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## How and why do superintendents build and maintain trust with school principals: Exploring the highly complex nature of relationships between leaders within a school district

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Education

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# TRUST BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

## Abstract

As society increases its expectations of education systems, school leaders are required to adapt their leadership practices to meet these demands. The province of Ontario has focused on establishing a framework for its educational leaders, *The Ontario Leadership Framework* (Institute for Education Leadership, 2013) to help communicate and support a coherent leadership structure in its public schools. For school leaders to be able to meet the provincial expectations, they need to be supported at the district level by superintendents who build and maintain strong relationships based on trust so that the school leaders can maximize change to educator practice, and positively influence student achievement and socioemotional wellbeing. This research used an exploratory case study to investigate how and why superintendents build and maintain trust in their relationships with school principals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the director of a school district, six school superintendents, and six elementary and secondary school principals, all working in the province of Ontario, Canada. This allowed the three participant groups to describe their relationships through the lenses of trust and high trust; how the level of trust within those relationships influenced their leadership practices and behaviours. The research findings revealed the intricate tapestry of the complex nature of building and maintaining trust in relationships between educational leaders. Specific recommendations for the district's educational leaders and for future research are also suggested as part of the information gleaned from the participants of this study.

*Key words:* trust, high trust, relationships, leadership practices of superintendents and principals

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As part of the first cohort of the Doctorate of Education, the camaraderie of my peers helped me stay focused and added to the overall knowledge building. Be it during our course work, our group meetings, or our ongoing email communications, I want to say thank you to the group for sharing your own vulnerabilities alongside mine, and making the journey not so lonesome. The humour was a gift we gave each other and that sustained all of us when we doubted our ability to complete this journey.

The passion for exploring relationships, trust and how it connects to authentic leadership was honed by family and life experiences. Being brought up in an Ontario francophone family, and surrounded with the importance of learning and sharing that learning with others had much impact on my perspective of education and my responsibility to others. My mother as an educator, and my father as a school board trustee in a small community modeled the importance of 'paying it forward', of leading with, or without, a formal title. I owe them my passion for learning, teaching and leading, of helping a community not just improve itself, but also care for all of its members.

## TRUST BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

I need to say thank you, or ‘merci’ to my lovely family for their patience, and unconditional love and support during this learning journey. You listened; you changed plans to accommodate my complex schedule balancing work and study, understanding that this was something that I needed to do. To my dear husband, Murray, your flexibility, your ability to know when to push and when to just be there and listen helped during the hard times. You never doubted that I could complete this learning journey, and with your help, it is now a reality. To my two beautiful children, Christophe and Anne, your support, regardless of where you were on this globe, was a joy to have, and I know hope that my passion to learn has been passed on to you.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to the participants in this study. Your passion for what you do on behalf of students, your need to explore your own work relationships and leadership practice is the foundation of this study. Thank you for taking the time to share your perspective and for entrusting me to share your voice. I do not take this lightly and hope that this study will help you as well as others to understand how complex the work of leading and learning can be, but also how committed you are to being authentic leaders. That determination to be great leaders will help me continue to study and explore how interpersonal relationships, high trust and leadership so that together, we can support educators who wish the very best learning environment for all of the students we serve.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Over the past decade, the province of Ontario has, in a myriad ways, been impacted by globalization and had to adapt to changes in its current occupations and approaches to maintaining a high standard of living (Ontario, 2017). While education continues to be seen as key to maintaining the wellbeing of its population, the ever-increasing demands in other areas such as health, put education under increased scrutiny and the Ministry of Education must justify its policies and progress through regular monitoring and accounting of the results of its provincial education system. By doing so, it sees itself as meeting its ‘social contract’ by ensuring that all children and youth meet with a high level of achievement and socioemotional wellbeing to be able to effectively engage in their communities as communicated in a provincial report, *Achieving excellence: A renewed vision for education in Ontario* (Ontario, 2014).

Specifically, the Ministry of Education has increased accountability through various mechanisms such as standardized testing for all students as they ‘navigate’ the public school system, and annual school board improvement plans to support improved student achievement and socioemotional wellbeing. In *Achieving excellence: A renewed vision for education in Ontario* (Ontario, 2014), the government publicly restates its vision and commitment to high expectations for all of its students. This provincial document straddles two worlds: one, which looks at a centralized, business-related schema where students must gather knowledge and skills to become and remain employable; and the other, which encourages the pursuit of creativity, innovation, critical thinking skills, and a focus on overall wellbeing.

Within this complex reality, educational leaders at the district and school levels are being asked by the Ministry of Education to lead in a manner that differs from their previous roles. Leithwood (2013) describes this dialectic stance of the work to be done by school districts in *Strong districts & their leadership*, as requiring system leaders to move from a role of “central manager” to that of “transformational leaders” (p.10). He further explains this as the evolution of the role of director and school superintendent, moving from the administration and management of running schools efficiently, to one where the system leaders are now also held accountable for both system and school improvement while also being mindful of individual communities’ diverse needs.

### **Inquiry Question**

Taking into consideration the reality facing public schools in Ontario requires that school districts and their leaders examine their current leadership practices and be able to make sustainable changes at both the district and school levels that will have a positive impact on student achievement and their socioemotional wellbeing. It implies the creation of educational systems that are able to become learning organizations (Senge, 1990), led by system leaders who can model learning and adapt their leadership practices to support the school leaders, who, in turn will do likewise with their staff. The belief in, and the valuing of continuous learning by district leaders potentially helps create a positive culture which nurtures the school leaders’ own quest in adapting their leadership practices to meet the needs of their school communities (Schein, 2010). Within this school system there is the ability to mobilize knowledge based on how leadership is actually practiced, at both the district and school levels. For this learning on leading to

occur implies that there are sound relationships between district and school leaders based on trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Taking the reality and current research into consideration, this study posed the following question: How and why do superintendents use trust to build and maintain relationships with school principals? Within this inquiry, the researcher also wanted to explore the ways trust between the superintendent and the principal shapes the nature of the principal's leadership practices in their school community. The researcher, through an exploratory case study methodology, investigated how district level leaders, particularly a director of a school district and school superintendents, built and maintained trusting relationships with their school principals, which helped school level leaders reflect on their leadership practices and feel confident to change how they approach their leadership at the school level. The researcher used an Interpretivist stance while conducting a modified constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) of the data.

The following four assumptions were taken into account during this study. First, the link between high trust and positive relationships between district and school leaders was seen as an influence on the leadership practice in schools. Second, in a reciprocating fashion, if the school principal highly trusted their superintendent, this has the potential of also impacting the type of leadership practice used by the superintendent. This led to the third assumption; some specific leadership approaches and personal resources (those resources that are linked to an individual such as cognitive ability and emotional intelligence) are more conducive to the building trust between district and school leaders.

Fourthly, a school district can contribute to the process of transforming into a learning organization by supporting its leaders through trusting relationships.

It was recognized in the current research that both trust and leadership are complex concepts, which are impacted by numerous factors or variables, including but not limited to, the organizational context, the individuals themselves, and the temporal fluidity of the relationship between those specific individuals (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Kramer & Cook, 2004; Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998). The social phenomenon of trust, at the roots of learning and leadership, needed to be investigated within the specific realities of the roles of district and school leaders (Blase & Blase, 1997, 2001; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Louis, 2007; Mulford, Silins, & Leithwood, 2004; Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001; Nestor-Baker & Tschannen-Moran, 2001). As stated by Lyon, Möllering and Saunders (2012), “trust is one of the most fascinating and fundamental social phenomena yet at the same time one of the most elusive and challenging concepts one could study” (p. 1). This study explored how trust, and more significantly, how high trust between a small group of system and school leaders helps build a culture of learning and continuous improvement within their leadership practice, which in turn has the potential of positively impacting teacher practice, student achievement, and socioemotional wellbeing. At the heart of this inquiry were some probing questions related to trust and relationships from the perspective of the director, the superintendent, and the principal:

- 1) How do system leaders such as a director and superintendents build and maintain high trust with school principals that are aimed at building of a learning organization?

- 2) How do superintendents model leadership practices that help maintain highly trusting relationships with principals?
- 3) What do principals expect from the superintendents so that they can effectively lead their schools and have a positive impact on student achievement and socioemotional wellbeing?

The third assumption dealt with the type of leadership practice and personal resources that best support a trusting relationship between leaders within an organization. Of particular interest for this study were those leadership practices described using such terms as transformational, distributed, shared, democratic and authentic? Researchers such Bishop (1998, 1999a, 1999b), Hallinger (2003), Harris (2009), Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons and Hopkins (2007), Leithwood and Jantzi (2006), Mulford, Silins and Leithwood (2004) and Sheppard, Brown and Dibbon (2009) have contributed much to the field and will provide insight on the link between leadership practice and effective relationships which include trust between educational leaders. The seminal work of Kouzes and Posner (2012) provided background knowledge on leadership practices, which also can impact the leader-follower relationship. *The Ontario Leadership Framework* (OLF) (Institute for Education Leadership, 2013) connected both leadership practices and personal leadership resources or traits and is the current framework used by school districts within the province. Deeper review of both leadership practices and traits supporting trust in relationships was addressed in the literature review and the major concepts that helped inform this research.

A fourth assumption was based on the fact that the organizational structure of a school district within the province of Ontario is not going to change in the immediate

future, considering the political context outlined earlier in this paper. Within the existing hierarchical reality of school districts, it is difficult for a school district to be able to be flexible or adaptive, and supporting its leaders to grow their capacity to lead in a more complex environment (Bishop & Mulford, 1999). Leithwood alluded to this in his paper, *Strong districts and their leadership* (2013), where he concluded, “sustaining progress (“moving from good to great”, for example) depends on a devolution of authority from the centre” (p. 30). He implied that, not only does Ontario need to look at moving from a top down way of managing the education within the province, but that district leaders need to adopt a similar approach when working within their district. How do system leaders see adapting their own leadership practice as they work with school principals so that together they can become a vibrant learning organization (Senge, 1999), a collaborative team that can learn and lead change in pedagogical practice? And, how is this done if the current structure still has components which narrowly adhere to a hierarchical approach to leading, where learning is compartmentalized according to one’s role within the organization?

### **Significance and purpose of study**

This study is of particular importance as it explored the impact of the building and maintaining of high trust in the relationships between superintendents and principals within a school district in the province of Ontario. There has been little if any Canadian research to continue to build on Dr. Leithwood’s work on the importance of personal resources as foundational to sound leadership practices (Leithwood, 2013). It was important to this researcher to use the knowledge gained from her own practice as a principal and superintendent, knowledge from the practice of other system and school leaders, and connect it to current research on high trust, relationships between educational

leaders and the impact on student achievement and socioemotional wellbeing. By conducting this research and sharing it the school district, the researcher hoped to be able to help support the work being done on the building of high trust that would help the district attain its goal of being a learning organization anchored in high trust. The researcher also hoped that ultimately, the key beneficiaries of such a learning organization would be the students.

### **Structure of study**

This thesis consists of five further chapters, each chapter providing specific information on the inquiry. Chapter 2, the literature review, will help the reader make connections with current theoretical perspectives and research studies on trust, high trust, relationships between educational leaders, leadership practices as provided in the literature review. Literature is provided to support the chosen theoretical framework, as well as specific research information on trust, leadership, culture, climate, and organizational change. Chapter 3 informs the reader on the chosen methodology, including details on the study's sampling, data collection, data management, data analysis, challenges, limitations, ethics, and overall timeline for the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, in three key areas delineating the specific themes extrapolated from the information provided by the participants: 1) facets of trust, leading from trust to high trust within the superintendent-principal relationship; 2) practices and behaviours as builders of trust within the superintendent-principal relationship; and 3) culture and climate that nourish trust within the superintendent-principal relationship and within the district. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth discussion of the findings, connecting the themes found through the modified constant comparative analysis and the literature in



the areas of trust, high trust, relationships, leadership practice, and culture and climate within an organization. The conclusion, in Chapter 6, outlines recommendations for a district and possible future research as a result of the inquiry, as well as the limitations of the study.

### **Definition of terms**

The following terms need to be defined within the context of this study to help the reader understand the key elements of the research as constructed by the researcher:

1. Climate: for the purpose of this research, climate was seen as those artifacts or evidence of a specific group's culture which involved how they perform their work, and how they build their relationships (Schein, 1999); within the context of a school district, the researcher used this understanding when analyzing the information provided by the participants when providing specific examples of their relationships with each other or with the entire district or organization such as leadership practices, and behaviours within the context of trust
2. Culture: the researcher used the work of Schein (1985, 1999) to help define the 'state of an organization' as its culture; in this case it involves the school district's previous history, as well as its current reality; this includes the assumptions made by members of the organization, as well as the subculture (superintendent and principal relationship) make as they as develop their own ways and approaches to learn, problem solve and then pass them on to new group members, the modus operandi within the district level as well as within the superintendent-principal dyad
3. Exploratory case study: the use of an exploratory case study methodology helped the researcher explore the concept of trust, relationships and impact of trust on

leadership; it is important to note that while the case studies were within one school district, they consisted of individual superintendents responsible for specific schools, and principals also responsible for specific schools; the exploratory case study helped the researcher analyze each participant's voice in the three cohorts as individual case studies, then as part of their individual group (director, superintendent, and principal) via a modified form of comparative analysis which led to possible areas for future research

4. High trust: the concept of high trust is anchored in a level of trust that is described by specific behaviours such as risk taking, open and honest communication, resulting being empowered to do the work needed to improve student achievement (Blase & Blase, 1997, 2001; Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Louis, 2007; Schockley-Zalabak, Morreale, & Hackman, 2010; Wicks, Berman, & Jones, 1999); there is no fear of retribution or reprisals (Bishop, 1998) as there is a very strong interpersonal connection as opposed to trust which is anchored more on the operational or managerial aspect of leadership and less on the interpersonal relationship
5. Modified constant comparative analysis: the analysis conducted in this research is based on a modified approach used in grounded research which involved ongoing analysis of the information provided by the participants, where each participant's voice was analyzed, then compared to other members of the same cohort, and then to the entire sample, which included the director, the superintendents, and principals involved in the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015)
6. Personal leadership resources: this term is used to refer to those aspects of leadership, which include as outlined in the OLF (2013): 1) cognitive - specific

knowledge on key components of the field of education; social – how one perceives, manages and acts emotionally; and 3) psychological resources such as optimism, and resilience (IEL, 2013; Leithwood, 2013)

7. Practices: refer to the concept postulated in The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) (Institute of Education Leadership, 2013), which refers to the work associated with system and school level leadership; these practices involve specific knowledge and skills as identified through the OLF, and are used to review the performance of system and school leaders
8. Behaviours: refer to actions based on the interplay between the knowledge one has, the context or situation involved, the emotional intelligence, which includes both the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of the work being done (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001)

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

While not presupposing what may come from the analysis of the data collected during this exploratory case study, it was important for the researcher to have some knowledge of previous knowledge built from studies on trust, on leaders' practices and behaviours, and the overall culture and climate that can impact change within an educational organization. This proved helpful in the initial framing of the analysis of the data gathered, leading to a greater understanding of the unique relationship phenomenon between leaders of an educational organization within a school district in the province of Ontario. To that end, the literature review focused on the following key areas: 1) the theoretical framework which supports the research approach to the study's inquiry question; 2) knowledge on trust and 'high trust'; 3) the connection of trusting relationships with leadership practices and emotional intelligence; and 4) trust as part of organizational culture and climate and its influence on change within an educational organization. It is important to state that these key areas informed the research, and did not negate the identification of possible new concepts as a result of the modified constant comparative analysis of the data conducted during the research study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research study is rooted in the inquiry question, how and why superintendents do build and maintain trust in their relationships with principals, so it was important for the researcher to have some understanding of how trust, relationships, leadership practices, and personal resources impact district and school leaders as they go about their day to day work of leading. Specifically, the researcher, as a former principal

and superintendent, wanted to add to her understanding of how superintendents and principals saw trust and its impact on their relationships and the ability to lead at the system and school levels. The researcher wanted to provide insights that could potentially help the specific school district with recommendations towards its ongoing work on trust and effective educational leadership that would positively impact student achievement and socioemotional wellbeing.

The work of Charmaz (2008) supported the researcher's social constructionist approach when looking at building a deeper understanding of the day-to-day experiences of superintendents and principals within their relationship and their leadership efforts at both, the system, and school levels. Charmaz (2008) explains her approach with the "...following assumptions: (1) Reality is multiple, processual, and constructed—but constructed under particular conditions; (2) the research process emerges from interaction; (3) it takes into account the researcher's positionality, as well as that of the research participants; (4) the researcher and researched co-construct the data—data are a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it" (p. 402). This study involved the interaction of the researcher and participants through a semi-structured interview process that supported the co-construction of an understanding of trust within the superintendent-principal relationship, and its shaping of their leadership practices. The social constructionist stance allowed the researcher and participants to develop their understanding of trust within their relationship and its impact on their leadership practices, through their interpretation of the key elements of trust within the parameters of the inquiry question, how and why do superintendents build and maintain trust within their relationships with school principals. This particular approach is also supported

through the work of Merriam (1998), and Scotland (2012) who also see the co-construction of the participants' reality alongside the researcher as a part of coming to an understanding of the world.

Lyon, Möllering, and Saunders (2012) provided insights on the current state of research studies focusing on trust. Their work, *Handbook of research methods on trust*, (Lyon, Möllering & Saunders, 2012) reviewed both qualitative and quantitative research methods used to try and understand the concept of trust, with a focus on empirical studies. It reinforced the idea of the highly complex nature of trust, and how no one specific research method could provide the complete universal application or explanation of the phenomenon of trust. It is important to note that this particular work was not specific to trust within an educational system, but in the broader context of organizations across the globe. This current review of the research and methodology specific to trust examined six areas or clusters, three of which are of particular interest for this study: 1) antecedents that support the growth of trust (p. 4); processes used to build trust (p. 4); and contexts or situations in which trust is built (p.5). The knowledge gleaned from Lyon, Möllering, and Saunders (2012) helped further inform the researcher in her choice of methodology, hence the decision to proceed with a case study approach.

The work of Yin (2014) informed the researcher on the specifics to an exploratory case study approach, while also supporting the researcher's social constructionist, and interpretive stance while undertaking throughout this inquiry. This helped with the structure of the qualitative study, especially in understanding the key parameters of a sound qualitative research study such as, the boundaries, the data collection and analysis protocols, the possible challenges as well as limitations and ethics incurred when doing

an exploratory case study. Cresswell's (2015) main arguments helped the researcher understand the complexities of creating and adeptly using a strong interview process that would provide rich data for an in-depth analysis of the participants' perspectives on trust within their relationships, how it impacted their leadership practice and overall ability to do the work expected as system and school leaders.

The expertise of scholars, Corbin and Strauss (2015), helped the researcher understand the intricacies of using a modified constant comparative analysis of the data. This was key to the interpretation of the information provided by the three participant cohorts, the director, the six superintendents, and the eight school principals. Literature by Corbin and Strauss (2015) also helped the researcher establish a process for the interpretation of the data collected as well as navigate the challenge facing the researcher as having been both a principal and a superintendent in the school district. A modified constant comparative analysis of the data helped the researcher, specifically the use of refined probes based on accrued knowledge from the interview process. As well, the ongoing use of a journal during the interview process, as suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015) helped the researcher understand the impact of her own perspectives and biases during the interview process as well as the analysis of the data collected. This also supported the ethical parameters as outlined in the Government of Canada's (2014), *Tri council statement protocol*, which ensures the ethical research protocol is followed when doing the research involving humans. In this particular situation, ensuring the anonymity of the director as a sole participant in their particular cohort meant understanding the role of ongoing member check in, as well as a thorough appreciation of the role of the researcher in a qualitative research study. Finally, it was important for the researcher to

understand the importance and implication of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. The researcher used the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2011) as a guide through the inquiry, to help ensure that the exploratory case study was conducted to meet levels of trustworthiness, credibility, and confirmability as expected by the qualitative research field. Transferability, as explained by Yin (2014) continues to be one aspect which must be noted as a difficult aspect of the case study, considering the uniqueness of the bounded system explored by the researcher.

For the purpose of this study, the research began with the concept of trust based on the definition as “ an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 204). This led to the review of specific facets of trust identified through the literature review as well as those facets described by the participants. The second area of focus looked at leadership practices and emotional intelligence, or personal resources as referred to by educational leaders in Ontario (IEL, 2013), and how it intersects with the concept of trust. Lastly, understanding the overall context in which individual district and school leaders work necessitated being aware of the possible forces at play within the culture and climate, as it relates to trust, within an educational system or organization. The next sections of this chapter will provide an overview of the literature used as part of the researcher’s knowledge building on the concept of trust and its impact relationships and educational leadership within the context of a school district within the province of Ontario.



**Trust**

Blase (1991), Blase and Blase (1997, 2001) provide much insight on the role of trust from the perspective of teachers, students, parents, and principals within schools. Beginning with an overview of micropolitics within the school setting (1991), and incorporating nine qualitative studies, Blase brings forth the concept of power and how its use impacts relationships between principals, teachers, and parents. In a consequent qualitative study, involving 285 teachers in 11 schools in the United States, Blase and Blase (1997) posed the question, “what are teachers’ perceptions of the characteristics of school principals that influence their sense of empowerment, and what does being empowered mean to teachers” (p.141). As a result of this study, the authors brought forth the finding that “trust in teachers emerged as the most significant aspect of facilitative school leadership” (p. 145). Finally, in their 2001 study, they further expanded on the concept of trust by listing specific actions taken by facilitative and democratic principals, one which they define as, “modeling, building, and persistently supporting an environment of trust among teachers, whom they consider professionals and experts” (Blase & Blase, 2001, p. 143). While their research is focused on the perceptions of teachers towards their school principals, the findings will likely help inform this study exploring trust and the relationships between superintendents and principals. It is important to note that similarly, Hargreaves (1991) addressed the concept of “contrived collegiality” as part of the micro-politics between teachers and principals. When there is low trust, teachers would agree to what was being asked by the principal, but the end it was a token acceptance that was not followed through. This could be projected to the

superintendent and principal relationship where a token agreement may be perceived by the superintendent but with little if any follow through on the part of the principal.

Concurrently, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) reviewed the literature on trust over four decades, and conducted an empirical study on trust in urban elementary schools, from the perspective of 50 teachers in 50 schools in five states in the United States. This study involved the use of a trust survey, a self-estrangement scale, a teacher efficacy scale, and a Likert item looking at conflict in the school (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 191). The results of the study supported the concept of trust as multi-faceted, which in turn supported their espoused definition of trust and its five facets, “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open” (p. 204). The same authors also reviewed the nature of trust in a multi-disciplinary analysis of the literature and empirical studies (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). This study provides further information on the nature of trust, its meaning, the dynamics of trust and how trust impacts organizational processes. In her most recent work, Tschannen-Moran (2014) builds on her previous research on trust and connects it to specific school leadership practices. Using case studies, a literature review on trust in schools, and providing trust assessment measures, the author combines the use of narrative, and research to further investigate the need for school leaders to establish and maintain relationships based on trust. Similar to the works of Blase (1991) and Blase and Blase (1997, 2001), Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999, 2000) and Tschannen-Moran (2014) examined trust through the lenses of teachers.

Similarly, the work of Bishop (1998, 1999a, 1999b), and Bishop and Mulford (1996, 1999) looked at the impact of trust in the teacher-principal relationships within the Australian context. While hard work, competence, and confidentiality helped anchor trusting relationships between teachers and principals, there was a tension between the principal's role as 'manager' and 'leader'. Trust was seen as supporting an open sharing of practice and positive professional discourse on the part of teachers, but the principal's ability to be perceived as a supporter of the teachers' work as opposed to ministry expectations was a key determinant of the teachers feeling empowered and trusting of their school leader.

Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001), and Nestor-Baker and Tschannen-Moran (2001) explored the role of American superintendents and the key elements of their work. This particular qualitative study looked at how district leaders blended knowledge and practice, anchored in interpersonal and intrapersonal competence. These researchers discovered through their research that successful superintendents had an understanding that their district or organizational goals were dependent on the ability of others, or all stakeholders to work effectively and collaboratively on behalf of the students they served. Maintaining positive relationships at the board level, and with school principals and communities while also being aware of one's own self as a leader and being able to self regulate was key to being able to support the work of learning and teaching within schools and the district.

Louis (2007) extrapolated information from a large longitudinal study that took place over 3 years, in 9 American school districts and focused on 5 high schools that were involved in implementing quality management practices (QM). While this study

did not start with a specific focus on trust, the teachers, principals, assistant principals, and central office management shared their perceptions, which focused on trust, and more specifically on organizational trust as well as relational trust. The research results identified that relational trust had the highest impact on change in teacher practice, alongside administration's overall behaviours and competence. It also identified components of low trust, high trust, and mistrust. A high trust environment was described as one where teachers believed that the school district's administration had students' needs at heart, and were able to accept the overall vision set initially by the district. This was opposite to the low trust description of 'back room' dealings where the overall district vision was one based on manipulation, of micro-politics and not related to the students' needs. High trust was also equated to cooperation between all stakeholders and where risk taking was part of the teachers' practice and honesty, integrity, and overall respect for the other were key components to describe the relationships between teachers and school leaders while low trust was evident in tense relationships, with little if any cooperation among stakeholders with a sense of fear, of possible punishment and the presence of 'power politics'. Teacher empowerment, being part of the decision-making process, and solidarity or cohesiveness between colleagues was seen as evidence of high trust, while a perception of not having a voice, of being manipulated, even of being punished via arbitrary evaluations, and the splintering of colleagues into cliques were seen as elements depicting low trust. Mistrust was seen as not being able to impact decisions, not recognizing all stakeholders' perspectives and interests, and holding one accountable via measures that were not agreed upon by all parties. Louis (2007) stated that "organizational researchers...examine trust as an interpretive agent between the

transactional (relationship-focused) and transformational (change and value-based) aspects of leadership” (p. 20).

Noonan, Walker, and Kutsyuruba (2008), conducted a qualitative study that included 25 Canadian principals of elementary and high schools, over a period of 7 months. Through group sessions involving round table discussions, focus groups, and paired semi-structured interviews, the researchers explored the participants’ definition of trust, how it is built and maintained during the day-to-day work of leading classroom teachers. During the course of this study the participants shared their perspective on the changing role of the principal, the impact of trust on both personal and professional relationships, and the importance of having hope. Hope was seen as a foundation for caring for the other or benevolence, of taking the ‘high road’ when working with others. Trust was demonstrated via good listening, having a social life with staff, contributing to an inclusive culture where vulnerability, benevolence, honesty, and openness were key components of the day-to-day relationships. The findings in this particular research appeared to have clear similarities with the work of Tschannen-Moran (2014), but from a Canadian perspective.

Forsyth, Adams and Hoy (2011) reviewed three decades of empirical research on trust, and provided a theoretical framework of collective trust based on the dynamics of external, internal, and task contexts within the educational setting. Their study provided a definition of collective trust as follows: “ a stable group property rooted in the shared perceptions and affect about the trustworthiness of another group or individual that emerges over time out of multiple social exchanges within the group” (p. 22). These researchers saw differences between interpersonal and collective trust, yet they do see it

as complementary; collective trust is between groups or between a group and an individual as opposed to only two individuals. This is important to consider in this researcher's inquiry, as there are two levels of trust: that of the superintendent and the principal or the dyadic relationships, and that of the superintendent group and the principal group within a school district.

Canadian editors Samier and Schmidt (2010) provided the researcher with a collection of articles on various theoretical foundations of trust, current research approaches that have been done, and the ongoing issues, which need to be addressed if we are to fully understand how trust impacts the work within educational settings. The collection of articles reviewed connections between trust and personal efficacy, of trust as a key element of social capital, of educational leadership, and how mistrust can impact an educator's work provided further insights on the complex nature of trust in current educational realities.

The researcher also explored the work of trust from a cross disciplinary perspective to get a sense of how trust was perceived in various types of organizations. Kramer and Tyler (1996) analyzed the work of multi-disciplinary scholars involving the concept of trust as part of organizational theory, and the various forms of trust within organizations. Looking at the social context within the United States, the contributors presented theory and other evidence on the social conceptions of trust, the dynamics of trust, and the reason people decide to trust others. Kramer (1999) continued his review of organizational trust in a later article, and provides information on what trust is within an organization, the different bases of trust, the benefits of trust as well as the barriers that interfere with the building of trust. While not specific to the educational setting, this

information supports the aforementioned researchers' definition of trust, and expands to include the link to relationships, behaviours and personal attributes that support trust within an organizational structure. Kramer and Cook (2004) further considered trust, and more specifically distrust in organizations focusing on the fragility of trust and how it can be difficult to sustain, and recovered if it is destroyed. The selection of articles again provided the researcher with another cross discipline perspective on how trust and distrust impact the work of an organization. It helped expand an understanding how specific characteristics of the trustee and the truster and within a specific context must be considered when looking at trust. Distrust in Kramer and Cook's (2004) study is seen as linked to a personal threat, which in turn limits personal disclosures, acknowledge mistakes made, or bring forth new concepts or ideas. This is seen as especially important when considering trust within a hierarchical organization. Similar to other studies mentioned, interpersonal trustworthiness, competence, benevolence, and integrity are at the heart of trust. Kramer and Cook (2004) expressed the need for "context specific, 'middle range' theories of trust that can be empirically tested" (p. 17).

In a similar vein to Kramer and Cook (2004), Wicks, Berman, and Jones (1999) also speak to the link of the various levels of trust and the impact of two specific contexts, that of the persons involved and the particular situation in which they are engaged. They present another theoretical framework, which, in brief, proposes a link between high trust and interdependence; if there is low trust, there is more monitoring and a more opportunistic approach to the relationship or less of a personal connection based on the moral character of the parties. If there is moderate trust, there is more of a personal connection, a balance between the rational and the emotional aspects to the

relationship. If there is high trust, the relationship appears to be based on the personal and moral character of the individuals, with some reliance on the rational.

Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies (1998) brought forth a theoretical framework that suggests trust and distrust existing along a continuum within a relationship. As a result of an extensive literature review spanning over 40 years, combined with many of the most recent research studies, the authors identified key elements of high trust, low trust, high distrust, and low distrust. High trust involved hope, faith, confidence, assurance, and initiative while low distrust was seen as having no fear, lacking in skepticism and cynicism, with minimal monitoring and no vigilance (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998). Conversely, low trust was seen as evident when there was a lack of hope, of faith, and of confidence as well as elements of passivity and hesitance; high distrust was connected to fear, skepticism, cynicism, wariness or watchfulness, and vigilance (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998). Due to the complex nature of organizations, and the relationships of individuals within these organizations, the authors “contend that organizations are rife with mixed-and multiple motive conditions that challenge people’s ability to manage the complexities of simultaneous trust and distrust” (p. 454). This perspective helped the researcher further understand the complex intersection of trust and distrust within existing relationships in social systems across all disciplines.

Dirks’ and Ferrin’s (2002) empirical meta-analysis took a historical view of the literature regarding trust, across multiple disciplines and constructed a theoretical framework based on the type of relationship parties have and the impact of trust. It was especially compelling to this researcher as it introduced the concepts of direct leadership as well as that of organizational leadership, and how each of these two leadership



perspectives impact trust. The authors posit that the impact of trust may differ when considering a relationship-based perspective or a character-based perspective, or a follower's relationship with a direct leader or supervisor as opposed to a senior leader or administrator. Dirks and Skarlicki (2004) continued to explore the complex nature of trust and its impact on an individual's overall performance and efforts to meet the organization's goals or expectations. Especially important to a follower's perception of trust, how they perceive the "leader's character and how it influences a follower's sense of vulnerability in a hierarchical relationship" (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004, p. 22). This was important to this researcher, as the role of superintendent is a dual one, being the direct leader and supervisor of school principals while also being part of the senior administration within a hierarchical organization such as a school district. These two authors acknowledged the complexity of the relationship between follower and leader, and that more research needed to be conducted to understand the interplay of relationship-based and character-based trust, in specific environments or organizations.

Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, and Hackman (2010) helped to further expand the researcher's understanding of high trust, its components, and impact on organizations. This particular perspective was based on an empirical quantitative study at a global level involving 4,000 respondents across various types of industry, which used a survey tool, the Organizational Trust Index (OTI). These authors focused on trust and high trust at the organizational level. Their working definition of organizational trust was described as "the overall belief that an organization in its communication and behaviours is competent, open and honest, concerned, reliable, and worthy of identification with its goals, norms, and values" (p. 12). Their trust model for an organization included the

following components: 1) competence; 2) openness and honesty; 3) concern for others; 4) reliability; and 5) identification to the organization. These components connect with the literature specific to the field of education mentioned earlier in this section. From the research on these specific components, the authors build a high trust organization pyramid that includes three specific types of trust: optimal trust, resilient trust and deep trust. These specific types of trust impact an organization's structure, the work efforts of its employees, and how the organization learns. Based on the data collected from the OTI, the authors perceive that an organization, built on high trust, is "more creative, innovative, and able to engage in productive risk taking" (p. 188). There is trust in the organization's decision makers and an open approach to sharing information on change, the impact of the change, and the expected results from the changes to be made. The openness includes ongoing information on the evaluation of the work and the results, which also includes a shared responsibility in meeting the expectations.

It is important to mention at this point that participants in the study had become familiar with the work of Katz and Dack (2013) as part of looking at their leadership practice. Part of this process was to reflect on their leadership practice, within the context of each of the leaders' roles, be it as superintendent or principal. A collaborative, collegial framework of using a group of one's peers to help frame future steps in refining one's leadership practice was in place. Key elements of this reflective practice was built on being able to be open, honest and not fall prey to what Katz and Dack (2013) referred to as a "culture of niceness" (p. 66). This concept, sometime also referred to, as a 'culture of nice' was often part of the dialogue during the interview process with the participants.

The above literature review helped anchor the researcher's understanding of trust, of the many components identified through the research, including the concepts of high trust and distrust. An understanding of the complex nature of trust and its impact on relationships, especially between various leadership levels within a hierarchical organization is crucial when looking at the interplay between the organizational leader, the superintendent, and the school leader, the principal and their leadership practice.

The work of Blase and Blase (2001), Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999, 2000), Bishop and Mulford (1996, 1999), and Louis (2007) were especially illuminating to this researcher as their work helped extend the connections made between, trust in the relationships between teachers and principals, to the relationships between the superintendents and their principals. The modeling, building and supporting of trust within the relationship between principal and teacher appeared to be replicated in the relationship between the superintendent and principal. The day-to-day interactions of the superintendent and principal was similar to those interactions between teacher and principal; if the superintendent modeled trust in their relationship with the principal, built it through time and positive interactions, and, consistently supported the growing trust through consistent actions, then the principal felt empowered. Principals linked the feeling of empowerment to high trust, which in turn they saw as influencing their own leadership practices with the educators in their respective schools.

### **Leadership**

As part of the inquiry into how school district leaders build and maintain trust with school principals, ideally one must have an understanding of leadership practices and personal resources that will typically optimize the work of leading. While the field of

leadership practice is abundant with various approaches, for the purpose of this study, this author started with a focus on transformational leadership. Following nearly two decades of research into transformational leadership, Dr. Ken Leithwood (2013) presented nine features of strong school districts, based on a literature review of various qualitative and quantitative studies, which included those undertaken in Ontario, Alberta, and the United States. The paper, *Strong school districts* (Leithwood, 2013) also provided recommendations on specific district leadership practices, as well as personal leadership resources to support the work needed to move educational systems from “good to great” (p.6). These practices described as ‘core practices’ included: 1) setting directions; 2) building and developing people; 3) developing the organization to support desired practices; 4) improving the instructional program; and 5) securing accountability (Leithwood, 2013). Personal leadership resources are anchored in the experiences leaders have within their roles and the perceived influence of leaders on their followers within the complex nature of their relationships. These personal leadership resources include: 1) cognitive resources such as specific work related knowledge and problem solving skills; 2) social resources related to an understanding of the emotional side of leading, or the emotional intelligence component of leading; and 3) the psychological resources the individual leader needs to have to be impactful in their role, namely optimism, efficacy, and resilience (Leithwood, 2013). Dr. Ken Leithwood’s vision of strong districts able to meet the needs of all the students within the province of Ontario, (in essence to be able to transform and maintain an effective educational system) acknowledges the move of district level leaders “from central managers of large

bureaucracies to transformational leaders of a continuously improving menu of instructional services for students” (p. 10).

As a result of the paper, *Strong districts and their leadership* (Leithwood, 2013), the existing Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) (Institute for Education Leadership (IEL), 2013) was revised to reflect the latest information. It is important to include this document as it currently supports the formation of school and system leaders as well as anchor their evaluation. The OLF (IEL, 2013) “identifies specific practices, actions and traits or personal characteristics that describe effective leadership” (p. 5) at the district and school levels, linking to the K – 12 School Effectiveness Framework as well as the District Effectiveness Framework. Five core leadership capacities are at the heart of the OLF (IEL, 2013) and one can clearly see the connection to current leadership research: 1) setting goals; 2) aligning resources with priorities; 3) promoting collaborative learning cultures; 4) using data; and 5) engaging in courageous conversations. These capacities demonstrate the importance of the blend of knowledge, practice, and personal leadership resources to be an effective district and school level leader, and show the strong link between research in the area of transformational leadership and actual leadership practice.

In an earlier study, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) looked at transformational leadership, based on empirical data gathered in a large study in Britain involving primary school teachers. The findings indicated that leadership practices have a very strong direct impact on teachers’ work settings as well as motivation and some impact on teachers’ capacity (p. 223). The authors presented a model for transformational leadership that included three categories with sub categories of practices: 1) setting directions; 2) developing people; and 3) redesigning the organization (p. 205). While there is no

specific definition to the concept of transformational leadership in this study, the researchers provided the above specific practices that help build a model of the practice associated with transformational leadership.

As a result of a large quantitative and qualitative American study, Leithwood and Louis (2012) outlined the educational leadership practices and personal resources that appeared to be necessary to be effective leaders at the district and school levels. The results of their study identified specific aspects of leadership that affected student learning in a positive manner: 1) focusing or targeting a specific aspect of the work of leading and learning; 2) inclusion of formal and informal leaders; 3) sharing of the power or influence amongst stakeholders; 4) developing the capacity of others through strong relationships; 5) creating a vibrant professional community; 6) being able to adapt according to the needs of the local community; and 7) being able to work with and not against or ignoring external pressures and improvements. These specific leadership practices connect demonstrate the complex nature of the work to be done, and the need for a collaborative approach to share the responsibility of educating all students within a school district.

Mulford and Silins (2003) expanded on the impact of transformational leadership via an Australian study that saw results indicating the intricate web between formal and informal leadership and how this symbiotic relationship between the two types of leadership practices was able to respond to students' needs as well as those of a community. The ability to mesh a sound and well communicated mission, vision, and goals arrived at through consensus with all stakeholders, combined with establishing trusting relationships based on valuing of the other, providing individualized support,

caring, shared decision-making, and encouraging reflective practice meant that the ensuing climate was one where educators felt that their practice could impact student learning and overall achievement.

Mulford, Silins and Leithwood (2004) further explored organizational learning within secondary schools in a specific study conducted in Australia and Tasmania, over a four-year span, involving students, teachers and principals. Through this study, the researchers discovered that organizational learning “was found to involve *sequentially* establishing a trusting and collaborative climate, having a shared and monitored mission, and taking initiatives and risks within the context of a supportive, ongoing, relevant professional development” (Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood, 2004, p. 5). The authors connected transformational leadership to position, while distributed leadership interfaced with a collective approach to work between the administration and teachers. This is important to note as it demonstrates the complexity in defining various leadership practices or approaches and their effect within a particular context or situation. Be it viewed as an intricate web, or tapestry, the art of leading, teaching and ongoing learning is constructed from multiple aspects of relationships and practice that combine to impact student learning and overall wellbeing in either a positive or negative manner.

While this researcher started with a focus on transformational leadership she became cognizant of the concepts of shared or distributed leadership as explained by Hallinger (2003); Harris (2009); Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, and Hopkins (2007); and Hoy and Smith (2007). These studies helped provide knowledge and shed a light not only on transformational leadership but also on distributed leadership, and shared leadership. Hallinger (2003) looked at the perspective of instructional verses

transformational leadership practice. He interpreted instructional leadership as a top down approach, where one was the expert or the master at instructing while transformational practice, which was seen as impacting the capacity of others to do the work. There appeared to be an evolution in the role of the principal, moving from too often being a manager to facilitating the learning and practice of others, namely teachers. This transformational or distributed leadership approach was referred to as second order change – impacting teacher practice verses the instructional leadership practice, a top down approach, which was seen as having a direct impact, in this case, on student learning.

Harris (2009) further expanded on the concept of school improvement and closing the achievement gap of students through distributed leadership that saw a focus on innovation that was a fine line between the distribution and delegation of power. Further, Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, and Hopkins (2007) after reviewing studies on distributed leadership and organizational change, looked at the role of professional learning communities within schools and their overall impact on school improvement. While the authors recognized the impact of the blend of knowledge, expertise, and coordination of efforts of the professional learning community's members within their respective roles, they acknowledged that barriers and unforeseen impacts or consequences could occur, depending on the overall interactions of the members of the professional learning community. Further research and study was deemed key to defining further the role of distributed leadership on the impact of school improvement and student learning.



Hoy and Smith (2007) expanded on the role of “getting others to follow” (p. 158) as pertaining to the work of leading within an educational setting. They looked at the concept of how one as a leader, can “influence horizontally, not vertically” (p. 160). Similar to Kouzes and Posner (2012) they saw the importance of creating relationships, of reciprocity, of respect for colleagues as key to being able to lead and impact practice. This approach was seen as part of demonstrating commitment, sharing one’s expertise, communicating in an authentic, transparent and honest manner that helped support trust that in turn led to interdependence amongst all parties involved in the work of leading and teaching in a school setting. This fairness led to self-efficacy and optimism, also key concepts within the OLF (IEL, 2013) and Dr. Ken Leithwood’s work on what constituted strong educational districts (Leithwood, 2013).

Sheppard, Brown, and Dibbon (2009) reviewed school leadership from a district perspective, as practitioners and action researchers, and presented a critical analysis of leadership practice based on a literature review and case studies within the context of Newfoundland. Of specific interest were their inquiries in how formal leaders, in this particular situation, superintendents of school, facilitate leadership and collaborative learning; the challenges of hierarchy and risk associated with collaborative research; and how a district superintendent can use collaborative leadership to facilitate organizational learning (Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009). Five key elements were presented that espoused the concept of distributed leadership within a school district: 1) the importance of the superintendent’s knowledge of current research and theories on educational leadership and change; 2) the presence of trust and mutual respect so that risk taking could occur; 3) changes to the organizational structure of the school district that were

clearly communicated to help make the change understood by all within the organization; 4) a collective understanding and commitment that every child will be successful in their learning within the district; and 5) one will think systemically, strategically and will include all level of leadership to support the learning and leading of the district. This resonated to the researcher, as it connected to her personal experience and goals while in the roles of principal and superintendent.

The work of Begley and Zaretsky (2004) on democratic leadership, based on an empirical study expanded the researcher's understanding of the Ontario reality. This looked at leadership through democratic lenses, where principals and parents were seen collaborating in the process of making decisions as it pertained to a school community. These researchers looked at the changing reality of the role of the principal, and the importance of providing "democratic dialogue" (p. 653) as part of the new approach to school leadership. This meant that time, open discussions, collaboration, long-term relationships, and honest communication of values and ethics were key to an inclusive way of collaborating and innovating within a school community. These were seen as key elements of administration that was seen anchored in a democratic leadership approach.

It was also important to be aware of the work outside of the educational context, and the work of Kouzes and Posner (2012) in the area of leadership practices brought further understanding to the elements of leadership. Based on over twenty-five years of research across the globe, and empirical data from their Leadership Practices Inventory, the authors presented five leadership practices that support exemplary leadership in public, private as well as profit and non-profit organizations. The inventory provided data that helped identify five characteristics of admired leaders: 1) honesty; 2) ability to look

forward; 3) competence; 4) being able to inspire others; and 5) intelligence. These descriptors connected with aspects of facets of trust as explained by Tschannen-Moran (2014) and the personal leadership resources outlined within the OLF (IEL, 2013). Of particular interest for this study was the practice defined as enabling others to act, as “leaders foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships,” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 21). This particular practice again reinforced the links between the research based within an educational setting and the broader cross-disciplinary contexts.

While reviewing the literature on leadership within an educational setting, and the focus on the sharing of roles, some of the conceptual frameworks made direct connections to learning, and aspects which were beyond one’s notion of competence or specific skills required to lead and educate others. Sergiovanni (1984) postulated that educational leadership was based on a hierarchy of various leadership forces or the sharing of five specific roles: 1) management engineer; 2) human engineer; 3) clinical practitioner; 4) chief; and 5) high priest. The interplay of the activities in each of these specific areas was key to leading a school towards excellence. However, due to the complex nature of being an effective educational leader, it was seen as important to share the load of these various areas of practice as one person could not be all, at all times as well as focusing on what he sees at the heart of excellence in schools. Love of learning, critical thinking, problem solving, curiosity, creativity, an appreciation of the arts, and interpersonal competence were all anchors to the greater good as opposed to personal success in one’s role as leader (Sergiovanni, 1984). This particular perspective helped reinforced the researcher’s understanding of the complex nature of the role of educational leader.

Stoll, Fink, and Earl (2003) also linked leadership and learning in their research, and identified seven key aspects of leadership in a learning organization which included: 1) understanding learning for both adults and students; 2) making connections with all stakeholders; 3) futures thinking so as to be proactive instead of reactive; 4) contextual knowledge so that leadership practices are appropriate depending on the specific situation; 5) critical thinking used in handling the many areas of focus; 6) political acumen built on an awareness of the macro and micro politics involved within a school system; and 7) emotional understanding or understanding of their own emotions as well as those one leads so as to ensure bonding that leads to a moral commitment to the public good (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003). These authors described the art of leading within an educational setting as holistic, and the required interplay between formal and informal leaders as the ongoing use of the above leadership practices as needed, depending on the particular context, and individuals involved.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) looked at educational leadership through “the way women lead” (p. 1). While gender was not of specific focus for this study, understanding the possible impact of gender given the fact of being a female researcher as well as a former principal and superintendent, and having 60% of participants being female was a key element that could not be overlooked. Reviewing the work of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) provided insights on women as educational leaders. Specifically these authors reviewed the existing literature on women in leadership roles, current social theories as they pertain to leadership, and the components, which appear as key elements of women in educational leadership roles. These included: 1) leadership for learning; 2) leadership for social justice; 3) relational leadership; 4) spiritual leadership; and 5)

balanced leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). The concept of leadership for social justice also connects with the work of Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks (2009) on the link between the required skill set of 21<sup>st</sup> century educational leaders and social justice, looking at change from what is morally grounded as opposed to what is operationally convenient. When considering change in education, it was seen as important to consider the “collective power” (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 45) of the voices within the educational context, and that it was important to consider “power with rather than power over” (p. 47). This was seen as an effective way to implement change in practice as it was seen as leadership that was “socially constructed, collected, distributed, shared or co-leadership” (p. 43). This particular description resonated with the researcher as it intersected with previous literature as well as with some of the participants’ perspective on what educational leadership.

As mentioned in this section, leadership practices that were seen as supporting of the current reality of the work of leading, be it at the system or school levels within Ontario, in effect broadly centred around the concept of distributed leadership (e.g. power sharing as part of leadership practices), which could impact or transform schools and educational systems in a positive manner. The literature review established a foundation in understanding various aspects of leadership, be it transformational, distributed, shared or collective, and at the heart was the concept of a leadership approach that was based on the sharing of the work of leading in a educational setting due to the many aspects of leading to support educator practice and in turn, improve student learning. It is important to consider that many of the studies reviewed indicated the importance of further research on specific contexts and aspects of leadership within the educational setting so as to be

able to be more specific on the interplay between individuals' leadership practices, their relationships with colleagues or followers within the organization and the impact of trust. The next section will look how trust, relationships and change in leadership practice intersect with the culture and climate of the educational organization.

### **Cultures, climates, and organizational change**

It was important for this researcher to include the seminal works of Schein (1985, 1999, 2010), Argyris (1999), and Senge (1990), regarding organizational learning and the role of formal and informal leaders play in creating cultures, which support ongoing change to practice. The works of these authors presented conceptual frameworks, which helped understand the context in which the data would be collected, that of an organization and its prime responsibility, that of learning not only from the student perspective, but from the adult stance, as system and school leaders having to maximize their impact on student achievement and socioemotional wellbeing. Specifically, Schein's classic *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985), and the 4<sup>th</sup> edition (2012), provided theoretical information and case materials to help understand the interconnectedness of leadership practices and culture within organizations over the past decade. Schein (1985) defined culture as, "a pattern of basic assumptions-invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration-that was worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 9). It was also espoused that the task of leading was not to be separated from building a culture within an organization. As a result of previous studies, Schein (1985) explained that a leader needed to have

specific competences to be able to do the work of leading effectively, and within a culture that would be of benefit to those doing the work. This included three different aspects of competency: 1) the ability to identify and communicate problems; 2) the ability to build and maintain relationships within different groups; and 3) the ability to manage one's own emotions and those of others (Schein, 1985). Schein (1999) shared in a commentary for the *Handbook of culture and climate* (1999) entitled, *Sense and nonsense about culture and climate*, his perspective on the differences between culture and climate. He describes climate as a "cultural artifact resulting from espoused values and shared tacit assumptions (p. 3). Schein saw it, as the link to what one experiences as a visitor or new staff when entering the site, or physical plant of an organization, be it the design of the site itself or the emotional behaviours of the staff. Culture for Schein (1999) is "a 'state' of the existing system, even as one knows that the system is dynamic and perpetually evolving" (p. 4). Culture is based on the history of the organization, how people relate to each other within the organization over time, and within the ongoing external and internal changes. For the purpose of this particular research, the concepts of culture and climate are interconnected as the participants used these terms interchangeably. It may be a chicken and egg situation, where which comes first, the climate or the culture when superintendents and principals attempt to reflect on their relationships, the impact of trust, and their own behaviours and practices in light of their ever-changing relationships.

Another key researcher, Argyris (1999), presented an overview of the barriers, which organizations inadvertently put in place and which interfere with the learning of their members and hence possible change in their practice. These barriers appeared to be based on strategies focused on fixing the symptom, as opposed to addressing the key

cause of the problem. Hence, there was perhaps success for a short while, but the heart of the problem would reappear, as it had not been resolved. This failure to learn was seen to be the result of vague, unclear, inconsistent, incongruent, and scattered information (Argyris, 1999). It was also important to consider the tension between local and whole system perspectives, and needs during this attempt to learn. The end result was one of a defensive approach to leading by the supervisor as well as a defensive approach to learning on the part of the follower. This observation was of particular interest to this researcher as it helped further her understanding of the importance of a leader being able to identify the 'root problem', of providing timely and valid information relevant to the problem, of collaborating when problem solving, of providing choice, within an environment that encouraged care, and benevolence towards one's self as well as the follower. This amalgam of elements would result in growth in one's overall practice, be it, in this case the superintendent or the principal.

Lumby (2012) presented information on the link between culture and power within organizations, specifically, in educational organizations. Culture can be seen as a management tool to integrate followers in supporting the organization's vision or goals while also able to divide or fragment those same followers as part of the use of power to control. The identification and understanding of subcultures (Lumby, 2012), within an educational organization, is seen as an important competence for educational leaders. This understanding of how cultural competence impacts an educational system is seen as having a direct link to whether one feels empowered or marginalized within the organization.



Senge's *Fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization* (1990) explained five specific disciplines based on the information gleaned from interviews and case studies to help understand theories and models of learning. Using Deming's work to help create the framework, Senge (1990) focused on: 1) systems thinking; 2) personal mastery; 3) mental models; 4) building a shared vision; and, 5) team learning. These disciplines were seen as the foundation of a learning organization that could grow and be proactive within its environment as opposed to simply being reactive. Senge (1990) defined a learning organization as "an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future," (p. 14). This notion of a learning organization connected with the researcher's personal practice as a former principal and superintendent, and the overall direction of the school district in wanting to be a more effective learning organization.

Stoll, Fink, and Earl (2003) referred to culture as how a school or organization goes about its day-to-day work. They also made the connection between culture and its impact on school improvement. Specifically, they reviewed specific cultural norms, which Stoll and Fink (1996) had first discussed in a previous publication, and that saw as having to be present if a leader wanted to improve the practices within a school setting: 1) shared goals; 2) responsibility for success; 3) collegiality; 4) continuous improvement; 5) lifelong learning; 6) risk taking; 7) support; 8) mutual respect; 9) openness; and 10) celebration and humour. An effective school leader was seen as being able to work with the above norms as part of what Stoll, Fink, and Earl (2003) described as leadership for learning, which included also learning for leadership. This has both a personal and professional perspective to the work of leading, where one has not only expectations for

one's followers to learn, but also for one as a leader to be able to learn and improve one's own practice. This learning, a combination of individual and collective learning, is described within the concept of a learning community, where various factors can impact the learning, such as relationships, culture, power, structure of the school, leadership itself, morale, past history, and the actual combination of students being served (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003). While the work of Stoll, and Fink (1996), and of Stoll, Fink, and Earl (2003) was centred on the school, many of the points made could be extended to the entire district as a learning organization, where superintendents and principals were part of ongoing learning on how to be effective leaders at the system and school levels, to help improve student achievement and socioemotional wellbeing.

Mulford and Silins (2003) and Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) explained the results of a research project that investigated the link between leadership, organizational learning, and improved student outcomes as it related to students, teachers, and leaders in secondary schools in Australia and Tasmania. The researchers looked at the organizational learning, and its impact on the changing of educator practice as it relates to the leadership approach taken. This research found six key components of transformational leadership: 1) individual support; 2) culture; 3) structure; 4) vision and goals; 5) performance expectation; and 6) intellectual stimulation (Mulford, Silins & Leithwood, 2004). Transformational leadership was found to have the strongest direct and indirect impact on organizational learning. This was described as including the positional leadership of the principal, and the distributed leadership of both the administration and educators. This particular culture was described as being one that respected and encouraged the collective efficacy of teachers, where a collegial way of

working was key. The main elements described through the research centred on empowering the ones doing the work, in this particular situation, the teachers, who are trusted, respected and encouraged to explore their practice and how they can better serve the students. Another element was the ability for the school to provide a professional learning community in which the teachers can do their work. The final element is to nurture a capacity for learning, for being able to look at one's practice, reflect on what is working and explore alternative approaches where it is not working to improve student achievement and socioemotional wellbeing. This research also identified the importance of a leader being able to discern which approach to use when building the capacity of staff, of going beyond the academic measurement of student success to incorporate broader elements that include a love for learning, of knowing strategies on how to learn, and being motivated to pursue inquiries. Finally, these researchers repeated the importance of context, and the need for leaders to match their leadership approaches to the particular context or situation. The research reinforced the importance of organizational learning that is anchored in a collective climate, where educators can take risks, can openly share their successes and failures by monitoring their work, and receive ongoing support through professional development that is based on what they need to learn so as to improve their practice (Mulford, Silins & Leithwood, 2004). This can be extended to the organizational learning at the district level, where superintendents and principals approach their learning in a similar fashion, and extend their learning to impact the leadership practice at the district level, which would then impact educators' practice.

Given the location of the study, it was important for this researcher to come full circle, and to return to the Dr. Ken Leithwood's paper, *Strong districts & their leadership*

(2013). Based on the research behind the District Effectiveness Framework (DEF) and added empirical data gathered after the implementation of the DEF, and various other reports, Leithwood proposed that strong districts were those who possessed “collective district cultures” (p. 14), and where “a culture of joint responsibility” (p. 20) encouraged continuous learning by all. This meant that the district or organization was in a better position to improve its impact on students, and to do so, possessed nine very specific characteristics:

1. A broadly shared mission, vision and goals founded on ambitious images of the educated person;
2. A coherent instructional guidance system;
3. Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions.
4. Learning-oriented organizational improvement processes.
5. Job-embedded professional development for all members.
6. Budgets, structures, personnel policies and procedures, and uses of time aligned with the district’s mission, vision, and goals.
7. A comprehensive approach to leadership development.
8. A policy-oriented board of trustees.
9. Productive working relationships with staff and other stakeholders. (p. 11)

The strong district is one that is based on empowering all in the day-to-day work of supporting students, be it the classroom teacher, the school principal or the superintendent. It was seen as moving from a managerial perspective to that of transforming others, of building their capacity to be better able to do the work. Leithwood described it as a “devolution of authority from the centre” so that the organizational

change can be sustained over time (p. 6). Moving away from a hierarchical manner of not only doing the work but also considering a change in the actual structure of an educational organization connects with Normore (2004) and his work on the emphasis on accountability at all levels, including that of school leaders. The ability to trust those doing the work with a focus on decentralizing brings forth accountability concerns. The combination of managerial and interpersonal skills as part of core leadership competencies explained by Normore, Brooks, and Silva (2016), where doing what is right, as opposed to doing what is correct in the eyes of the organization, is key. The true leader is recognized through “their ability to connect with others and inspire trust both on the shop floor and in the board room, not based on their title or what they say but on who they are, even without having to speak a word” (p. 171). This perspective connects with Leithwood (2013), where an open, supportive culture encouraging change in practice to better meet the needs of students is seen as key within a context of a willingness to share authority not only within the organization, but also from a provincial perspective. This would become evident as government and district leaders demonstrated collaboratively establishing both the vision and the operationalizing of that vision for the province and its many school districts. The high level of collaboration, of valuing of the other, not only is seen as empowering but also reinforces the personal resources of the system and school leaders alongside the classroom teachers, optimism and resilience. It is important to consider the information for this study was based on the empirical information gleaned from principal and district leader surveys from 49 out of 72 school districts within the province of Ontario; case studies involving 3 Ontario school districts; nine U.S. states that included 45 districts and 122 schools; as well as 3 districts in California. The study

also considered the results of student achievement through standardized testing (Leithwood, 2013).

The literature review provided the knowledge necessary for this researcher to be able to interpret the information shared by the three participant cohorts. It is important to acknowledge the work of those who came before and on ‘whose shoulders’ this researcher stands as she examines the findings of her study. The next chapter will elaborate on the methodology, why the research design was chosen and the key components of the study that support the inquiry question, how do superintendents build and maintain their relationships with school principals.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Methodology**

This chapter will briefly provide the ontological and epistemological perspectives that support the choice of methodology used to answer the inquiry question, how district leaders, specifically superintendents responsible for schools, build and maintain trust in their relationships with school principals. The boundaries of this exploratory case study as well as a conceptual framework of trust help anchor the practical aspects of study, namely, the data collection and analysis, the challenges and limitations, the ethics, and timeline as it relates to this study. An Interpretivist position was intentionally taken by the researcher as it best reflected her approach to learning, and understanding the complexity of trust, relationships, and the role of leading.

As noted in the literature review, trust is a highly complex concept, and especially so within hierarchical relationships (Leithwood, 2013; Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). It was important to use a research methodology that would support the researcher's "desire to understand complex social phenomena," (Yin, 2014, p. 4) within the system-school leader relationships. While quantitative tools such as surveys and questionnaires have helped identify various components of trust and leadership practices or behaviours, to 'help peel away the layers' that make up the unique relationship between the superintendent and the school principal, a specific qualitative research methodology, namely an exploratory case study was chosen to show "how all the parts work together to form a whole" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). It provides an opportunity for the researcher to use a method where, "meaning is not discovered; it is

constructed through the interaction between consciousness and the world” (Scotland, 2012, p. 11).

This social constructionist approach, as explained by Charmaz (2008), acknowledges an interpretation of the social world, based on two perspectives, that of the participants and the researcher. The link between a social constructionist approach, and this researcher’s interpretivist stance is supported by Charmaz (2008), “...a social constructionist approach encourages innovation; researchers can develop new understandings and novel theoretical interpretations of the studied life” (p. 398), in this case the life of system and school leaders. It also purposefully includes the researcher’s reflection on the inquiry process, their own perspective on the phenomena being investigated within the research inquiry. More specifically, “...when social constructionists combine their attention to context, action, and interpretation with grounded theory analytic strategies, they can produce dense analyses with explanatory power, as well as conceptual understanding” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 408-409). This is true for this exploratory case study, where the researcher bound the case to a specific Ontario school district, and provided the opportunity for the participants to share their understanding of trust within their particular relationships and its impact on their leadership practices. The exploratory case study approach allowed the researcher to look at the specifically constructed realities of the participants via information gathered during the interview process. As well, the modified constant comparative analysis approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2015), a process taken from grounded theory, was used (but modified) to help guide the researcher through the analysis process, providing an opportunity for ongoing reflection on the data and emerging themes.



**Sampling**

To ensure as wide a representation of an Ontario school district's system and school leaders as possible within this purposeful sample, the researcher was able to meet directly with the director and all superintendents at one of their regularly scheduled meetings to introduce the research and invite participants to get in touch via email. A district-wide information message on the research project was sent to all school principals as part a regular weekly communication to the system; again, interested principals were asked to communicate directly with the researcher. The final sample resulted in 3 participant groups: 1) the school district's director; 2) 6 superintendents with direct responsibility for schools; and 3) 8 principals from across the district, nominally (but not statistically) representing elementary and secondary schools. The only caveat made to establish the purposeful sample was that the superintendents and principals directly responsible for schools; system-focused superintendents and principals were excluded from the inquiry. Of note, as it happened, was the fact that the final sample resulted in an equal number of men and women in roles of superintendent and principals, as well as leaders starting their careers in those roles through to over ten years of experience in their respective roles. The district currently has a total of 159 school principals, of which 103 are female, and 56 male. There are 93 female elementary principals and 39 male elementary principals while at the secondary level there are 10 female principals and 17 male principals.

While the use of an exploratory case study method supported the constructivist stance of the researcher to discover how superintendents built and maintained trust in their relationships with school principals, it is important to note that trustworthiness,

credibility, transferability and confirmability were sought (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) during the course of this research. As noted earlier, the researcher has over ten years' experience as a school leader, and seven years as a superintendent within the school district where the participants were recruited. This speaks to the experiential knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) of the researcher, the professional relationship between the researcher and the participants, the credibility of the participants, the researcher, and ultimately the study itself. This can be perceived as both positive and negative; more will later be said regarding this in the challenges of this research. The use of multiple cases within the superintendent and principal cohorts potentially increases the credibility and confirmability of the findings. While the context of the study is bound by one Ontario school district, there are aspects of the research, which readers, who are versed in the leadership work being done in Ontario school districts, will likely be able to make connections to, and even consider the possible duplication of the study.

This researcher was mindful of the importance of the triangulation of the data during the gathering of information from the participants. Three different perspectives, or lenses, were considered during the interview process, that of the director, the superintendent, and the principal. This provided the researcher with data that reflected three different leader perspectives. As well, key documents (IEL, 2013; Leithwood, 2013; Ontario, 2014), influencing the current leadership practice, were part of the literature review to help connect the participants' perspectives to the overall provincial reality of educational leadership.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Since the district had already begun conversations on trust and its impact on leadership practice at the system and family of schools level on trust based on the work of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), the researcher used these particular researchers' definition of trust, "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open" (p. 204). Alongside the sharing of the definition of trust previously, the researcher also made use of the five facets of trust as identified by Tschannen-Moran (2004) in her work connecting trust with specific leadership practices. Those five facets of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness were key components in the open-ended questions of the semi-structured interviews (see Appendices G, H, and I). The pre-interview activity helped establish a common starting point for the interviews, which lasted from 1.5 to 2 hours per participant. The interview's open-ended questions helped focus the dialogue with the participants, while also providing the opportunity for the researcher to listen and use clarifying or elaborating probes if required (Cresswell, 2015). This helped to mine the information provided by the participants on their understanding of trust, its impact on their relationships and overall leadership practice. The work of Blase (1991), Blase and Blase (1997), Gillespie in Lyon, Möllering and Saunders (2012), Kouzes and Posner (2012), Tschannen-Moran (2014), and *The Ontario Leadership Framework* (OLF) (Institute for Education Leadership, 2013) informed the content of the questions and probes for the interviews. The researcher piloted the interview protocol, and as a result, was able to further refine the questions and the order of these to help with a more natural flow to the focused conversation while also recognizing any possible areas where the participants may be

hesitant in providing information due to the complex dynamics of the relationships between the different levels of leaders.

### **Data Management**

Once participants contacted the researcher and indicated an interest in becoming involved in the research, an email was sent with the Letter of Information and Consent form to help the participant further understand their role, the confidentiality and anonymity aspect of their involvement within the research project. Once consent was received, the researcher scheduled a mutually convenient time and location for the interview. Most of the participants were comfortable having the researcher come to their place of work, a location they felt not only comfortable in, but also provided confidentiality; only one participant chose a different location due to time constraints. Once the date, time and location specifics were confirmed, a pre-interview activity was sent to the participants (see Appendices G, H, and I) to help anchor the interviews. Interviews began in mid January 2016, and were completed early March 2016; all 15 interviews were audio recorded, and then transcribed to ensure that all that was said was included in the transcript to facilitate the data analysis (Merriam, 1998). Digital copies of the transcripts were encrypted and password protected, while paper copies filed in a locked compartment. The participants' anonymity was protected; a system of alpha and numeric codes was used in the transcripts. The contact information of the participants was in a separate file, also locked in a separate location from the transcripts so as to maintain confidentiality. The transcripts were shared with the participants to help validate the content of their interview and provided an opportunity for them to further clarify what they had shared during the interview process.

**Data Analysis Methods**

The researcher used a modified form of constant comparative data analysis with the information provided through semi-structured interviews. This is supportive of a qualitative research process that incorporates existing concepts of trust, relationships, and leadership practice within an educational system while also considering emerging themes from the participants (Blase, 1991; Blase & Blase, 1997; Lyon, Möllering & Saunders, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; and the OLF, 2013). Merriam (1998) explains the constant comparative analysis as “a process whereby the data gradually evolve into a core of emerging theory” (p. 191). Also, as explained by Corbin and Strauss (2015), data collection was scheduled in a manner that allowed for the ongoing analysis of the current data to help inform the next set of interviews. While there are a number of empirical studies that look at trust between classroom teachers and principals (Bishop, 1999a; Bishop, 1999b; Bishop & Mulford, 1996; 1999), few looked at the dynamic relationships between system and school leaders, and even fewer considered these unique relationships within the province of Ontario.

The open-ended inducted analysis of data collected during the interviews helped establish specific core categories, which led to major themes and conceptual ideas (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) that helped understand why and how trust is a key part of the relationship between those system and school leaders participating in the study. Transcripts were reviewed, interpreted, and coded individually, based on the participants’ perspectives on trust, high trust, relationships and leadership practices within their reality, be it at the system or school levels. As the study progressed, codes, and categories within each of the participant groups, (i.e. the director, superintendents, and principals) were

compared to help establish similarities, differences and new codes /categories. Next, those were compared across the three groups, to further establish trends in the data, and as explained by Charmaz (2008), to help the “emergent social construction” (p. 407) of the participants’ understanding of trust, the dynamics of their relationships and leadership practices. The key themes identified were: 1) the specific facets of trust which included benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness; 2) practices and behaviours that help define trust, build and at times, reduce trust; and 3) the culture / climate that supported while also creating moments where the fear of retribution impacted trust and the relationships negatively. In keeping with the exploratory case study purpose, this helped elucidate the field on how trust impacts relationships between system and school leaders and their leadership practices by providing areas of focus for further research within the province of Ontario.

### **Anticipated Challenges**

As part of this qualitative research study, it is important to acknowledge the following challenges that were anticipated and responded to in a proactive manner. Since the researcher has experience in the role of both principal and superintendent, she was aware of the impact of her personal bias, and used a research journal to record her journey and focus on three main areas: 1) her feelings as the research study progressed; 2) her reaction and feelings regarding what the participants shared during the interview process; and 3) the tracking of her own responses as she analyzed the information collected during the study. This helped the researcher acknowledge her perspective during the interpretation of the data and how it impacted the analysis.

Another challenge was based on the relationship between the researcher and the study's participants and its impact on the information shared. As explained in Yin (2014), it was important to consider that the participants may have provided answers based on what they thought the researcher wanted to hear due to their past relationships or connections. At the time of the interviews, the researcher had not been in the employment of the school district for two years; this might have had a mitigating impact on the occurrence of "reflexivity" (Yin, 2014, p.106) on the part of the participants. It is important to consider that as a researcher, having an in-depth knowledge and experience of the work of system and school leaders, and having a positive connection with the participants also brought knowledge in the creation of robust, open-ended questions with appropriate probes during the interview process.

### **Limitations**

It must be noted that this research approach has limitations due to its specificity to the context of one school district; it did not set out to be (nor cannot be) generalized to this or other school districts. The singular position of the director, following an invitation, meant that while that leader wanted to be involved in the study, there were limitations on being able to answer some of the questions so as to maintain allied issues of confidentiality and anonymity. So far as this research was concerned, the director's perspective stayed focused on the district as a whole, and on entire groups of individuals a director works with during the normal course of their work; this included superintendents, school trustees, principals and various community stakeholders. Finally, due to the work sanctions within the province of Ontario, which had just ended before the interviews began, this may have had an impact on the participants' overall perspectives.

**Ethics**

The researcher received ethical approval from Western University's Research Ethics Board and followed its non-medical protocol for participants over the age of 18, to ensure minimal risk to the participants involved in the study. Once approval was received, the researcher was able to submit an ethics application to the designated school board as part of their protocol; the study was approved for access to the school district's staff, with one condition involving the start of the research, to begin once the work strife/sanctions had been resolved.

A letter of information and consent form was sent to the participants via email once they indicated interest in the study (see Appendices D, E, and F). Participants were informed of their right to end the interview at any point in time, or to remove themselves from the study at any point in time. Confidentiality was maintained through the de-identification of any data that contained identifiable information; alphanumeric codes were used to identify the participants and preserve the anonymity of the participants. The participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded; they were also informed that they could continue to participate in the study even if they did not wish to be recorded. Personal information and data collected in digital form was saved on the researcher's personal laptop, encrypted and password protected. Hard copy of information was stored in a locked compartment at the researcher's home. The researcher sent a transcription of the interview to the participant as part of the research process. This provided an opportunity for member check in and respect the participant's role within the study. Every effort was made to respect and value the voice of the participants



during the course of this study as per the government of Canada's *Tri council policy statement protocol: Ethical conduct for research involving humans* (2014).

### **Timeline**

The following was the timeline for the exploratory case study research, using a modified constant comparative data analysis of data collected during semi-structured interviews. As indicated in earlier, it is important to note that the interviews were delayed by four months due to labour strife across the province of Ontario; this impeded access to system and school leaders until January 2016.

Table 1

#### *Thesis Work Timeline*

Date of Research Project Activity	Research Project Activity
September 2015	Western REB Ethics Application Approval
November 2015	School Board Ethics Application Approval: approval provided but start of data collection delayed due to labour strife
November 2015	Communication with Director / Superintendents on Participation: Attendance at regular senior administration meeting to explain and invite participants to email researcher if interested
December 2015	Communication with School Principals on Participation: system email sent to all school principals with information on research study and contact information of researcher through email or phone number
January – March 2016	Interviews Conducted: 15 interviews conducted between mid January until early March at school/office sites or other site as chosen by participants
January – August 2016	Data Analysis: ongoing comparative data analysis, from individual participants, to the groups, and then cross case analysis
May - June 2016	Member check in / transcripts sent to participants
October 2017	Final thesis submission
December 2017	Defense of Thesis

### **In summary**

This chapter has provided information connecting the theoretical framework, specifically, social constructivism, and the research methodology best used to support that stance and the inquiry on how superintendents build and maintain trust in their relationships with school principals. The modified constant comparative analysis was conducive to the type of analysis required to help explore the groups of participants' perspective on their multi-faceted relationships and work.

The next chapter will identify the findings based on the emerging themes of the research study, via the information provided by the various participants, as they shared their perspective on trust, its impact on their relationships between levels of leadership, their leadership practice, and the overall culture / climate of the district.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

#### **Introduction**

This inquiry was anchored on the research question, “how do superintendents build and maintain trust in their relationships with school principals”. As mentioned in previous chapters, since the school district had made connections to the work of Tschannen-Moran (2014), it was logical to continue within that particular perspective. The definition of trust, “...an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open,” (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 204) helped anchor the semi-structured interviews for the three cohorts of participants, the director, superintendents, and school principals.

As a result of a modified constant comparative analysis of the data gathered during the course of this study, the following three themes emerged within the context of the relationship between a superintendent and a principal and the role of trust: 1) facets of trust, which move trust to high trust within the relationship; 2) specific practices and behaviours by superintendents and principals, which help build mutuality or reciprocity, and maintain a state of trust within the relationship; and, 3) the culture and climate that nourish trust and the relationship as seen by the participants.

Table 2 provides an overview of the themes and subthemes found during the study. These will be further explained in the next part of this chapter via quotes from the participants and narrative from the researcher. This will help the reader gain a better overall ‘pictorial’ understanding of the realities of the leadership work conducted by a

director, superintendents, and principals, at a specific point in time, in the province of Ontario.

Table 2

*Themes/Subthemes on Trust*

<p><b>Theme 1:</b> <i>Facets of trust</i> leading from trust to high trust within the superintendent-principal relationship</p>	<p><b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspects of <b>vulnerability</b></li> <li>• Aspects of <b>openness</b></li> <li>• Aspects of <b>benevolence</b> - accepting of one's own and others' vulnerability</li> <li>• Aspects of <b>reliability</b> as a strength to draw upon when taking risks</li> <li>• Aspects of <b>competence</b> based on the ability to build relationships and continuous learning that leads to empowerment</li> <li>• <b>Trust</b> verses <b>high trust</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme 2:</b> <i>Practices and behaviours</i> that help build and maintain trust within the superintendent-principal relationship</p>	<p><b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Taking risks</b> as a practice</li> <li>• <b>Communicating</b> in an open, honest manner as a practice</li> <li>• Being <b>open to feedback</b> as a practice</li> <li>• <b>Trusting</b> of the other as a behaviour</li> <li>• <b>Supporting, relating and relying</b> on the other as behaviours</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme 3:</b> A <i>culture and climate</i> that nourish trust within the superintendent-principal relationship and at a district level</p>	<p><b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relationships</b> that are anchored in trust</li> <li>• <b>Individual</b> vs. <b>organizational / collective</b> trust within an educational system</li> <li>• <b>Positive environment</b> that nourishes trust <b>Hierarchical</b> vs. <b>empowering</b> culture</li> </ul>

It became evident to the researcher as the analysis of the data progressed that the interconnectedness of the various themes and subthemes often times made it difficult to isolate any one of the themes and subthemes. As the reader will discover, the participants' quotes on their perspectives of trust, their relationships, and overall leadership were organic in the sense that they presented many different scenarios to

explain their relationships, and the work of leading. This did not readily lend itself to a neat or linear approach, as there are many intersections between the various themes, and subthemes during the analysis process.

**Theme 1: Facets of trust within the Superintendent-Principal Relationship**

The themes and subthemes listed in the chart above emerged from the participants' perspectives and the literature review already conducted on the facets of trust leading to high trust, namely: 1) willingness to be vulnerable; 2) honesty; 3) reliability; 4) competence; 5) openness; and, 6) risk taking. These facets are seen as key elements of trust in the literature (Blase & Blase, 1997, 2001; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, 2000; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The seminal work of Kramer and Tyler (1996), while taking a cross-disciplinary perspective on trust, provides important aspects of trust within the organizational setting, and helps to understand the participants' views on individual and organizational trust. Further exploration of the links to the above mentioned works will be made in the following chapters as the researcher discusses the findings and their implications within the district and future research.

An extension of trust within this study focused on the difference between trust and high trust, and the implications on the superintendent-principal relationship. Links were made to specific research investigating aspects of trust and high trust to help build the researcher's understanding of the impact of high trust within the relationships of system and school leaders and the overall educational organization (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Lewicki, McAllister & Bies, 1998; Louis, 2007; Samier & Schmidt, 2010; Wicks, Berman & Jones, 1999). The research conducted by Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, and Hackman (2010) on high trust across various types

of organizations also helped inform the researcher's understanding of high trust, and how those participants perceived this aspect of trust, and its impact on their relationships, their practices and behaviours, as well as the culture and climate of the organization.

**a) Subtheme: Vulnerability.** When explaining their perspective on being willing to be vulnerable, the three groups of participants used aspects of openness, competence, reliability, honesty, and benevolence. Vulnerability was also described by some of the participants as being misunderstood, their behaviours and/or practices as being misperceived, leading to retaliation or punishment.

The ability to openly share that one did not know everything, that one needed to improve in their practice, acknowledge weaknesses and mistakes made, was seen as part of being vulnerable, as a system or school leader. Being able to not have to 'know it all' was seen as an important component, a key message from the director, to superintendents, to the principal participants, and to staff. The director's openness in sharing their own problem of practice was interpreted as giving permission for superintendents, and principals to communicate openly their own problems of practice in leadership, and/or instructional work, hence lending themselves to being vulnerable. The director stated:

I am putting my own vulnerability on the table with not only my smaller group but with the larger group and I am willing to put it out there, to all of our principals and system leaders next week. Because I think if I, as the role model for the district...I always look at it, if I expect principals or superintendents to do this, then I need to put myself in the same situation where yes, it does feel uncomfortable and maybe it feels clunky and awkward...

Similarly, a superintendent described their perspective on being vulnerable within their own practice:

The vulnerability comes from opening myself up to be critically examined; so one of the things I share with my principal colleagues is, here is a problem of practice

and it's on finding, working on, developing better questions to work with you; that's what I am working on. So I think I have to model that in my behaviours and in my actions and in my interactions with people.

Another superintendent used the analogy of "it's like being naked; it's true because you need to, when you're vulnerable, you need to bare your soul to say, I don't know and I would like to learn."

Principals, in particular, saw reliability and predictability impacting their willingness to be vulnerable in a positive manner. Specifically, principals saw their experience over time providing them with consistent approaches within their practice that then helped them feel comfortable when not 'knowing it all'. While one might see reliability and consistency as a deterrent to a willingness to be vulnerable, they saw it as a strength that supported them when trying something new within their practice. There was also mention of confidence as being part of vulnerability by principals, within the context of feeling comfortable with who they are, and that making mistakes would be seen by the superintendent as a positive, as being open and honest in one's practice of leading a school. One principal explained:

I think I'm at the stage in my career where I am not ashamed or I don't feel vulnerable if I say look, we're trying, it's just not making a difference with them. We're not getting the traction we thought we were, right? When I look back when I first became principal and I remember, it was my first year as a principal and they put things out where the director visits the school so [name of director] came to my school and asked if we would go for a tour... I still remember that question..."what is your biggest challenge?" And I said, "I don't have one." I didn't have one that was my first reaction. I was new in the position so probably didn't know what my challenges were yet but looking back I'm not sure if I said it was because I just didn't want to be saying anything.

It is important to note that one principal drew attention to the director's honesty and openness at not knowing everything, and looking for the right answers within their role as a part of being vulnerable; in effect, modeling what superintendents and principals

needed to do within their own roles. This perspective connected with Leithwood's contemporary work with the province of Ontario and the Ontario Leadership Framework (IEL, 2013) regarding the important role of system leadership to impact school leaders. However, for another principal, the willingness to be vulnerable was seen as dependent on the situation and past experiences.

Oddly enough, I feel that my willingness to be vulnerable kind of goes up-and-down like a roller coaster in that respect. I think in general my willingness to be vulnerable both with superintendents and other principals has increased in times when it would decrease based on sort of situational things, I guess. I feel like it has decreased at a point right now where I'm a little bit less likely to be vulnerable. Whereas last year, it was much more likely to be and it's depending on the situation.

**b) Subtheme: Openness.** All participants saw openness as a key element of trust. They connected it to honesty, vulnerability, and identified it as an element of high trust. Through understanding one's role and the work that needs to be done, openness was seen as being able to provide support based on what was truly happening within the district or school context. It was equated to being transparent in communicating what was actually happening and being able to provide the appropriate feedback, be it from the director, the superintendent or principal perspective so that one could be more effective in their individual roles.

The director provided insight on how openness was a key element of the role of leading, of navigating the line between the various hierarchical layers of the educational system. It was being mindful of the balance between specific responsibilities of the role of director and knowing what was actually happening in all areas of the district, from the senior administration to the classroom. It is important to note here that the concept of "class" is an expression used within this particular district when referring to the



immediate group one has responsibility for, through a combination of support and supervision. The director states:

I'm open to people inviting me to things. I hope my door is always open, always being mindful that the function of my time too and my calendar and I just to make sure that I have time to do some of the big pieces of my job. I don't want to get into the minutiae and I don't want to ever think that superintendents think that I'm crawling through them to get to the principals, that I'm working outside my class. Because I feel my class, is working primarily with the associate directors and the superintendents, but principals are a key group too, and I want to know what is happening in classrooms.

Superintendents saw openness as being part of a reciprocal component, or *quid pro quo*, between themselves and the principals. It was seen as being able to share in a very candid manner their lack of knowledge, or need for support. For this particular group of participants, it was also often linked to specific competences, such as the ability to communicate effectively, be it to ask for specific support, or in providing helpful feedback. The competences were a means to an end: to support the learning and leading of the principal, through stronger relationships, be it between the superintendent-principal dyad, with staff, with parents, or community members at large. One superintendent explained it as follows:

In terms of openness in my work with schools and school improvement when we're looking at moving forward with a plan, it's having principals be fully prepared to say I don't know how to do that. It is my openness to sometimes hit at too. Well, okay how do you know that this is your greatest need, maybe they don't know how to assess the data, maybe they then have the data and then they have no idea what might be the next step for their staff. So having that, again it goes back to the vulnerability piece – be willing to share. Here's what I know: here's what I don't know. And here's where I need help and that can go for us too when we're trying to solve problems as superintendents.

Another explained the idea of being open as it pertained to being 'direct':

Openness to me, you know, it's all being honest and transparent too. I don't want to sound negative by saying 'direct' but you really want to be able to just say what needs to be said. I think it's important to be open about, you know, how are we

going to work together how am I going to work with the principals and expectations that you may have.

One superintendent spoke of openness as being part of having integrity, and the more open and frank one was, the more trust would build:

I still have to be honest with what I have to do moving forward; I know this isn't the best for you but because of this, this, this and this, this is the direction that we have to take and I understand it's painful at the school level but we have to go this route and this is why. If they don't trust you, that can be really hard but I think the more you are open and honest the more they trust you; you're saying it like it is. It's all about integrity too.

However, if one is by nature, open and trusting, one superintendent shared that it was not always easy to rebuild the relationship once that trust had been broken:

I'm by nature very open and I think in my relationships with people my openness has allowed for people to be able to trust me and what I think happens is that I trust very easily, because I'm so open. But when the trust is broken, that's where it's very challenging for me. So I think I will everyone, there's that expression, it takes a moment lose someone's trust a lifetime to gain it back. I walk into probably every relationship whether it's parents, kids, colleagues and I just trust what you see is what you get. But when that's broken because it's either taken advantage of or turned against me or there's judgement; it's very hard for me to trust again or to open up that trust.

Similar to superintendents, principals made connections between openness and the various areas of competence that is required to be effective in their role, be it as the leader within a school community, as part of their learning team with colleagues, or making sound decisions during the course of their day-to-day obligations. One principal described it as follows:

I feel like openness, from my perspective is something to be willing to express a thought or an opinion and I am not usually expressing that thought or opinion to be contrary, but in an effort to make things better for all administrators typically... and that openness impacts the work that I do as a principal and my learning team especially.

Openness was seen as being able to communicate the reasoning behind decisions, but also being able to have that personal link between who they are, as person and not just the principal:

In my role as a principal, I try to be quite open with people in the sense that I want them to understand my thinking behind decisions, and I want them to understand me as a person. I'm comfortable with sharing personal information and again, letting my staff know who my family is and know me as ... not just in my role.

That very openness helped create a bond, which ultimately supported a more one on one relationship, as further described by this principal:

I think that is important to establish kind of a personal connection, or personal link, because when you're dealing with challenges, or issues then they see you in all your roles, not just as principal. I think openness comes into play, as well, and as I mention decision-making and just kind of being willing to be wrong at times and say I made a mistake, I apologize for my mistake and just be that kind of person that is active and always thinking about how we work together, and trying to be open and honest.

Principals also saw a reciprocal aspect to being open, where if one does it as a principal, it encouraged the other to follow suit:

Openness means that you invite people to dialogue with you, to communicate with you and that you show them that you value what they have to say. I think openness means you're transparent in your action, that when you send an email or you say something over the PA that you mean it, and there's no other agenda; there's no hidden agenda. I think that it's important that they know that this is who you are and they're asking that question because you're looking for some input.

Similar to the superintendents, principals also saw a connection between openness and trust; specifically, when not sure of what the overall intent or purpose of what is required of them by the superintendent or the system. If there is doubt and not as much trust, open, frank communication and risk taking is limited, as one principal explained:

At this current time I'm not sure that there is trust enough there for me to be open about how we might improve principal learning teams and what we are doing because I get the impression that that's not what's valued or wanted. What's wanted I think is a more status quo type of ... so which leads me to be less open

and when reading Tschannen-Moran talking about that guarded - having to expend energy making sure I'm not being too open and not putting myself out there.

**c) Subtheme: Benevolence.** During the course of the interviews, some of the participants had queries about the concept of 'benevolence'. The researcher provided a brief description and a few examples to help them understand and reflect on benevolence as it pertained to their individual situations. Reference was made to Tschannen-Moran's (2014) concept of benevolence, of what she described as the caring aspect one has towards another, beyond the professional aspect, to the personal. An example was provided from one of the interviews, relevant to the district's current situation at the time of the data collection, where a superintendent encouraged a principal to use a lieu day to reenergize after difficult situations due to work sanctions. The superintendent explained:

I mean it was a very difficult time in the labour stuff because we couldn't necessarily protect them from some of the things happening. But what we could continue to be is human beings with them and to support them and to understand their context. Knowing who they are as people, knowing about their families, caring about their whole perspective, reminding them repeatedly to take care of themselves.

The concept of benevolence was often referred to as being kind, showing dignity towards the other, of supporting and protecting the other. One superintendent linked it to building that individual's capacity for the future:

Well it's about being a good human being. It's about having people that you work with, recognize that you care about them as persons first and foremost. The work is the work; we're driven to do well for kids and that's absolutely paramount, but keeping the person whole, and keeping them intact, you know, building capacity for tomorrow.

For another superintendent, benevolence was linked to respect and personal regard for the principal:

Benevolence is like Covey ... he said being faithful to the absent, and I think that's a really important part - they know whether you are with them or not. With

them, that you would treat them the same way – the same level of humankind human kindness and dignity with nothing about wanting them to be better administrators and to support them in doing that. We care about them as human beings.

A previous director of the district used to say, “I don’t really care how much you know, I want to know how much you care,” (Personal communication) which resonated with a superintendent who linked benevolence to the “human side of leadership”:

It’s so important, the human side of leadership. We’ve got to know our principals as individuals who have a life, who have, just like our students. When it was important to make decisions around our students we had to know what they were dealing with and so if we don’t show empathy and caring as leaders and model that then how can we expect them to do it with their staff and their students? It’s crucial, if you’re missing that piece, wow...I don’t know how you can excel as a leader.

Principals also made connections to care, empathy, and a sense of comfort that led to confidence and risk taking. This was offset with some apprehension regarding the transfer of the benevolence from an individual superintendent to the system, as an organization. One principal shared their perspective on benevolence as a key component of a trusting relationship between themselves and the superintendent:

In that sense I would see that [benevolence] as a fairly significant factor then, to developing that trusting relationship with my superintendent. I am lucky that the superintendents I have worked with do have that empathetic side to them; always make a point about asking about my family, and wanting to know me as a whole person not just in my role as a principal, in spite of the fact that our interactions are fairly limited. We don’t interact on a regular basis, but I think the fact that most of the superintendents I’ve worked with, have similar family situations that I do, and have children and that’s just a natural connection that we have.

Another principal spoke to the human, personal connection they had with the superintendent that helped when they had to work through the challenges faced when leading a school:

I think it is a key component; it is something I try to be very consciously aware of myself in the sense that we have to know people on a personal level so that...when there’s that level of humanity, or kind of human connection between

us, I think it makes the relationship so much more deeply. And, if, and when there are issues or challenges, you feel like the person understands you, and will back you even if there is disagreement; I think you feel at least that they understand who you are.

One principal used an analogy that compared the superintendent to a shepherd, to help communicate their understanding of benevolence within their particular context.

Knowing what was expected, following through on those expectations meant that from their perspective, they would continue to have a positive relationship with the superintendent, alongside their support:

Benevolent. I'm not sure that that is a term that I would ever just pull out and say, yeah, [superintendent] is benevolent; they embody benevolence because I don't think I really have a good working definition of it. I think when I think about the word benevolent I see their role as sort of like the shepherd right? And as long as I'm a good sheep and I stay where I'm supposed to, the [superintendent] isn't going to have to hit me with the hook. But the [superintendent] doesn't set out to beat you with the stick, right? They start with us all on level ground; we're all their kids.

One principal saw benevolence as part of the relationship between themselves and the superintendent but had reservations on extending the concept of benevolence towards the whole system:

Having my best interests or having my back and that's how I would [pause][definition of benevolence]. I know it seems strange that I have no reason to believe that my superintendent wouldn't or doesn't, but it crosses my mind occasionally that the system may not necessarily view it the same way as my individual superintendent. I don't know why that is but it does [pause]. I try not to dwell on it but I don't ignore it either...I guess it's probably the nature of the interactions and the sense of caring and interpersonal connection between myself and the superintendent [pause] and it's almost like the emotional bank account comes to mind.

**d) Subtheme: Reliability.** Superintendent and principal participants equated reliability to consistency, and the ability to follow through on one's responsibilities within their respective roles. The ability to follow through, of 'walking the talk' was seen as part of a trusting relationship. The director and some superintendents spoke of

reliability as a ‘two-way street’, a level of mutuality based on being able to rely on the other to support and respect the work of leading. Starting with the leader of the district, the director saw themselves as the role model for all within the school district:

I think it is a two-way street. If I show that trust and respect and reliability and show up and be present; I need to be the role model for all of those aspects, with reliability as well. Again, if someone is in difficulty, then that’s when you hope they feel comfortable with you and can respect and you have that open door and they can come to you in times of need to say you know what, I can’t deliver now because of ‘x’.

Superintendents saw the concept of modeling tied to reliability, and went one-step further, that is, seeing consistency in their response to principals, from both the communication of information as well as the emotions displayed during their interactions as key elements of reliability. One superintendent explained it as follows:

I think that they need to know that they are going to get the same level of response from you. It doesn’t mean that they are going to get the same response all the time but if they make a mistake they’re going to get a calm kind of even when you agree but they’re going to know how you’re going to respond. You don’t want a principal to say I don’t want to phone [name] today because I am worried she’s going to fly-off-the handle, whereas another day when [name] is in a good mood, so it’s a good day to call. It needs to be that kind of even, measured response so that they have that confidence and that readiness to open up, to share, to make the call and they’re not worried about what [pause]... is there going to be a temper [pause] ...is there going to be a response; all those kind of things.

Being reliable from a superintendent perspective meant that they saw themselves returning calls and emails in a timely manner, being accessible and following through on supporting the principal with either information and / or advice:

To be reliable, I would say, phoning principals back if they call me. E-mailing principals back if they call me. I say I’m going to go and investigate something; I am going to go and investigate something, gather information and follow-up with them. I think being supportive, being accessible and visible, that they know that they can get a hold of me if they need to get a hold of me and I’m there to support them.

Superintendents saw reliability for principals similar to their own. One superintendent explained it as:

...So for principals the same things hold true that principals are going to follow through. They're going to do what they say they're going to do, that they're going to access resources and support staff, as they need to, that a response from one parent to another may not always be the same...But it's the same process for decision-making. They may be able to say apparently no my answer isn't the same to you as it was for the other person, but here's the process I've used to do that so that there's kind of a consistent framework for the way they are structuring the decision-making, so that there's some kind of measure of accountability there too and generally being there for the people the supporting the following a process so that there's some understanding.

The idea of relying on the other, in this case the superintendent relying on the principal to accomplish what needs to make the school, and indirectly the system, run smoothly, was a key element for the superintendent. If you cannot rely or count on the other, trust may be diminished. It was described as:

I need to be able to rely on them, the timelines are terrible in some of the things that they have to submit and they may not understand the breadth of why we need this information but I have to count on them and when you can't count on them, it's awful because then you're losing your faith in their leadership in the building if they can't even meet deadlines for you how are they going to make deadlines within the building, you know, what else is being dropped?

Principals saw reliability as consistency, predictability in behaviour and practice for both themselves, and for superintendents; these 'trust builders' were key elements that also helped nourish or maintain trust within their relationship. They saw specific competences connected to reliability; knowledge of policies and procedures, effective communication skills, and emotional stability. Considering the number of issues, or challenges to deal with, at both the system and school levels, it is not surprising that there would be a perceived need for cohesiveness, that would in turn help not only build but also help maintain trust.



Table 3

*Reliability as a Competence*

<b>Reliability</b> – (as predictability in practice and behaviour that can lead to cohesiveness) Superintendents and Principals must have specific competences in the areas of...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knowledge of policies and procedures</li> <li>2. Effective communication skills</li> <li>3. Emotional stability</li> </ol>

One principal explained reliability, as part of the superintendent's role, in the following manner:

Superintendents, in what ways are they reliable? I think as I mentioned, being visible but also being there in supporting the development of the principal and also their schools. Doing what they said they would, be reliable and consistent. Someone we depend on to bring issues forward, sometimes issues we may not have the answers for...

Another principal connected reliability of the superintendent with accessibility; when needed the superintendent will be there to help resolve issues:

No there shouldn't be any surprises. I should be able to know that you know what, if I call up my superintendent that he is going to support me, that I'm, that he is reliable, that I know that he will listen; he might not agree with what I've done, but I know that he is going to be there, to help a situation.

How did the principal describe their own reliability? One principal stated:

Well, to me reliable means being there when you're supposed to be there and being consistently supporting people and people can count on you to be there. So in my role, I have high expectations of myself, to be here each and every day to support staff and students. It is my goal and I try to improve student learning and student success.

Two principals presented some downside to being reliable; one explained that if there was too much reliability, or predictability, that could be seen as trying to find the easy answer, without reflecting. One principal explained it as:

I think that on a surface level we are very reliable with our moving school forward. I think we're doing all the right things on a surface level, like putting up

bulletins, communicating to staff. Staff meetings are generated around a school improvement plan in place. I have got my look fors and I'm doing my walkthroughs. I think where it breaks down is then when it actually ...the rubber hits the road, and something is not happening.

The principal continued to talk about the role of the superintendent, of not encouraging a deeper reflection on practice, of being consistent, but not searching enough for the right answer. There was a connection made between reliability and honesty. When one accepts past practice, and does not question what is happening due to a lack of time, or perhaps not wanting to change the status quo, reliability may be seen as interfering with building knowledge and possible change to practice. It was described as:

I think superintendents are ...sort of ... at times it's a little too surface, and we don't go deep, get really honest. Oh this is all nice we're doing this, we're doing that. Yeah, we're teaching problem-solving but when we see that something is not going the way it should be, we're not always cutting through – cutting to the point. We have a culture of nice. It's like you know you say to somebody that the hair cut looks nice when it doesn't. [Laughingly] Are people reliable when we're not being honest and that's not really what problem solving is. That's not really what – the haircut really doesn't look that great, right? But we don't say that we're going to be nice but then are we improving on our ... are we improving on ourselves as much as we can when we're not willing to be really honest.

A second principal talked about how being reliable may be interfering with his future career. While reliability is seen as a boon to the work at the school level, being visible, and supportive to staff also meant less time in networking and building a profile at the system level, which could impede future professional goals. The principal commented:

I think of reliability as a principal, and I think it maybe connects to my approach as a principal is to take care of my school first, to be in my school, to put that as my absolute first and foremost priority. And I think that certainly, as I have started in a new school again, that's something that is recognized by the staff. They see me as being visible, and approachable and here, every day, and in the halls. I think that sends a message that this school is my first priority.

The downside of being reliable as a principal, of being present and totally involved in the day to day of school life meant less involvement in system committees where principals get exposure to the overall school district and its way of doing the work at a system level. This principal continues to explain:

I think in some ways that approach may be to the detriment of my career, because I am not out doing committee work and I am not at a building here and there and doing all kinds of other things because I'm very careful about making sure that this school runs well.

**e) Subtheme: Competence.** Part of the dialogue between the researcher and participants focused on one of the facets of trust, competence. When asked what were the key areas of competence needed when in the role of director, of superintendent and of principal, over 100 thought units were made referring to specific areas of competence involved in the work of leading at the system and school levels. The key areas of competence shared by the three cohorts of participants included: 1) building relationships; 2) collaboration; and 3) continuous learning. Superintendents and principals also saw a need for competence in the areas of organization, communication, and specific knowledge, and when looking at each of their roles, spoke to the commonalities between their roles, while at times describing the broader context of the superintendent's versus the principal's work. However, the importance of building strong relationships remained the key competence for both leaders.

Table 4

*Key Competences of the Work of System and School Leaders*

Competences Seen as Key to the Work Director, Superintendent, and Principal
1. Building relationships
2. Collaboration
3. Continuous learning

Other competences: organization skills; communication skills; knowledge in specific areas

The following quotes help set the context for competence, and how the participants saw this facet of trust as part of building trust within their relationships.

The director explained the importance of being able to build relationships with others, and how this collaboration brought the voices of all together when serving students. This was described as key to the role, not only of the director, but also for the superintendents and principals alike:

Well I think the first one [competence]; the most important one is relationships. You need to be competent in the relationships that you develop with the people, I would say all stakeholders, the staff that you supervisors, the students you are accountable to, your colleagues – so there's the lateral...relationships...our senior team and the relationships with each other and how we work as a team. I think with all of the stakeholders I think relationships with parents, with trustees.

And, this was seen as superseding the management aspects of the role of system leader, of being able to create an environment where all voices are considered in a respectful, trusting manner to learn and support students before the political agenda:

I think there's the technical competence of doing the job, all the managerial aspects; the knowledge, you don't have to be expert at anything or everything. You know how to go and work with people and find the answers and be willing to put in the time in to find the answers; working really hard. It is a tough job and using your colleagues to get the best out of people. I think the mutual respect and trust that you have is an area of today's leaders that you absolutely have to have and to take the high ground, to be a moral leader, to have that integrity, to know the difference between right and wrong...if you're actually acting in the best interest of students and putting yourself in that role rather than political expediency; the weighing all of the voices.

Similarly, superintendents perceived building relationships as the foundation for getting the work done, be it with principals, colleagues and parents. One superintendent explained it as follows:

For the superintendent the ability to build relationships and that would be to the long-term relationships with principals and school leaders and obviously with senior admin colleagues. But also, how do you really form relationships with parents you have never met before and may never meet. Which is a whole different skill set of how do you develop a rapport with people that you interact on a regular basis and will probably only interact with one or two times if you have done your job well and are able to kind of resolve that issue.

Another superintendent stated the following, using the OLF (2013) to help define the competences, and in particular the importance of starting with strong relationships:

That's huge; there are a lot of areas of competence. I mean all of the areas, the Ontario Leadership Framework are a big part of SO competence whether that means securing accountability...all of them, setting direction, building relationships. They are all very important but the key is relationships, building relationships. I don't think you can be a good leader without being able to build relationships. Being a visionary, being collaborative, modeling, coaching, being able to co-lead and co-learn but making decisions, being able to make good solid decisions when you need to. Pressure and support...

A superintendent who was newer in their role commented on the change in their perspective between a competence based on how much you know and the skill of being able to relate to others:

It's interesting when I first started the job I think I would have answered this competence piece more around your knowledge of things, and I would have worried about my competence in the role early on because I didn't understand a lot of the minutiae of my own elementary colleagues. And, maybe, I didn't understand a lot of the inner workings of the central office either and so I would have said then my competency scale I would have said was low, but I think I've shifted over time.

The superintendent goes on to explain how, as their confidence in the role grew, their focus moved from knowledge and information to the more complex process of building sound relationships with the principals they work with:

I no longer see competency really about what you know. And it really is defined more in terms of the relationships you carve out of the role and you do that – I mean, competence is based on your ability to listen, and your ability to clearly, specifically, concisely say what it is you need to say but I don't think competence is measured necessarily by how much of the [Education] Act I remember – remember memorized.

Principals addressed similar aspects when focusing on competence. They made connections to the OLF, and again, the building of strong relationships was seen as a key area of focus. The following principal's perspective looked at the tapestry of competences required to be able to be successful in the role of principal, and how ultimately the relationship one has with others is key to being able to do the work:

I see competence in my role the person... the person that pops in my mind in the entire leadership framework? I can sit here and think about all kinds of competencies but really I think it encapsulates a lot of things I talk about in my job. I mean obviously building relationships is one, setting directions, trying to understand using data to make informed decisions, where we go next, adequate space, instructional leadership, I would say is a huge competency. I think being collaborative with people, being open.

This principal wove within the tapestry a blend of interpersonal competences alongside the knowledge, or information needed to make sound decision. Ultimately, they saw the ability to build relationships the foundation as key to being able to do the work of leading.

All those are the key areas I mean being well organized, on top of instructional leadership. I mean we've got ability to run here; I wear many hats and besides organizational skills are huge. But I think in the end, people skills and building relationships is all important; it's in essence a pre-requisite. If you don't have that, I think everything else ... you can achieve the others but this is the main.

Competence as knowing, understanding your role, the knowledge to support a sound decision making process was acknowledged but within a context that saw it as continuous learning. This was also mentioned as part of being vulnerable, of being open to admitting that one did not know everything, and was constantly in the process of learning, and in this particular situation, learning how to lead. One principal explained it as follows:

Competence doesn't mean you know it all. Competence means that you have the ability and the willingness to get to the answers. So you work collaboratively with people to get there. Competence is also you know, when you don't know it, you

sometimes, you just, depends on the situation; there are situations where you just kind of have to make people believe that you do know it, depends on the situation. But I don't think competence is about you knowing it at all, at all. At all, I think it's about just knowing that you're comfortable enough as a leader that you're going to help and guide teachers, whatever it is, to finding the answers and support that they need.

Collaboration was important to principals, and was seen as crucial between their role and that of the superintendent. One principal also described it as what superintendents expected of principals and that this collaboration was connected to another facet of trust, namely, vulnerability. Specifically, it was described as:

So I think you have to go through some very challenging settings and situations and I think every school provides them to you and how you choose to go at them and who you choose to take with you, as you go at them, will really form how it goes. Right? I could fight every battle by myself, that'll kill me, or I can take people along with me and choose the important battles to fight. I feel that that's very much what our superintendents expect from us. At least the ones that I have worked with. Right, they expect to you know, line up on the front line and fight as hard as they're fighting and they respect that I do and I'm not going to be shot at sunrise if I fall down.

Finally, within this subtheme, it is important to note the concept of emotional intelligence. Some participants alluded to the managerial aspect to their respective roles and the personal self-knowledge, or self-confidence that helps one tackle both worlds, that of managing and leading. Knowing how to navigate between the operational and inter/intrapersonal skill sets is key to being able to do the work as a system and school leader. It was described as follows by the director:

I think intra-personal; I think you need to know who you are as a person and a leader and what your values are; what you bring and how you bring your game to people everyday and then you can wake up grumpy and [that is] how people will perceive you. But you have a job to do and you are paid extremely well to lead your organization and your school. I think sometimes we forget that about the big roles that we have in education.

One superintendent explained that under the multiple competencies one had to have emotional intelligence to be able to maximize the use of the other competencies required of an effective leader:

But I think underneath all of it is organization and a means to keep yourself and the myriad of things that we're responsible for, sorted out. So I think that there's a layer of those things. There are personal leadership qualities and competencies too that I think actually serve to operationalize those competencies and that's humanity and respect and taking care of yourself and others around you and benevolence and trust, good emotional intelligence; I think you have to have outstanding emotional intelligence to do this job.

A principal described it as a personal capacity built on self confidence, and helped them manage the balance between the managerial aspects of leading and the more complex decision making process to support others:

I think competency exists in I want to say two silos, one is a managerial silo, all the cogs and wheels that have to turn together successfully to make a school tick the way it should, so that it's good for everybody, not just for teachers or good for kids but something that works for everybody. The second silo is that personal self-confidence that you have in your own skills, to make good decisions, to listen impartially to all the audiences and from that, make a decision that doesn't bury anybody. So I think it exists, you have to walk in two silos all the time right; you have a foot in each pile.

**f) Subtheme: Trust versus high trust.** As mentioned at various points in this research, the inquiry question was based on how superintendents build and maintain trust within their relationships with school principals. Using Tschannen-Moran's (2014) work on the facets of trust as a springboard for this research, it was important to consider how the participants perceived not only the concept of trust but also what has become part of the research in the last 2 decades, that of the notion of high trust as outlined in the literature review (Bishop, 1998; Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011); Leithwood & Louis (2012); Lewicki, McAllister & Bies (1998); Louis (2007); Samier & Schmidt (2010); Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale & Hackman (2010); Wicks, Berman & Jones (1999). The



researcher posed two questions, which provided insight into the participants' perspectives on trust, high trust, and the overall impact of these levels of trust on their leadership practice.

The participants within the three cohorts explained high trust using the facet of trust focused on reliability. No matter at which level one was a leader, participants saw high trust anchored in a personal connection, the empowering of the other to do the work that needs to be done. The director stated:

I have worked with them [system leaders] before, and they've not let me down and they've been a team player and they have all the qualities and characteristics of highly effective leaders I think you can just – when they come to you with ideas you can just say I love it, run with it, go with it. If you want some advice in terms of how to play it out with a senior team here's some, but I think you can just empower them even more so and know that they are reliable, they will get the job done and they will come back when they need help... Everything meshes yeah. It's like an amazing flow. Things just come together.

The idea of reliability as letting go, of following through on what needs to be done, and being honest about what was actually happening was also part of the superintendent and principal perspective. One superintendent described high trust as follows:

A person I highly trust I think it comes down to some pretty basic things; they've demonstrated, every interaction demonstrates integrity, follow through, you know we talked about competencies. You can quickly, you know I'm thinking about a person right now, so I'm thinking about communication, they're the first person back on a concern from a parent or they're the first to say hey, look I got this call I'm giving you a heads up but this is what I've done.

This superintendent continued to explain the concept of being a voice from 'the trenches', when in a high trust relationship, where the principal would also be there for them, and provide them with information to consider:

They're the first person you know to talk about something that they're, you know those qualities in an amalgam are...and also the person who calls you up on the

phone and says listen I'm going to give you a heads up, I was at the Principals' meeting the other day and this is what's coming.

The same superintendent then explained their understanding on having less trust as:

Those that I would say fall on the other side of it; I don't really have a lot of people like that, maybe I'm just naïve or something but maybe I get a sense through experience typically that they aren't genuine about what they say or what they promise to do or tell the truth, frankly. I don't have a load of examples on that but what I can say is that where I start to feel that I don't trust a person or I'm less trusting of a person is when I start to see incongruities in what they say and what actually happens, and that leads me down to okay, what's actually going on?

A principal explained it in a similar manner, making connections between high trust, risk taking and feeling comfortable working with a superintendent as opposed to staying out of the fray if they were not sure about the relationship between themselves and the superintendent:

When you have a high level of trust – I think of the risk-taking and willingness to do something new and putting it out publicly. I think for me, I would probably in a situation where I have a high level of trust with the superintendent I would seek out opportunities to work with that person on a more regular basis so they come and support their portfolio in some form or ... what we did with the mentoring program, part of the reasons I wanted to do that is because [superintendent's name] was there. If it were another superintendent carrying that portfolio I wouldn't have signed up. So pick and choose kind of ... where I want to work on it... My system level work I guess, does depend on whose at the helm and trust this kind of ... a big part of how I gauge what areas I want to get involved with.

The superintendents and principals did have some different perspectives on high trust. Superintendents added the concept of being committed to a shared purpose or goal.

One superintendent explained it as:

I don't know whether you have to have the same personal values and beliefs, but I think you have to be a little bit – an open book. I am going to trust people who I get the sense that they are telling me what they really think, and that there is no hidden agenda and that there is a transparency in motive and action and in kind of thinking. If I didn't believe that they had a shared purpose, then it would be harder to trust - if I didn't think that they were always acting in the best interests of kids or that they understood the system a little bit then it's harder to trust. I guess you do have to have some shared values, but it doesn't mean all of that has to be the same.

A principal suggested that they would feel free to do their work without fear of reprisal; they described the nature of high trust as:

...One I highly trust, I just think I would be just much more open about everything that's going on, able to take risks, not worry about the consequences. I think that I would make the superintendent part of the team, what I do at the school. I also would have, when I highly trust somebody I think their actions are always pretty much consistent with the way they treat me and also the way they treat all of their schools that are under them. So I think the consistency has to be there, the reliability has to be there as well, so someone I highly trust would do that.

The same principal then described how they interpreted the concept of having trust, but not high trust:

I just probably would do the same but I'm just not sure I would take in their suggestions as seriously. Right, because if I'm only mediocre really trusting them, I'm thinking you know, thank-you for helping out but I'm not sure I would really, it would impact my decision making, by any means. When you highly trust somebody and you, I think they're competent, reliable, and consistent then I think you seek their leadership because you know that you can count on their feedback. When they are mediocre, I mean I would, I probably would approach it the same but I'm not sure I would take their suggestions or I would look at it as something as, I don't know, as I would highly appreciate the other person, if that makes sense.

Specific facets of trust were explored through the lenses of a director, superintendents and principals in the above theme and subthemes. As the research evolved, it became more and more obvious that the interconnectedness between the facets of trust, and the practices and behaviours of the director, superintendents, and principals was a complex one. What are specific practices and behaviours that build and help maintain trust with the other? What comes first, the giving of trust unconditionally, or the practices and behaviours, which demonstrate trust as present? Or, is this an organic phenomenon where trust is given through vulnerability, benevolence, honesty, reliability, competence and openness, while also being demonstrated via specific leadership actions or ways of being?

The next section examines how the participants viewed various practices and behaviours specific to building and maintaining trust within their relationships and supporting their work, leading either a system or a school. It became evident that this inquiry was similar to the unweaving of an intricate tapestry to better understand how it had been woven in the first place so as to be able to understand how to improve and make it reflect how high trust between system and school leaders impacts student wellbeing and achievement.

### **Theme 2: Practices and behaviours as builders and maintainers of trust**

Each of the cohorts of participants (director, superintendent, and principal) was able to provide specific practices and behaviours, which built, maintained, or damaged trust.

The most recurring subthemes consisted of three specific practices: 1) taking risks; 2) communicating; and, 3) accepting of feedback. There were two key behaviours mentioned by the participants that also helped build and maintain trust: 1) trusting of the other; and 2) supporting, relating, and relying on the other. When asked to describe the impact of trust on their leadership practice, links were made to a willingness to be vulnerable, not just taking risks in one's practice but also in being open to accept feedback and truths about one's own practice as seen by an other. This in turn was part of a practice of communicating in an effective manner that combined open, frank messaging that respected and valued the other. These specific practices were seen as emanating from behaviours of trusting the other while supporting, relating and relying on the other. It is important to note as mentioned previously that the following subthemes are

interconnected with each other, and at times were difficult to untangle as evident in the following participants' quotes.

**Subtheme: Taking risks.** The aspect of taking risks in one's practice appeared to be intricately linked to a leader's willingness to be vulnerable, trusting that the other would respond in a trusting manner. This brings forth a communication that is forthcoming from one to the other, being willing be open to the feedback provided. The director explained it as:

I think you let out even more of your vulnerabilities; when I look back to the work as a superintendent of program and working with [other system leaders]. There were quite a few that really connected – I really connected with, and you can go to them in confidence, you know what, I need help here. I need your advice. I am not putting it out there for a number of people to give me advice. I just need to know, should I tread down this path and so there are some confidences that you would have in that person or persons.

As a result of this confidence, of trust in others, the director stated:

...And I think you are willing to give more of yourself and your own vulnerabilities, your own insecurities, and truly ask them for some advice on a more personal level and say you know what if you hear anything, I want you to tell me. Tell me the good, the bad and the ugly rather than what do you think about this idea. You need to tell me what are you hearing about my own leadership style. Give me, do the 360 on me, tell me where I'm falling short, what I need to pay attention to or if you were in my shoes, how you might see things playing out.

Similarly, a superintendent shared that with trust and being able to take risks, this brought openness, a readiness to share feedback, making for a more mutually responsive relationship. Taking risks when trust was part of the relationship was described as:

Probably much more open, probably much more interactive, so I would be looking for and truly engaging in that two-way conversation, not filtering responses; not filtering the comments, not having to worry about that... That they are more willing to take risks, that they are more willing to throw an idea on the table and not worry about that judgment that would be there. Probably less judgmental too if you trust, you accept something that happened or comments that somebody might make truly at face value without me trying to second guess for what they say – what was the intent?

A principal spoke of not being micromanaged, of having autonomy, of also being able to take risks without having to worry if things did not work out:

I see two things, the first thing is extremely relaxed because she is not breathing over my neck, over my shoulder, second guessing everything that I do. So there is that freedom to try some things on, to risk, to fall, to fail, to get back up, to ask for help, to ask for time, to ask for whatever.

The principal continued to explain how this comfort, lack of judgement resulted in not having feelings of discomfort:

...It's easier for me to be comfortable in my own skin in my own school because you know you are not being judged and if I'm not being judged then I don't have time to be judging everybody else from a negative standpoint. I am still judging every day as I watch and see what's going on in classrooms and who's line is being pokey and that kind of things or noisy or whatever the choice might be but you don't have that same sense of impending doom right?

Some superintendents and principals used descriptive words such as invigorating, energizing, and liberating. One principal went one step further, describing what it felt like when their superintendent believed in them, trusted them to do the work of leading a school:

It gives you wings to try to, sorry I'm being a little poetic here but, to just soar towards excellence and you'll find the bumps along the way but you won't give up. You'll just keep going knowing that you are supported and the trust is there, it does give you wings. If the trust isn't there it's a heavy feeling, very heavy and it makes always second-guess yourself. While the other one I think that with your wings you just take off and with you, you are able to influence others to kind of get that momentum going. That thrust you need for take off.

**Subtheme: Communicating.** Communicating in an effective manner was seen as crucial not only to get to the work of leading, but as a key component to a trusting relationship, between all levels with a school district. It was used to explain how one demonstrates honesty and openness via practices and behaviours as well being listed, as a key competence in one's role, be it the superintendent or the principal. Being able to

communicate in an open, honest manner built and helped maintain relationships at all levels of the system while being able to do one's work in an effective manner.

As a competence, superintendents linked communication to being able to listen, and to articulate in both verbal and written form. For one superintendent, the ability to communicate was key to both the problem solving process and the building of relationships:

And where you have to make different decisions, for the larger good for a system perspective, if you make a different decision that people understand and can separate that but...they know why you made that decision. I think that helps with competence when you are able to articulate. Here's the decision this is why it went that way, particularly in a context where someone may not necessarily benefit from your decision, or think it was the right one. So I think competence really comes down to how well you manage that communication piece within the relationships you have. For principals, I don't think it's terribly different than that.

Principals saw communication as a required competence for both superintendents and themselves, a key element of again, working with others and being able to achieve goals. One principal commented:

The third area of competence for me is all around communication and this is such an important piece because you are involved in working with people and the work that you do often is all around the conversations you have with the folks. I think I really learned that from [superintendent's name]; that would be one of the key lines I had when [superintendent's name] was with me is the importance of those conversations and in all the reading I've done around leadership and increasing student achievement, it seems to me that the conversations that you have with folks are central to all of that process.

Open communication was seen as not easy, especially when trying to share information that might be difficult, that include elements of constructive feedback on how to improve or problem solve with the best intentions. This was seen as an important competence as explained below:

And you know I've talked about courageous conversations as part of that communication and it's being able to communicate with students, with teachers

and with parents on a range of things so...I know that if you struggle in that area, and I've got staff who struggle in that area, that it becomes very difficult to be effective, be competent, and certainly be viewed as competent in the school.

The principal continued to explain how they saw communication as a key element for the superintendent in building their relationship not only with one particular principal, but also with all of the principals within their community or family of schools:

I would say that communication for a superintendent is equally important to the principal, no doubt about it and I think that the challenge for a superintendent around communication is while you are dealing with parents who have already tried to resolve whatever they have issue with, with the principal who presumably is a fairly competent communicator and now it's getting to you so it can be more challenging but you're also working with a group of principals in your community of schools who are fairly skilled folks.

Further, the principal addressed the difficulty when a superintendent cannot communicate effectively with the group of principals, how this can impact the overall ability of the group to be on the same page, of having a consistent, coherent message from the superintendent:

And I think that's got to be a big challenge in terms of communication when they are...you know they've thought through some things and they are working through some things with you and they may have some expectations and they may have different perspectives on leadership and what the superintendent should do, so your ability to communicate with a group like that must be a challenge. So I would say that would be the first [competence for a superintendent].

All three cohorts of participants saw communicating in an honest and open manner part of trusting relationships. This was especially evident when in one's role, one had to communicate a difficult message while trying to preserve a trusting relationship between themselves, as a superintendent and a principal. A superintendent explained the situation as follows:

I once was left with the assignment of telling an administrator, who was a vice principal at the time and had repeatedly applied to be a principal, to tell him that they should come to the table no more, and to tell them that, without really good



data, to tell them that based on the perception of senior administration he really didn't have what it takes to be a principal.

The superintendent further explained how they felt at having to communicate the system perspective to an individual, and then continue to work and support the individual:

It was a really hard conversation, probably the hardest in my career, because I cared about this person. They are principal by the way, right now, and it's because a couple of years later, and, I think maybe, in part, because I cared about that person a fair bit. I worked fairly intensively with them over time to address what perhaps were the things that were lacking, but they didn't take their ball and go home. They didn't turn around and ... I'll go home at 3:00 everyday. And they could have and they didn't, to their credit.

Another superintendent faced a similar situation, trying to balance being honest, open and still mindful of trying to maintain the trust within the relationship. When one tries to build and maintain a trusting relationship, to be able to support the principal, while at the same time having to look the ability of the individual to meet the needs of the system, being able to communicate in a caring, benevolent manner is not easy:

When a principal wants to become an SO [superintendent] there's a really good time to give them your honesty but not to crush them. They have every right to move forward but maybe slowing them down a bit, maybe, giving them direction on what areas to work on...those kinds of things. It's subtlety, it's an art, and it's a skill. You can't just be blatant; honesty can be cold and hard too you have to curve it a bit in some situations.

The superintendent continued to explain the difficult balance between being open, honest, and not harming the individual:

In others they want it, they just want it, they're that way and so you just [pause]...you don't tell them they're great at something when they're not. Like how is that helping anyone? I remember being a principal and having to tell a vice-principal that they weren't ready to become a principal; that was a really tough conversation, but I felt it was my job too. I mean it is part of my responsibility to be honest about that. Why would I set him up for failure so I'm not going to lie? It's hard though.

Similarly, one principal talked about being more open or honest in their communication with the superintendent after having some years of experience in the role. As the principal gained experience and confidence in their role and relationship with the superintendent, the communication was more open, creating a trusting relationship:

I think as I said in the beginning as a young administrator, yes. There were times when I didn't put all of my cards on the table because I didn't want to be seen as ineffective, I didn't... I was hiding about the things I didn't know or you know how things were going because I wasn't sure how things were going. I was figuring it out. I'm to a point now where I don't have a problem with it and it's not that devil may care you know, take it or leave it kind of attitude, but I just feel so comfortable with the people I'm working with and I feel so comfortable about what I'm doing and my ability to do it reasonably well that's it's very easy to lay stuff on the table...

One superintendent captured the connection between high trust and open communication as follows:

If I had and I do have great communication, regular communication, open communication with all of my principals, that person it's more regular, it's more open, it's more trusting, it's more fun too to be honest, like there's a lot more joking, there's a lot more about personal, there's absolutely, not to say that there isn't with others, but it's just elevated, it's just far more superior I would say. How do I see it impacting the principal? Oh yeah, so I think that she knows that she has full autonomy and support.

**Subtheme: Open to feedback.** When the participants described a trusting relationship, be it between the superintendent and principal, principal and superintendent, or other relationships, where there existed trust, there was an awareness of being more accepting of the other's feedback. This was also seen as possessing autonomy, having confidence and trust in being able to take risks while seeing feedback or advice as key to learning and leading in new and innovative ways.

The director as mentioned earlier, explained that in a trusting relationship between themselves and others within the system, a readiness and need to want advice from others whom you trusted:

There were quite a few that really connected – I really connected with, and you can go to them in confidence, you know what, I need help here. I need your advice. I am not putting it out there for a number of people to give me advice. I just need to know, should I tread down this path and so there are some confidences that you would have in that person or persons. And I think you are willing to give more of yourself and your own vulnerabilities, your own insecurities, and truly ask them for some advice on a more personal level and say you know what if you hear anything, I want you to tell me. Tell me the good, the bad and the ugly rather than what do you think about this idea.

One superintendent mentioned a similar situation, where if there is trust between themselves and a principal, the open dialogue leads to a willingness to accept information gathered from staff during a school visit. The hierarchical component was seen as diminished, and the performance appraisal seen as more looking for ways to support practice than ways to find weaknesses that could be linked to a power and control type of relationship. The superintendent perceived it as:

... We probably have more open dialogue, more open honest dialogue, more willingness to say this is where I'm at and I haven't got this far with x and y yet. I mean there is more transparency, on both sides... You can have dialogue about what someone needs. My inquiry conversation this morning with that principal and they know I'm going to go digging in their staff asking them what that principal says and they are okay with that... If there's congruity or incongruity with the message I receive, they'll be okay whatever comes of it...

A principal had a similar perspective on their leadership practice, and how they looked at the superintendent as a 'critical friend'. They saw this as vital to their practice and being able to move staff practice forward. The other set of eyes, that perspective without judgment was seen as crucial to being an effective school leader:

Leadership practice would be one that again, I think it just empowers you to know that you can make decisions for your school without being judged by your Superintendent. And that as a leader of a school, I know that I have a very positive relationship as I do that you know when he visits the school I can just say I want you to be my critical friend. I want you to go through the school now and look for these, for these things that we're working on. So I am comfortable enough to say, yeah, go through my school and I want to hear for the look fors, and I'd like some feedback. So I am open to the feedback from a superintendent

because obviously they visit lots of schools so I would like some feedback on what, I think that's critical too...

**d) Subtheme: Trusting.** When trust was seen as part of the relationship, system and school leaders identified three practices as present: taking risks, communicating, and each party being open to feedback. Specific behaviours were also described, behaviours which one could connect with emotional intelligence as well as the personal leadership resources identified in the OLF (2013). Being able to extend trust towards the other while supporting, relating, and relying on the other was seen as key behaviours within relationships.

Trusting was seen as directly connected to openness. However, when addressing trusting the other, most participants narrated experiences that were from a negative perspective, where the behaviour of trusting the other had not occurred and what had ensued. Superintendents addressed situations involving a former director, their own peers, as well as trustees and principals. Specifically, one superintendent reflected on a situation that had occurred a number of years ago, involving an open meeting where the director at that time encouraged addressing trust between superintendents and principals via an open survey involving technology that would show the immediate responses to the audience. The superintendent explained:

It was really about in my view - it was all about trust. I think you were there when a few years back [name] was the [principal association] guy, and we were somewhere. The director was there [name] and we were doing this survey about trust between administrators and superintendents as you recall and you were using clickers? And I'm sitting at a table with my then superintendent; I was a principal at the time and they were asking me questions about trust. I was clicking away answering these questions with these poor people sitting there and I'm thinking oh my God! Like, if you had a sense that we're doing the survey because there's no trust or there's a lack of trust - how can you do this, in that context? How can you possibly think this is okay to do this in a context where you think that trust isn't good?

Within that particular context, wanting to build trust between the layers of the organization was seen as crucial, but that particular effort was not seen as achieving what it was meant to do. The trusting behaviour was replaced with not knowing what to do, for all those involved, and for this participant who was now a superintendent, the experience was one that was the antithesis of trusting behaviour:

...And I mean, once it started, I mean then it lasted a half an hour, but there are two hundred of us there, or however many there were, myself included. No one stood up and said, you know 'this is really unkind' – nobody did – I didn't; I feel horrible. Who would have got me to stand up in front of the director to say you're really being unkind to a lot of people in the room here and you should quit doing what you are doing. [Laughing] [Inaudible] But it certainly for me, as I look back on it, demonstrated incredible lack of courage or an incredible force field of conformity in the room. I don't know...where people didn't dare ... like I'm sure lots of people in the room as I did, I can't imagine that I was the only one.

One principal explained the lack of trusting behaviour with their superintendent as having to second-guess what they needed to say, share, and do:

If trust is lacking it is very challenging to do your work for a period of time; you sort of find a way, at least for me. So what's my next best move, what my best course of action? Do I pull back more? Do I contribute more? Do I reach out to that person sort of say here this is where I'm at ...do you put yourself out there or do you not and it becomes a dance.

When asked whether this impacted the overall approach to their work, the participant indicated, "Probably...That I might take less risk. I haven't likely taken many risks more recently...yes."

Another principal explained how they saw a trusting behaviour within the day-to-day practice of the superintendent and the possible impact when that trust was not part of the relationship. This was seen as detrimental to being able to lead one's school:

So I just think that it's great we have a relationship with a superintendent who trusts what you're doing but when they start not trusting right, and they start maybe indicating that they want you to go in a different direction then, I think it just becomes very difficult for a leader because you start second guessing everything, right?

This principal continued to explain how they saw the role of the superintendent:

...And I think the job of the superintendent is to guide them; if they're struggling, it's to guide them to, and that's where the POP [problem of practice] comes into place again, guide them to how they can handle that situation to make it better. We're all different leaders, with all different strengths and weaknesses, and you really have to tap in to what your leadership style is. So how you might handle a problem would be different in how I handle it. Is it right or wrong? It isn't, by the end of the day, I can't have someone telling me how to lead my school, and I have to lead my school.

The participants were asked two specific questions related to behaviours exhibited when one disagreed with an other, if there was the perception of punishment, if one did not agree with one's superintendent. One superintendent explained walking that fine line between being transparent and respecting confidentiality, of taking the time to communicate effectively, to explain, and accepting disagreement as adding to one's understanding of the situation and perspective of the principal:

If someone strongly disagrees with me and I have had this, it's not that I lose a sense of trust towards that principal, I just know where they stand and I think you know, I think you have to find some comfort in disagreeing sometimes and it depends on the way that they demonstrate their disagreement. If it's disrespectful, well then that's probably going to impact the way that I trust them. But if they share their views; I always try to see it as food for thought. I don't think you should be linear in your thinking and only think about your side and you know in this case where this individual has disagreed with me the way that we handle a certain program in special education, it's given me some food for thought, that's okay.

A principal addressed the issue of disagreement by separating actions under the control of the superintendent verses those actions, which were not. They explained it as follows:

One of the things I think you have to separate out is what is required by the superintendent, by the organization, by the policy, by the law and what is in the judgement of the superintendent. If a situation I perceive as being primarily in the judgement of the superintendent and I totally disagree, I think that it will depend on my relationship with that superintendent, how I feel about that. If we have a good relationship, if over time this superintendent has built up trust with me, I'm willing to accept that.

The principal further described what occurs when there is not a level of trust between themselves and the superintendent, then, the relationship further disintegrates:

If that's not the case, I think what happens here is any trust that was there it begins to be eroded by this. If the situation is mostly due to the board policy or education law or whatever the situation is, it is what it is. I mean I expect that if I'm in the superintendent's situation, I'm making the same decision.

The second part to the question involved looking at the impact of possible punishment, if one disagreed or did not follow directives as expected, on the trust between the individuals, and more specifically on the relationship between the superintendent and principal. The director saw it as:

It just shuts down the relationship and word gets out. I mean we're a pretty small organization, when you think of it. People, I think, it's any kind of work relationship, I will go to the wall for anybody, but if something happens in the relationship and whether you have been put in your place, then you just basically say you know what, I've learned a lesson. I know that I am not going down that road. I am not going to take a risk anymore. I know I can't trust that person and they have to do something pretty special to earn that trust back again. I've seen that happen and I understand that people really have to think twice about how they pick up and move on.

Superintendents acknowledged this perspective; if one punished an other, possible ramifications included dishonesty, distrust, and less risk taking. A superintendent stated:

It definitely takes away the willingness to be honest in the future and it would take away that openness I would say it would take away the willingness to ask questions. It just diminishes the trust, because the principal will stop asking the question, do what they want to do without doing it, or stop innovating and try new things. You know what she's not going to let me do that anyway because last time I did it, I got my hands slapped for doing it and so I'm just not even going to try.

The superintendent continued to explain how a principal would react if there was fear of reprisal, evidence of a lack of trust:

I'm not going to do anything new, different. I am just going to keep my nose down and do my job, which then becomes a pretty focused, narrow way of trying to lead a school, and they become managers rather than leaders because they feel like they are not being encouraged to risk-take or do innovative things.

Similarly, principals saw punishment, or the threat of possible punishment as a distrusting behaviour which impacted their ability to take risks, be innovative, to challenge the status quo. It enhanced, what one principal described as “the culture of nice”:

I think it has promoted “the culture of nice” and promoted the culture of, do what you’re supposed to and if you’re going to break the rules don’t let anyone know or you know, don’t break any rules but ... and then don’t take any risks, right? I think it restricts us greatly in terms of us moving ... being innovative, moving forward. When I see some of the innovative things but ... like that person in particular who disagreed with a lot of things that happened was also very innovative. By not being open to some of the innovation, we miss opportunities, right?

A second principal explained it through the lenses of hierarchy, where one needed to be aware of one’s place and not question the superintendent:

Possibly because there’s a bit of defined hierarchy and there may be a lack of comfort, with being willing to put your neck out and question something publicly...for fear of repercussion, I suppose. There are some superintendents that I would never question anything they ever did; never, because I know it would be ... I would be putting myself at risk. [Laughs] There are very few, thankfully, but there are some.

And, a third principal explained punishment as possible banishment to another part of the district:

I think, the minute your actions are determined to be punishment, any trusting relationship is gone. If you perceive that what was done to you was on purpose and deliberate and is going to have long lasting ramifications, like we always joke here in [name of county] that you know you’ve screwed up when they send you to whatever the furthest school is out in the west end...

The participants shared their perspectives of trusting behaviours through ‘deficit’ lenses. The experiences shared presented various instances where they explained the lack of trusting of the other, the fear of retribution and its overall negative impact on their career, both in the short and long terms.



**e) Subtheme: Supporting, relating, and relying on the other.** The final subtheme of practices and behaviours relates to the concepts of supporting, relating and relying on the other. These subthemes and the behaviours they describe appeared through the interview when referring to the facets of trust, more specifically when addressing benevolence, competence and openness. The participants used these three specific descriptions of behaviours to explain their understanding of the facets of trust, and how these related to their own work.

The three cohorts of participants connected supporting to benevolence, being able to relate to others as a required competence, and relying on the other to be able to do one's own work of leading, as part of reliability. The director explained support via the building the capacity of others, of looking to the next group of leaders that would carry the system forward. They saw it as helping others reach their potential as leaders through their ongoing support:

I think any good leader should be developing leaders too. I think you should be developing the next person or persons who could replace you and so to provide multiple opportunities for principals and superintendents to be successful. And I think when I look at the leadership and the leadership gap, I want to give every opportunity to leaders who can be successful, who can take that next step and I think people are flattered when they are tapped – you know, that I see something in you. I see potential in you – you have unique skills and abilities and I will do anything that I can do to make sure that you are successful.

However, the director also addressed the fine line between supporting and managing others. Considering the hierarchical framework of a school district, the director presented their dilemma of balancing trying to make a more flat organization that supports its leaders but one that did not micromanage their day-to-day work:

I guess it's a matter of I've got work to do; I mean the work that I do is different from the work of a superintendent and the work of a principal so we all have different work but how do you, then in a big flat-line organization, make sure that

people feel supported and not micro-managed and still make sure everything is moving along. That's a big question.

One superintendent commented on the work sanctions that the school district had just experienced, and how that had impacted the principals. The caring and support is portrayed in their understanding of what needed to be done to help the principals through the difficult time:

I couldn't imagine what it was like for them to be running those schools with everybody basically on work to rule and not even having a partner and so I kind of decided that my role was ...going to be their vice principal or I was going to be their co-administrator and just listen.

Another superintendent saw it as being there for the principals, of making sure that they felt comfortable sharing any of the issues, so that they could be of support:

They've got to know you've got their back. And when they're struggling you have to be there for them; you have to drop everything and be there for them. It's so important and scary too because sometimes you don't know; because sometimes they hide it and then you feel like, wow I would've been there for you, if I had known.

The principal perspective was similar to the superintendent, seeing support as part of a trusting relationship. A principal equated support to having the superintendent on call, and available if they required them to help with a difficult situation, if they were needed:

I always feel supported whether it's professional or personal. Should something come up if need support - I don't think there was never any time I asked when I haven't received the support that I needed. For example, I was preparing for a suspension meeting with a parent that was going on yesterday. The SO [superintendent] sent me a text asking if I wanted her to be there. So we have that relationship and I know she is available to support me in whatever capacity.

Another principal explained it as being able to know that if they were having difficulty balancing all of the issues, the superintendent would be available to support by

taking some of the issues so that they could concentrate on what they saw as the heart of their work at the school:

One of the things that he has done recently in terms of and I don't know if this is touching on benevolence but I think he's recognized the load that I have in dealing with some of the challenges and tried to take his share of it so that I could continue to focus on the students and the staff at the school. And when I say load, I'm talking about some of the more politically challenging issues that arise for the school.

The next behaviour revolved around relating to others, within one's role as a system or school leader. This was seen as an aspect of openness, and again, all three cohorts of participants provided examples or their explanations on how if one could relate to the other, that impacted their ability to do their work in a positive manner. The opposite created a sense of discomfort, even distrust and impacted their ability to lead in an effective manner. The director shared a decision made with the associate directors on staying connected to the principals and staff in schools, to help them relate to those directly involved with students. However, their intent to establish a better understanding, to relate to school principals and teachers was not seen in the same vein by some principals and staff:

...They [teachers] are really, really nervous. They are not sure why the three of us are there. I heard this morning that one of the unions ... a half dozen of the teachers in the school are really nervous about us coming in, but we are not there to judge or evaluate in fact, I don't even know who the teachers are in this school because I've never been to the school... we want to see physically where the school is, and see what it looks like and see the principal and meet some teachers to wander through, have a casual conversation, and we're not there to judge.

One superintendent explained relating to the principals within their community of schools as ensuring that their voice, their perspective on a specific challenge was part of their understanding of the matter before engaging in the conversation at the senior

administration table. They saw their relationship as based on being able to be open and accepting of their principals' perspective on a specific matter:

I think the best relationship I've ever had with principals is when I come to them for an answer, a solution. I don't always agree with it, but I come to them first, they love it when you come to them before you go to [the senior administration], I'm telling you. They just respect that all to heck because once it goes to [the senior administration], a decision comes out, right. So if whenever possible, I try to go to them before and that's built a lot of trust, a lot of trust.

One superintendent discussed their perspective of how being more open, more connected emotionally as a key element for others to be able to relate to them. This was something that they saw as helping the connection between themselves and others and something they had to continue to work on, to help establish trusting relationships with both principals and their superintendent colleagues. It was explained as:

I think they [principals] need to see you as you are. I mean some of us are open personally in a way that maybe lends some credibility to that. I mean, they talk about their cat and their dog. I don't think I'm as open that way. We've done the EQ 360 stuff. For me, the big thing is that maybe I don't open up emotionally, and don't share with those around me. I'm harder to read from an emotional perspective because I don't put it out there, and so that's a part for me, that's always been work. In terms of the openness, to be fully open to my colleagues, I might be willing to allow them to see a little more of the emotional side of me, which I don't think I do much.

The principal stance was similar in that relating to the other, principal to superintendent, was seen as being able to be open with each other so that one could be more effective at reflecting on one's practice. If a principal felt a connection, was able see that the superintendent was relating to what they were experiencing, how they were trying to problem solve, this had a positive impact on their practice. One principal described it as follows, when talking about brainstorming with one superintendent with whom they had a trusting relationship, where there was more of a coaching approach to that of another superintendent that was directing what they were going to do:

...I have felt as though my call was like a brainstorming session and yet were both kind of coming to the same conclusions. Or we are both coming to a conclusion but then you know a previous superintendent might have said, but you can't do that or but we would be able to do that and that's okay. I understand that. So what could we do and that sort becomes a whole different dynamic. So what if this happened?

For this principal, they wanted the superintendent to be a sounding board, and to provide the opportunity to go over possible next steps as opposed to telling them what to do:

Well I would try this. What if that happened, well I would try this right and I even recall sort of hearing that frequently from a former superintendent right, what about this/what about that ... have you tried? That helps. For me that helps me, right. Help me formulate my plan of action right instead of it being no, and not really any discussion about why. I guess I need for my own...for my own leadership, I kind of need the why too.

One principal shared an experience where they had made a request for a change of schools for the coming school year. The request was not supported, and the principal explained how they felt when later in the summer they were asked if they wanted to now move to another school. They felt that if the superintendent had been more open, they would have been able to relate better to the superintendent and the previous decision to not have them lead that initial school. The principal explained it as follows:

Well and I get that that process has to be, it is on a need-to-know basis. I guess I would've just liked a little head's up about why I wasn't getting the move and you know what, if [name of superintendent] had looked me in the eye and said, I don't think you can manage 600 kids, I'd have been okay, okay...

Behaviours that demonstrated relying on the other was another key component that emerged during the research. It was seen as needed due to, not only the amount of work to lead a system or a school, but also to the complexity of the work to be done to support students and their families. The mutuality or reciprocity this particular behaviour was seen as crucial by the three cohorts of participants; to be able to rely on each other

reflected trust in the other. From the director perspective, being able to rely on the other, in this case with superintendents, meant that they are able to rely on being able to be open, to share what has not been done, what fell through the cracks:

I've had a couple of superintendents come to me and say you know what, I'm sorry. I dropped the ball or I know that this is due next week and I'm struggling to get it done, and they feel open enough to express why they can't and yes, there again – come and talk to me about it then you know ... at the crunch time, and find out, okay where is it? What happened? I don't want to go back and I don't have the time to go and check up on them and micro-manage. I think when you're given a job or you step up to this type of role, then you have to respect people and trust that they are going to pull through for you and deliver.

One superintendent described the similarity between what they have to do, and what principals also do in their roles. The ability to accomplish the work, in this particular situation, communicating with a parent, was anchored in reciprocating in the communication of information. Without both the superintendent and principal being able to rely on each other, the ability to address the parent concern became difficult to do. It was explained as follows:

Principals, being reliable? I think it's similar. I think you know following up if I need some more information. So I've got a parent who called me and they want to talk to me about their child. Well I need to gather some information before I can call them back. I'm looking for the principal to provide that information and so I send them an e-mail or phone call and they get back to me with that information and so then I can make that parent call and then I'll follow up with the principal afterwards... Yes on both ends. They will follow up. It's kind of like that mutual ... very mutual, right? I don't have different expectations for me than I would have for them, right? So it would be the same.

Similar to the superintendent's perspective above, a principal explained their need for reliability as being able to rely on the superintendent to handle certain aspects of what they are trying to achieve within their school community. One cannot do the work alone; there needs to be a mutual understanding of which part of the work will be done to effectively handle the situation. The principal explained:

As far as the superintendent is concerned; on their side, one of things that I need in terms of reliability is I need the Superintendent to deal with those situations, particularly parents that I haven't been successful with. So if they say, you know, I'll handle this one, I need them to be reliable on that and I've got a parent right now whom we've worked with for two years that where my goal is not necessarily to change the parents' behaviour it's to try to manage the situation as best as I can.

Due to the complex nature of the work, the principal stated having the support of the superintendent key to being able to be effective in their role:

...But I can't do it alone; I need the superintendent to help me with that situation and there are some things I can deal with at the school level and I'll do that with the vice principal but there are just some things that I need the superintendent to support me and help me with and so I need the reliability with respect to that.

This second theme has looked at the perspective of the participants on specific practices and behaviours that can be builders and maintainers of trust, or deterrents to trust within the superintendent-principal relationship. The facets of trust, the behaviours and practices that build trust exist within a culture and climate unique to the participants within this particular study. The next section will briefly look at the participants' perception of the reality of their district's culture and climate, and their impact on their relationships.

### **Theme 3: Cultures and climates that nourish trust**

For the purpose of this study the researcher used definitions for culture and climate as explained by Schein (1999). He described climate as "a cultural artifact resulting from espoused values and shared tacit assumptions" (Schein, 1999, p. 3). This helped situate the information provided by the participants in the study, especially when sharing their perspectives on why they did things a certain way, what they believed in, and what their reality actually was in light of their relationship with the superintendent as well as the district organization. The researcher considered the subthemes of

relationships, described by the participants within their particular context, and their explanation of individual versus organizational trust as a result of those relationships to be their own representations of what they believed in, what they saw as part of their lived and shared experiences. These ‘cultural artifacts’ in turn, represented the culture of the school district, or as Schein (1999) explained, “a ‘state’ of the existing system, even as one knows that the system is dynamic and perpetually evolving” (Schein, 1999, p.4). The climate, in effect, appears as a barometer to the culture, in this case the perceived relationships, and the individual and organizational trust as a result of these relationships feeds the overall culture of the school district. The subthemes, which emerged at the time of this study revolved around how a positive environment enabled, or empowered versus the hierarchical dynamics mentioned by some of the participants, which resulted in fear and status quo in one’s leadership practice.

**a) Subtheme: Relationships as an artifact of the climate.** Relationships were seen as key to all three cohorts of participants, especially those grounded in trust. This was seen as the only way to meet the combined expectations set by the parents, community members, and the Ontario Ministry of Education. The director addressed this when looking at trust and sound relationships as the foundation to a sound school system, starting with the senior administration team:

I think it’s [trust] the foundation of all the work that we do. I think if you don’t have a sense of trust and you don’t have strong interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships then I don’t think you can get the best out of people and work as a team for the benefit of student achievement. So it’s foundational in my mind; I feel I have a sense of trust and good relationships with superintendents and I feel extremely privileged to work with the senior team. I have heard of other senior teams across the province. I have seen them in action and I have been part of some dysfunctional senior teams, and the work doesn’t get done.



A superintendent also explained the need for trusting relationships between peers at the senior administration level as key to moving the system forward. Without this trust, the lack of a good relationship was similar to jamming the cogs of the system or organization, where an initiative or project was not supported and did not get implemented due to the micropolitics within the group of superintendents. It is explained as follows:

Well even peer-to-peer like around the admin council table it is hard if you don't feel that there are those supportive relationships with everybody around the table, then it's going to be challenging to be open with them during those conversations... I may have questions about it, about the position or about supporting the position but it depends on who is kind of initiating that position and the relationship that you have with them too so...or the influence that person has around the group, in getting the support.

Another superintendent spoke to the power, and the added responsibility of being in the role of superintendent. It was not about being 'the boss' or telling the other what to do, it was about serving:

I think the more power you have, the more you are in a position of power, the more responsibility you have to build relationships and trust. That's our job. We're in a position of power, there's no doubt about it and if it's all about ego than we're dead in the water before we even start. The greatest leaders, it's not about ego. It's about serving others, it's servant leadership so in that situation you don't go in and direct the principal, you go in and have, and if it takes two hours, it takes two hours to talk about it and work together and come up with a solution but don't just direct people; that's not what this is about. I'm your boss; do it this way; it can't be about that. Because then if you lead, who is going to follow? Are they going to follow out of fear or what?

Considering the aspect of high trust verses trust as it relates to a professional relationship, one superintendent extended the comparison of that relationship to the organization:

...Where there is high trust, there's respectful, open dialogue that is free from judgement, pushing your thinking, rather than criticizing. And though in the trust relationship there's still trust, there's still a good relationship but there's a sense of criticism and judgement and I think in those organizations where there's

probably high trust, there's an openness, a collaboration, a respectful professional banter, I guess it would be.

A principal explained the importance of relationships as key to their work, and during their performance appraisal process, shared that leveraging relationships with all was key to achieving what is expected:

So what I had put in place, this was a couple of years back, was building relationships is one of them I think and I felt that that is all encompassing because if you don't build relationships, you can't move the learning agenda forward, you can't engage parents, you can't build relationships with your leader, your superintendent; the whole thing was very important at what point in my life I was at.

Where does it all start? From a principal's perspective, it starts with the superintendent modeling trust within their relationships and then moves to the principals within their community of schools. That trusting relationship builds the team and effectiveness of the system. It was explained as follows:

Well, you know one of the roles that a superintendent would have, and particularly in the communities of schools, is to try to foster teamwork among principals and those trusting relationships are going to have a positive outcome in building that team. It starts with the superintendent and then it's got to work I think with the other principals and I think as we begin to work together as a team, I think it's going to benefit, we have to be systems thinkers a bit here, right? If it's going to benefit every school in the area and not just my school or not just the school down the road...

**b) Subtheme: Individual versus organizational/collective trust.** A subtheme that emerged centred on some participants sharing that while they may have trust in a particular individual, they did not necessarily have the same trust for the organization. One superintendent shared how disparate the information can be when trying to assess how the principals perceive the trust, and relationship with their superintendent verses when their overall level of trust with all superintendents, or the organization as a whole. This superintendent reflected on the disconnect as follows:

So, does trust extend beyond the person? Can you have trust over the entity called, the superintendent, or, the Board, or our senior administration or whatever because in education there are tons of examples like that in a teaching world ....For example, they will say, oh that mark is crazy because he got it at summer school. It can't mean anything and you say well the curriculum is the same. In fact, the teacher's a friend of yours who taught him.

They continued to explain the difference in perception when one moved from being a principal to the role of superintendent:

And then when you're the principal at your school it's like a good relationship but then when you're downtown, you're part of some amorphous, you know, you're one of those downtown people. And so maybe there is something to this notion of trust between levels of authority or between hierarchical constructs and the person.

Further, the superintendent explained the discrepancy between trust for the individual superintendent and not for the entire system or district:

You know, because at the personal level it seems, as I said our example [end of year surveys completed by principals on superintendent], from our community of schools and it seems like there's trust. Either I am completely blind to what's going on and have a way out to lunch view of what's happening, because I can't imagine that my colleagues don't have similar experiences in their community of schools times twelve, so how can there be no trust?

A principal shared a situation where the school was trying to go in one direction, had the support of the school staff and community for an initiative, but the district chose not to give the approval for it. The principal disagreed with the decision; it did not reduce the trust for the superintendent because this had been a system decision, hence a bit of loss of trust in the system.

...So ultimately the board chose not to go with the plan that would've worked for my school and so I had to abandon it at that point and I disagreed. Knowing that there were other jurisdictions that were doing exactly what I thought we should do, I disagreed but I also recognized that that's the board's job is to interpret the [Education] Act that way and make a decision that would be used in schools consistently across our board and so it wasn't necessarily about me but it really impacted me negatively. And so I did disagree with that and that diminished trust in this case, in this situation not so much...because that wasn't the

superintendent's judgment that was more about organizational, an organizational position...

Another situation that was shared by a principal described the ebb and flow of their trust with individuals, and that when all was said and done, it came to believing in the good intent of those making decisions, on behalf of the organization. The participant shared how their own practice as the leader of the school was based on having trust unless proven otherwise, and how a principal had to work with others within the organization and others to arrive at the appropriate decisions for the good of everyone:

That's exactly how I work with staff and somebody articulated that to me about a year ago, they said your mode of operating with people is, I will trust you until I can't. But you know that situation I described regarding my colleague... That was a shock for me; you know I had been generally going along believing that I could trust people who were in positions of leadership in the organization and that challenged my belief, for sure.

The shock experienced by the principal was mitigated by their willingness to trust others within the organization:

But I think over time, I've dealt with it but also I really try to work on trusting the judgement of the folks in the organization because they are good at what they do and they are there because they are competent and they are capable of doing a good job. And it's my job to figure out how I can work with them around the decisions that need to be made and how they impact schools.

The ability of system and school leaders to co-construct relationships anchored in trust, through their day to day interactions be they more at a personal level, or at a professional level, is part of the tapestry mentioned earlier. This researcher looked at the artifacts collected during the interview process as part of what makes the entire design of the tapestry, the environment and actual culture of the system, or school district. The next two subthemes provide insights on what participants described as a positive environment, and how empowering practices are part of such an environment.

**c) Subtheme: Positive environments.** As the researcher explored the facets of trust, and the practices and behaviours that were seen by the participants as evidence of trust, or its lack within their relationships, it was impossible to ignore the specific context of the environment in which the participants worked. The three cohorts of participants provided examples that helped understand how they perceived their environment and its impact on their work. When the director talked about the purpose of the school district, they spoke from the lenses of the leader of the district, and what should be at the heart of that environment:

As I said before it's the foundation of all the work we do, trust and integrity are important to me, personally. I see that we want, we need to make the right decisions for children and you can't do that when people have hidden agendas and they are out for political expediency as opposed to doing the right thing. And I think, as a director, sometimes I see decisions made not in the best interests of the children but in personal gains for people whether or not it's a staff, superintendent, or principal. They are personally gaining from a decision, versus doing the right thing, and really looking at the work that we have to do with students and student achievement.

Be it for personal recognition, or from a professional silo, the director explained that this approach to leading at the senior administration level was not conducive to meeting the end goal of supporting the students they serve. To alleviate the micropolitics at the senior administration level, the current and past directors worked on facilitating dialogue that would help create an environment where openness was present, alongside the ability for all at the senior administration table to build trust within their own relationships. This had been part of a group exercise at one of the annual retreats; the current director evaluated the process as one step in the building of a more positive environment, starting with the superintendents:

Maybe we're not 100% [having trust], but I think it really did a lot to have people freely express their views and be open and honest to the extent that they felt they could with a larger group to say, this is what I think is really going on. And you

have to have that; otherwise, I just wouldn't want to work in that type of a team, or organization.

A positive environment is where openness and vulnerability are part of the discourse, and a superintendent, when looking at their own role within the district in creating a positive environment, described it as follows:

I think if we truly want to make a difference, support students in schools; the whole system, you need to have that to really have an impact and get your work done you need to have that trusting relationship. It also allows you to support that positive working environment that you are working in, and you feel comfortable and confident because you know that it's a highly trusting organization that you are working in.

When that positive environment exists, another superintendent explained it as follows:

It's just liberating. It's exciting; it gives you energy; it's energizing; you want to be the best you can be and you want them to be the best they can be. You're not holding back, you're not wondering whether it's a good decision because if you really trust them, you can ask. You know that you can build things together. It's supportive, really easy to model the actions because you know you're supported. The actions that you believe in: no ego, non-judgmental, yeah...

That positive environment then is seen as encouraging openness, risk taking and modeling by both the superintendent, and the principal. Again, one thinks of the reciprocal aspect to this process of building trust in an environment that encourages it from all parties, especially when looking at the work of improving schools. One superintendent described it as:

In terms of openness in my work with schools and school improvement when we're looking at moving forward with a plan, it's having principals be fully prepared to say I don't know how to do that. It is my openness to sometimes hit at too. Well okay how do you know that this is your greatest need, maybe they don't know how to assess the data, maybe they then have the data and then they have no idea what might be the next step for their staff. So having that, again it goes back to the vulnerability piece – be willing to share. Here's what I know: here's what I don't know. And here's where I need help and that can go for us too when we're trying to solve problems as superintendents.

Without that positive environment, trust will not be able to exist and grow within the relationships of the superintendents and principals. The perception of possible punishment was described by a superintendent as damaging to the relationships and the overall work environment. This was seen as especially difficult when an educational leader wears two hats, that of supporter but also that of supervisor and must still try to maintain a positive environment:

...Trust doesn't grow well where there are bad feelings. So I think that punishing anybody is not going to do anything for building trust between a principal and a superintendent. It's hard because there are things that you need to do as a leader whether you are the principal, vice principal or the superintendent that may be construed as a punishment, but really it's just you doing your job because there's a supervisory component that could be misconstrued as a punishment. But I think even maybe when there's those supervisory requests or expectations that probably does some damage to trust.

When all is said and done, trust and positive relationships help build the environment where one has to work, be it as superintendent or principal. That day-to-day environment where one leads needs to be anchored in trust, to be inviting for all, as explained by a superintendent:

...So you know that's why trust is so important to me when I come to work because I want to be surrounded by relationships that are positive and good and will make me feel good about my work and I want the people I work with to feel the same way. I don't want them to not look forward to me coming, right. You know because then they don't want to come to work that day and nobody should feel that way. Yeah, so that's why it's important.

The principal perspective was similar to that of the superintendent, where examples provided described the positive work environment where trust, and strong mutually supportive relationships helped foster risk taking, innovation, and reflection on one's leadership practice. A principal described this positive environment as impacting their ability to reflect on their own leadership practice as well as empowering them to make changes:

You're much more invested, not just trying to endure that three hours because it can be ... people think of it that way – I have, oh my goodness! Just get through it as opposed to, wow! This is going to be the best; I can't miss this in a million years because this is going to be the best two or three hours! Well that's ... I have three other groups outside of my own PLN [professional learning/leading network] that we're doing, meeting very regularly, all within a five or ten day span. We need to make it come on clear your calendars let's do this; let's get together; let's practice this. Really for them to do that, it is sort of leading them to see that they ought to, as opposed to telling them. That's advantageous for the superintendent.

The confidence, shown by the superintendent towards the principal, was seen as helping to create that positive environment that brought more trust, risk taking in one's leadership practice, fulfillment in one's day to day efforts as a school leader:

If my superintendent has confidence in me, I can have confidence in the decisions that I make, I can have confidence in what I have to do today and tomorrow and the next day. And I think with that confidence I think obviously you feel a lot more fulfilled in your job and the work that you do. The second thing is, and I think this is a natural outcome, is you're more likely to take a risk when that positive, trusting relationship is there. And it's not like I wouldn't tell the superintendent, this is what I'm thinking, this is what I'd like to try, it's you're more willing to even have that conversation and just say I want to give this a shot, what do you think? Or in some cases just give it another shot. And then talking about it later...

The importance of being able to work in an environment that was positive, where high trust was the foundation upon which the work was done to support students was passionately described as follows by one principal:

...Because I don't want to work in a place where there isn't trust. I don't want to work in a school or in an organization where we have to second-guess intentions, we have to second-guess behaviours all the time. I don't think that we can allow people to feel fulfilled in the work they do, to really help children, to really move a school forward unless we have the currency of trust in a school.

**Subtheme: An overwhelmingly hierarchical versus empowering culture.** As explained at the beginning of this third theme, culture and climate emerged as key elements. If one considers the climate as an organization's barometer for its overall culture, it was important to explore how the participants perceived the impact of the



district's culture on their leadership practice, and on the trust within those relationships.

During the course of the interviews, the concepts of hierarchy verses empowerment surfaced in all three cohorts of participants, but with a very different set of lenses. The director explained how important it was for them, in their role, to seek the perspective of all stakeholders so that they could be informed and knowledgeable in their work. This quest for knowing transcended the hierarchy of the organization but that was not without its challenges for the director. They began by explaining it as:

...I don't really see any hierarchy. You don't see any role definition; you just see the work to be done. You have a different view. It doesn't matter if you're the superintendent, or the principal, or the student, or the teacher. I want to know; tell me from your perspective, what does this look like? And how can I be more effective within my work because I want to know...

They continued the explanation through the lenses of needing to empower every stakeholder group in being able to voice their perspectives on what was needed to support students:

Transparency. Openness. Some of the colleagues, some of the superintendents would say why would you go to that person or that group for advice? They don't understand it, for me it's not a big deal. I don't care; I want the best possible outcome and decisions. I don't care that the trustees and new advisory committee – they'll [superintendents] say well you know they're into the kitchen and it's more operational; you know they have a perspective. They'll see it from a parental view or from the community. They just see things from a different view; it's not us versus them. They've got a different worldview. They have a different set of networks and people they connect with. They hear things from the community that we don't hear. It's not a big deal for me. It's kind of flat-lined and not hierarchical at all.

The director, while considering the concept of a 'flat-lined' organization, and the empowerment of others, saw this, not without its pitfalls, especially if the superintendents did not support a more benevolent approach in leading, especially while encouraging risk taking by principals:

I've messaged on numerous times at the system leader meeting around innovation and risk-taking, so they've heard it from me and I've had feedback from principals and superintendents to say, you know what, when you make that statement as the director, people really paid attention and they feel empowered by the fact that you've actually communicated that to them. And I see and hear that principals are now saying okay now I can go and try this and then sometimes when things don't work out with principals and superintendents, they've either made a mistake or they know about something; it saddens me when a superintendent is hard on them.

The superintendent perspective of empowerment was anchored in being able to trust the other, be it a colleague or a principal, regardless of the rank, which resulted in a better self and ability to lead without fear of being criticized or judged. There was a joy in doing the work as opposed to the day-to-day grind. One superintendent explained it as follows:

I think it's the ability to be authentic with another person, knowing that it's free from judgement and criticism but will also bring you to a better place, whether professionally or personally so the same thing if you're thinking of trust in a marriage, it's the ability to really be your true self and know that that person is going to make you a better you and it's the same thing professionally. If I think of that individual, that principal, I can be my true self as a leader and a person because really even though we're all leaders, we're really, all just people. And I know that that person will actually make me a better professional, without feeling like I'm being criticized or judged. And I can rely on them to do their job, so I trust them to do their job.

When defining trust, one superintendent explained it as key to relationships that would make the work not only easier to do, but more pleasant, eliminating the need to tell people what to do, in essence, empowering them:

Well, in its absence [absence of trust], I can't do the things that are important in my work or private life. So having warm, caring, respectful relationships with other people around common interests is impossible in the absence of trust. I can still work – I can work; grind it out; punch a clock; people can do that; I can do that. But the joy you get out of the things that we do in life are really predicated on their being a positive, and fruitful relationship, and that won't happen in the absence of trust. Yeah, I can be the boss and direct people and tell people what to do and in front of my face they'll do it, but behind my back they won't.

The opposite of a culture that empowers is one that was described as ‘debilitating’, where people put their head down, and where risk taking is not attempted in fear of reprisal, especially if seen as not successful. One superintendent stated:

It can be debilitating to a school; and it can be debilitating to an organization. I will use military terms here; if I’m more concerned about the fire from behind then the stuff coming at me, then there’s a huge problem. So I have to feel, I have to believe that I am going to be working shoulder to shoulder with people beside me and that all of our intent is to the greater good. That has to be; it’s always been my belief system and I need to know and be prepared to shoulder my part in that and do my part to make sure that I uphold that virtue.

When there is no culture of empowerment, the perception of the environment was seen as one where again, the ‘culture of niceness’ silenced the voices, in this case, the voice of some of the superintendents around the senior administration table:

I think that certainly that culture of niceness exists, because people may take it personally if you challenge something or you share your ... Just because I might share an opinion that’s different than your opinion doesn’t mean that I am not supportive of you and what you want to do. People will see that as a lack of support too and it’s easier just to be nice and smile and agree with everybody. Because sometimes you feel like it’s not worth getting shut down so I’m going to ... you know... head down, do my work, and move on because ... you sometimes can be punished too, right, depending on, you know, if you share your feelings about something as well. Or your opinion and that opinion might be different than other people’s opinion.

When there appears to be a lack of benevolence, of truly empowering the other to take a risk, and it is perceived as doing something wrong, one superintendent explained it as not being able to create a culture that truly nourishes trust and the ability of leaders to take risk in their practice:

...I think with many things where somebody takes a risk, we, for lack of a better term, beat them up because it didn’t work out. It’s because we don’t appreciate the context within which they are making that decision. They’re doing those things – they’re trying those things. We think we do – we think we know it, or we think we experience it or we think we understand it but we’re not really in their place. We’re not really in [pause]...so when you say ‘how could you?’ – how could you agree to that? How did you make that decision and even when you

explain it after the fact. Well it was like this...that doesn't translate [risk taking environment].

When looking at empowering verses more hierarchical leadership practices, participants within the principal cohort spoke of self-direction, an element of reciprocity or mutuality, and shared leadership. There was also mention of how a hierarchical approach to leading led to compliance verses empowerment. One principal stated in their definition of trust, that when trust existed between themselves and the superintendent, the following occurred:

...It allows me to put my best forward everyday because I'm making decisions for myself; I am allowed to self direct because there is an understanding that...there's a two-way understanding, when I get lost, I can call somebody who will help find me or if they see that I'm off course and I'm not paying attention, they will re-direct me kindly.

Another principal explained how trust within their relationship with the superintendent increased their level of engagement, and a desire to do more than required:

I would say that I feel more engaged in my leadership work and willing to put my own leadership out there among colleagues when I know that there's a high level of trust between the superintendent and myself. I would be willing to lead more with my colleagues, as opposed to sitting back and waiting to be asked.

This principal added that they were prepared to of support to the superintendent, to help with the work of leading within their professional network if trust was present:

The superintendent – if there is a good level of trust, I am more than willing to carry some of the load for the superintendent absolutely, whether it be work within the community of schools or the PLN [professional learning/leading network] work, because I have been working on it a little bit. Absolutely, I don't mind just facilitating and taking a leadership role in this or helping my colleagues with it; no problem, but on the flip side, if the level of trust is not great then I'll be waiting to be asked [loud laughter] I wouldn't start though to do it on my own.

One principal who had the opportunity to work in another school district explained the differences they observed how, in that environment, the culture was one of

questioning, of empowering of school principals as opposed to what they were experiencing within this district. They described it as:

It's interesting when I was in [name of school board] before I came to [name of school board] there was a different culture between principals and superintendents. Principals did question the work, not just the work, but also decisions and policy much more vocally than they do here. And when I first came here, through all of admin meetings I sat in, there's very little public dissension on things...I think there is more of a culture for a willingness to be able to be open to questioning, and I don't know that we necessarily have it at our school board, a culture for questioning what we're doing and why we're doing it.

This unease in questioning, of feeling empowered was described by another principal as that 'culture of nice', where they saw it inhibiting the taking of risks; in essence this was the opposite of a culture that was empowering, where one followed the status quo:

I think it has promoted "the culture of nice" and promoted the culture of - do what you're supposed to and if you're going to break the rules, don't let anyone know or you know, don't break any rules but ... and then don't take any risks, right? I think it restricts us greatly in terms of us moving ...[pause] being innovative, moving forward. When I see some of the innovative things but ... like that person in particular who disagreed with a lot of things that happened was also very innovative. By not being open to some of the innovation, we miss opportunities, right?

Working in an organization whose culture is empowering was seen as impacting not only the superintendent-principal relationship and way of leading, but also the relationship between the principal and their staff. One principal described their approach of 'leading from the middle', where it was a combination of principal and staff led decision-making. It led them to describe their own leadership practice as follows:

Shared leadership, where I am not the only one who makes decisions here because sometimes people would look at me ... make a decision and staff will do that to me all the time. If I make decisions, not with them, why am I making the decisions? Because people some days do that ... I am not indecisive and I try to gauge where people stand and involve them in the decision-making. So I would say again shared ... I lead from the middle more than anything else although there are some days I wish I was more in front of it ... but that's just my own reflection.

Empowerment was seen as essential to doing the work, in this case, improving the achievement of all students in the school district. To be able to move away from mere compliance, the principal as well as the superintendent expressed the importance of building and maintaining trust within their relationships. A culture of empowerment needed to be grounded in open communication, which would in turn, hopefully impact principals and staff to go beyond compliance. A principal it described as:

So how can I set that atmosphere for it to happen [improving student achievement]? It's through the relationships that I'm building. So and how can I, through building these relationships, have staff not just comply but also really want to do it? So compliance is easy, they'll just say, shut her mouth, you know, she'll stop talking or watching or doing because I am going to do it. How does that become embedded practice for them? How is that...so I am looking for more...that was the building part of, showing them that...together we'll move forward and I think it's important that you showcase when there is growth and when there is something you celebrate; that so you don't wait for the end but little areas along the way.

Another principal explained the work as being collective work, where as the school leader, they were impacting student learning via others, namely their staff. Again, trust and sound relationships were seen as helping create a culture that is empowering:

You work through other people, to impact student learning so working through other people will happen if there is trust and good relationships. And if it's not done this way, chances are that nothing is going to happen. We can punish people and make them believe what we believe and agree, convince them but are we after compliance or to empower people to be the best that they can be in a way I bet I could ... we have to check on people every day, but without the trust and positive relationships, I'm just asking for compliance. It is the most important; I would say they are very important, trust and relationships. For a superintendent, I don't think it's different, again on the surface it may look like everything is all good but it could be just compliance.

This chapter presented the data collected through 15 cases as part of the inquiry into how superintendents build and maintain trust in their relationships with principals in a school district within the province of Ontario. Through a modified, constant comparative analysis, the researcher was able to identify three themes that respond to the

key research question: 1) facets of trust leading to high trust; 2) practices and behaviours; and 3) the culture and climate that help build, and nourish the superintendent-principal relationship. The next chapter will discuss the importance and potential impact of these themes on the work of system and school leaders.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

#### Introduction

System and school leaders in Ontario need to possess an in depth understanding of their leadership practice as they move to meet the expectations set by Ontarians for their educational system. These expectations, based on four goals (at the least), as stated in *Achieving Excellence* (Ministry of Education, 2014) include: students achieving excellence in academic performance, ensuring equity, and promoting wellbeing for all students, while also enhancing public confidence of Ontario residents in the school system. Leaders need to be able to model ongoing learning on how best to lead and support the work of an education system that will be able to meet these goals across very diverse communities. To achieve this, an adaptive stance by the organization's leaders needs to be present to support continuous learning and encourage reflection upon one's leadership practice. This is at the heart of an education system that describes itself as a learning organization (Senge, 1990). An organizational culture that supports healthy, reciprocal relationships between the organization's leaders is key (Schein, 1985) to the nurturing of continuously learning to lead.

The purpose of this study was to explore how and why superintendents build and maintain trust in their relationship with school principals within a large school system that deals with the ongoing organizational changes and needs of its students, their families, community members, and ministerial expectations. The interpersonal connection between these two educational leaders is at the heart of their ability to move district progress from 'good to great' and the key to sustainability (Leithwood, 2013).



Having sound work relationships built on trust is key to the superintendent-principal dyad, of being both effective operation managers as well as transformational leaders (Leithwood, 2013). This unique relationship between system and school leaders is one that is based on interdependence (Hoy & Smith, 2007); the superintendent within a school system cannot achieve their goals without the engagement, and support of the school principal. In a similar vein, the principal cannot easily meet their own school-based goals without the active support of the superintendent, be it their expertise, access to system resources, or acting as a buffer when exploring new ways of supporting classroom educators.

This symbiotic relationship is one that is based on trust, that is nurtured through regular, personal connections, and which evolves over time, through reciprocity (Hoy & Smith, 2007). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) defined trust as “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open” (p. 204). This definition was used as a foundation for this study on two levels: 1) to anchor the dialogue between the researcher and the participants during the semi-structured interviews; and 2) to help anchor the modified, constant comparative analysis of the information shared by the participants. Many of the participants within this particular school district had been exploring Tschannen-Moran’s latest work, *Trust Matters: Leadership for successful schools* (2014), as part of their professional learning; it made sense for the researcher to continue the discourse with this particular perspective of trust.

This chapter will briefly review how the chosen research methodology supported the inquiry, meshing with the researcher’s Interpretivist stance, and the use of conceptual

frameworks for trust and leadership practice. Insights will be provided on how trust was perceived by the participants; specifically, how they connected key aspects of trust; how they differentiated between trust and high trust; and how trust impacted their practices and behaviours, as well as the overall culture and climate within the school district. The researcher will consider what this means for the district and how it relates to the existing research on trust, high trust, relationships between educational leaders. This will lead to the next chapter, the conclusion, where key recommendations will be presented as possible next steps for the district, as well as further research to help expand our understanding of the connection between trust and the superintendent's relationship with the school principal.

### **Methodology Overview**

An exploratory case study was the chosen methodology used to support the inquiry into how superintendents build and maintain trust within their relationships with school principals. This qualitative research approach connects with this researcher's Interpretivist stance, as it respects the social and experiential dynamics within the superintendent-principal relationship (Yin, 2014). It is based on participants' perceptions in regard to the day-to-day experiences of the superintendent and principal through their relationship and leadership practice. The interaction of the researcher-participant in the interview process provided the opportunity for the co-construction of an understanding on how trust impacted the relationship between the superintendent and principal. The phenomenon of an interpersonal relationship is complex, and indeed even more so when looking at the interplay between district and school leaders. One must consider the individuals, their understanding of the roles they play, and their relationships within the

various contexts and situations of a specific educational organization, in this case a large school district in Ontario (Leithwood, 2013; Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009).

As noted earlier in the thesis, the participants in this study included the director of a school district, six superintendents, and eight school principals. The researcher was able to initially meet all superintendents at one of their regular administration meetings to share information on the research study, and request volunteer superintendent participants who responded directly to the researcher. As well, the district was able to send a system message to all school principals who then connected directly with the researcher. It is important to note that the director volunteered to be part of this research to help present a district leader's perspective. Due to being a single participant in the director participant group, the focus was on overall personal perspectives of the role of the director, superintendent and principal when answering the interview questions. The researcher also communicated findings and prospective recommendations as related to the director in order to respect this individual's unique position within the research.

Data were collected through pre-interview reflective questions, which helped anchor the 60 to 90 minute semi-structured interview (see Appendices G, H, and I). The analysis was informed by key components within the literature review as well as from new themes arising from the participants' interviews. As noted earlier, the data were mined using a modified constant comparative analysis method. This provided the researcher with ongoing insights from each of the three participant groups and helped refine the probes in further interviews and clarify any questions by the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Participants also provided some system communications such

as slide decks, and memos between superintendents and principals to help contextualize the information shared during the interviews.

It is important to note that the researcher has experience as both a principal and a superintendent within the school district where the research was conducted. At the time of the study, the researcher was no longer employed by the school district, but still had occasional professional interactions with various staff members. While this professional history provides for a deeper understanding of the relationship phenomenon between the superintendent and school principal, and the school district, it was important for the researcher to be aware of their personal biases. A research journal was used during the interviews and allowed for an ongoing intentional awareness of personal feelings when conducting the interviews. This was of support during the data analysis process as it provided the researcher with the opportunity to be aware of links between their own personal professional experiences and those of the participants as well as their own understandings of the dynamics of the relationship between the superintendent and the principal.

### **Connections to Literature Review**

Lyon, Möllering and Saunders (2012) identified particular areas of interest when investigating the impact of trust within specific relationships and settings. Three of these areas were used to help frame this research: 1) the antecedents that support the growth of trust; 2) the processes that are used to help build trust; and 3) the context or situation where trust is built. Within the context of what supports the growth of trust, this research also used the facets of trust as identified by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999, 2000), and Tschannen-Moran (2014) as it pertains to principals and teachers: a willingness to be

vulnerable, benevolence, honesty, reliability, competence, and openness. Similarly, the work of Blase (1991), and Blase and Blase (1997, 2001) identified the dynamics at play in the relationships between principals, teachers and parents. The micropolitics that were identified looked at the impact of principals' trust and empowerment of teachers and the impact on teacher practice, especially when trying to improve or change pedagogical practice. For the purpose of this research the above information was used as it relates to the superintendent and principal within a school district. Since both school superintendents and principals have experience as teachers, as mandated by the Ministry of Education for the province of Ontario, extending the above concepts to system and school leaders was seen as a valid assumption.

**a) Facets of trust.** As mentioned in the previous chapter, three main themes emerged from the study, as outlined in Table 2: 1) facets of trust leading to high trust within the superintendent-principal relationship; 2) practices and behaviours as builders of trust within the superintendent-principal relationship; and 3) culture and climate that nourish trust within the superintendent-principal relationship and at the district level. These themes evolved from an in-depth review of the interview transcriptions, where specific thought units were identified and helped the researcher focus on trends within each cohort of participants.

Openness was the most frequently mentioned facet of trust by all three groups of participants. It was seen at the heart of being vulnerable, especially by principals when describing their relationship with their superintendent. A willingness to accept one's humanity, and caring for the other, while making one vulnerable, was explained as a key element of being benevolent in one's role as a leader, both at the system and school

levels. Openness, in combination with vulnerability, benevolence, and reliability, were seen as key elements of a trusting relationship between the principal and superintendent. Having an understanding of how ‘the other’ would respond, having no surprises of the other’s reaction to not knowing the answer to a problem or having made a mistake, reinforced the ability and willingness of both the superintendent and principal to be more open about their practice. Being able to be open and ask for advice, of admitting to having made mistakes, or of disagreeing without fear of reprisals was a key element of the principals’ and some superintendents’ perspective on being able to trust the other.

The other key element of trust proposed by the participants was the concept of competence. While many different aspects of competence such as knowledge of operational matters, continuous learning about instructional practice, and organization skills were listed, being able to build relationships, of collaborating with others were seen as key skills for leadership by the director, superintendents and principals. Alongside openness, being competent at establishing sound, and positive relationships with others was key to building trust, leading to empowering of the other (Blase & Blase, 1997, 1991).

Thus, being vulnerable, open, benevolent, reliable, and having the ability to build relationships were seen as key antecedents to trust within the relationship between superintendent and principal (Lyon, Möllering, & Saunders, 2012). This aligns with the research of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999; 2000); Tschannen-Moran (2014); Hoy, and Smith (2007); Louis (2007); and Bishop and Mulford (1996, 1999) where a positive relationship between teacher and principal was grounded in trust so that the ever

changing demands on teachers were supported by the school leader, and who, in turn, built and maintained trust within the larger educational organization of a school district.

It is important to note that while the focus on trust within this research is based within an educational context, there are some similarities with trust research at large. The work of Kramer and Tyler (1996) on relationships and the impact of trust and distrust alongside Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998); and, Wicks, Berman and Jones (1999), provide similar concepts of trust, and its importance between leaders and followers. Here as well, trust is seen as the ‘glue’ that holds relationships together (Wicks, Berman & Jones, 1999, p. 108) and underpins the overall work of individuals, almost regardless of their work environment.

What of trust as opposed to high trust? What are the differences as seen by the participants? How does high trust between two individuals within an educational organization impact their leadership practice? These are but some of the many questions that emerged during the course of this inquiry into the practice of superintendents as it relates to building trusting relationships with the principals. Research on trust within relationships between educators, more specifically between teachers, principals and superintendents clearly establishes trust as the ‘lubricant’ (as cited by Noonan & Walker, 2008, p. 2) that helps support the one on one relationship that nurtures the partners within the relationship.

The director, superintendents and principal participants in this research saw reliability, openness, and specific leadership skills as key to high trust within their relationships and empowering them in their role as school and system leaders. High trust was described, as having a personal attachment or connection, where there was less

filtering of information, and where there was acceptance that no one knows everything, regardless of their role within the organization. The concept of high trust brought forth more emotional perspectives such as optimism, confidence, recognition of the other, and wanting to work together. These perceptions of levels of trust connect with Samier and Schmidt's (2010) interpretation of levels of trust where low trust is described as based on predictability; medium trust is founded on dependability; while high trust is based on faith, where individuals have a belief in the good intent of all involved within and outside of an educational organization. This researcher does see predictability as a component of trust, but also sees the aspect of high trust of going beyond what is expected, or predictable, especially when a situation requires astute risk taking. For teachers, it typically means being part of the vision, of being supported by the principal, of shared values where there is high involvement and risk taking in day-to-day school-based practice, be it by teachers or by principals (Louis, 2007). It is reasonable to extend the above concept of high trust to the relationship between superintendents and principals as demonstrated within this research. Similar to teachers and principals, superintendents see an openness within high trust relationships that supports behaviours and leadership practices that lead to ongoing reflection on the work of leading, be it at the system or school levels. When there is high trust, practices and behaviours of teachers, principals and superintendents encourage reflective practice, astute risk taking, and continuous learning. However, further study on the specific dynamics of the superintendent-principal dyad is needed to help build our understanding of learning how to lead within an ever-changing Ontario public school context.



**b) Practices and behaviours as builders and maintainers of trust.** System and school leaders described specific practices and behaviours that demonstrated the impact of trust, be it as building, maintaining or (the destruction of in the case of) lack of trust. When high trust was present, taking risks, open and honest communications, as well as an acceptance of feedback were seen as part of the practice. Trusting behaviours were also evident, and were described by the participants as acts that were supporting, relating, and relying on the other. A focus on practices and behaviours was often connected to the personal leadership resources within the OLF (IEL, 2013). These practices were described as open, honest communication on the part of both superintendents and principals, where feedback is given and accepted with good intent and ultimately leads to being comfortable taking risks, of exploring different leadership approaches at both the system and school levels. Again, it is important to note that participants clearly articulated the difference between trust and high trust; high trust was perceived as a result of practices and behaviours that created feelings of safety, comfort, confidence and optimism verses lesser trust practices or behaviours that could result in feelings of caution, of uncertainty, or second guessing one's leadership practices.

When there is high trust within a relationship between two leaders, taking risks becomes a valued approach in the day to day work of leading at both the system and school levels. The director spoke to the idea of empowering of others when there is high trust; that the individual will do the job, and when in need of help, will seek advice. That advice is given with good intent, and accepted in like manner. Similarly, superintendents sought out more information on their leadership practice within the community of schools they lead, so as to be more receptive and effective in their roles. Principals also spoke to

seeking out working with a specific superintendent, as they trusted their feedback, and appreciated their humanity or benevolence when asked for help. A specific comment of a principal explained it clearly:

...The vulnerability, that you are able to show that person that you highly trust, exactly what you're feeling and thinking at the time. Like I can't do this anymore or I need help, I need...while the other you might not go that route.

This reciprocity or mutuality of treating the other as a trustworthy partner was seen as the ultimate relationship, and sought by all three cohorts of participants.

The work of system and school leaders is complex as described in the revised Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) (2013); this document clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of both system and school leaders within the province of Ontario. Five specific core leadership capacities are outlined: 1) setting goals; 2) aligning resources with priorities; 3) promoting collaborative learning cultures; 4) using data; and 5) engaging in courageous conversations (OLF, 2013, p. 8). These core leadership capacities help anchor the roles and responsibilities of directors, superintendents and principals. The following table helps to both elucidate the distinct roles yet compare the specific practices of system leaders and school leaders (OLF, 2013, p. 12, 13, 18, 19) and while there are similarities between the roles and responsibilities of system and school leaders, there are aspects that differ based on where the work of leading occurs:

Table 5

*Comparison of Superintendent and Principal Roles / Responsibilities*

<b>Superintendent Role/Responsibilities</b>	<b>Principal Role/Responsibilities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish shared mission, vision, goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Setting directions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide coherent instructional guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving the instructional program</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build district/school staff capacities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing the organization to</li> </ul>

	support desired practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing accountability</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide job embedded learning</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align budget, resources, policy/procedures with mission, vision and goals</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use comprehensive performance management system for school / district leadership development</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate/support policy governance role of Board of Trustees</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurture productive working relationships with staff and stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building relationships and developing people</li> </ul>

These specific expectations are anchored in what is referred to as personal leadership resources, which include: 1) cognitive resources; 2) social resources; and 3) psychological resources (OLF, p. 12, 13). Within the psychological resources, one finds mentions of optimism, self-efficiency, resilience, and proactivity (OLF, p. 13) as key foundations for system and school leaders to be able to do the work expected of them within their respective roles. The descriptors mentioned of a leader's psychological stance link to the participants' understanding of the impact of high trust on their overall perspective of their relationships and ultimately on their leadership practice, be it within their own group (superintendent or principal) and between the superintendent and the principal.

Participants acknowledged the importance and impact of having a relationship where both felt safe, comfortable and able to be open about voicing their perspective on their work. This high trust relationship leads them to feel able to confidently question their every day leadership practice, reflect on possible next steps and take risks in moving

that practice forward. Superintendents and principals spoke of having autonomy, and accepting feedback. Both superintendents and principals saw their work within a high trust relationship as energizing, of wanting to be and do their best, not second-guessing whether they were making the right decision and worrying about retribution. This brought a higher level of engagement in the work to be done, and for principals that meant a willingness to be more open in sharing their leadership practices, not sitting and waiting to see what happens. It also meant that principals were willing to take risks in leading their peers in understanding their leadership practice. The director, as leader of the district had a similar stance; when describing a high trust environment, they spoke to the open sharing of vulnerabilities, of not knowing certain things, and of seeking advice of others. It is important to draw attention to what happens if high trust is perceived as not being present in the relationships between superintendents and principals; rethinking their course of action, alienation, and fear of reprisal were shared. Principals saw an element of power and control on the part of the superintendent over their work and future.

The information gleaned from this highly contemporary, Ontario- based study demonstrates how relationships built on high trust can positively impact the personal resources of educational leaders, and their behaviours and practices. Various theoretical frameworks for leadership attempt to describe the complex nature of the leadership work within educational systems. Sergiovanni (1984), Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003), Begley and Zaretsky (2004), and Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) have provided schemas to help deconstruct the work of leading, be it at a system or school level. When considering the meshing of theory with the OLF (2013) practices and personal resources within this specific Ontario school district, the work of Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003), and Grogan and

Shakeshaft (2011), help further explain not only the specific leadership practices and behaviours but the key foundations or traits of effective educational leaders. Stoll, Fink, and Earl (2003) speak to how educational leaders must be able to lead for learning as well as be learn to lead. They identify seven key areas, which “focus on the core leadership role of leadership for learning” (Stoll et al., 2003, p. 102) and exemplify a leadership practice that is based on relationships or networks and distributed amongst formal and informal leaders within the system (p. 103):

- 1) Understanding learning from both the student and adult perspective (p. 104)
- 2) Making connections to help others understand the holistic nature of the educational system (p. 104)
- 3) Futures thinking that acknowledge the ever-changing context of the educational system and the need for continuous capacity building (p. 105)
- 4) Contextual knowledge as it relates specifically to the uniqueness of the educational system and the schools, which make up the system (p. 106)
- 5) Critical thinking as a key requirement to effective problem solving grounded in knowing how to pose the right questions as opposed to providing ready-made solutions (p. 107)
- 6) Political acumen that is based on an understanding of macro and micro politics, connecting to the concepts of Blase (1998, in text citation), of power with as opposed to power over (p. 107)
- 7) Possessing an emotional understanding of the impact of changing contexts where trust and relationships are key to the ever-evolving nature of leading within an educational system (p. 107).

The work of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) presents a theoretical framework based on the importance of relationships within the work of women educational leaders, and men who adhere to a similar approach to leadership. Its five key elements revolve around specific aspects of leadership: relational leadership, leadership for social justice, spiritual leadership, leadership for learning, and balanced leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 6). Of particular interest for this research is the focus on relational leadership explained as being horizontal or lateral as opposed to hierarchical (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). More specifically, these researchers also speak to the use of power to help others as opposed to control others, something that was described by the participants when describing high trust, and the impact of trust on their leadership practice within the context of their relationship – superintendent, and principal. The issue of power and control will also be addressed in the next section, which looks at the impact of trust on relationships within the cultures and climates of an educational organization.

The other two links between the work of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) and this research lies within the concepts of leadership for social justice and leadership for learning. The social justice aspect is also similar to Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks (2009) when they looked at the development, coaching, and mentoring of new educational leaders, something that they saw as crucial in the expectations of 21<sup>st</sup> century educational leadership. First, this connects with the provincial focus on providing quality education for all children attending its public school system (Ministry of Education, 2014) and the concept of doing public good through sound instructional practice that impacts all students. Participants in this research also spoke of advocacy, of moral obligation when answering questions related to disagreement with the other, be it with

ministry policies, which they sometimes saw as not supportive of the students they served. Similar to classroom teachers, superintendents and principals commented on the link between their leadership and instructional practice. It is recognized as a competence, be it directly mentioned or as one of the many areas of knowledge that effective superintendents and principals must have to lead effectively. Instructional leadership is a key element of the promotional practice within the province of Ontario, where directors, and superintendents responsible for schools and principals started as teachers within the school system, and being members in good standing with the Ontario College of Teachers. This aspect of leadership intersects with another as presented by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), specifically, leadership for learning. It connects with the OLF and its expectations that principals will improve the instructional program within their schools (OLF, 2013), while directors and superintendents must oversee coherent instructional guidance and lead learning oriented organizational improvement processes (OLF, 2013). When addressing competences, the participants, after referring to the importance of building relationships, of being organized, and of having excellent communication skills, shared the importance of continuously learning about their own leadership practice as well as instructional practice. Ongoing knowledge building is also evident in the district's attempts to help superintendents and principals reflect on their leadership practice during regular conversations on a specific problem of practice as it relates to their current work. The current director works alongside a small group of superintendents to review the progress towards their next steps in their problem of practice as it relates to their role within the system. The superintendents and principals follow a similar process of open conversation and exploration of their work of leading.

The peer-to-peer feedback supports a more rigorous reflective practice on the part of the director, superintendent, and principal, and is yet another example of continuous learning on how to lead for a positive impact on student learning.

It may be advantageous for the district to consider reviewing the results of a trust/high trust inventory as it relates to the impact of the perception of the relationships between superintendents and principals on their leadership practice. Does high trust contribute to a superintendent and principal having a relational leadership practice that reflects ‘power with’ as opposed to ‘power over’ the other while supporting leadership for learning not only for themselves but for all members within the district?

**c) Cultures and climates that nourish and maintain trust.** Another approach to understand the impact of trust on system and school leaders is to look at how those within a school district see the connection between trust, relationships, and the actual culture and climate of the school district. Two key elements were part of the discourse during the interviews with the participants, the impact of trust on relationships, and how a hierarchical organization can impede the ability of its members to take risks, reflect and learn how to lead more effectively.

High trust relationships were seen, as key to having confidence in one’s ability to do the work be it as a superintendent or principal. It empowered one to believe in their capacity to lead, to take risks to learn how to lead more effectively, based on open, honest feedback that was provided from a caring, benevolent perspective. When high trust was not present, some participants mentioned “a culture of nice” that resulted in a lack of openness, of honesty and a fear of the impact on their future. Superintendents described feelings of discomfort with their own peers, a perhaps understandable element of



micropolitics within the senior administrators; if not prepared to support a peer's agenda, then theirs would not receive support. Principals spoke of a fear of the repercussion of taking risks and impacting their future; of being transferred to another school without input, of being blocked if wanting to become a system leader if not 'towing the party line'. This element of hierarchy undermines the effectiveness of not only the school leader but also the system, in being able to move their leadership practice forward, as well as instructional practice, student achievement, and their socioemotional wellbeing.

In *Strong Districts and their Leadership*, Leithwood (2013) identifies "productive working relationships with staff and other stakeholders" (p. 20) as one of nine key elements of highly effective school districts. This is seen as crucial within an educational organization, which wants to improve student wellbeing and achievement, through and within a "culture of joint responsibility" (p. 20) between all stakeholders. Learning is not solely the domain of students, but seen as part of the day-to-day work of classroom educators, school, and system leaders. Hence, "...continuous learning in the interests of improving the success of all students becomes a foundational premise of the organization's culture" (p. 21) and part of a collaborative, reciprocal relationship between the system and school leaders. In that environment, the role of system leaders, namely the director, and the superintendent, is to serve and support the school level leader, or principal in their work (Leithwood, 2013). The interconnectedness between the relationships of leaders and the leadership practices they use is a difficult one to unweave.

The idea of a reciprocal relationship between system and school leaders is based on a level of high trust that supports growth in learning how to continuously improve and empower the other in their work. This connected to principal comments regarding the evolution of principal learning/leading teams, where they expressed wanting to take on

this process so that they could go more deeply into their practice. Principals saw the role of the superintendent as a facilitator, a supporter. As principals, their current frustration appeared to be connected with the operationalization of this process, of turning it into a checklist of actions to do, as opposed to being more of a unique process, for each of the teams. This meshes with the earlier mention of relational leadership within a dynamic organizational culture (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011), a culture that is focused on horizontal leadership...“about facilitating the work of others who share the power and authority to collaboratively craft direction for the district” (p. 10). This implies that trust, and more specifically high interpersonal trust is key to relational leadership within an educational organization. This interdependency is seen as a key component of a collective approach to leadership, (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). In turn, collective leadership implies that collective trust is present within the educational organization (Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011). Collective trust is defined as “...a stable group property rooted in the shared perceptions and affect about the trustworthiness of another group or individual that emerges over time out of multiple social exchanges within the group. These socially constructed shared trust beliefs define the group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another group or individual” (Forsyth, Adams, and Hoy, 2011, p. 22).

What is the difference between trust and high trust? What is the optimal trust between leaders, between leaders and followers that positively impacts the work? Superintendents and principals in this study described high trust as empowering, as giving them energy to take risks within their leadership practice. Wicks, Berman, and Jones (1999) define optimal trust as “an embedded construct, suggesting that it is determined in context and shaped by a variety of factors, such as the trustworthiness of

the agent, local and broader social norms regarding trust, and other features of the relevant social structure” (p. 103). These researchers look at the costs, benefits, risks and associations of high versus low trust. The following table shows a comparison of high and low trust (Table 1, p. 108):

Table 6

*High Trust versus Low Trust*

<b>High Trust</b>	<b>Low trust</b>
<u>Costs:</u> -few options and alternatives -limited monitoring ability -costs of creating and maintaining relation	<u>Costs:</u> -high agency and transaction costs -low capacity for adaptation, cooperation, and commitment -no preferred partner
<u>Benefits:</u> -low agency and transacted costs -preferred trading partner -high capacity for adaptation, cooperation, and commitment	<u>Benefits:</u> -many options and alternatives -low cost of relationship -great deal of monitoring
<u>Risks:</u> -assessing betrayal -betrayal -divorce -stifled creativity	<u>Risks:</u> -opportunism -encouraging opportunism -insufficient commitment
<u>Associated with:</u> -strong ties -interdependent relationship	<u>Associated with:</u> -few or no ties -independent relationship

While this perspective is based on a management perspective, Wicks, Berman, and Jones (1999) infer that their analysis could be of interest to institutions and society as a whole. The above descriptors connect with key points made by the participants in this study: the need for high trust in relationships where openness, honesty are part of the vulnerability that anchors an interdependent relationship between horizontal or hierarchical leaders that nurtures a capacity to learn, adapt, create an educational system

that supports all students. Where trust is minimal, system and school leaders do not feel comfortable openly sharing their reflective thinking on their practice, risk new approaches to support others, and second-guess themselves on what their immediate supervisor may be thinking of their leadership. The interdependency of the leaders is minimized, their ability to combine their efforts to impact the system in a coherent manner severely hampered.

Similarly, Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies (1998) describe high trust using words such as hope, faith, confidence, assurance and initiative, and where low trust is where there is no hope, no faith, no confidence, passivity, and hesitance. These descriptors also connect with the participants' perception of high trust, and when there is a deficit of trust. While the participants in the study did not use the words distrust or high distrust explicitly, they described feelings, and practices or behaviours that made them feel unsure, of being judged, lack of respect and of benevolence, all leading to not wanting or feeling not able to take risks in their work of leading. This meshes with the high distrust Lewicki et al. (1998) characterize as fear, skepticism, cynicism, wariness and watchfulness, and vigilance. One superintendent described the difference between high trust and trust as:

...In the trust relationship there's still trust, there's a good relationship but there's also a sense of criticism and judgement and I think in those organizations where there's probably high trust, there's an openness, a collaboration, a respectful banter.

A principal explained high trust as:

...When you have a high level of trust, I think of the risk taking and willingness to do something new and putting it out publicly...I would seek out opportunities to work with that person on a more regular basis...my system level work I guess does depend on who's at the helm and trust this kind of ...a big part of how I

gauge what areas I want to get involved with.

These perspectives demonstrate the fine line between trust, high trust, some level of distrust and the impact on the practice of educational leaders, be it at the system or school levels.

Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, and Hackman (2010) identify competence, reliability, identification to the values of the organization, openness and honesty are seen as key to a state of high organizational trust in their research across business sectors, using an organizational trust index as a measuring tool. The one determinant that had the most impact was showing concern for the employees, of caring for their wellbeing, of listening to what they have to say and act on issues brought forward, another aspect of benevolence (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). As a result of their study, these researchers see a high trust organization as one that can be described on three continuums of trust: 1) distrust to optimal trust; 2) fragile to resilient trust; and 3) shallow to deep trust (p. 16). These continuums appear to be reflected in the many comments of both superintendents and principals when expressing their behaviours and leadership practices when there is optimal trust, for example more risk taking, surrounded by resilient trust which would make one accepting of feedback delivered constructively to improve practice that would in turn lead to deep trust, or a trust that is grounded in knowing that the superintendent truly cares for the principal.

These continuums are linked to how trust survives during times of change and the making of difficult decisions, of how it builds from shared values and the interdependence within the organization. While this particular model is based on business environments, it does commonalities with previous description of trust within

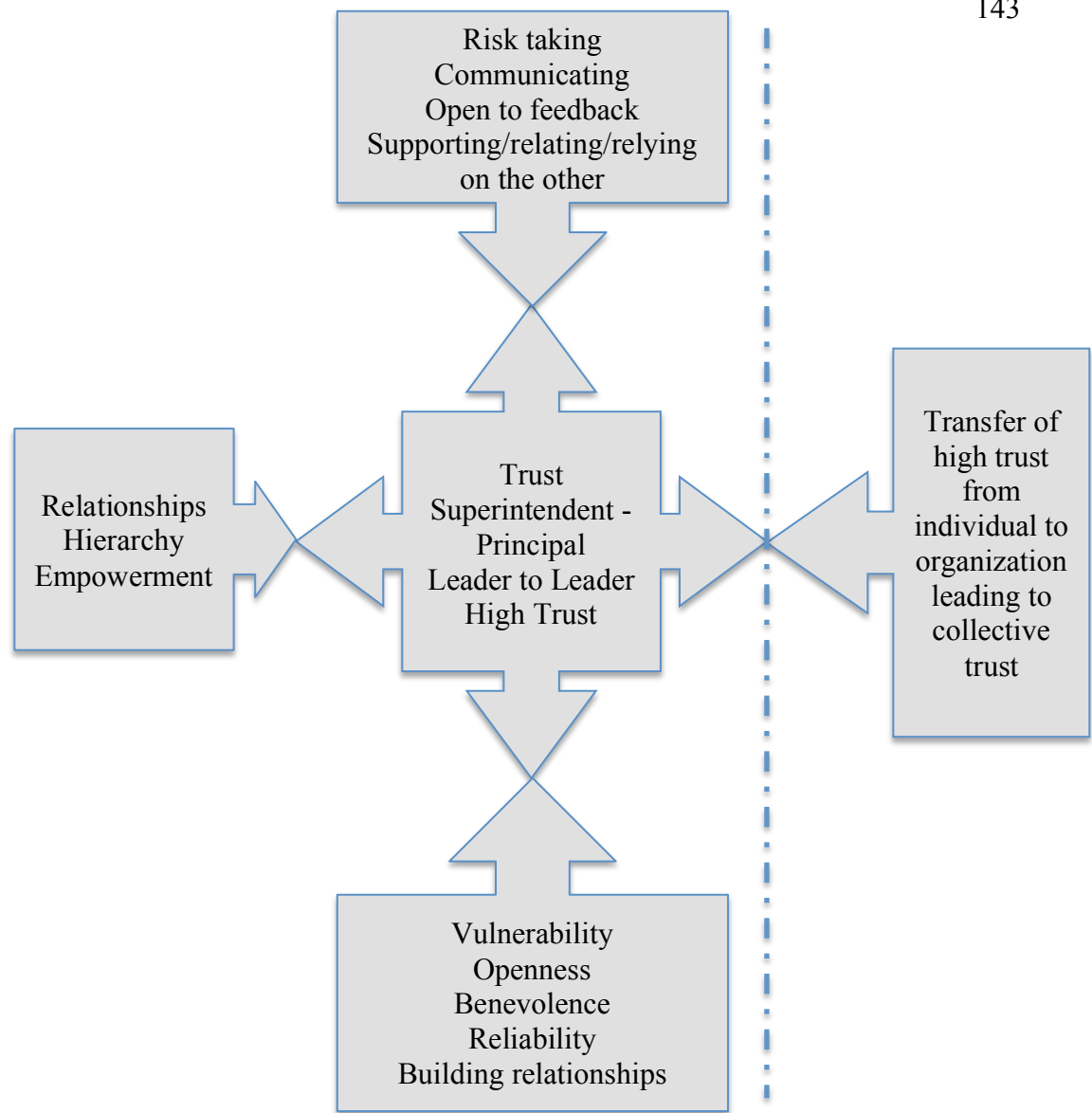
educational organizations. Similar to the work of Kramer and Tyler (1996), Kramer and Cook (2004), and more recently, the work of Samier and Schmidt (2010), there has been research on the diminishing of trust in various contexts. When there exists feelings of being scrutinized, of being continuously monitored or micro-managed, there may be some trust at a superficial level, but there is probably more distrust, directly impacting one's ability to change one's practice to be more effective. This was apparent in the comments of the participants when speaking about 'second guessing' themselves, of 'flying below the radar' of the superintendent, and the district. It could also be connected to surface acquiescence or "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves, 1991), where the principal might agree to follow through or support the superintendent's perspective when in their presence, but communicating a totally different message to their peers.

Samier and Schmidt (2010) situate educational trust within a context of social capital, a key factor to providing an equitable learning environment for all students. Since the beginning of this millennium, a focus on accountability has been at the heart of many educational institutions, with the intent to level the playing field across socio-economic groups via increased student achievement. As well, Samier and Schmidt (2010) define social capital as, "the cultivation of networks fostering shared norms, values, and understanding that facilitate co-operation within or among groups (p. 47). Those norms and values are anchored in trust, in educational trust, as it pertains to school systems and school communities, and for the public good where all stakeholders collaborate to ensure the overall wellbeing and learning of all children. The ability to make sound decisions in a timely manner, to meet the diverse needs of staff, students, and parents while meeting political and societal expectations cannot be accomplished unless

on believes, builds, and maintains a high level of collective trust (Forsyth, Adams, & Foy, 2011), while also using collective leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011) within the educational system or organization.

The district should recognize the impact of time on building and maintaining high trust relationships between system and school leaders, and school leaders and staff. System and school leaders should also begin to address the need to intentionally name and identify leadership practices that reinforce a collective responsibility towards the leading of the educational organization.

It is important to note that the numbers of men and women leaders were equally distributed in both the superintendent and principal roles. Upon further exploration of the concept of shared or distributed leadership, the researcher became aware of studies that looked at the practices of women educational leaders. The concept of power of the collective (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011) helps define relational leadership, a leadership practice that has horizontal as opposed to hierarchical leadership practices. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) explain the particular approach of women towards leadership as: 1) leading with and through others; 2) listening carefully to what others say; 3) leading with passion; and 4) using the power of leadership to address social justice issues. When considering the components of effective school districts (Leithwood, 2013), and the leadership practices in the OLF (2013), collective trust and relational leadership appear to be key to effective educational organizations within the province of Ontario. In light of the above and the key role women leaders play in school and district leadership, further research in women educational leaders' current practice and its impact on a school district should be considered.



*Figure 1:* High Trust Leader to Leader vs. Organizational Trust

What does this all mean to a superintendent, be they starting in their role or have years of such experience? What leadership practices and personal resources will support them in building and maintaining trust in their relationships with school principals? How do they blend their responsibility of being the Ministry representative within a school district, while also being an advocate and supporter for each of the schools they are responsible for, within their community of schools? Within the current reality of school



districts, the superintendent must be able to use leadership practices and personal resources that maximize not only their own leadership but also that of the principal. A key component to maximizing others' leadership potential also resides in the ability to build relationships based on high trust. Fig. 1 represents how this particular study's three participating cohorts perceived key facets of trust, specific practices and behaviours, and aspects of culture and climate that they saw as leading towards high trust. This diagram also demonstrates the disconnect between high trust for an individual verses high trust for an entire organization, in this case a school system.

Superintendents and principals who participated in the study saw vulnerability, openness, benevolence, reliability, and the competence of being able to build relationships as key to being able to lead effectively, be it at the system or school levels. This, in turn, led to the participants describing specific practices such as risk taking, communicating honestly about what was happening, accepting of feedback, resulting in behaviours that were perceived as supporting, relating and relying on each other in doing the work of leading. While the culture was described as hierarchical, both superintendents and principals also expressed the belief that if their relationships were based on high trust, the hierarchical dimension of the organization receded into the background, and there was more empowerment of the superintendent and principal within this large school district. However, it is important to note that principals mentioned that while they may have high trust within the relationship with their superintendent that did not necessarily transfer to the organization as a whole. For some principal participants, a high level of collective trust did not automatically flow to the school district or system. This may be related to the possible interplay of the theoretical frameworks on trust

presented by Dirks and Ferrin (2002, 2004), where ‘relationship-based trust’ and ‘character-based trust’ interact, depending on the context or situation and the actors involved. Another aspect brought to the attention of this researcher was the duality of the role of the superintendent, from the principal perspective. Similar to Dirks and Ferrin (2002, 2004), there appears to be a link between the ability to trust, and highly trust a direct leader verses an organizational leader. Superintendents in this particular school district have a dual role, that of system leader and that of direct supervisor of the school principal. Participants within the principal cohort distinguished between their ability to highly trust the superintendent to whom they reported as opposed to the other superintendents whom they portrayed as ‘the system’ or larger organization. This may explain why a principal while highly trusting of their superintendent does not necessarily have high trust towards the school district itself. The following table is an adaptation of Dirks and Ferrin’s (2004) chart on how trust impacts practices, behaviours and the overall organization as it relates to this study:

Table 7

*Trust versus Distrust*

<p><b><i>If there exists...</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerability</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Benevolence</li> <li>• Reliability</li> <li>• Ability to build trusting relationships</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>If there exists...</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of reprisal</li> <li>• Silence / Subterfuge</li> <li>• Lack of caring for the other</li> <li>• Inconsistent practices / behaviours</li> <li>• Lack of emotional intelligence</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Then...</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk taking in leadership practice</li> <li>• Truthful communication</li> <li>• Acceptance of feedback</li> <li>• Support, relationship with and reliance on each other</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Then...</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little positive change in leadership practice</li> <li>• Lack of open communication</li> <li>• Suspicious of feedback</li> <li>• Token support, minimal relationship and reliance on each other</li> </ul>

<p><i>And at the organizational level...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong interpersonal relationships that are based on high trust and extend to the organization as a whole</li> <li>• Hierarchical stance in background / not preferred leadership practice</li> <li>• Empowerment of all actors, at all levels of the educational organization</li> </ul>	<p><i>And at the organizational level...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships based on the operational or management side of leading with minimal transfer to the organization as a whole</li> <li>• Hierarchical stance drives leadership practices / behaviours</li> <li>• Empowerment limited to the ‘chosen few’ within the educational organization</li> </ul>
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This chapter has connected the findings to the inquiry question on how superintendents build and maintain trust within their relationships with school principals to previous research in the field of educational leadership. The final chapter will provide conclusions, implications, and specific recommendations that may help further our understanding of trust between educational leaders, and towards an education system that wishes to positively impact the learning of all of the students it serves.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusions**

This is the first study in Ontario to focus on how and why superintendents build and maintain trust with principals. These findings complement Leithwood's (2013) work and the OLF; specifically, the results underscore the primacy of trust in the relationship between superintendents and principals. Trust, is a key personal resource for educational leaders who wish to lead in a way that supports the maximum learning environment for both educators and students.

It is clear from this study that trust, and specifically, high trust, is a key component in the relationship between the superintendent and the principal if a school district wishes to have reflective, confident and empowered leaders who will be able to meet the needs of the classroom educators, the students and their families. From the perceptions shared by participants in this Ontario-based research, high trust is evident through particular cultures and climates at the school level, and at the district level. When high trust is present, educational leaders almost invariably openly share their goals, their practice, what is working, and what they wish to change to have more impact on what is happening in the classroom. The superintendent who can build a relationship based on a highly trusting relationship with the principal, maintain that positive relationship through the ups and downs of supporting the school level leader, and who can also have a similar relationship with their peers around the district administration table has the opportunity to impact the cultures, and the climates that make up the school district, which in turn variously impact the classroom educators and the students. By building and maintaining highly trusting relationships, that use the foundations which

include benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness, superintendents are able to support principals, as they grow into confident, reflective school leaders, able to take risks and not feel fearful of being punished if they make mistakes. By and large, the work of educating students is not solitary, individualized work; to be effective, and impact the classroom; superintendents and principals need to work together to support effective classroom practice. This collaborative leadership built on high trust between superintendents and principals helps create cultures and climates that support a school district's primary objective, that of being a true learning organization that can positively impact the learning of students.

**Implications:**

This study has several implications for a school district to support high trust relationships amongst its system and school leaders. In this era with a focus on professionalism that includes leadership skills, it is important to consider how a system will mentor, coach, and review the performance of its future educational leaders. While it has the OLF (IEL, 2103) as a guide to help in this endeavour, it must take into account the status of its leaders' relationships, how it operates in the day to day work, and reinforce those leadership skills that focus on the ability to build and maintain strong relationships anchored on trust, the ability to communicate in a positive manner especially when providing feedback, and how it shows benevolence in difficult times.

An extension to the leadership skill acquisition implication is the concern of discerning when risk taking on the part of a principal or superintendent is based on sound practice, is seen as an 'experimenting risk' that will do no harm, verses the 'problematic risk taking' which could endanger another or the organization as a whole. Leading

within a high trust relationship does not negate the responsibility to make sound decisions, and especially when taking risks in one's practice, be it as a superintendent or principal.

Another implication of this study is the ability of superintendent and principals to discern when there is "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves, 1991). If there is a fear of possible reprisals, a key element of a lower level of trust within the relationship between the superintendent and principal, the opportunity for a superficial agreement may occur. The superintendent may assume that the information provided is accurate, rely on the principal's support while the opposite is the reality at that point in time.

A final implication that must be considered is the Ontario Ministry of Education's ability to accept a more collegial and collaborative role for its system and school leaders (Leithwood, 2013). Moving towards being a mentor, a coach, and confidant, the superintendent has the opportunity, through their relationship with the school principal, of changing the overall structure of the school district. By building high trust relationships, system and school leaders can begin to move towards a structure that is closer to a learning organization (Senge, 1990), an organization that can change its culture that could lead to an increase in organizational trust. This helps a school district to become more flexible and adaptive in its efforts to meet the academic and socioemotional needs of all students.

**Recommendations:**

The following recommendations present possible next steps:

*Recommendation #1:* That an independently administered survey be undertaken within a school district, using one of psychometrically sound the trust/high trust inventories. As

part of the conducting of the survey, obtain the support of senior administration and the local Ontario Principal Council executive for the survey and its purposes, gaining an overview of the superintendent-principal perception of their interpersonal relationships.

*Recommendation #2:* That the school district consider the results of a trust/high trust inventory and how these results impact the relational leadership practices of the superintendent and principal, and how ‘power with’ potentially empowers all to engage in a leadership for learning.

*Recommendation #3:* That a school district reviews its operational protocols to examine the factors that lead to short time lines associated with principal placements in schools and consider this another possible opportunity to work collaboratively with the local Ontario Principal Council executive, taking into account that high trust interpersonal relationships as well as collective trust takes time to build and maintain.

*Recommendation #4:* That the school district identify research specific leadership practices that support relational, collective leadership while helping create a culture/ climate of high trust within the organization thus reducing the hierarchical approach to leading at both the system and school levels.

*Recommendation #5:* That further research investigates the connections between interpersonal and organizational trust within a school district to help build cohesiveness within an educational system.

*Recommendation #6:* Through further qualitative research, identify women leaders’ practice and its impact within an educational system as it relates to the context of high trust and collective trust.

The above recommendations address possible next steps for research for the school district in the area of trust, high trust, and relationships between educational leaders, for the wider field of organizational trust (or collective trust) and the identification of women leaders' practice that impact educational systems. The complex nature of high trust relationships between educational leaders within what can be a very hierarchical organization needs to be investigated within the province of Ontario. The Ontario Leadership Framework (IEL, 2013) has helped to bring a collective language and understanding to school leaders within the province on what is seen as effective leadership practice, but further research on the personal resources, especially on the impact of high trust in leader to leader relationships would help solidify the foundation of the work of leading.

Recommendation #1 proposes that the school district focus on collecting data from surveys that would provide insight on how superintendents and principals perceive their relationships through the lenses of trust and high trust. Using a collaborative approach between senior administration and the local Ontario Principals' Council representatives within that school district would help set a shared goal and process that would help both superintendents and principals to not only be partners in the research study but build a shared ownership of the results. Using an empirically sound high trust inventory specific to educational organization would be ideal and provide data to help understand the current reality of the relationships between superintendents and principals.

Recommendation #2 considers the implication of the results of the inventory as mentioned in the first recommendation. The results can help begin an open communication process amongst the following: 1) superintendents and director at the



senior administration table; 2) superintendents and the principals within the family or community of schools they lead; and 3) superintendents and local representatives of the Ontario Principals' Council. This open conversation can help identify specific relational practices that build and maintain high trust within the superintendent-principal dyad and lead to a mutual understanding of the benefits of high trust such as empowerment, which was seen as a key element by the participants within this research study. This is especially important if the school district wishes its leaders to consider change and innovation in how they lead within their areas of influence, be it at the system level or the school level. The identification of those relational practices between leaders could have impact on their leadership practices, and ultimately student achievement and their socioemotional wellbeing.

Recommendation #3 considers the importance of the school district reviewing its own operational protocols as it relates to the length of time a superintendent and principal work together. While the reality may impact ongoing movement of both system and school leaders, a possible benefit of having superintendents and principals work together for a longer period of time will be the building and maintaining of high trust relationships, which may lead to a school district benefiting from the empowerment of its school leaders, and in turn the educators in the classroom who are the direct connection to student achievement and their overall socioemotional wellbeing.

The 4<sup>th</sup> recommendation, also at the district level, considers the use of focus groups that would help in the identification of specific practices that lead to collective leadership, de-emphasizing the hierarchical stance currently perceived by the participants. Many school districts in the province of Ontario are involved in reflective

processes regarding their leadership practices, sharing case studies to help inform not only their own practice but also that of their colleagues in other school districts.

Connecting with provincial organizations such as the Ontario Public Supervisory Officials Association and the Ontario Principals' Council can help to disseminate information gleaned across various school districts while also providing support in the conducting of the focus group and review of the information gathered.

Going farther afield, recommendation #5 looks at research into the connections or, disconnections, between interpersonal trust and organizational trust. School districts, especially large ones want to have coherence and consistency in how the work of educating students and leading school communities is done. Since the work of learning and leading is very much based on the relationships amongst the parties involved, and that high trust appears to be a key component, it is imperative that we investigate organizational or collective trust as it pertains to an educational organization.

Lastly, while the researcher did not start with a focus on women leaders in an educational organization, it became apparent that the increased number of women in positions of leadership both at the system and school levels may be impacting the work of learning and leading. Recommendation #6 suggests that further qualitative research be undertaken to investigate the role of women educational leaders, especially when looking at high trust relationships, collective trust, and collective leadership.

### **Limitations of Study**

This research study was conducted in one Ontario school district, and is bound by that district's reality, and its way of doing the work to educate the students it serves. It cannot be generalized to other boards within the province as the individuals; the leaders'

interactions are those of specific individuals, the organizational setting unique to that particular context. While the exploratory case approach involving 15 different participants has provided a level of validity to the analysis of the information provided, it is important to acknowledge the highly complex and situated nature of the phenomena of trust within the relationship of system and school leaders. This complexity extends to the ability to untangle interpersonal trust and organizational or collective trust. The use of further qualitative research alongside quantitative study such as the use of specific inventories may be able to not only shed further light on how superintendents and principals build and maintain trust to effectively lead, but how these crucial interpersonal relationships also support, or not, organizational trust.

While the representation of superintendents and principals was robust, it was important to be mindful and respect the individual role of the director within this particular study. The director of this particular school district was enthusiastic and passionate about participating in the research. They saw their role as one of modeling what system leaders needed to do, that of showing trust in the ability of others, of being open and honest about their own vulnerability, within the parameters of their role as director, and as a former superintendent. The director's professional stance was often one of 'horizontal' verses 'hierarchical' position; one that they often described as being related to a more flat-lined organization.

As noted earlier, the researcher does have an understanding of the context based on past professional experiences as both a principal, and a superintendent. While no longer working within the district, it was important to identify and understand one's own preconceived ideas, perceptions of the system. This was addressed through journaling

during the interview process as well as during the analysis of the data. The use of specific themes from pre-existing research helped to start the analysis of the data and further establish a certain level of separation.

Through this inquiry, this researcher developed a deeper understanding on the complex nature of the relationship between the superintendent and the principal. While there continues to be questions and more research needed to help further elucidate high trust, and relationships between educational leaders, it is hoped that this current research will result in the readers of this study to reflect on their practice, and pose their own questions on the impact of high trust on educational leaders' relationships on how they lead.

### **In conclusion**

The journey for this researcher has been one filled with questions, discoveries, and more questions. The belief that leadership is a role that must be shared due to the complex nature of educating a society's children has been reinforced throughout this inquiry process. The ability to learn how to lead, how to change one's leadership practices can only occur in a culture where interpersonal relationships thrive, where all individuals are valued, cared for, and empowered to make decisions. One cannot expect a classroom teacher to be able to value their work, care for the children they are responsible for, and empower them in their learning, if that is not their own reality. Multiple studies have described the effective relationships required between teachers and principals for this to occur but few studies have looked at the complex relationship between the superintendent and principal, and the impact of high trust on the leadership practice of the principal.

This exploratory case study appears to be the first in Ontario, and perhaps Canada, that attempts to inform the field in an area that has insufficient literature on practice to support its leaders in school districts. This researcher hopes that the steps outlined in this study, can set the scene for others to build and continue the work through larger qualitative studies focused on trust, relationships, and empowerment as it relates to the achievement and socioemotional wellbeing of students within educational organizations. While the province of Ontario has much to be proud of, it must continue to fulfill its 'social contract' and ensure that all of its students have the best possible learning environment that will help them become not only contributing citizens but healthy, caring individuals possessing a love for learning and having the confidence to explore what the world has to offer. High trust relationships built and maintained at the leadership level, between superintendents and principals that empower those leaders to learn how to lead will set the vision for this reality. An educational system that is anchored on high trust empowers its members to go about the business of leading for learning, valuing their perspectives built on their day-to-day practice and become the structure of a true learning organization.

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**Appendices****Appendix A****Email Script for Recruitment – Director**

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research

You are being invited to participate in a study that is being conducted by Dr. Pam Bishop, Principal Investigator and, Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, field researcher. Briefly, this study is to learn from superintendents and principals how trust impacts their relationships and leadership practice. The school district has discussed trust and its impact on the work of providing staff and students a working and learning environment that encourages innovation, creativity and risk taking.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to be part of a one on one interview, which will include pre and post interview activities. It is anticipated that the entire task will take 2.0 hours for the pre/post interview activities and the one on one interview. The interview will be conducted at your work location.

The letter of information on this study is attached to this email. If you would like more information on this study, please contact one of the researchers at the contact information given below. We also recommend that you use a personal email for ongoing communication to ensure confidentiality.

Thank you,

Dr. Pam Bishop  
Principal Investigator

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald  
Field Researcher

**Appendix B****Email Script for Recruitment – Superintendents**

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research

You are being invited to participate in a study to be conducted by Dr. Pam Bishop, Principal Investigator and, Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald. Briefly, this study is to learn from superintendents and principals how trust impacts their relationships and leadership practice. The school district has discussed trust and its impact on the work of providing staff and students a working and learning environment that encourages innovation, creativity and risk taking.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one on one interview, which will include a pre and post interview activity. It is anticipated that the entire task will take 2.0 hours; and, the interview will be conducted at a location of your choice.

The letter of information on this study is attached to this email. If you would like more information on this study, please contact the researcher at the contact information given below. We also recommend that you use a personal email for ongoing communication to ensure confidentiality.

Thank you,

Dr. Pam Bishop  
Principal Investigator

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald  
Student Researcher

**Appendix C****Email Script for Recruitment – Principals**

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research on how trust is developed and maintained between superintendents and school principals

You are being invited to participate in a study to be conducted by Dr. Pam Bishop, Principal Investigator and, Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, field researcher. Briefly, this study is to learn from superintendents and principals how trust impacts their relationships and leadership practice. The school district has discussed trust and its impact on the work of providing staff and students a working and learning environment that encourages innovation, creativity and risk taking.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one on one interview, which will include a pre and post interview activity. It is anticipated that the entire task will take 2.0 hours for the pre/post interview activities and the one on one interview. The interview will be conducted at a location of your choice.

The letter of information on this study is attached to this email. If you would like more information on this study, please contact one of the researchers at the contact information given below. We also recommend that you use a personal email for ongoing communication to ensure confidentiality.

Thank you,

Dr. Pam Bishop  
Principal Investigator

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald  
Field Researcher

**Appendix D****Letter of Information / Consent Form - Director**

# Western Education

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University

**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Ed. D. (c), Faculty of Education, Western University

**Letter of Information – Director****1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this research study on how trust impacts the relationship between superintendents and principals and their leadership practice. Your current role as director of a school district provides you with personal experiences and insights, which will help us better, understand how superintendents and principals need to interact to lead a school district and schools.

**2. Purpose of the Letter**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

**3. Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to learn from a director, superintendents and principals how trust impacts their relationships and leadership practice. This study will be able to provide you with the opportunity to share your perspective on how you see trust within the relationship of superintendents who supervise schools and their principals, within the overall context of a school district. I am inviting the superintendents responsible for schools and principals who work with the superintendents to help me understand further the concept of trust and what occurs when there is a high level of trust between the system leader and school leader, and how this can either support or challenge a leader's ability to do the day to day work of leading. I would like to learn from you how you describe trust and the key leadership practices and dispositions that help leaders feel confident in their ability to lead, while strengthening the overall leadership practice of a school district.

**4. Inclusion Criteria**

A director who has responsibility of leading a school district within the province of Ontario is eligible to participate in this study.

**5. Exclusion Criteria**

A director who is not currently leading a school district with direct responsibility for superintendents supervising schools principals who have system responsibilities is not eligible to participate in this study.

**6. Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one on one interview, which will include a pre and post interview activity. It is anticipated that the entire task will take 2 hours; and, the interview will be conducted at a location of your choice. There will be up to 25 participants within the school district involved in the research study. Please note that the interview will be audio recorded and that this is mandatory to participate in the research project. You do not waive any legal rights by participating in this study.

**7. Possible Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

**8. Possible Benefits**

The possible benefits to participants may be the opportunity to provide insights on how trust and leadership practices are perceived within the school district as well as time to reflect on their own leadership practice. The possible benefits to society may be the opportunity to provide information on trust and leadership practice within a Canadian, and more specifically an Ontario public educational organization setting.

**9. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

**10. Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future employment.

**11. Confidentiality**

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. While we will do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research

Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

## **12. Contacts for Further Information**

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact:

***Principal Investigator***

Dr. Pam Bishop

Or

***Field Researcher***

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca).

## **13. Publication**

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please provide your name and contact number on a piece of paper separate from the Consent Form.

## **14. Consent**

A Consent Form is included with this letter for you to sign.

*This letter is yours to keep for future reference.*



**Consent Form**

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust to school principals: Any leadership learnings?

**Study Investigator's Name:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education,  
Western University

**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald,  
Faculty of Education, Western University

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix E****Letter of Information / Letter of Consent – Superintendent**

# Western Education

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop,  
Faculty of Education, Western University

**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Ed. D. (c),  
Faculty of Education, Western University

**Letter of Information – Superintendents****1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this research study on how trust impacts the relationship between superintendents and principals and their leadership practice. Your current role in the school district provides you with personal experiences and insights, which will help us, better understand how superintendents and principals interact to lead a school district and schools.

**2. Purpose of the Letter**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

**3. Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to learn from superintendents and principals how trust impacts their relationships and leadership practice. This study will be able to provide you with the opportunity to share your perspective on how you see trust within your relationships with the principals you support within your communities of schools, and how it impacts your own, and the principals' leadership practice. I am inviting superintendents responsible for schools and school principals to help me understand further the concept of trust and what occurs when there is a high level of trust between the system leader and school leader, and how this can either support or challenge a leader's ability to do the day to day work of leading. I would like to learn from you how you describe trust and key leadership practices and dispositions that help a leader feel confident in their ability to lead.

**4. Inclusion Criteria**

Superintendents who have responsibility for the supervision of schools are eligible to participate in this study.

**5. Exclusion Criteria**

Superintendents who have system responsibilities and are not involved in the supervision of schools are not eligible to participate in this study.

**6. Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one on one interview, which will include a pre and post interview activity. It is anticipated that the entire task will take 2 hours; and, the interview will be conducted at a location of your choice. There will be up to 25 participants within the school district involved in the research study. Please note that the interview will be audio recorded and that this is mandatory to participate in the research project. You do not waive any legal rights by participating in this study.

**7. Possible Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

**8. Possible Benefits**

The possible benefits to participants may be the opportunity to provide insights on how trust and leadership practices are perceived within the school district as well as time to reflect on their own leadership practice. The possible benefits to society may be the opportunity to provide information on trust and leadership practice within a Canadian, and more specifically an Ontario public educational organization setting.

**9. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

**10. Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future employment.

**11. Confidentiality**

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. While we will do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

## **12. Contacts for Further Information**

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact:

***Principal Investigator***

Dr. Pam Bishop

Or

***Field Researcher***

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca).

## **13. Publication**

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please provide your name and contact number on a piece of paper separate from the Consent Form.

## **14. Consent**

A Consent Form is included with this letter for you to sign.

*This letter is yours to keep for future reference.*

**Consent Form**

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust to school principals: Any leadership learnings?

**Principal Investigator's Name:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education,  
Western University

**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Ed. D. (c), Faculty of Education,  
Western University

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix F****Letter of Information / Consent Form – Principal**

# Western Education

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University

**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Ed. D. (c), Faculty of Education, Western University

**Letter of Information – Principals****1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this research study on how trust impacts the relationship between superintendents and principals and their leadership practice. Your current role in the school district provides you with personal experiences and insights, which will help us, better understand how superintendents and principals interact to lead a school district and schools.

**2. Purpose of the Letter**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

**3. Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to learn from superintendents and principals how trust impacts their relationships and leadership practice. This study will be able to provide you with the opportunity to share your perspective on how you see trust within your relationship with the superintendent who supports you within your school, and how it impacts your leadership practice. I am inviting the superintendents responsible for schools and principals who work with the superintendents to help me understand further the concept of trust and what occurs when there is a high level of trust between the system leader and school leader, and how this can either support or challenge a leader's ability to do the day to day work of leading. I would like to learn from you how you describe trust and key leadership practices and dispositions that help a leader feel confident in their ability to lead.

**4. Inclusion Criteria**

Principals who have responsibility for leading schools and their communities are eligible to participate in this study.

**5. Exclusion Criteria**

Principals who have system responsibilities and are not involved in the direct supervision of schools and their communities are not eligible to participate in this study.

**6. Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one on one interview, which will include a pre and post interview activity. It is anticipated that the entire task will take 2 hours; and, the interview will be conducted at a location of your choice. There will be up to 25 participants within the school district involved in the research study. Please note that the interview will be audio recorded and that this is mandatory. As well, I would like to review your documentation on your problem of practice. This will help me understand what you are doing as a school leader and how you are approaching your leadership practice. You do not waive any legal rights by participating in this study.

**7. Possible Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

**8. Possible Benefits**

The possible benefits to participants may be the opportunity to provide insights on how trust and leadership practices are perceived within the school district as well as time to reflect on their own leadership practice. The possible benefits to society may be the opportunity to provide information on trust and leadership practice within a Canadian, and more specifically an Ontario public educational organization setting.

**9. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

**10. Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future employment.

**11. Confidentiality**

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. While we will do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

## **12. Contacts for Further Information**

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact:

***Principal Investigator***

Dr. Pam Bishop

Or

***Field Researcher***

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca).

## **13. Publication**

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please provide your name and contact number on a piece of paper separate from the Consent Form.

## **14. Consent**

A Consent Form is included with this letter for you to sign.

*This letter is yours to keep for future reference.*



**Consent Form**

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?

**Principal Investigator's Name:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education,  
Western University

**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-Macdonald,  
Faculty of Education, Western University

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name (please print):

---

Participant's Signature:

---

Date:

---

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print):

---

Signature:

---

Date:

---

## Appendix G

### Interview Guide – Director

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop,  
Faculty of Education, Western University

**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Ed. D. (c),  
Faculty of Education, Western University

### *Director Interview Guide*

#### *a) Email Correspondence to Director Participant (prior to interview):*

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_, for consenting to be a participant in this study. In your role as a Director, you are responsible for a number of schools in the district. You interface regularly with superintendents responsible for schools, and principals who lead those schools, to communicate district goals and expectations.

Research indicates that trust is a key element in strong relationships between individuals, be it in their personal or professional lives. ***For the purpose of this research, trust will be defined as, “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open” (Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 1999).***

In preparation for our interview, I would like to ask you a few questions regarding how you perceive trust and its impact on your relationships with the superintendents and principals you support in your school district. Please bring your responses with you for our interview, in hard copy; this will help start our interview and guide us for the 90 minutes we will have together. Again, thank you for your time and willingness to share your thoughts with me.

*1. Please circle the number on the scale of 1 to 5, which best reflects your perspective on the statement, as you reflect on a particularly good working relationship between yourself and the principals you work with in your community of schools.*

Statement:	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Uncertain 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
1. You are open to being influenced by the superintendents' and principals' perspectives/ points of view	1	2	3	4	5
2. You are prepared to have discussions between yourself and your superintendents and principals that are honest and candid	1	2	3	4	5
3. You encourage superintendents and principals who experiment and take risks	1	2	3	4	5
4. You protect superintendents and principals who take risks	1	2	3	4	5
5. You provide opportunities and support your superintendents and principals' growth in the work of leading	1	2	3	4	5

2. When you reflect on your work with the superintendents and principals you work with, within the school district, especially when involved in the discussion of their leadership problems of practice, how would you describe the discussion regarding their practice?

Thank you very much for your time and contribution to this research project. I look forward to our time together on \_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions, please do contact me via email or phone.

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald

Field Researcher

***b) Director One on One Interview Guide:***

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University  
**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Faculty of Education, Western University

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_ for being a participant in this study. This research study focuses on how you perceive trust and its impact on your relationships with the superintendents and principals you support in your school district.

This interview will take approximately 90 minutes. I will be audio-recording our conversation; you may ask me to stop the recording at any point in time during our interview. Similarly, if you wish to end this interview at any point during our conversation, I will respect your decision. During our time together, you may ask me any questions during the process. The audio recording will be kept in a safe place; and your identity will not be disclosed (I will be using code names to protect your anonymity). Here is a copy of the questions for today's interview:

1. First, let me thank you for answering the short inventory and open-ended questions in the email I sent you. Could you share with me the information as you reflected on the short inventory of comments, and the two questions?
2. When one considers the definition of trust provided to you, and given that you are dependent on the superintendents and principals being highly effective across the district, how would you describe a "willingness to be vulnerable" within your context as a director of a school district?
3. How do you see being "benevolent" in your role as director, as you interact with the superintendents and principals you support?
4. Honesty is often mentioned as a key to a positive relationship, and for trust to be present within that relationship. Are there times when you feel that honesty is difficult for you due to certain situations, or contexts? Can you elaborate?
5. Being reliable is a very important component of being an educational leader, be it at the district or school level. What are your thoughts on this descriptor within your context as a director? In what ways are you "reliable"; in what ways are superintendents and principals "reliable?"
6. As a district leader competence is a key to being able to lead. How would you describe the key areas of competence for your role? For the role of superintendent? For the role of principal?

7. Another facet of trust is openness. What does this mean to you? Can you provide an example where this is crucial to your role and impacting the work of the superintendents and principals you support? What about a time when trust was lacking...
8.
  - a) As you think of the many interactions you have with superintendents or the principals within the school district, can you think of a time when you observed someone who experimented, or took a risk and which turned out to be a mistake. How did the person they report to, treat that person? What might we learn from those situations (mistakes that were worth attempting even though they didn't work out; mistakes that showed less than ideal judgement)?
  - b) Sometimes superintendents and principals may strongly disagree with you or a Board policy or Ministry policy. In those situations, how does that impact your sense of trust toward the superintendent and/or principal?
  - c) Sometimes leaders "punish" a direct report who strongly disagrees with a request or an opinion; what might that do to the sense of trust between district and school leaders?
9. We have talked about trust, its many facets and how it impacts interpersonal relationships. When we take a look at the Ontario Leadership Framework, and the practices of effective district and school leaders, how do you see the role of trust and relationships impacting the enactment of those practices...by principals? ...By superintendents?
10. When you think about a superintendent or principal whom you **highly** trust compared to one whom you trust, what are the different factors at play for you?
11. When trust is present, when the relationship is a positive one between yourself and a superintendent and / or principal, how would you describe your own leadership practice? How do you see it impacting the superintendent and / or principal you are working with, within the school district?
12. After all of these questions, and reflecting on trust, relationships and leadership practice at both the district and school level, how would you define trust?
13. Considering the key points you shared with me during this interview, including your own definition of trust, why is trust important to you as the director of a school district?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
15. Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

*Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me today, and sharing your thoughts. Moving forward, I will send you a transcript of the interview today via email, as well as a brief reflection, which will provide you with the opportunity to add further thoughts on our conversation. Again, thank you for sharing your valuable time with me today.*

***c) Reflective journal via email:***

**Project:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University  
**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Faculty of Education, Western University

Participant:

Date:

1. Upon reviewing the transcript of the interview, are there any areas you wish to clarify?
2. When you read your definition of trust near the end of the interview, does this definition still resonate with you and what you have experienced in your role as a superintendent?
3. While going through the interview process, did you experience an “aha” moment which you are willing to share with me?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Again, thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this study. Your reflections and insights in the research on trust will help me further understand how school districts and their leaders do the work of leading and learning.

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald

Field Researcher

## Appendix H

### Interview Guide – Superintendent

<b>Project Title:</b>	How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University
<b>Field Researcher:</b>	Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Ed. D. (c), Faculty of Education, Western University

### *Superintendent Interview Guide*

#### *a) Email Correspondence to Superintendent Participant (prior to interview):*

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_, for consenting to be a participant in this study. In your role as a superintendent, you are responsible for a number of schools in the district. You interface regularly with principals who lead those schools, be it to support, provide advice or communicate district goals and expectations.

Research indicates that trust is a key element in strong relationships between individuals, be it in their personal or professional lives. ***For the purpose of this research, trust will be defined as, “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open” (Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 1999).***

In preparation for our interview, I would like to ask you a few questions regarding how you perceive trust and its impact on your relationships with the principals you support in your communities of schools. Please bring your responses with you for our interview, in hard copy; this will help start our interview and guide us for the 90 minutes we will have together. Again, thank you for your time and willingness to share your thoughts with me.

*1. Please circle the number on the scale of 1 to 5, which best reflects your perspective on the statement, as you reflect on a particularly good working relationship between yourself and the principals you work with in your community of schools.*

Statement:	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Uncertain 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
1. You are open to being influenced by the principals' perspectives/ points of view	1	2	3	4	5

2. You are prepared to have discussions between yourself and your principals that are honest and candid	1	2	3	4	5
3. You encourage principals who experiment and take risks	1	2	3	4	5
4. You protect principals who take risks	1	2	3	4	5
5. You provide opportunities and support your principals' growth in the work of leading	1	2	3	4	5

2. When you reflect on your work with the principals you work with, within your communities of schools, especially when involved in the leadership network meetings to discuss their leadership problems of practice, how would you describe the discussion regarding their practice?

Thank you very much for your time and contribution to this research project. I look forward to our time together on \_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions, please do contact me via email or phone.

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald

Field Researcher



***b) Superintendent One on One Interview Guide:***

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University  
**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Faculty of Education, Western University

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_ for being a participant in this study. This research study focuses on how you perceive trust and its impact on your relationships with the principals you support in your communities of schools.

This interview will take approximately 90 minutes. I will be audio-recording our conversation; you may ask me to stop the recording at any point in time during our interview. Similarly, if you wish to end this interview at any point during our conversation, I will respect your decision. During our time together, you may ask me any questions during the process. The audio recording will be kept in a safe place; and your identity will not be disclosed (I will be using code names to protect your anonymity). Here is a copy of the questions for today's interview:

1. First, let me thank you for answering the short inventory and open-ended questions in the email I sent you. Could you share with me the information as you reflected on the short inventory of comments, and the two questions?
2. When one considers the definition of trust provided to you, and given that you are dependent on principals being highly effective in schools, how would you describe a "willingness to be vulnerable" within your context as a superintendent?
3. How do you see being "benevolent" in your role as superintendent, as you interact with the principals you support?
4. Honesty is often mentioned as a key to a positive relationship, and for trust to be present within that relationship. Are there times when you feel that honesty is difficult for you due to certain situations, or contexts? Can you elaborate?
5. Being reliable is a very important component of being an educational leader, be it at the district or school level. What are your thoughts on this descriptor within your context as a superintendent? In what ways are you "reliable"; in what ways are principals "reliable?"
6. As a district leader competence is a key to being able to lead. How would you describe the key areas of competence for your role? For the role of principal?
7. Another facet of trust is openness. What does this mean to you? Can you provide an example where this is crucial to your role and impacting the work of the principals you support? What about a time when trust was lacking...

8. a) As you think of the many interactions you have with other superintendents or the principals within your community of schools, can you think of a time when you observed someone who experimented, or took a risk and which turned out to be a mistake. How did the person they report to, treat that person? What might we learn from those situations (mistakes that were worth attempting even though they didn't work out; mistakes that showed less than ideal judgement)?  
  
b) Sometimes principals may strongly disagree with you or a Board policy or Ministry policy. In those situations, how does that impact your sense of trust toward the principal?  
  
c) Sometimes leaders "punish" a principal who strongly disagrees with a request or an opinion; what might that do to the sense of trust between a principal and superintendent?
9. We have talked about trust, its many facets and how it impacts interpersonal relationships. When we take a look at the Ontario Leadership Framework, and the practices of effective district and school leaders, how do you see the role of trust and relationships impacting the enactment of those practices...by principals? ...By superintendents?
10. When you think about a principal whom you **highly** trust compared to one whom you trust, what are the different factors at play for you?
11. When trust is present, when the relationship is a positive one between yourself and a principal, how would you describe your own leadership practice? How do you see it impacting the principal you are working with, within your communities of schools?
12. After all of these questions, and reflecting on trust, relationships and leadership practice at both the district and school level, how would you define trust?
13. Considering the key points you shared with me during this interview, including your own definition of trust, why is trust important to you?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
15. Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

*Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me today, and sharing your thoughts. Moving forward, I will send you a transcript of the interview today via email, as well as a brief reflection, which will provide you with the opportunity to add further thoughts on our conversation. Again, thank you for sharing your valuable time with me today.*

*c) Reflective journal via email:*

**Project:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University  
**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Faculty of Education, Western University

Participant:

Date:

1. Upon reviewing the transcript of the interview, are there any areas you wish to clarify?
2. When you read your definition of trust near the end of the interview, does this definition still resonate with you and what you have experienced in your role as a superintendent?
3. While going through the interview process, did you experience an “aha” moment which you are willing to share with me?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Again, thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this study. Your reflections and insights in the research on trust will help me further understand how school districts and their leaders do the work of leading and learning.

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald

Field Researcher

## Appendix I

### Interview Guide - Principal

**Project Title:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University  
**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Ed. D. (c), Faculty of Education, Western University

### *Principal Interview Guide*

#### *a) Email Correspondence to Principal Participant (prior to interview):*

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_, for consenting to be a participant in this study. In your role as a principal, you are responsible for a school in the district. You interface regularly with your superintendent responsible for your community of schools, be it for advice, or being a sounding board on your day-to-day leadership practice.

Research indicates that trust is a key element in strong relationships between individuals, be it in their personal or professional lives. *For the purpose of this research, trust will be defined as, “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open” (Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 1999).*

In preparation for our interview, I would like to ask you a few questions regarding how you perceive trust and its impact on your relationship with the superintendent you report to within your communities of schools. Please bring your responses with you for our interview, in hard copy; this will help start our interview and guide us for the 90 minutes we will have together. Again, thank you for your time and willingness to share your thoughts with me.

*1. Please circle the number on the scale of 1 to 5, which best reflects your perspective on the statement, as you reflect on a particularly good working relationship between yourself and the superintendent you report to, with in your community of schools.*

Statement:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Your superintendent is open to being influenced by the principals' perspectives/ points of view	1	2	3	4	5
2. You are prepared to have discussions between yourself and your superintendent that are honest and candid	1	2	3	4	5
3. You are encouraged by your superintendent to experiment and take risks	1	2	3	4	5
4. You are protected by your superintendent when you take risks	1	2	3	4	5
5. Your superintendent provides opportunities and supports growth in the work of leading your school	1	2	3	4	5

2. When you reflect on your work with the superintendent you work with, in your communities of schools, especially when involved in the leadership network meetings to discuss your leadership problems of practice, how would you describe the discussion regarding your practice?

Thank you very much for your time and contribution to this research project. I look forward to our time together on \_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions, please do contact me via email or phone.

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald

Field Researcher

***b) Principal One on One Interview Guide:***

**Project:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University

**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald, Faculty of Education, Western University

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_ for being a participant in this study. This research study focuses on how you perceive trust and its impact on your relationships with the principals you support in your communities of schools.

This interview will take approximately 90 minutes. I will be audio-recording our conversation; you may ask me to stop the recording at any point in time during our interview. Similarly, if you wish to end this interview at any point during our conversation, I will respect your decision. During our time together, you may ask me any questions during the process. The audio recording will be kept in a safe place; and your identity will not be disclosed (I will be using code names to protect your anonymity). Here is a copy of the questions for today's interview:

1. First, let me thank you for answering the short inventory and open-ended questions in the email I sent you. Could you share with me the information as you reflected on the short inventory of comments, and the two questions?
2. When one considers the definition of trust provided to you, and given that you are dependent on your superintendent's support in helping you to be highly effective in your school, how would you describe a "willingness to be vulnerable" within your context as a principal?
3. How do you see being "benevolent" when in the role of superintendent, and as it pertains to your relationship between your superintendent and yourself as a principal responsible for a school?
4. Honesty is often mentioned as a key to a positive relationship, and for trust to be present within that relationship. Are there times when you feel that honesty is difficult between yourself and your superintendent, due to certain situations, or contexts? Can you elaborate?
5. Being reliable is a very important component of being an educational leader, be it at the district or school level. What are your thoughts on this descriptor within your context as a principal? In what ways are you "reliable"; in what ways are superintendents "reliable?"
6. As a school leader competence is a key to being able to lead. How would you describe the key areas of competence for your role? For the role of superintendent?

7. Another facet of trust is openness. What does this mean to you? Can you provide an example where this is crucial to your role and impacting the work you do as a principal, and how this relates to your relationship with your superintendent? What about a time when trust was lacking...
8. a) As you think of the many interactions you have with your superintendent or other superintendents within the school district, can you think of a time when you observed someone who experimented, or took a risk and which turned out to be a mistake. How did the person they report to, treat that person? What might we learn from those situations (mistakes that were worth attempting even though they didn't work out; mistakes that showed less than ideal judgement)?  
  
b) Sometimes as a principal you may strongly disagree with your superintendent, or a Board policy or Ministry policy. In those situations, how does that impact your sense of trust toward your superintendent?  
  
c) Sometimes leaders "punish" a principal who strongly disagrees with a request or an opinion; what might that do to the sense of trust between a principal and superintendent?
9. We have talked about trust, its many facets and how it impacts interpersonal relationships. When we take a look at the Ontario Leadership Framework, and the practices of effective district and school leaders, how do you see the role of trust and relationships impacting the enactment of those practices...By principals? ...By superintendents?
10. When you think about a superintendent whom you **highly** trust compared to one whom you trust, what are the different factors at play for you?
11. When trust is present, when the relationship is a positive one between yourself and a superintendent, how would you describe your own leadership practice? How do you see it impacting the superintendent you are working with, within your communities of schools?
12. After all of these questions, and reflecting on trust, relationships and leadership practice at both the district and school level, how would you define trust?
13. Considering the key points you shared with me during this interview, including your own definition of trust, why is trust important to you?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
15. Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

*Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me today, and sharing your thoughts. Moving forward, I will send you a transcript of the interview today via email, as well as a brief reflection, which will provide you with the opportunity to add further thoughts on our conversation. Again, thank you for sharing your valuable time with me today.*

***c) Reflective journal via email:***

**Project:** How and why do district leaders develop and maintain trust with school principals: Any leadership learnings?

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Pam Bishop, Faculty of Education, Western University

**Field Researcher:** Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald,  
Faculty of Education, Western University

Participant:

Date:

1. Upon reviewing the transcript of the interview, are there any areas you wish to clarify?
2. When you read your definition of trust near the end of the interview, does this definition still resonate with you and what you have experienced in your role as a principal?
3. While going through the interview process, did you experience an “aha” moment which you are willing to share with me?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Again, thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this study. Your reflections and insights in the research on trust will help me further understand how school districts and their leaders do the work of leading and learning.

Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald

Field Researcher



**Curriculum Vitae**

Name:	Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald
Post Secondary Education And Degrees	<p>Western University (UWO) Doctor of Education 2013-2017</p> <p>Western University (UWO) Master of Education 1988-1993</p> <p>Western University (UWO) Bachelor of Education 1984-1985</p> <p>Queen's University, Kingston, ON Honours Bachelor of Arts French, Canadian Studies 1972-1977</p>
Related Work Experience	<p>Professor Fanshawe College 2014 to the present</p> <p>Superintendent Thames Valley District School Board 2007-2014</p> <p>Principal / Vice Principal Thames Valley District School Board 1996-2007</p> <p>Teacher Thames Valley District School Board 1985-1996</p>
Honours/Awards:	<p>Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence (1994) June Callwood Volunteerism Award (2015) Fanshawe President's Distinguished Team Award (2017)</p>
Publications:	<p>Co-author of school district information: Module Six - Strong Districts and Their Leadership Characteristic – A Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development; in collaboration with K. Leithwood and C. McCullogh, 2013; available online at: <a href="http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca">www.education-leadership-ontario.ca</a></p>

## Presentations:

- Canadian Association of School Administrators (CASA), Annual Conference, “Full Day Kindergarten: *An Opportunity for Innovation!*” (Niagara Falls, July 2011)
- Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Directors of Education, Annual Conference, “Implementation of Full Day Kindergarten.” (St. John’s, June 2011)
- Childreach, Community Partner, Panel Discussion, “Full Day Kindergarten: People, Program and Partnership” (London, May 2011)
- Supervisory Officers Qualification Program, Conflict Resolution (Toronto, October 2010)
- Ontario Home and School Association “Implementation of Full Day Kindergarten” (London, April 2010)
- Panel Member, Association of Early Childhood Educators Organization, Fanshawe College (London, November 2009)
- Staff Development Council of Ontario, “Powerful Designs for Professional Learning” (Mississauga, 2005 Spring Institute)