manager of equity to propose the plan. From there, I will connect with three of the groupings of administrators (LEAP, FOS, EPA) that I work closely with. I will start with the all-woman LEAP group, as the relationships already exist, and trust is established. We already come together, tell stories, support one another, and share best practices to reduce work

intensification (Pollock, 2017). The entire LEAP group will be recipients of the proposed change. I have considered their valence and through informal conversations; they all indicate that they perceive the potential change can indeed produce desired benefits. According to Armenakis and Harris (2009), for change to be successfully initiated, the individual and/or organization must perceive the change as beneficial. Bandura (1986) describes efficacy as the perceived belief and capability to implement change initiatives.

A goal of the Multi Year Strategic Plan (CTBSB, 2022) is that all staff experience a positive, healthy, and inclusive work environment. Rintoul and Bishop (2019) consider the ever-changing role of the principal. A positive is that the percentage of women administrators in Ontario is growing. This increase is relatively consistent with the growth at CTBSB. Figure 14 represents the percentage of females as elementary teachers, secondary teachers, and administrators in Ontario public schools. In the 1994-1995 school year, 39 % of elementary school administrators were women. This percentage rose to 67.8 % in 2019-2020. This amount is still not proportionate to the percentage of woman teachers (81.9%) in 2019-2020, which has risen from 78% in 1994-1995 (OME, 2020).

**Figure 14**

*Female Representation in Ontario Public Schools*

| Year | Female Elementary School Teacher | Female Elementary School Administrator | Female Secondary School Teacher | Female Secondary School Administrator |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000-2001 | 75% | 58% | 52% | 44% |
| 2005-2006 | 81% | 60% | 54% | 46% |
| 2010-2011 | 81% | 65% | 55% | 49% |
| 2015-2016 | 81% | 67% | 56% | 50% |
| 2019-2020 | 82% | 68% | 58% | 53% |

*Note.* This data is derived from OME. This table demonstrates the number of females in teaching and administrator positions in Ontario every five years from 2000-2020.

The work of the administrator continues to become more complex and regulated; however, the policies and procedures have not evolved to consider the possible unique needs of females and other equity seeking groups (Rintoul & Bishop, 2019).

**Potential Issues and Limitations**

There will be issues and limitations that come up. When considering gender issues there are three major 'purple elephants' in the room. The elephant in the room is an English metaphorical idiom for an obvious reality that is either being ignored or not being addressed. In many circles, purple represents a combination of traditionally male (blue) and female (pink) colours. Purple is also used for International Women's Day. Amy L. Robinson suggests that these purple elephants in the room include the acknowledgment that there is not a gender-equal work force, gender bias exists implicitly and explicitly in the workplace, and there is a major obstacle of men not supporting women and women not supporting other women.

Throughout my DiP journey I have positioned myself as a scholarly practitioner. I may also be a participatory action researcher as described in *Qualitative Research in the Post-Modern Era* (White et al., 2022). I am seeking transformative change while simultaneously investigating the issue (problem of practice). My work will follow true to the roots of action research: acting, observing, reflecting, and revising. From the genesis of my dissertation, it was necessary that data (GM@W, anecdotal and street data) is collected regarding where we are. Along the way, I presented at virtual conferences for administrators on how we are supporting wellness and specifically social-emotional programs. I continued sharing my thoughts at the EPA meeting in 2023. Sadly, my efforts were met with resistance from a colleague. This was not the first time that addressing the needs of women administrators has been dismissed. It would appear as though there has been a socialization process (Weber et al., 1978) of competition or conflict

between various administrator groupings. Almost all the CTBSB administrator social groupings are delineated by gender.

Through an associative social process that involves learning and spending time together there has been an improvement. Now, I am seeing more of a cooperation between the administrators and a desire to work together and support each other as a group. For example, we take pride in at the CTBSB in how we can care for each other. Recently many administrators have experienced a great deal of sickness, sadness, and death of loved ones. Colleagues are coming together at visitations and funerals to be supportive. There needs to be an increase in the opportunities for the relationships to grow and develop. A major obstacle is time and administrators feeling that they cannot be away from their school.

I have concern that although the CTBSB has commenced affinity groupings for other equity seeking groups and they have recognized the need to support women leaders, that they will not commit to the proposed solution. The collaboration of the senior team and administrators on this problem of practice would result in growth for the organization and ultimately for the students we serve. If the CTBSB will not support (with time and financial resources) the implementation of an affinity group for women administrators, I will pivot to an additional source of support, the Elementary Principal Association. Through this organization I would communicate the problem of practice, seek input, and request time at meetings to introduce the proposed solution. My positionality is much stronger as a decision maker at the EPA, yet my heart is hoping that the senior team at CTBSB will commit to change by way of the preferred solution articulated herein.

Recent key changes for many senior team and human resources positions have created a new opportunity for growth, development, and rebuilding of the organization. The new regime

seems dedicated to supporting the wellbeing of all staff, but at the cost of administrators who they expect to shoulder the burden of staff well-being. I strive to be what Fullan (2019) describes as a nuanced leader. I want to be present and learn from others. I am actively engaged, seek collaboration, and willing to adapt so that I can see what may make this desired change possible and meaningful.

**Knowledge Mobilization Plan**

A knowledge mobilization plan (KMb) will describe how the knowledge is created and used to inform practice and policy (Malik, 2020). The plan will involve consideration of many activities relating to moving from the current state to the desired state. The plan is needed to put research into practice and facilitate the implementation of necessary policy and practices. This plan will involve applying knowledge from outside of the organization and from the data collected within the organization. In essence, knowledge mobilization is moving knowledge into active service for the broadest possible common good (SSHRC, 2008b). In the context of this DiP, the KMb is a component of my CIP as the change we are looking for relies on systemic organizational change, individual awareness, and a commitment to a common vision.

*Historical Context*

To understand where I am going, it is necessary to consider the past. Specifically, a consideration on the history of advocating for females (specifically) should be analyzed. The Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO) was created in 1918. On February 16, 1967, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was established. In 1968 the FWTAO submitted a brief addressing concerns and suggested recommendations pertaining to women educators. These recommendations were that there were greater opportunities for leadership, tax

deductions and assistance for childcare, equal pay, and elimination of discrimination against women. To date, I do not think that all these recommendations have been fully implemented.

Malinda S. Smith suggests that during the 1970s and 80s the category of "women" and gender differences was the focus of difference. Many equity practices and policies led to the focus being on gender equity. In 1972 Gloria Steinem, the founding director of *Ms*. magazine was invited to the 1972 FWTAO dinner. At that event Steinem spoke of gender discrimination with the example of men in administrative posts and women as teachers. This insight sparked a provincial wide campaign looking to increase pay and women into positions of authority in Ontario schools. At the time women represented 68.1% of elementary teachers but only 2.3% of administration jobs. By 1979 the Ministry of Education for Ontario endeavored to look at employment equity, especially in positions of leadership (Gidney, 2002).

Gender issues and concerns have been discussed in the past. Perhaps people believe that the concerns have been acknowledged, the professional development work has been done in the past and there is no need to continue. The "issue" has not been resolved. On March 8, 1975, the first International Women's Day was established. On March 8, 2024, almost 50 years later, with great sadness this day was not identified nor acknowledged from our system, no resources were distributed, and no messaging from our senior team. Many administrators ensured that the day was noted and celebrated within their local schools. For many other celebrations (Black Heritage Month, Down Syndrome Day, Social Worder Appreciation Day) we receive system communications, resource materials, and direction. Of note, we celebrate World Teacher Day, yet Principal Appreciation Day is not recognized. I believe that the current lack of attention to the matter is recreating a problem and a lack of equality by not recognizing the differences that exist.

*Connection to Change Implementation Plan*

The KMb is aligned with the change implementation plan as discussed earlier and draws on critical feminist theory (Watson, 2016) and equity. It will be necessary to use the proposed KMb and the blended model of change as a framework to implement a formal affinity program for administrators that is based on research and rooted in relationship building. The creation and support for an affinity grouping for women administrators will provide a mechanism for like-minded, equity seeking administrators to share stories, seek input, and ultimately find joy. Figure 15 depicts the Knowledge Mobilization Plan. The KMb will provide a guide for the transfer of knowledge. Adhering to a KMb will aid the change leader to understand the participants, reflect, explore possibilities, and determine the best course of action. The components of the KMb are integral to the success of the CIP. It is imperative that appropriate information is created, articulated, shared, processed, disseminated, and institutionalized.

**Figure 15**

*Knowledge Mobilization Plan*



*Note.* The adapted KMb will provide a framework for ensuring the specified aspects are considered.

*Discover and Awaken - Knowledge Creation*

The initial stage of the KMb will look at the readiness for change. The target audiences will be identified, and networking should commence. The readiness needs to come from both the individuals and the organization. The social process should focus on building and improving relationships. The MYSP, GM@W, census, street data, and culture assessment will be considered. Knowledge will be co-created and shared so that advocacy will naturally commence. At this stage, self-efficacy, awareness, building relationships, social trust, and openness are key components.

The main stakeholders that are impacted by this change will be the women administrators. The change implementation plan has been organized in consideration of the blended change model (Figure 5) discussed in Chapter 2. The first step is to create a sense of urgency. The information from the GM@W survey, informal conversations, and street data indicate that mental health and wellness are urgent matters. The senior team articulates at meetings and through the strategic plan (CTBSB, 2023) that the need for improvement in mental health and wellbeing is a priority. There has been an increase in optional professional development, more information is distributed through weekly staff communication, and the board has partnered with Mental Health Ontario. The sense of urgency is apparent (for some) in naming the concern, but what lacks is the connection to any action that addresses the concern. For change to be meaningful and continued there must be buy in and meaning from the change agents.

As a school leader, it is important to be self-aware and be efficacious. Bandura (1986) describes efficacy as the perceived capability to implement change initiatives. As the change initiator and leader, I must continue to listen to the concerns, ideas, and celebrations of the

women leaders. Thus far, it is clear from the small informal group that the building of

community, sharing experiences, and learning together can bring the joy that is sought. Some of

the members of the LEAP group are also a part of the FOS professional learning community

(PLC).

*Dream and Mobilize - Knowledge Sharing*

The second stage will look at knowledge co-creation and synthesis. There should be

consideration of ethics and moral purpose. Organizational and individual readiness will be

measured. The KMb aligns with the Ontario Education Act (OME, 1990), which requires all

school boards to have a clearly outlined strategic plan that are three years or more in scope. The

2022-2025 Multi-Year Strategic Plan (CTBSB, 2023) is aimed at achieving the Ministry of

Education's goal of increased student wellbeing and achievement. The strategic plan considers

interrelated (families, parents, community, students, and staff) stakeholders. Each year of the

MYSP there is a check in with administrators, which has resulted in a reaffirmation that the

CTBSB's mission, vision, and beliefs should remain unchanged. Further, there was agreement

that the key areas essential to student and staff success and wellbeing relied on equity, diversity,

and inclusion. These key areas are central to the solution for my problem of practice within the

DiP.

*Knowledge Construction*

The third stage will look at knowledge uptake, innovation, and integration, which

coincides with the design and acceleration stage of the blended change model. Knowledge will

be constructed through active participation. One direction of the CTBSB strategic plan is to

support success for all while promoting a culture of belonging and respect. The data that is

collected from the census will inform programs, policies, and practices that support a more

inclusive working and learning environment for students and staff. As a direct result of the information/data that has been collected, two affinity groupings have been established. I contemplate whether it is possible for a change leader to be both the holder of the power and to be oppressed. I need to ascertain where my power comes from and how it is influenced.  It is important to consider gender as power and to look at the power relations that exist within the CTBSB. The plan is set up in a linear fashion, yet it will multidirectional. Constant reflection and revision are necessary.

*Knowledge Creation*

The fourth stage will look at knowledge dissemination and institutionalization. Through an associative social process, there has been social gatherings and professional learning. Now, I am seeing more of a cooperation between the administrators and a desire to work together and support each other as a group.

One of the goals of the CTBSB strategic plan is inclusivity. Inclusivity aligns with the notion of belonging. There is a moral imperative to weave equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout any organizational improvement plan (Fullan, 2003). Inclusion is also central to the ethic of care (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2017; Shields & Hesbol, 2020). This DiP relies on the development of an inclusive discourse within the system with a view to ensure that all are called to belong. Inclusive instruction, text, and materials need to be present within the schools. Inclusive hiring and continued commitment to support equity seeking groups is being considered. To align with the blended model of change and to meet the DiP proposed solution to create a formal affinity grouping for women administrators, I will need to act as a change leader and commit to conscientization (Lopez, 2016). As a change initiator, I am committed to the inclusion of the voices that are unheard, amplify the voices of the minorities and challenge

gender stereotypes. I want to celebrate and embrace differences. Many of the women

administrators will be both the change participants and the change recipients.

The CTBSB is a large board that is responsible to a neoliberal provincial government.

Most administrators are experienced educators that are passionate about their job and care

deeply. Successful change cannot be mandated within an organization. The implementation of

the preferred solution will need to be planned carefully and backed with research and evidence.

For example, drawing on Debebe's (2011) qualitative study that articulates the value in

achieving transformational learning in women-only settings would be helpful. It is imperative

that there the awareness is achieved at the senior team level. For the change process to be

successful, there must be clear communication, planning, evaluation, and monitoring that leads

to an internalized shift that results in the process(es) becoming routine.

<div align="center">**Plan to Communicate the Need for Change and the Change Process**</div>

Communication of the plan will involve the sharing of information formally and

informally. I have a gendered first-person knowledge that I will apply to the plan. It is imperative

that I use a feminist epistemology lens (Longino, 2017) to focus on the complexities of gender as

a social and relational construction to relate to communication, evaluation, monitoring, and

change mobilization. A feminist post structural epistemology suggests that an educator take a

stand on an issue, overtly identify their own epistemological position, recognize their partiality

and contradictions within the position, and then engage in self-interrogation of that position

(Capper, 2019). Within the context of this DiP, clear, concise, planned communication is central

to the success of the implementation of the proposed solution. The plans will connect the

research and findings to policies and practices. The CIP and KMb will be strengthened by

building trusting relationships through social processes. The mobilization will be interwoven in

the implementation, communication, and monitoring plans. The goal of the monitoring and communication plan is to move towards the desired state.

The target participants required to implement this plan are the women school leaders. The CTBSB equity plan identifies that there is a desire for all to belong. Recent happenings and public outcry have caused a much-needed professional development priority to be placed on other equity deserving groups. For the 2022-2023 school year administrators and senior team focused their learning on supporting 2SLGTBQ+ students. For the 2023-2024 the professional development learning has focused on Anti-Black Racism. Just because professional development has been delivered, that does not mean that the learning is done. Now, there needs to be an awareness around gender issues. It is important to measure and gauge success of the professional development. An exit ticket could be used to highlight what went well, what needs to be improved, and potential next steps.

Of great importance is understanding yourself in relation to your organization and the organizational culture. Dr. Carol Beatty is a professor at Queen's University and a leading expect in human and organizational issues resulting from change initiatives. She suggests that just because change leaders are thoroughly familiar with the why, what, and how of a change initiative, they should not assume that everyone else knows. Beatty (2015) suggests that if communication is not started at the beginning and continued throughout the change process, then the change may not transpire. A communication model must be carefully considered, planned, and implemented.

As the communication plan for the organization improvement plan is at its genesis, it is important to consider the communication principles suggested by Beatty (2015). These principles include trust, integrity, confidence, commitment, brand, and objectives (p. 23). As the DiP

continues to develop, there are areas that need to be further investigated. The consideration of

leadership, balance, commitment, and communication are necessary components to include. The

communication plan must ensure that the message is being received as it was intended. There

needs to be intention and purpose when the information is disseminated. There needs to be

careful consideration as to what is communicated, how it is communicated, and when

information is distributed. Before information is sent out, it needs to be carefully vetted and input

should be requested from those to whom it is directed.

<div align="center">**Aspects of Change Communication**</div>

I think that people do not fear change (metathesiophobia), rather they fear the unknown.

As such, communication is the key to the change process in organizations as it is a highly social

process of understanding the world around us (Lewis, 2019). When communicating, it is

important to consider who the intended audience is and what will be the impact of the impending

change on them (Beatty, 2015). For change to be successfully implemented the individuals and

the organization must see the change as beneficial. Valence represents the perceptions of the

recipient of change, either the individual or organization, to believe that the potential change can

indeed produce desired benefits (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). It is imperative that there is a plan

to communicate and receive information from the targeted stakeholders, the women

administrators.

**Communication Plan**

Change is required for women leaders of CTBSB to feel supported, cultivate their

positive wellbeing, and experience joy. To help move the vision to a reality, there must be a

monitor and evaluation framework. The framework will involve collecting, monitoring,

analyzing, and evaluating information to be shared. The problems of inequity have been

amplified and access to resources has been diminished. Now that we know more about administrator wellbeing, we need to do more. We need to consider that not all the administrators in our district will have the same experiences. Some have an extensive background in mental health and wellness, some have none.

It is important to ensure that the communications are strategic. Continuous reflection will help to understand and learn from what works, what does not work and appropriateness of timing. The communication plan has guiding questions that must be considered. These include the following questions: How do I know all voices are heard? How am I ensuring that individuals are invited to belong? What will I communicate? How will I engage individuals in the feedback process?

The communication plan shows seven suggested opportunities for communication that coincide with the change plan suggested herein. The plan is an important tool for accountability. I need to decide which communication metrics the individuals who are intended to be recipients of the change use the most (email, flyers, intranet). My experience tells me that being intentional and invitational will work best. The four stages in the PDSA cycle mirror the scientific method (Taylor et al., 2014). The cycle starts with a formulation of a hypothesis (plan-clearly stated problem of practice, communicate with stakeholders). Next data is collected to test and analyze the proposed solution (do-consider GM@W, street data, PESTL to analyze). Thirdly, there must be an interpretation the results (study-review, reflect and refine if the solution is working). Finally, a conclusion needs to be drawn from the original hypothesis (act-implement the preferred solution).

Figure 16 is a visual representation of the initial year of a communication plan. Within each section of the communication plan, a PDSA cycle (Deming, 2018; Langley et al., 2009)

may be used to provide an opportunity to reflect, engage, consider, and manage the individual

aspects of the overall communication. The PDSA cycle involves four steps to guide the thinking

process and break down the steps. The PDSA cycle aims to collect data and information to move

the learning forward closer to the preferred state. This approach is embedded in the

communication plan to ensure that there is thorough consideration of possible barriers, obstacles,

or need for adjustment.

**Figure 16**

*Year 1 - Communication Plan including PDSA Cycle*
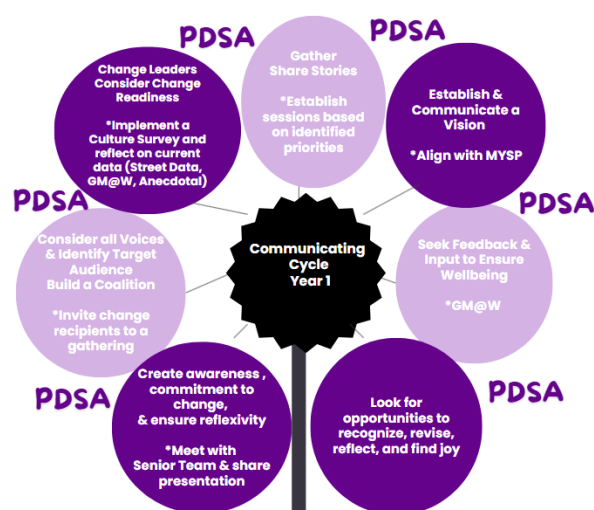


*Note.* The plan is not necessarily linear or sequential in nature, as it will be constantly revised.

**Potential Questions**

Other administrators and the senior team are likely to have many questions. What is

presented here will not change the system overnight. It will require collaborative hard work,

humility, and acceptance from the senior team that will align with the MYSP for the betterment

of the CTBSB system. There may be push back about females being identified as equity seeking.

Another concern may be about inclusion. How does this solution involving women leaders address administrators who may not identify as woman? How does this solution ensure that the voices of all equity seeking administrators are recognized? How can this solution impact male leaders?

I will need to be consistent in my messaging, ensuring that it is rooted in the research and evidence collected as described herein. This consistency is important so that the communication and suggested learning is consistent to avoid any misinterpretations. My lived experience may be different, and I need to be open to adjusting the plan to serve the needs of all. I will need to listen, learn, and reflect from the onset. There may be push back, as there has been when other affinity groups have been created. Another concern could be about time and resources. The work of school leaders has become very demanding, with the average principal working 55 hours a week (Pollock et al., 2020). Finding time to meet and share will be a challenge, yet the rewards will be plentiful. I must clearly articulate the benefits of collaboration. Funding and resources will always be a concern.

A part of the Ontario Leadership Framework discusses aligning our resources with our priorities. I believe that I need to advocate that the CTBSB aligns its resources with their priorities. The publicly available 2024-2025 budget for the CTBSB allocates between $750,000-$1,000,000 towards mental health and wellbeing initiatives. Implementing elements of the DiP would rely on some of those funds being allocated for administrators' professional development.

A clearly identified priority has been inclusion and equity. In recent years, the board has spent a large amount of money on administrator professional development around equity issues. Unfortunately, the format, timing did not land as best as it could have. For this initiative it is

important to have a communication, monitoring, and evaluation process throughout to be able to revise and improve along the way.

## Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation

This DiP relies heavy on critical considerations and appreciative inquiry. Brookfield (2005) describes critical theory as being rooted in the desire to fight oppression, injustice, and bigotry to create a fairer, more compassionate world. According to Serrat (2008), appreciative inquiry can be useful to build a community, create openness, and willingness when a negative position has prevailed. To move from the status quo to the preferred state I must include a monitoring and evaluation framework.

The monitoring and evaluation plans are directed by applying knowledge mobilization, feminist, and critical appreciative inquiry. To improve the likelihood of successful change, I will apply McArthur-Blair & Cockell's (2012) critical appreciative inquiry to provide a logic model framework for monitoring and evaluating the change process. McArthur-Blair and Cockell's 2012 critical appreciative inquiry (CAI) is an extension of Cooperrider's 2005 appreciative inquiry (AI). It merges social constructionism (Vygotsky, 1978), critical theory (Capper, 2019), and appreciative theory (Cooperrider, 2005). Social constructionism is a sociological theory that maintains that learning occurs through the help of others and social interaction, often in a group setting. Through the informal LEAP gatherings, opportunities to communicate after mentoring sessions, and social interaction at administrator retreats, I know that when we dialogue and connect with others, the greatest learning often occurs.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

While creating monitoring and evaluation activities, it would be prudent to start by considering Podems' (2018) feminist considerations for evaluation. These aspects include

acknowledging that evaluation is a political activity; contextualizing evaluation in relation to knowledge; generating and using knowledge as resource; respecting multiple ways of knowing; framing gender inequalities as social injustice; considering the gender discrimination as systemic and structural; being aware that research methods, institutions, and practices are social constructs; and acting on opportunities to create, support, and advocate for change. These considerations are consistent with the feminist underpinning such an intentionality, power, capacity-building, hearing all voices, inclusivity, and belonging. These considerations should not be considered as how to do an evaluation. Figure 17 represents a logic model. This logic model has been created to give a visual representation of the resources, activities, and intended effects. The logic model is a road map to describe the journey.

**Figure 17**

*Logic Model for Monitoring and Evaluating*

| What do we need to do? | How much will we do? (INPUTS) | | Activity | How well are we doing it? (OUTPUTS) | | Are female administrators better off? OUTCOMES) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| What evidence/data leads you to believe that there is a problem of practice?<br>☐ Observations/ Conversations<br>☐ Contextual data<br>☐ Demographic data<br>☐ Attitudinal data | **What we INVEST:**<br>☐ Culture Survey<br>☐ Staff<br>☐ Volunteers<br>☐ Time/Money<br>☐ Materials<br>☐ Equipment/ Technology<br>☐ Community Partners | **What we DO:**<br>☐ Professional Learning<br>☐ Book Study<br>☐ Meetings<br>☐ Guest Speakers<br>☐ Counseling<br>☐ Assessments<br>☐ Mentoring<br>☐ Build Relationships | **Establish an Affinity/Employee Resource Group for Female Employees** | **Are all voice accounted for?**<br>☐ Female Administrators<br>☐ Male Administrators<br>☐ Equity Seeking Administrators<br>☐ Aspiring Female Leaders<br>☐ Senior Team | **Short-Term Results**<br>☐ Knowledge<br>☐ Awareness<br>☐ Attitudes<br>☐ Opinions<br>☐ Motivations<br>☐ Aspirations<br>☐ Culture | **Medium-Term Results are related to ACTION:**<br>☐ Behaviour<br>☐ Skills<br>☐ Decision-making<br>☐ Policies<br>☐ Work Intensification<br>☐ Mentoring<br>☐ Social Action | **Long-Term Results are related to IMPACT.**<br>☐ Well-being<br>☐ Mental Health |
| *How do I know?*<br>• *'Street Data'*<br>• *Staff Census*<br>• *Guarding Minds at Work Survey Results 2022 & 2023*<br>• *Informal conversations* | *How will I monitor our investments and program implementation?*<br>• Communication Plan | | | *How will we monitor the reach and the learning because of the creation of the affinity group for female administrators?*<br>• *Wellness Check-ins*<br>• *Feedback*<br>• *Exit tickets after sessions* | | *How will we monitor the action and the impact on female administrators because of the creation of the affinity group for female administrators?*<br>• *Guarding Minds at Work Survey*<br>• *Exit Questionnaires*<br>• *Kelly's Leadership Wellness* | |

Note. This visual tool will be used to identify inputs, activities, outputs, and desired outcomes.

We need to look at what is working well and celebrate. Cooperrider (2005) maintains that if members of an organization look at the strengths and positive attributes of the organization

they will discover more of the same. Donohoo et al. (2018) look at the power of collective efficacy. I also believe that when teams of administrators believe that they can make a difference, exciting things may happen. The preferred solution strives to build upon the collective efficacy for all. Women need to support each other. Men need to support the women. Women need to support the men. For student achievement, we look to measure success by the evidence of impact: when instruction improves, achievement improves (Donohoo et al, 2018).

A possible measuring tool within the monitoring and evaluation logic model is Kelly's six stage School Leader Wellbeing Survey (SLWS) (Kelly, 2022). The SLWS is an anonymous online survey leader wellbeing framework that looks at monitoring and evaluating the change and the impact on wellbeing. The survey questions focus on workplace culture, school leader experiences, and mental health awareness and support (Kelly, 2022). Following the completion of the survey, the CTBSB will receive a report containing a full analysis of the data. The report also includes recommendations and next steps for the organization to improve wellbeing.

Measuring change is a challenge. Measuring change in ways that are consistent with feminist values and approaches are even more so. A feminist evaluation approach is rooted in three common feminist beliefs. These beliefs include that there should be equity amongst humans, gender inequity leads to social injustice, and gender-based inequalities are systemic and structural (Podems, 2018). Utilizing critical appreciative and feminist approach as a guide for monitoring and evaluation will foster a positive future state. This approach creates a space for multiple voices. Rather than looking at the faults or deficits, an appreciative inquiry looks to the strengths and successes. In situations such as the problem of practice at hand where power, privilege, and social justice issues impact the people within the system, using a critical

appreciative lens goes beyond the appreciate inquiry as it critically focuses on social justice and the notion of emancipatory practice (McArthur-Blair and Cockell, 2012).

## Next Steps and Future Considerations

It has been a challenge to select a problem of practice and potential solutions that are within my agency as a school principal. I have always believed that if you want system change, you must change the system. Michael Fullan (2021) considers the four right drivers for success. These drivers constitute a human paradigm. They are forces that attract power and generate motion for continuous development. Forces include wellbeing and learning (essence), social intelligence (limitless), equality investments (dignity) and systemness (wholeness). As the goal is that women administrators improve their mental health and wellness so that they can find joy in their work, Fullan's notion that the right drivers provide opportunity for learned hopefulness is compelling. Figure 18 is an example of the possible topics that will be suggested for the first year of the female affinity group.

**Figure 18**

*CTBSB Year 1 Female Affinity Grouping Possible Sessions*

| Session | Topics | Potential Guest Speaker |
|---|---|---|
| *Who am I?* | Mindset Self-Esteem Lumina Spark | CPCO Lumina Spark Facilitator |
| *Changing the Status Quo* | Inclusive Leadership Gender Justice Equity & Equality | **Paulette Senior Senator** Past President of CWF Past YWCA CEO |
| *Above the Line* | Culture Positivity Mindfulness | **Allison Lee, Executive Coach** BA, CPCC, CNTC |
| *Balancing the Unpaid Work* | Health & Wellness for Women Work/Life Balance | Family Physician |
| *Women Supporting Women* | Mentoring Collective Efficacy | TBD |

*Note.* The session topics and activities are intended to be examples of possible topics and activities for a female affinitiy group.

The suggestions are based on information found in relevant literature, internal data, external research. A goal of the affinity group and sessions are to create a safe space for people to open lines of communication, build trust, feel a sense of value, and be heard. The space will allow for belonging, building a caring culture, and creating community.

**Future Considerations**

Administrators are facing challenges worldwide. The happenings in America are not drastically different to Canada. Canadian research pertaining to women administrators is not as recent, broad, or readily available as data from other countries. Based on American data, there are differences in the types of public schools that women lead:

In 2016, women were more likely to lead elementary schools (68%) than middle schools (40%) and high schools (33%). They also lead schools with larger numbers of students of colour (47%, compared with 38% in the typical male principal's school). Women also lead public schools with slightly higher shares of low-income students (52%, compared with 50% in the typical male principal's school. (Grissom et al., 2021, p.18)

As a future consideration, in the CTBSB it would be appropriate for there to be a consideration and more input from the administrators as to where they are placed as principals. The location of where one works, and the commute required significantly may affect their work-life balance.

Through personal conversations, I know that current CTBSB administrators can only identify one CTBSB female elementary administrator who has gone on parental leave while she was a principal. In the CTSBS most women administrators wait until their children are older to commence the journey of administration. As a system, there needs to be consideration as to why this is happening. Conversations with other women administrators lead me to know that women do not believe that they can commit to a young family and leading a school simultaneously.

There needs to be a view to recruiting and clearly articulating the role and expectations thereof. Perhaps if administrators are clear about the job responsibilities and role expectations, this may lead to improved retention.

When recruiting administrators, there is a clear invitation to those individuals who are equity seeking. This is optimal as it pertains to seeking the voices of those who are not heard. Unfortunately, as of late, when the parameters were listed for those who are equity seeking, women were not considered equity seeking enough to warrant an interview as someone who is equity seeking, this needs to be reconsidered. My core beliefs consider authenticity, family, and caring for others. For me, leadership is about intentionally giving voice your values and acting with integrity. I want to lead a school within a school board where all are welcomed, and heard, and wellness is a priority for all. I strive to make the envisioned future state a reality.

While reflecting upon my recent academic journey, I realize that my voice does matter, and I am able to find joy. Joy is not a continuous feeling; it is in moments. One way I find my joy is when I support others on their journey. Specifically, as one of the senior principals I need to come back to why I started in education. I love working with children, and other adults supporting children. My job is about creating opportunities and possibilities. I need to encourage teachers who are considering administration. I need to support my fellow female administrators. I need to be authentically positive. I need to advocate for the much-needed shifts in the mindsets of some others.

## Dissertation-in-Practice Conclusion

The CTBSB is committed to increasing awareness and embracing equity, diversity, and inclusion. This commitment is demonstrated by the hiring of multiple staff members to create awareness, uncover biases, and support positive change. A concern is that the current practice is

limited to looking at race and identification and does not consider gender inequalities. There needs to be an alignment between awareness, achieving transformative insight, and creating meaningful change to leadership practices. The importance of relationships must be highlighted. This concern connects to the problem of practice and possible solutions as it reiterates the value of women only learners and the use of gender-sensitive training and learning. Paying attention to the needs of those equity seeking groups is paramount to any organizational improvement plan being successful.

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OME, 2013) serves as a guide to securing accountability, leading the instructional program, developing relationships, and setting direction. Some cognitive, social, and psychological resources are included in the OLF. There is a gap when it comes to belonging and supporting the administrators. The focus herein is on the personal leadership resource of and how it can be fostered to support women administrators. I hope that this work generates information to increase recruitment and retention of women administrators, decrease burnout, and increase the feeling of belonging and support. It is imperative to note the importance of being aware of the intersectionality and how aspects such as sexual orientation, race, age, and class may play into the experiences of administrators. Simply due to the scope of the DiP, only gender is considered.

The creation of an affinity group for women leaders will have tremendous benefits. Working at the system level will support and move forward change at the local and system level. Fullan (2010) discusses that when there is a combined force of shared moral leadership changes happen. These differences happen and result in school leaders being driven (and supported) to drive change, systemwide progress, shared understand that may lead to avoidance of educational blind valleys, and finally a culture of moral leadership.

The health and wellbeing of school administrators is fundamental to the present and future achievement of school communities and school boards (Ontario Principals' Council, 2017). For school administrators, the increase in job responsibilities, caused by changes in policies and regulations, challenges their capabilities to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Pollock, 2016). As a principal I have experienced the lows and the joys of the job. I am fortunate that I have stay true to myself and built my personal self-esteem, collective efficacy, mental wellbeing, and leadership skills to find the joy in the work that I do.

## Narrative Epilogue

As I contemplate and reflect on my experience writing this Dissertation-in-Practice, I know that I grew as a research practitioner and a principal. The knowledge that I gained helped shape how I approached leading a school. As a direct result of my theoretical knowledge and shared experiences with my cohort, I am a better leader, listener, and colleague. Of particular importance is my knowledge around ethics, governance, positionality, feminism, and implementing change. A visual representation of the dissertation-in-practice is found in the appendix.

My father was in the military and our family lived on military bases all over the world. Power was distributed based upon your rank and leadership was reliant upon disciple. A male-centered world where order, structure, predictability, and compliance are all that was modeled for me. I love the structure. When I started my career in education, I discovered the importance of relationships and caring for others. I have always been influenced by and gravitated to strong, equity seeking people who strive for the betterment of all. These people include Jesus Christ, Mary, Bill Glied, Elie Wiesel, Mother Teresa, and Brene Brown.

As a new teacher I was once asked what my husband did for a living. I asked, "Why the question?" The male teacher replied, "Well, he must not have a great job if you must work." I was shocked and surprised. Sadly, I and many other women administrators have many experiences that are similar in nature. I am grateful that I found a group of women leaders to share and learn with. We have been fortunate to have a few strong women leaders on the senior team. As a principal it is imperative to me to change the experience for the women educators who work with and follow me. I, like almost every other female leader, waited until my children were older to be an administrator. There were no role models for me to see that being a school leader and a mother to young children was achievable. The board needs to address through policy and practice the components that make up a positive work life balance (Ontario Principals' Council, 2017, Pollock et al., 2014, Riley, 2017).

Throughout my DiP journey, I have positioned myself as a participatory action researcher as described in White and Cooper (2023). It was during the study of a Master's degree at St. Francis Xavier that Robert White inspired me to facilitate change which I was seeking. I am seeking transformative change while simultaneously investigating the issue (problem of practice). My work will follow true to the roots of action research: acting, observing, reflecting, and revising.

From the beginning, it was necessary that data is collected regarding where we are. In this case, I looked at the provincial climate, the GM@W survey results, and street data. The results did not shock me because I was living the concerns. Along the way, as a part of my healing I presented at virtual conferences for administrators on how we are supporting wellness and specifically social-emotional programs. I continued sharing my thoughts at an EPA meeting in 2023. Unfortunately, this was met with incredible resistance from a single male colleague.

This completely inappropriate and sexist interaction demonstrated to me how important my work was. I was admonished and told that sharing my concerns and lived experiences would scare new administrators. I was also told that I should limit the discussion at the EPA to board business. Thankfully, the majority of those in attendance reached out via text, email, or phone to remind me of the important work that we do, and that we are not alone. The male leader made it clear to me that my ideas, my voice, and my sharing of my lived experiences as a female leader who struggled to find joy were not welcome.

Measuring wellness and  positive mental health is difficult. I am grateful that I have colleagues that were able to see when things are not going well. In our district the data from the GM@W survey and the workplace census are used. One of the benefits of having this data available is the opportunity to look at areas that require social change and/or need to be looked at with the lens of social justice. I appreciated the relation to building professional learning communities and communities of practice. This notion helped me to connect to my practice as an educator and as a scholarly practitioner.

It is my hope that using the strategies and research outlined herein might help to change the culture of the CTBSB (or at least engage with my direct influences) while addressing the current issues that we face. As I start to develop and execute a plan, I am confident that I will continue to contemplate the ideas and discover new questions. I hope that by using an action research methodology I can support organizational development by merging research and praxis together.

For people to change, we need to move away from the status quo. There needs to be a brave group that will challenge the norms and prepare for a better future. I aspire to completely execute this DiP. I am a lifelong learner, and reflection is the most important part of my practice.

Through my experience devising this DiP, I further believe Kurt Lewin's (1947) notion that there

is no action without research and no research without action. I am hopeful that my work as a

scholarly practitioner will lead to positive action that will improve wellbeing and mental

wellness for women administrators so that they may find opportunities for joy.

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**Appendix**

**Visual Representation of the Dissertation-in-Practice**