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## Inclusive Leadership Processes and Practices that Improve Educational Social Justice Outcomes for Manitoba's Children in Care – An Exploratory Case Study

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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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### **Abstract**

Grounded in a critical transformative paradigm, this case study examined how Manitoba public school principals worked to support social justice goals in education for Manitoba's children in care. A qualitative case study methodology was used to investigate how inclusive school principals develop processes and practices to work towards improved social justice outcomes for children in care. Social justice outcomes and inclusive leadership, as it is operationalized through processes and practices in schools, comprised the study's conceptual framework. Data were collected using document analysis of government documents, semi-structured interviews with principals/vice principals from six Winnipeg school districts, and focus groups with former youth in care. Findings based on analysis using the conceptual framework indicate that principals and vice principals do not yet have a common starting point in their understanding of how different systems, i.e., education, child welfare, and lived experiences affect the children. The complexity of the children's experiences, e.g., trauma, transitions etc., coupled with siloed processes/practices in education and other support organizations, create misunderstandings and incorrect assumptions that lead to inappropriate programming. In response, inclusive educational leaders successfully use processes and practices to flex boundaries within the education system and intentionally built relationships with the children and interorganizational stakeholders to improve social justice outcomes for children in care. At this time, all school leaders should consider a focus on planning for intentional relationships and differentiated environments for children in care. At the provincial level, there appears to be a critical need for an interorganizational supervisory body under the umbrella of the Healthy Child Committee

of Cabinet (HCCC) to centralize collaboration, implementation of information, and measures of success for children in care based on government protocols, while also supporting the development of a shared digital platform for the dissemination of information about what it means to be a child in care and resources to support school leaders. Further implications for policy, practice and suggestions for future study are also discussed.

**Key words:** Children in care, inclusive leadership, processes, practices, Canada, Manitoba, case study, social justice, etc.

### **Summary for Lay Audience**

This study explored strategies used by successful educational leaders (i.e., principals and vice principals) in Manitoba schools to improve the educational (i.e., academic, social-emotional) outcomes of children in care. The lives of over 10 700 children in care in Manitoba are affected by multiple systems that work in isolation and do not share information freely about the children's needs. Children in care have a complex history of experiences that include trauma, neglect, and frequent transitions. Collectively these factors make programming and supporting this group of young people complex and difficult for educational leaders. In this study, information was collected, analyzed and interpreted from three sources. Government legislation, and policy documents were referenced to determine responsibilities outlined for educational leaders as they support children in care. Educational leaders, who participated in interviews, recognized and understood challenges caused by the systems involved and wanted to improve outcomes for children in care. Former youth in care participated in two focus groups and shared their views of educational leaders' programs and actions of support in schools. The different kinds of data were separately analyzed for themes and then combined to look for patterns and differences in participants' understanding and interpretation. The results demonstrated that educational leaders used government documents to outline their administrative work with children in care. However, they did not find these documents helpful for supporting/programming for children in care. Initially, educational leaders did not have enough information about the children's lives or how different systems outside education work to support children in care. The lack of information and misunderstandings about the lives of children in care was the biggest barriers for both

groups of participants. To inform themselves and to break down barriers for children in care, educational leaders used formal/informal strategies to change the educational environment, and developed interorganizational relationships to improve outcomes for children in care. Recommendations include better strategies for interorganizational collaboration, development of a central site for collection/sharing information and resources about children in care, and development of an interorganizational working group of representatives to help monitor the children's success.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In Manitoba, K-12 public schools represent a site where overlapping historical, social, economic, and systemic factors affect educational outcomes for more than 10 700 children in care<sup>1</sup> (Brownell, Chartier, et al., 2015; Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet [HCCC], 2017, p. 47; Manitoba Child & Family Services, 2014; Manitoba Child & Family Services, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2018a). According to Manitoba's HCCC (2017) report, and for the purpose of this study, the term *children in care* refers to:

Children under the age of 18 who have been deemed in need of protection, requiring intervention, as determined by The Child and Family Services Act, or are voluntarily placed in care by agreement between the parent or guardian and child and family services agency. (p. 46)

Typically, these children have academic achievement and social-emotional outcomes far below national and provincial averages (Brownell et al., 2015). For example, high school graduation rates (long held up as a signpost of educational success by Canada's provincial and territorial governments) are 33.4% for children in care in Manitoba, and 89.3% for children in the province who were never in care (Brownell et al., 2015, p. 54). Viewed from a critical perspective to achieve social justice, this situation is unacceptable.

The concept of *social justice* applied here is grounded in Critical theory (see Theoretical Framework) and draws from Ryan's (2013) articulation of the concepts of "legitimacy, fairness, and welfare" (p. 361). In practical terms that translates to a redress of inequitable distribution and recognition of tangible (e.g., food, housing, and clean

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<sup>1</sup> Although Manitoba's Child and Family Services Act (2015) outlines the many areas of the day-to-day lived experiences to be considered in the physical, behavioural, academic, and social-emotional well-being of children in care, it does not clarify the term children in care.

water) and intangible benefits (e.g., human opportunities, academic skills, self-advocacy, democratic processes and quality of life) for groups of people who live on the margins of society, because they are purposefully or unintentionally excluded (Nussbaum 2002, 2003, 2004; Ryan, 2006b; Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Tuters, 2014, Shields, 2004).

According to Brownlee, Rawana, MacArthur, and Probizanski (2010) as well as Shields (2004, 2013), educational leaders who focus on improving these outcomes work towards critical social justice outcomes by helping to free affected students from systemic barriers that limit their self-determination and ability to make choices. With regard to students in care, highly successful principals and vice principals are also seen as inclusive educational leaders, as they achieve social justice outcomes by concentrating on improved academic, behavioural, and social-emotional outcomes rather than focusing on a single sphere of disadvantage (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Ryan, 2006b; Theoharis, 2007). This study is focused on better understanding the actions taken by school principals and vice principals working in Winnipeg, Manitoba's K-12 public schools, who are successful in supporting social justice goals that improve the educational outcomes of students in care.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Children in care represent one of Manitoba's most vulnerable, underserved, socially complex groups. Approximately 90% (Brownell et al., 2015, p. xi) of the province's more than 10 700 children in care have an Indigenous ancestry (HCCC, 2017, p. 47). The disproportionate representation of Indigenous youth is a direct consequence of intergenerational poverty and trauma stemming from colonization, residential schooling, and systemic barriers embedded in society's social institutions, including education (Brownell et al., 2015; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; HCCC, 2017). The details and

data presented in the reports for Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) (2015) Calls to Action, Manitoba's Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) (Brownell et al., 2015) and Manitoba's Commission for the Educational Outcomes of Children in Care (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016) suggest that these intricately intertwined and layered components perpetuate a lack of visibility, power, and success within the educational context for Manitoba's children in care.

Manitoba's provincial government, through the Education Administration Act (CCSM c E10) and the Public Schools Act (CCSM c P250), positions public school principals, and vice principals in their absence, as agents of change best suited to advocate for and demand an accessible and equitable learning environment for all students, including Manitoba's children in care. Although this falls well short of a multi-tiered government sponsored advocacy model, it does embed implicit opportunities for social justice activism, as school principals and vice principals are authorized to interpret and enact the day-to-day duties and processes laid out in district policy level initiatives (Gross & Shapiro, 2016; Rottmann, 2007; Ryan, 2006; Starratt & Leeman, 2011). With much of the managerial responsibility for the day-to-day provisions of education in schools delegated to school leaders, each principal and vice principals in Manitoba is legally accountable for the academic planning, instruction, and success of students in the school (The Education Administration Act, CCSM c E10). In the context of this study, the terms 'school leaders' and 'educational leaders' imply both school principals and vice principals, and are understood as characterizing legal representatives within schools, whose positions place them in a larger arena of systemic and moral influence as potential change agents for all students, including children in care (Angelis et al., 2007; Ryan, 2007; Ryan & Tuters, 2014; Shields, 2013; Starratt & Leeman, 2011).

Bogotch and Shields (2014), Marshall (2004), Ryan (2012), Shields (2013), and Theoharis (2007) have all examined how education leaders can advance social justice goals in the area of race/ethnicity, poverty, culture, gender, and religious diversity. Although research in educational leadership appears to be moving towards a social justice agenda in these areas of concern, Canadian research that examines specifically how K-12 public school leaders can support children in care, especially those with an Indigenous ancestry, remains virtually absent in the academic literature. Indeed, my literature review identified only a handful of researchers working to better characterize what Manitoba's children in care need to thrive while enrolled in the public education system (Brownell et al., 2015; Brownell et al., 2012; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2012, 2013; Manitoba Child and Family Services, 2014; Roos, Roos, Brownell & Fuller, 2010).

With regard to policy and grey literature, the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) and the Canadian Association of Principals (CAP) (2014), along with reports from Manitoba's Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) (Brownell et al., 2015), and Manitoba's Commission for the Educational Outcomes of Children in Care (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016), all highlight the urgency in the work of Manitoba principals and vice principals, policymakers, and researchers seeking to improve educational outcomes for children in care, and to transform processes and practices that may contribute to the marginalization of this group at the provincial and school level (Brownell et al., 2015; ATA & CAP, 2014; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). Still these policy sources fall short of making the connection between the real life experiences that affect the school-readiness of children in care, and the subsequent work of educational leaders as they try to understand the children's needs, and work to bridge the efforts of schools and other



organizations that support these children.

A singular example in the literature that highlights strategies utilized by a Canadian school and principal to improve educational outcomes specifically designed for the large number of children in care, is a study by Brownlee et al.'s (2010). In this study, the principal's critical/transformational approach involved students, staff, and families in collecting an inventory of academic, social/emotional and behavioural strengths from different areas of students' lives. With their support, the principal used this information to successfully design differentiated interventions that transferred the strengths of students in care from one area in school into other school areas that represented goals. The principal's reflective comments outlined the fact that it was not one specific type of intervention that appeared to support the change in the behaviour and outcomes of children in care, but rather the focus on each student's specific needs and strengths that made them feel included, appreciated, and competent. Although part of the Canadian context, this study is not based in Manitoba's education or youth in care context. That only a single study can be located, underscores the gap that exists in the academic literature.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to better understand the actions of school principals and vice principals who are successful in supporting social justice goals for children in care, and to add information about how former youth in care experience and understand the support provided by education leaders in Manitoba schools. To the best of my knowledge, this project is the first in Canada to examine the phenomenon from the perspective of school principals and vice principals working in Manitoba, while also

including the voices of former youth in care, against a backdrop of relevant documentation (i.e., policies, reports).

### **Significance Within the Manitoba Research Context**

Many school principals and vice principals in Manitoba may want to help children in care attending their schools. However, the heavy and increasingly intensifying workloads that school principals and vice principals face, coupled with the multi-layered nature of the barriers these students face, means principals and vice principals, even those perceived as successful with their advocacy work, may not have a complete understanding of the range of leadership processes and practices that will nurture academic, social and behavioural success for children in care across a variety of contexts (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Flecha (2015). The findings of this study contribute to the limited body of leadership literature examining the work of educational leaders working to support marginalized youth and, specifically, children in care in Manitoba, and across Canada. Importantly, this study captures the voices of Manitoba public school leaders and former youth in care, a previously unexplored combination of perspectives. Moreover, the study's findings add to the existing body of literature that underlines the need to create change in the lives of these children (Brownell et al., 2015; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; TRC, 2015). Marshall (2004) points out that integration of multiple participant perspectives in the exploration of a relatively unexplored phenomenon helps to overcome the isolating effects of an individual group's siloed experience. It is the combination of research questions, methods, and participants in this study that uniquely situates it to address these timely concerns in the present Manitoba context.

### **Research Questions**

The following main question and sub-questions, anchored in the conceptual

framework, help to investigate the details surrounding this exploratory case study. The study's main question is:

In what ways are inclusive school principals and vice principals advancing social justice outcomes for children in care attending Winnipeg's K-12 public schools?

Four sub-questions frame the interrogation of the data:

1. Which responsibilities and educational goals are outlined in provincial and district documents to guide school leaders in addressing intended outcomes for Manitoba's children in care?
2. What challenges/barriers do these inclusive school principals and vice principals face while trying to promote social justice outcomes for children in care?
3. What inclusive leadership processes and practices are school principals and vice principals using to advance social justice outcomes for children in care?
4. How do former youth in care understand principals' and vice principals' school-based inclusive leadership processes and practices, intended to support social justice outcomes, in light of their past educational experiences?

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

Public schools are legislated to support the *academic success* of students.

Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, and Elias (2003) specify this to include "...that all students master reading, writing, math, and science" and that students will have "a good understanding of history, literature, arts, foreign languages, and diverse cultures" (p. 466). Nevertheless, the authors indicate that the expectation for schools also include the development of students' *social-emotional outcomes* (Greenberg et al., 2003):

High quality education should teach young people to interact in socially skilled and respectful ways; to practice positive, safe, and healthy behaviors; to contribute

ethically and responsibly to their peer group, family, school, and community; and to possess basic competencies, work habits, and values..." (p. 466).

Christensen and Lamoureux (2016), as well as Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, and Schellinger (2011) make a connection in their findings between students' academic success and their social-emotional competence, and stress the importance for students to recognize personal and inter-personal emotions, along with the ability to plan for and manage personal goals and positive relationships, to enhance academic success. In their work, Zins and Elias (2007) acknowledge the impact of the negative trauma-inducing factors (i.e., chemical dependency, family violence and subsequent family breakdown) that affect the school readiness of children in care. These findings further help to focus the definition of social-emotional outcomes for this study as, "...the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others..." (Zins & Elias, 2007, p. 1), which closely aligns with Christensen and Lamoureux's (2016) indication of what children in care in Manitoba need to succeed in schools.

The term *leadership* is widely used in many different communities, including academic, policy, professional, and the general public. Its specific nuanced definition is shaped by a range of factors, including individual (e.g., perceptions, intentions, assumptions), systemic (e.g., policy, processes, and the assumptions embedded within), and wider socio-cultural influences (e.g., historical, economic, political, etc.) (English, 2008; Northouse, 2016). The one common thread that connects different conceptions of *educational leadership* is the fact that educational leaders interact with and influence other people, individually and/or collectively (English, 2008; Northouse, 2016; Ryan, 2006b; Shields, 2013). Stemming from this broad conception of leadership, scholars, such

as Ainscow (2005), Flecha (2015), Ryan (2006), and Shields (2013) have written extensively about *inclusive leadership*, which these authors describe as a leadership approach with a social justice orientation to improve academic and social outcomes for a growing diversity of students in schools. Rooted in a critical theoretical orientation, it forwards an equitable stance for a range of diverse groups and communities, e.g., physical, neurological, academic, racial, cultural, gendered, LGBTQ, and religious diversity.

The tenets of this inclusive leadership approach are embedded in the *processes and practices* that educational leaders use to achieve their goals (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Ryan, 2006b; Shields, 2013; Thompson, Hall & Jones, 2013). Processes, understood to include policy guides, manuals, task frameworks, etc., deal with the organization and methods of leadership/management and describe how the leader/administrator is to enact the formal responsibilities and goals that make-up their professional role (Shields, 2013). Practices are the habits, customs, and routines leaders employ to achieve organizational goals (Ryan, 2006b). In the work of Thompson et al. (2013), the authors describe practices in relation to processes as the “patterned, everyday activities” (p. 157) around the “...arrangement of words, things, people and ideas which organize everyday life in change-making schools” (p. 157).

### **Positionality**

To situate myself in this study, I asked myself if it was possible to be engaged in a completely fulfilling profession and still become the victim of nagging discontent? After years of teaching and leadership opportunities, I developed many more questions than answers. Why are some students more successful than others? What facets of students' lived experiences follow them into the school? How does the education system affect the

many children in foster care who bounce in and out of our classrooms and lives? How do we design policies in order to better support the people they are intended to serve? How do educational leaders shape these policies in their work context? How are families affected by the policies that governments develop, and schools enact? Why is it so hard to gather families and organizations around the table to support students?

I firmly believed I had students' best interest at heart, and felt I had the right goals in mind. However, one quiet targeted statement made a 10-year old student, also a child in care, introduced a paradigm shift into my world, by allowing me to glimpse the education world through her eyes. "I am CFS, I have FAS, and I have ADHD. I come from a reserve and the more letters I have, the more money they get for me. I hate French, and I don't read. Every teacher I ever had hated me, and you're gonna hate me too" (Personal Communication, 2011). Her comment made me realize that I was only looking at what I perceived to be students' best interests. The child's comment challenged me to move beyond this perception. Over time, I recognized that I had to look within, and beyond the education system (i.e., academia), to find insight into these questions, because my professional lens, as it existed then, was no longer seeing enough of the picture.

In my professional capacity as a vice principal, I started noticing systemic barriers embedded in educational policies and practices that negatively impact the lives of students in care in Manitoba, e.g., stigma carrying labels affixed to students by our educational support/funding siloes; streamed academic programming; inclusive education legislation locally interpreted into exclusive practices; along with restrictive catchment regulations, to name a few. Specifically, these barriers created a two-tiered system: One of the 'haves' and the 'have nots'; the 'seen' and the 'unseen'; those that 'matter' and those that 'don't'.

Even as a white, European, Immigrant female, and vice principal with the financial, social and cultural advantages that come with these labels, I felt powerless to really lead change in the highly regulated and politically charged environment that is K-12 public education. The present cycle of 4-year political mandates encourages sitting provincial governments to address the needs of the most vocal groups and not those groups having the most need. Within the school environment, I became aware of the ongoing tensions and daily decisions around managerial priorities, positives versus negatives, as I worked to find the balance between many competing priorities, including budgets, funding, staffing, personnel decisions, and timetabling to name a few. I found myself pushed and pulled to choose the lesser of two evils, or to address the loudest voice at the table. But what is the price?

Expanding further on my earlier statement on the significance of the study, my plan is to disseminate the findings to the relevant academic, policy, practitioner, and social services agencies who can act on the findings to better support children in care in Manitoba's education system. Specifically, I will focus my dissemination efforts on those spaces that already exist and bring together researchers, policymakers, practitioners, families and members of the in care community, especially those most affected, to legitimize their voices and to share their experiences and expertise, with the aim to develop a better understanding of their needs. For example, policymakers have not yet had the opportunity to examine how the "in care" experience affects educational leaders' ability to support children in care, nor have they had the opportunity to deeply examine the complex systemic barriers embedded in education and child welfare system, and their impact on children in care. The intention is not to polarize the actors involved in this important advocacy work. Instead, by inviting different groups to learn about my findings

and share their own insights on this phenomenon, I hope to open the conversation and allow for new information and views to emerge.

### **Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study**

The organization of this study reflects the previously mentioned need to explore and integrate the information and perspectives of educational leaders and former youth in care around the processes and practices that inclusive principals and vice principals use to support social justice goals for children in care. This initial chapter outlined the study's problem, purpose, main (and sub research questions), definition of key terms, and significance (all grounded in the relevant academic literature), as well as the researcher's positionality statement, consistent with the study's critical theoretical orientation.

Chapter two describes the Canadian and Manitoba education context for children in care and school principals and vice principals. It also outlines the major ideological influences and effects of neoliberalism and neo-conservatism in education, while making a case for social justice, a critical perspective, and finally inclusive leadership in education.

Chapter three situates the study in a critical transformative theoretical framework, which legitimates the knowledge and experiences of inclusive principals, vice principals, and former youth in care. It also introduces the four concepts that constitute the conceptual framework, *social* justice in tangible and intangible outcomes, and *inclusive leadership* as it is operationalized through *inclusive processes* and *inclusive practices* enacted by educational leaders.

Chapter four presents the study's methodology, i.e., qualitative exploratory case design, and methodological details, including methods for data collection and analysis, sampling, development of protocols, etc. Consideration for the study's quality,



trustworthiness, and ethical dimensions, as well as limitations, are also included.

Chapter five presents the study findings, as they are organized around the four meta-themes that emerged.

Chapter 6 draws from the key findings to respond to the study's research questions, and also situates the findings in the relevant literatures to highlight how the study's findings affirm, nuance, challenge, or add new dimension to the discussions taking place in their corresponding academic, policy and practitioner communities.

Chapter seven provides an overall summary of the study's design, key findings, recommendations for future research, recommendations for future practice and policy, as well as concluding remarks.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review is organized into five sections. The review begins by providing a brief overview of the Canadian K-12 public educational context both for children in care and school principals and vice principals. I then situate my study in the discourses surrounding the major ideological forces that currently impact the work of educational leaders globally, in Canada, and in the Manitoba context. Finally, I provide a detailed review of the processes and practices employed by self-identified successful school principals and vice principals who promote social justice goals for underserved children in the current educational context, followed by a brief review of a few key studies that inform the design of this project.

### **Children in Care and the Educational Context**

#### **Canada's Children in Care**

Canadian children in the care of government fall under the mandate of individual provinces (Johnson, 2013; PHAC, 2008; TRC, 2015). In 2008, The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) reported 19 599 child welfare investigations that ended in a new out-of-home placement for children involved. Of these children in care, PHAC indicates that 46% of children presented functioning concerns that would directly affect their social, emotional, behavioural and academic ability to succeed in school (PHAC, 2008). The TRC report (2015) also suggests a direct link between Canada's Indigenous residential school legacy, and the poor social, economic and educational outcomes of children in care (Brownell et al., 2015). This theme is evident across the provinces, as a full 22% of children connected to the in care systems across Canada represent children that have an Indigenous ancestry (Brownell et al. 2015, p. 4).

### **Manitoba's Child Welfare System and Policy Context Shaping Education**

In Manitoba, historical versions of the Child and Family Services Act (CFS Act) (2018) dating back to 2010, including mention of amendments dating back to 1985, can be found online. Digital versions of the *Guidelines for School Registration of Students in Care of Child Welfare Agencies* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002) document are also available. Both the *Guidelines for School Registration of Students in Care of Child Welfare Agencies* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002) and previous versions of the *Child and Family Services Act* (CFS Act) (2018) were replaced as active guiding documents by the current *CFS Act* (2018), the *Education and Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care (Protocol)* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013), and the *Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care Support Resources Companion Document (Companion Document)* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013b). Their existence does, however, establish the Manitoba government's historical intention to develop bridging services between education and child welfare departments for well over 15 years. In particular, the provincial government's *Guidelines for School Registration of Students in Care of Child Welfare Agencies* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002) document outlines and integrates the responsibilities and actions expected of social workers and educational leaders in 2002, to ensure registration, programming (e.g., providing access to and support with appropriately levelled academic/curricular instruction and resources) and social-emotional support in schools for children in care.

Most of the 10-page document provided templates for social workers and educational leaders to use during the transition process, but two pages specifically mentioned roles and responsibilities of social worker and school staff members, as they related to children in care. The guidelines, as seen in this excerpt, focus much more on the

systemic accountability of social workers and educational leaders:

The Placing Agency will:

1. complete the Students in Care – School Intake Information form;
2. participate in an initial meeting with school administrator(s), and in subsequent meetings as required; and
3. provide pertinent information that is unique to the child's educational programming.

The School will:

1. meet with the social worker, foster parent(s) and/or legal guardian to review the student's educational needs and placement;
2. liaise with the previous school/division;
3. establish the earliest possible date of school entrance;
4. establish appropriate placement, programming and supports; and
5. be responsible for collecting information from previous schools. (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002, p.2)

Unlike the current *Protocol* and *Companion Document*, this earlier version does not specifically mention strategies or a joint responsibility for the academic, and social-emotional success of children in care in schools.

Three years after the release of the *Protocol* and the *Companion Document*, Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) recommended, "...that every professional working in CFS and education should have a working knowledge of the 2013 publication *Education and Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care*" (p. 20).

Together, the historical and present-day guiding legislation and government documents delineate a purposeful and growing intention to integrate child welfare and education

department services to improve academic and social-emotional outcomes for children in care.

Manitoba's provincial government, with the help of MCHP, is also currently engaged in ongoing provincial demographic data collection connected to the province's population of children in care. Drawing from these data, Brownell et al. (2015), supported by study results from Burnside (2012), Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) and the recent TRC (2015) report, all found that foster home transitions, residual effects of trauma, low levels of resiliency, as well as overburdened Child and Family Services department staff combine to impact the success of Manitoba's children in care, as they transition back and forth between primary caregivers and between schools (Brownlee et al., 2010; Burnside, 2012; Christensen & Lamoureux 2016; Neiheiser, 2015; TRC, 2015). As a result, complex personal histories and experiences act as predisposing factors that put the educational outcomes of children in care at risk before they arrive in Manitoba public schools. Roos et al. (2010) support this finding, and indicate that in schools, both overt processes (i.e., academic streaming), and more subtle practices (i.e., pulling some students out of class for less rigorous individual programming that isolates and labels students) compartmentalize the experiences of students based on life experiences, exceptionality, and funding labels associated with these processes and practices. In their recent report to the government of Manitoba, Brownell et al. (2015) outline quantitative data, from 1998-2012, that describes the education results for students in care in Manitoba, including high school graduation rates of 33.4 % for Manitoba's children in care, and 89.3% for children in the province who were never in care (Brownell et al., 2015, p. 4). The MCHP report also highlights the fact that almost 90% of children in care have an Indigenous heritage (Brownell et al., 2015, p. xi).

These data bring new considerations to the discussion, as the reasons for being taken into care often have their roots buried in dense layers of intergenerational trauma. Indeed, analysis of demographic, achievement, and other data reveal a range of social inequities that are not easily addressed, such as poverty, transiency, and historical trauma (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). The unique details that colour the education experiences of children in care are often invisible or viewed from a deficit perspective by educators working in the education system. This is the situation that a growing number of Manitoba's principals and vice principals are being urged to actively oppose (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016).

### **Canada's School Principals and Vice Principals**

In 2016 there were approximately 15 500 school principals (CMEC, 2016), 450 000 educators, and 5.1 million students enrolled in K-12 public schools across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018b). Unlike most of its federated counterparts, authority over education in Canada resides at the jurisdictional (provincial/territorial) level, and not at the national/federal (with some exceptions, such as education on First Nations Communities) (CMEC, 2016). Accordingly, this means that there is not one Canadian K-12 public education system, but 13 jurisdictionally governed systems that share a number of important values but each different in terms of sub-jurisdictional government structure for the organization/provision of education, policy, curriculum, etc., that, arguably, reflect the distinct needs of the citizens they serve (CMEC, 2016; Wallner, 2012). For this reason, the education literatures in Canada are often jurisdictional or even regional in their focus (ATA & CAP, 2014, p. 147).

Pollock and Hauseman (2016) argue that in recent years the managerial and accountability side of principals' and vice principals' work usually revolves around

changing and improving school culture and student outcomes through collecting and managing assessment data for both students and staff (ATA & CAP, 2014). Pollock and Hauseman (2016) indicate that principals' and vice principals' success in their work is affected by the nature of provincial government and school district support, staff relationships, the professional capacity of staff, as well as transiency rates for organizational staff and educational leaders. In a recent study on school principals and vice principals, conducted by ATA and CAP (2014), principals and vice principals report that standardized assessments, staff members' attitudes towards these, as well as the stress that comes with increased expectations to implement different initiatives, all detract from their work to improve student instruction (ATA & CAP, 2014). Concerning their efforts to take social justice action, principals and vice principals report that the diverse needs of students have an overwhelming impact on their daily work (ATA & CAP, 2014). Across the country, the government of Manitoba being no exception, budget cutbacks to publicly funded departments (e.g., social services, health, etc.) have led to greater public demands on the school system, schools in particular, to now act as intervention sites that support students' physical and mental health needs. Moreover, increasing public awareness of the need to address mental health concerns has led to a socio-cultural shift across communities where matters previously addressed privately within families or by community based organizations (e.g. complex family structures, high transiency, challenges of newcomers to Canada and poverty) are now matters of public concern, with families increasingly requesting support from schools (ATA & CAP, 2014; Pollock & Hauseman, 2016).

When managerial and social justice goals collide, for example, from resource cutbacks or when organizational processes and practices demonstrate values that are

incompatible with student needs, principals and vice principals report experiencing dissonance and frustration in their daily work to improve student outcomes (ATA & CAP, 2014; Pollock & Hauseman, 2016). Combined, these factors affect both the kind and quantity of work that principals and vice principals do in schools across Canada, as well as their ability to act to improve social justice outcomes.

### **Manitoba School Principals and Vice Principals**

In Manitoba, there are 37 school districts, as indicated in *Schools in Manitoba*, a Manitoba government report (2019). Six of these are exclusively located in the provincial capital of Winnipeg. Schools from one of these school division are located in Winnipeg, as well as in other communities across the province. The report also indicates there are 688 public schools in Manitoba, each generally representative of one principal per school. Some of these schools have one or more vice principals, depending on the number of students and the needs of the school. The total number of principals and vice principals was previously reported by Manitoba's Council of School Leaders (COSL) at approximately 1000 (COSL, 2008), but this report is no longer available through the link. Together with its membership, COSL works to influence Manitoba's provincial education agenda based on the many contextual trends that impact principals' and vice principals' work and student learning.

The same social, political, economic, and educational trends that affected the work of principals and vice principals across Canada over the past 15-20 years also affected Manitoba's education environment and the work that school principals and vice principals do in Manitoba schools (ATA & CAP, 2014; Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). According to Jaafar and Anderson (2007), from the 1970's to the 1990's, accountability standards and a neoliberal economic agenda became visible in education in the form of



standardized provincial curricula to promote more consistent academic outcomes, compulsory school district mergers, and greater central control of education at the provincial level. These growing trends in centralization, monetary redistribution, and mandated curriculum development, more tightly regulated principals' and vice principals' autonomy and sphere of leadership influence.

More recently, Christensen and Lamoureux (2016), along with the *Manitoba Immigration Facts: 2014 Statistical Report* (Manitoba Government, 2014), provide evidence that the complex nature of educational school leadership continues to be transformed by rapidly growing population segments of Indigenous students in urban schools, students' wide-ranging ability levels, and the arrival of over 16 000 immigrants from around the world each year (Manitoba Government, 2014, p. 2). Levin and Farthing (2004) expressed that starting in 1999 the newly elected NDP government tried to mitigate the impact of neoliberal economic pressures on Manitoba educators by introducing interventions focused on small realistic steps put in place to build understanding, capacity, transparency and trust with school leadership and communities (Levin & Farthing, 2004). However, in the past 10-15 years, student demographics, such as ethnicity, ability and language, as well as the skills required to succeed economically on a global level, continued to introduce unknown variables and unexpected responsibilities for school leaders (Manitoba Government, 2014; Ryan, 2006b; Shields, 2013). Public school principals and vice principals, legally responsible for the education of all children in their schools, are charged with a formidable task.

### **Major Ideological Influences of Neoliberalism and Neo-conservatism Affecting Educational Leaders in Canada and Manitoba**

This section provides a brief overview of two major ideological forces, namely

neoliberalism and neo-conservatism, influencing the direction of public education, especially in public schools, globally, and also in Manitoba, Canada. Together they affect the development of trends in education and influence the work of educational leaders.

### **Effects of Neoliberalism**

Supporters of neoliberalism identify it as a free-market ideology that supports few government interventions or regulation of the economy (unless the regulations help to 'set the markets free'), increased privatization, and individual responsibility-oriented principles (Clarke, 2012; Hill, 2004; Hursh, 2016; Winton & Pollock, 2016). In the 1980's, politicians and business leaders across Western countries argued that their economies were unable to compete at the global level due, in part, to an uncompetitive labour force, the result of low-quality education. In response, governments introduced numerous standards and policy requirements grounded in neoliberal ideology (Carpenter et al., 2012; Hursh, 2000; Pinto, 2015; Winton & Pollock, 2016), such as efforts to privatize education and standardize curriculum and learning outcomes (Hill, 2004; Riffert, 2005), with the aim to introduce competition and set clear, quantifiable standards that would better prepare students to compete in a neoliberal economic world (Alexiadou, 2010; Ball, 2012; Clarke, 2012; Coffield & Williamson, 2011; Hill, 2004; Hursh, 2016; Püschel & Vormann, 2012; Taylor, 2004; Winton & Pollock, 2016). The impact brought by these changes, across North America, including Canada, resulted in increased workloads and managerialist-type accountability tasks for school leaders, along with decreased personal control in the development and interpretation of policies relevant to the local context (Apple, 2001; Hill, 2004; Hursh, 2000, 2016; Pinto, 2015; Winton & Pollock, 2016). Partly as a response to these changes, there is a growing trend on the part of social justice-minded school principals and vice principals, including those from

Canada, to refuse to comply with policies they see as irrelevant, despite fear of professional censure (ATA & CAP, 2014; Ball, 2015; Hursh, 2016; Pinto, 2015; Wang, 2012; Winton & Pollock, 2016). According to Ball (2015) and Pinto (2015), these principals and vice principals view neoliberal policy implementation as a constraint on their ability to act on social justice issues, as it leaves little or no room for personal interpretation or refusal.

### **Effects of Neo-conservatism**

Working in partnership with neoliberalism, neo-conservative ideology legitimizes policies and legislation that privilege the knowledge of dominant white, middle class, Anglo-Christian values, but does not acknowledge disparities in resource distribution, and social power access for marginalized groups (Apple, 2001, 2012). In education, according to Young and Levin (1999) and Apple (2012), neo-conservative perspectives advocate for the restoration of a more focused effort toward fundamental educational measures (e.g., individual achievement tests) that reflect the beliefs and values of the white middle class but restrict the actions of principals and vice principals trying to support underserved students who's live experiences may not be represented in the design of the tests (Hill, 2004). Hill, Lewis, Maisuria, Yarker, and Carr (2015) indicate the main identifiers of neo-conservatism in education as:

1. Control of Curricula: of schools, teacher education, universities, the removal of dangerous content;
2. Control of Pedagogy: teaching methods, pedagogic relations between teacher and students;
3. Control of Students: through debt and through actual or fear of unemployment;
4. Control of Teachers and Professors: through surveillance and through a culture of

having to meet targets, punishment of dissidents and union activists; dismissals and closures of schools, closures of university departments (p. 59-60).

Embedded in Canadian public schools, aspects of neo-conservatism do not problematize or question which knowledge frameworks are seen as valid or given dominance in the standardized policies and curriculums (Apple, 2001, 2012, Hill, 2004; Ryan, 2006). Ryan (2006b) argues that, "Conservative proponents...believe that inclusion is simply a matter of integrating the excluded, marginalized and problematic into an already existing system" (p. 6). Viewed from a critical perspective, the processes and practices used in this approach do not create dissonance for those stakeholders already integrated into the system and demonstrate a lack of regard for the underserved students enrolled in schools, ignore the complex social layers that affect their lives, and constrict the actions of potential social justice-minded principals and vice principals.

### **The Effect of Neoliberal/Neo-conservative Principles on the Manitoba Context**

Manitoba's education context is situated in the larger Canadian and global context, so the influence of neoliberal principles is evident. For example, Roos, Roos, et al. (2006) indicate that Manitoba school principals were required to implement standardized measures and assessments, and that the outcomes did not take into account different contextual factors (e.g., socioeconomic factors, parental age, exposure to trauma, transiency etc.) that contribute to student results, specifically for children in care. As a result, information such as success rates, for provincial exams, for example, were an inaccurate reflection of student success, and thereby affected the reliability of education data shared about Manitoba's children in care.

Manitoba school principals and vice principals, like their colleagues across

Canada, also report increasing concern about resource and managerialist constraints within the day-to-day responsibilities that impact their ability to support a growing diverse student population (ATA & CAP, 2014). This is problematic, because children in care, as outlined by Brownell et al. (2015) and Christensen and Lamoureux (2016), exhibit complex academic, behavioural, and social-emotional needs that affect their ability to succeed in the present education system.

For administrators in Manitoba public schools, the influence of neoliberalism and neo-conservatism contributes to further marginalization of Manitoba's children in care, who continue to suffer the inequities and unintended consequences of a system not designed with their experiences and knowledge-base in mind (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Gross & Shapiro, 2016; Volante, 2008). Educational leaders in Manitoba are attempting to deal with the unfamiliar and extreme needs of children in care using processes and practices influenced by, and in support of neoliberal/neo-conservative aims representative of the dominant social group. For example, school district boundaries have long been a guiding factor that helps educational leaders determine whether or not a student is eligible to attend a specific school. In recent years, principals and vice principals recognized the negative effects that frequent school transitions have on the lives of children in care and allowed the children to remain at their school, even if they moved out of the district's boundaries because of a foster placement breakdown.

To make meaningful improvements in the lives of children in care, school leaders need greater autonomy to support the development of plans that utilize inclusive differentiated pedagogies/assessment strategies, curricula that honour different ways of knowing, and intentional relationship networks, which target academic, behavioural and social/emotional needs (Brownell et al. 2010, Brownell et al. 2015, Brownlee et al. 2010,

Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Roos et al. 2010). According to the ATA and CAP (2014) study, principals and vice principals are balancing conflicting motives and objectives, navigating resistance and bias, and purposefully flexing the boundaries of managerial and systemic accountability processes. This shift in principals' and vice principals' local intentional practices creates room for discursive spaces where principals and vice principals, who focus on social justice as a goal, see opportunities to amend, and reshape the present educational context for underserved students.

### **Creating Opportunities for Social Justice in a Neoliberal Context**

De Angelis, Griffiths, Joshee, Portelli, Ryan, and Zaretsky (2007) echo principals' and vice principals' concerns when they question whether it is even possible for public school leaders to focus on social justice issues within an educational framework influenced by neoliberal managerialist principles. Many school principals and vice principals still see themselves as either accountable to students and focused on the pursuit of social justice, or accountable to the system; yet Spencer (2013) insists that school leaders can find a balance that reflects social justice aims in education. With small, integrated acts and interpretations, administrators can move from being gatekeepers to becoming effective advocates. They utilize their actions to build on the rigid two-dimensional systemic frame to create individualized three-dimensional social justice environments in their schools. Kearns (2011) and De Angelis et al. (2007) agree and add that working for social justice within a managerialist approach is possible through reshaping and re-visioning processes, so they become more inclusive of different voices and participants, and through setting social justice goals for practices that are already accepted within the system. Apple (2001), as well as Young and Levin (1999) indicate that local political history and climate can influence the end results of implementing a

social justice agenda in a neoliberal policy context, resulting in local actors, such as educational leaders, who choose to (mis-)interpret policies and practices (a point to be touched on again later).

### **The Case for a Leadership Approach Grounded in the Critical Perspective**

To capture the theoretical leadership typologies most prevalent in schools, and most applicable for creating social justice change for children in care, I will use Rottman's (2007) Leadership and Change for Social Justice Framework to outline her categories of leadership and how these integrate with change, which she identifies as actions that have a social justice goal. In her text, Rottman (2007) presents three conceptions of leadership that include leadership as individual, group, and idea, and three conceptions of change that include keeping the status quo, following current trends, and resisting educational inequity (Rottman, 2007). Leadership as status quo may not reflect change, and because the central tenets of this study are situated in a critical transformative framework, change represents one of the main goals. Although the status quo dimension deserves consideration as a potential outcome for inclusive leaders' potential plans and actions, the scope of this study does not allow for its consideration here. (Participants were sampled to ensure that they were active in resisting educational inequities.)

First, Rottman (2007) situates leadership in an individual with specific traits, characteristics, or abilities, who holds legal or authoritative power. This conception of leadership is currently found in a wide range of theories, including managerial, transactional, and transformational (Mulford, 2003; Northouse, 2016; Shields, 2010). Although seen as a means to effective school reform for some situations, these theories are part of the current trend models that concentrate on organizational change goals, which position leadership in an individual (Ross & Gray, 2006); sometimes overlooking

both the interpersonal and contextual aspects necessary for social justice change to occur (Blackmore, 2013; Harris, 2005; Mulford & Silins, 2011; Rottman, 2007).

Next, she positions leadership, as it is manifest in a group through influence and change as they are affected by smaller acts of leadership that occur through interactions between individuals in the school. This conception of leadership includes the distributive theory, which is gaining much attention in schools as it supports the notion of collective action to enhance organizational goals (Harris, 2005; Leithwood & Harris, 2009; Mulford, 2003). With regard to change leadership, this current trend sees leaders invested in a highly popular approach touted as a potential intervention for a wide variety of organizational concerns. Execution of this theory in the school validates the idea of multiple knowledge perspectives and collective engagement (Day, 2014). However, it does not guarantee the application of critical democratic ideals within the relationships and processes of the school, as the power of distributing that leadership is not democratic, nor does it connect social justice change with students' needs inside and outside the school (Blackmore, 2013; Fuller, 2012).

Finally, leadership as a leading idea is presented as a barrier or catalyst for organizational change. Leading ideas provide a lens for what is seen as reality within a context, and therefore influence the decisions we make. Neoliberalism falls within the change component as a current trend whose ideas come into existence through those actors in the school context who enact neoliberal policies. The business-oriented goals sanctioned through privatization of schools, market competition, and perceptions of choice appear democratic and efficient, yet do not bring the structural inequities of marginalized students in school into focus (Apple, 2001, 2012).

On the other hand, critical theory, as a leading idea, according to Rottman (2007),



is located in the change dimension as a concept that resists educational inequity by placing social justice goals and equity as its core purpose for change. It questions the legitimacy and power imbalance of systems, structures, assumptions, processes and practices as they impact social justice change in schools. It is for this reason that Rottman (2007), Ryan (2006b) and Shields (2013) advocate for the use of a critical approach to leadership change. I also believe that a critically informed leadership approach has the greatest potential to advance educational leadership goals and outcomes for children in care.

The academic literature references multiple leadership theories, which align with the principles of critical theory, explicitly problematize circumstances that lead to marginalization, and outline actions for advocacy and emancipation of silenced groups in order to find ways to equalize access and outcomes for high quality education. The critical social justice umbrella of educational leadership theories and approaches, according Blackmore (2013), Ryan (2006b, 2013), and Shields (2013), comprises a growing list of theories: emancipatory, transformative, equitable, feminist, anti-racist, queer, gender, and inclusive, etc. taking a critical social justice focus. These theories, if applied to a situation in education, would consider the purpose, processes, experiences, as well as outcomes of education. Most importantly, these theories question the systems and structures that reproduce negative outcomes for vulnerable groups in schools. Given its structured approach, the work of James Ryan (2006a, 2006b, 2012, 2013) on inclusive education is the leadership pathway to advance social justice aims most relevant given the purpose of this project.

### **Conceptions of Inclusive Leadership**

Ryan's (2006b) inclusive leadership conception not only addresses the underlying

systemic inequities that Blackmore (2013), Ryan (2006b, 2013), Shields (2010) and other critical scholars address, but the concepts that he offers readily transfer to the knowledge frameworks and discourses that are part of the day-to-day lived experience of school leaders. This makes it an accessible as well as useful conceptual tool to investigate the ways in which highly successful inclusive school principals and vice principals are promoting social justice goals for children in care attending Winnipeg's K-12 public schools.

### **Processes and Practices of Highly Successful Inclusive Educational Leaders**

The availability of literature examining educational leadership processes and practices to support social justice aims for children in care across North American, and more specifically in Canada, is scant. For this reason, I widened the scope of my literature review to include sources related to the leadership processes and practices of highly successful school principals and vice principals who advance social justice goals for underserved children. In Manitoba and for the purpose of this study, I situate underserved students, like Manitoba's children in care, as student groups whose life experiences with neglect, trauma, social/cultural exclusion, and poverty resulted in further marginalization within the education system. I posit that at this time the education system does not adequately address these students' life experiences or learning needs in ways that make them feel valued by and fully engaged in the education system (Brittain & Blackstock, 2015; Brownell et al., 2015; Brownlee et al., 2010; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Ryan, 1998).

Ainscow and Sandill (2010) credit the development of inclusive leadership to "social learning processes within a given workplace that influence people's actions and..., the thinking that informs these actions" (p. 403). Together with Wenger's (2010)

understanding that the processes involved in social organizational learning affect people's actions, these authors characterize inclusive processes and practices as belonging to a comprehensive method of joint meaning making through organizational strategy supported by social actions based on relationships in the organizational context (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Wenger, 2010). Based on the principles in Ainscow and Sandill (2010) and Wenger's (2010) work, processes represent intentional plans for action, which include formal steps, outlines or artefacts that indicate intentions or goals. Practices, however, embody the day-to-day lived applications and implications of each process, as they are socially created through interactions and discussions between groups of people in the organization (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Wenger, 2010). Inclusive educational leaders across Canada and in Manitoba represent a key catalyst that brings attention to the social justice agenda, and the need for inclusive processes and practices that support the education of underserved students, including children in care.

### **Inclusive Principals and Vice Principals**

Inclusive principals and vice principals, along with social workers, lawyers, and teachers etc., represented in the academic literature locate their work with underserved students around marginalizing factors apparent in their context. Their work embeds critical analysis and advocacy action, but is not limited to topics in the area of racial and ethnic tension, also including differently-abled students, socio-economic differences, gender, sexual orientation, and how these priorities affect student experiences and outcomes in education (Blackmore, 2013; Pedro, Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2015; Ryan, 2006b; Shields, 2013; Theoharis, 2007). Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2008) identify three factors, having a big-picture perspective, a courageous/global vision and seeing themselves as change agents with the personal will and political insight to

affect change, which allow principals and vice principals to successfully develop and utilize inclusive processes and practices to support social justice goals (Ryan, 2010, 2016). Waldron, McLeskey, and Redd (2011), as well as Ryan (2006b) also note similar thematic foundations, which consist of developing organizational vision, redesigning organizational structures, supporting improved working conditions for staff, ensuring high quality instruction for all students, and using a wide variety of data to make decisions. The authors suggest that each foundation becomes manifest through a series of structured organizational processes, which are interpreted through and for the local context via practices that make essential contributions for successful inclusive leadership.

### **Key Studies that Inform the Design of this Study**

Foremost in the area of design, rests the concern based on the dependability of findings based on one group's perceptions. Mulford and Silins (2011) point out that principals tend to overvalue the impact of contextual or systemic changes, when compared to feedback from other staff members. Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2006) also suggest that using principals as the only source of information provides a limited view of the phenomenon under study. It would seem less than ideal for one group, educational leaders in this case, to state that their processes and practices are inclusive for another group, children in care in this case, without including the voices or experiences of the second group (Fuller, 2012).

Yet, most research that focuses on the educational outcomes of children in care provides recommendations based on the suggestions of professionals who are legally responsible for their welfare; however, several studies that helped to inform this study's design included former children in care as participants. Hedin, Höjer, & Brunnenberg's (2011), Johnson (2013, 2014), Mitchell, Jones and Renema (2015), as well as Rutman

and Hubberstey (2016, 2018) all introduce the voices of youth in care as valid and powerful sources of data. Mitchell et al. (2015) also utilize a critical transformative framework that provides an avenue for participants to share their own views and information with educators, policymakers and other children in care.

Although there was no shortage of studies that include public school principals and vice principals working toward social justice outcomes, McMahon's (2007) critical qualitative study of ten white Canadian administrators problematized the Canadian public education context for underserved students and engaged participants in a critical analysis of their actions within this context. The findings demonstrated that although many principals and vice principals are aware of inequities in the education context, they felt constrained in their ability to act, due to organizational demands. This information demonstrates the value of using a purposeful sample of successful inclusive principals and vice principals, willing to share their processes and practices with policymakers and educational leaders, in order to facilitate inclusive experiences for children in care in Manitoba's schools.

While a number of studies indicate positive results for underserved students in schools led by inclusive administrators, as previously mentioned, only one critical case study was identified that focused on specific inclusive processes and practices designed to meet the needs of children in care. Brownlee et al.'s (2010) used their Strength Assessment Inventory (SAI) (Rawana & Brownlee, 2009), a questionnaire/survey, to elicit information about strengths from different areas of the lives of student's in care who attend a K-8 public school in Thunder Bay, Ontario. This case study of a single school demonstrates that processes, like the school's structured intake steps, and practices, such as maintaining student connectedness with a variety of supportive adults to develop

problem solving skills, are especially successful for improving engagement, attendance and academic success, for children in care. The successful leadership strategies in this study were highlighted through the addition of rich data provided by the case study design and demonstrated the effectiveness of a wraparound process that spanned community boundaries and engaged a wide diversity of community groups, to develop educational success for children in care, many of whom had an Indigenous ancestry.

Based on information from these key studies, this study's design is not only viable but necessary, as it uses multiple sources of data, including the experiences of inclusive principals and vice principals and the voices of former children in care, to support a rich description of the phenomenon being studied.

### **Interorganizational Challenges to Inclusive Leadership in Manitoba**

For educational leaders, obstacles exist in the implementation and practice of inclusive principles. Not least is the fact that the current hierarchical structure of the education system is not compatible with principles of inclusion. By the nature of its design, the present system affords power to leadership in professional positions, rather than to leadership ideas (Rottman, 2007; Ryan, 2006b), thus making it vulnerable to situations where professional interactions are not based on hierarchy. Ryan (2006, 2013) and Theoharis (2007) indicate that overt hurdles such as inequitable "policies, practices and attitudes" (Ryan, 2013, p. 365) are more easily recognized. While others, such as organizational gaps in knowledge and understanding, program-selection criteria with subtle discriminatory outcomes based on accountability measures, confusing school practices, educational hierarchies, and the problem of connecting participatory processes with social justice goals, are more deeply embedded in education structure and thus more difficult to confront for inclusive educational leaders. (Goddard & Hart, 2007; Ryan,

2006; Theoharis, 2007).

Knowing and understanding the local culture, systems and micropolitical environment is important for educational leaders in general, as connections between events, relationships, and organizational power dynamics outside of education are not always visible or immediately evident to educational leaders (Ryan, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). Acting on that understanding and critically reflecting on progress adds even more layers of complexity to a professional educational environment that is already dense with growing responsibilities for educational leaders. Although evocative of the formal and informal strategies used by inclusive school leaders in Ryan's (2006b, 2010) and Theoharis' (2007) research, educational leaders working with children in care must develop their actions around the social complexity, historical racism, social isolation, and trauma that touches the lives of children in care in Manitoba (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). This helps to ensure that everyone working with the children can participate in understanding, planning, contributing and accessing social justice goals. As a result, inclusive school leaders must spend a significant amount of time and effort motivating, growing, and stretching the attitudes, understanding, and skills of families, communities, and school staff members; thereby ensuring the invested philosophical and participative support of all involved, when policy mandates are translated at the school level, and across organizational boundaries.

Working between different organizations, educational leaders characterize roles and employ strategies that in previous health and social systems research in the United Kingdom (Williams, 2011) and United States (Miller, 2008) are referred to as boundary spanning. Educational leaders accomplish similar work across interorganizational boundaries by developing different ways to enact their inclusive leadership plans while

situated in the education system and simultaneously working between different systems located outside of education (Johnson, 2016; Miller, 2008; Williams, 2011). Principals and vice principals in Manitoba are naturally situated as a locus of contact for everyone who is part of a child's in-care network, as they are generally co-located in the same environment with the child, Monday to Friday. That means at the school-level there is potential for contact from and collaboration between social workers, foster parents, counsellors, therapists, foster home agencies, court-designated officials, and group home staff members, as well as school-based and district staff members who may be involved with the child. Consequently, a good deal of their time, energy, and effort might be spent working across organizational boundaries with groups of people who are not part of the educational hierarchy. This gives educational leaders opportunities to develop and revise strategies that encourage and nurture relationships with stakeholders from the above groups. Previous research outlines these strategies as components of social-learning practices and educational leadership strategies in schools (Ainscow, 2005; Miller, 2008; Ryan, 2006b; Theoharis, 2010). In effect, inclusive educational leaders who work across organizational boundaries in education use "...contextual knowledge, interpersonal skills, trust and connectedness", while also drawing on "...an underlying community loyalty and a fundamental, socially conscious impetus—one which invites active advocacy for the oppressed via strategic collaboration" (Miller, 2008, p. 353).

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

In Canada, the development of policies and processes that support both the education and healthy development of children in care is a provincial responsibility. The consensus across relevant academic and policy literature is that children in care need special supports that foster positive educational outcomes, such as consistent caring



relationships, stable home and school placements and regular attendance, as well as treatment supports for trauma and wider recognition of their individual strengths (Brownlee et al., 2010; Burnside, 2012; Christensen & Lamoureux (2016); Neiheiser, 2015; TRC, 2015). Principals and vice principals in Manitoba are legally and ethically positioned to facilitate the development of processes and practices that structure and facilitate these supports. Qualitative interviews with inclusive principals and vice principals, conducted in related research, support the view that educational leaders who take a critically informed social justice stance, and demonstrate a willingness to work across organizational boundaries actively seek out and act on those processes and practices that constrain the development of inclusive education. These inclusive leaders are highly successful in supporting social justice goals for underserved students (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Ryan, 2006b; Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008; Waldron et al., 2011; Wenger, 2010).

### **CHAPTER 3: A CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIVE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to gain a better understanding of ways in which successful Manitoba public school principals and vice principals are working to support social justice goals for children in care, with the intention to also add information about the experience and understanding former youth in care have about the support provided by education leaders in Manitoba schools. In this chapter, I explain how Critical theory and transformative leadership theory were used to inform my study's theoretical framework, then proceed to describe the key concepts that form my conceptual framework (and their relationships), followed by discussion of the study's assumptions, all of which are implicated in the collection and analysis of data, and interpretation of findings

#### **A Critical Paradigm**

As researchers try to make sense of the world around them, they look for ways to orient themselves and their research, to determine what is truth, to identify patterns, and ideological principles. Cohen et al. (2018), Mertens (2010), as well as Patton (2015) indicate that researchers adopt worldviews or paradigms, which help frame a study's methodology. Creswell (2007) suggests that:

...the purposes, questions, and methods of research are all interconnected and interrelated so...the process of designing a qualitative study begins...with the broad assumptions central to qualitative inquiry, a worldview consistent with it, and in many cases, a theoretical lens that shapes the study (p. 42).

As such, the lens that the paradigm introduces to the study affects development of the study, including the scope, purpose, and the questions it asks. All three of these are

informed by the “assumptions”, “principles, standards or measures” (Scotland, 2012, p. 8) commonly accepted by the research community working within that paradigm. Three popular approaches to educational research provide different worldviews underpinned by different ideologies, resourced by a cache of distinctive methodologies and methods, and result in different data, even when they approach the same problem (Scotland, 2012).

As might be expected, a large field of academic literature exists to debate the utility, merits and shortcomings of each paradigm, and each researcher must reflect on the choice of paradigm, beginning with the end or purpose of the research in mind. For example, a positivist paradigm works with the assumption that the natural world exists separate from human interactions and that this world functions objectively, according to rules, and regular patterns that can be predicted, controlled, and independently measured, and that there is one way to know the world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Developed to understand a decontextualized world, a positivist paradigm would not include or uncover the voices or complex social experiences that affect children in care.

In the Interpretivist paradigm the world does not exist independently of its actors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Scotland, 2012). Interpretivism would account for the experiences of children in care mentioned above, because this paradigm focuses on multiple ways of knowing the world and developing a better understanding of reality through social construction of knowledge and the interpretations of individual actors. This perspective could bring into focus the challenges and barriers in education for Manitoba's children in care. Cohen et al. (2018) indicate that “The nature of [interpretive] research, then, is exploratory in nature, to investigate the interpretations of the situation made by the participants themselves, to understand their attitudes, behaviours and interactions” (p. 20), giving rise to a wide variety of unique experiences. Yet for the purpose of this

research study it is important to note that the interpretive paradigm does not question or critique underlying systemic assumptions, norms, or structures, and that "... participants might not be aware of invisible ideology which guides their actions,...[and that they] might not fully understand the forces which are acting on their agency, [as] their explanations of phenomena are incomplete (Scotland, p. 13).

A critical paradigm not only describes social behaviours, but sets itself apart from an interpretive paradigm, as it outlines past and present normative values that implicate(d) themselves in the construction of social policy, practices as well as the formation and day-to-day running of social institutions (Scotland, 2012). A core tenet of critical theory is that inequities in society, which are the result of an imbalance of access and opportunities, exist between individuals, and these inequities are reflected in and perpetuated by society's institutions (e.g., structures, cultures, traditions) (Mertens, 2010; Shields, 2013). The critical paradigm "...seeks to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 51). Countering the positivist or interpretivist paradigms, with the former assuming that the social world exists like the natural (i.e., external from and imposed on us), and the latter that the social world is no more than an extension of human consciousness, a critical perspective assigns agency to human actors, and questions the legitimacy of knowledge systems (Cohen et al., 2018; Mertens, 2010). The goal for critical research then "...is to critique and challenge, to transform, and to analyze power relations" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.59) through its findings. Given the precarious academic and life-trajectory outcomes of Manitoba's children in care, coupled with the findings in the Brownell et al. (2015) and Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) reports,

which forward historical, cultural, and systemic implication for these outcomes, a critical paradigm is appropriate for this study.

### **Understanding the Implications of a Critical Paradigm**

To understand the 'critical' of this study, it is necessary to delve deeper into the four sociological assumptions of the critical paradigm. In terms of its ontology, or ways of understanding what is real (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Mertens, 2007), is reality external to the individual or is reality a product of an individual's interpretation? Reality then is informed by the "...type of evidence that one will accept" (Mertens, 2007, p. 215). The ontological assumption of the critical paradigm rests on the understanding that there are many lenses through which one can view reality, but it also questions why some perspectives are privileged over others (Mertens, 2010), "...who has power, how it's negotiated, [and] what structures in society reinforce current distributions of power (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 61). This questioning, problematizing of power with the aim to eliminate inequities and empower the marginalized in society is a distinguishing of all assumptions viewed through the Critical (radical) sociological paradigm.

In another example, epistemology is the sociological assumption concerned with knowledge – such as what constitutes "true" knowledge (Scotland, 2012). Epistemology, then viewed through the Critical paradigm is also concerned with "knowledge" but problematizes what is seen as legitimate "truth", questioning those who claim to advance (and benefit) from such knowledge at the expense of others. Paradigmatic epistemological assumptions question the proximity of the researcher to participants (Mertens, 2007). Is a relationship necessary between researcher and participants to discover what is seen as "truth"? Moreover, epistemological concern for what constitutes "truth" extends to how truth is created, acquired, and communicated (Scotland, 2012),

including the nature of the relationship between researcher and participant to discover knowledge (Mertens, 2007). Through a Critical lens, epistemology necessarily questions the nature of this relationship but also seeks to legitimize participants' personal way of knowing by placing a strong emphasis on the researcher's proximity to participants, working with participants to clarify understanding in order to generate collective, contextual knowledge (Creswell, 2007).

Axiological assumptions outline the role of beliefs, values (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Creswell, 2007), and ethics (Mertens, 2009) that underline a theoretical paradigm. According to Scotland (2012), "The critical paradigm asks the axiological question: what is intrinsically worthwhile? Thus, the critical paradigm is normative; it considers how things ought to be; it judges reality" (p.13). In other words, researchers with a critical perspective set high ideological goals that have a moral, social justice impetus (Mertens, 2009; Scotland, 2012), where the research process itself may result in participants' raised consciousness around the problem.

The previous three assumptions in the critical paradigm lay the foundation for a methodology that uses culturally appropriate methods that capture participants' realities while also allowing space for them to share their concerns and addressing their community goals for equity (Mertens, 2007). However, the impact of a critical perspective moves well beyond the design of the study's methods, and may encompass a rich, complex case study design, which affects how the researcher selects, organizes, and analyzes the data, keeping in mind the involvement of participants. (Creswell, 2007).

### **A Transformative Leadership Theory Approach**

Shields (2014) insists that the very notion of transformative and social justice work is critical, regardless of whether or not it carries the 'critical' label, "...in the sense

of attending to the needs, backgrounds, and voices of those most neglected, most marginalized, and most oppressed in our society as it is currently constituted and in the systems of education that it perpetuates” (p. 338). The critical perspective mentioned above then is reflected in the transformative leadership approach, “...as it take[s] into account the situations of the marginalized and oppressed and seeks to offer remedy” (Shields, 2013, p. 19). Burns (as cited in Starratt, 2011) points to an earlier root of transformative leadership in which “...leaders promote a vision of large and fulfilling possibilities that lift people’s horizon beyond self-interest, toward higher, common ideals” (p. 131). Similar to assumptions and aims in the critical paradigm, the intention of a transformative leadership paradigm is to question established knowledge systems, but this approach also provides hope, in the way of opportunities and greater participatory democracy, for social, cultural, and economic groups that exist at the margins of social, economic, and cultural participation (Shields, 2013).

The focus on transformative leadership in schools for both Shields (2014), and Starratt (2011) rests on those students furthest removed by their social, economic, and/or cultural situations from full participation in our education system. Rather than beginning with specific assumptions about how to determine truth, a transformative leadership approach takes stock of “...wider society and the material realities (including disparities and inequities) that impinge upon the ability of individuals to succeed within the organization and on the organization’s ability to attain its goals (Shields, 2014, p.326). Starratt (2011) characterizes transformative educational leadership in four ways:

1. Leaders recognize and develop supports for marginalized groups of students who arrive at school unprepared to engage with the social, emotional, and academic context.

2. Leaders develop, or flex, and restructure existing processes and practices that present challenges or barriers to marginalized students' full participation in the opportunities offered in education.
3. Leaders build connections and relationships in a school culture that honours all histories and ways of knowing and includes the voices of everyone in the school community.
4. Leaders develop opportunities for students that connect their life and learning at school to their personal history and day-to-day life outside of school. The focus is not only on basic academic skills but also on skills that allow students to participate more fully as active citizens in the global community (Starratt, 2011, p. 132-133).

As a result, the goals of transformative leadership theory have the potential to address social inequities on an individual and societal level by improving the experiences of individual children, the opportunities and self-advocacy of underserved groups, and also by challenging and changing the underlying systemic barriers (Shields, 2014, p. 326).

### **Critical Transformative Theoretical Framework**

As the framework's title suggests, the critical paradigm and transformative leadership approach are the two major theoretical sources giving shape to this study's framework, and overall design. Accordingly, a framework infused by both critical theory and transformative leadership theory seeks to ensure that all voices are heard, empowers participants to seek change in their personal context, and, ideally, provides opportunities for them to create that change.

This study is broadly situated in a critical, transformative theoretical framework, where my assumptions are located in the understanding that many social and cultural



groups do not have equal access to economic resources and opportunities, and these barriers create personal, educational, and multi-systemic inequities that can and do affect educational outcomes for students in the care of CFS (Mertens, 2010; Shields 2013). As a result, the academic literature positions school principals and vice principals who practise with an inclusive intent as politically-minded actors situated in our school system, who have the opportunity to incorporate social justice for underserved students through personal moral consideration, discourse and action (Gross & Shapiro, 2016; Ryan, 2006, 2012).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study explains how theory and concepts relate to each other and become operationalized to make sense of the data collected, i.e., to identify and report the ways in which inclusive principals and vice principals are advancing social justice outcomes for children in care in Winnipeg K-12 schools. As mentioned in the previous section, this study's framework is grounded in Critical theory and transformative leadership theory, and their associated assumptions. Key concepts of the framework include: i) social justice outcomes; ii) inclusive leadership; iii) inclusive processes; and iv) inclusive practices. In the sections that follow, I flesh out each concept individually, followed by explanation of how the concepts come together holistically, all situated within the study's theoretical framework.

**Social justice outcomes.** Outcomes in education are often understood to focus on students' academic performance on standardized measures (Wang et al., 2006). For the purpose of this study, I conceptualize outcomes through a social justice lens that seeks to address both tangible (e.g., food, housing, clean water) and intangible (e.g., human opportunities, academic skills, self-advocacy, quality of life) equitable opportunities and

outcomes in education for children in care (Ryan, 2006b; Ryan, 2013). Understood in this manner, for example, the needs of these groups are assessed and supplemented with resources, so that all students are supported in different ways, so they are able to achieve the same goals.

**Inclusive leadership.** For the purpose of this thesis, inclusive educational leaders focus on outcomes of social justice to help free affected students from systemic barriers that limit their self-determination and ability to make choices (Brownlee et al., 2010). The concept of inclusive leadership is characterized by the inclusion of everyone in the school community (Ryan, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2013) where processes and practices are focused on social justice goals. Rather than fitting diverse students into existing school frameworks, inclusive leaders work to change the school system and environment in order to accommodate diverse students (Ainscow, 2005). The inclusive leaders continually work to integrate the voices of marginalized students, strive to “respond to” and “learn from” diversity, and are morally engaged in locating and removing obstacles to inclusion (Ainscow, 2005). Inclusive leaders do not work in isolation to achieve social justice outcomes, rather, they substantively “...include members of their school communities—students, parents, teachers and others—in decision-making processes and other activities in ways that provided them with the power that they often did not possess in other contexts” (Ryan, 2010, p. 363). Ryan’s (2006b) conception of inclusive leadership for social justice also involves a collaborative community of perspectives for the development of common values and differentiated student academic/behavioural interventions. Ryan’s (2006b) seven indicators, “advocating for inclusion, educating participants, developing critical consciousness, nurturing dialogue, emphasizing student learning and classroom practice, adopting inclusive decision- and policy-making

strategies, and incorporating whole school approaches” (p.11), represent important underpinnings for my conception of inclusive leadership.

Anchored in the transformative leaderships approach outlined in the theoretical framework, this study's conception of inclusive leadership for social justice also integrates Shields' (2013) work, as the author points out that transformative leaders working for social justice move their work and actions beyond the school. Here, inclusive educational leaders working for social justice, who develop an increased level of awareness for “socially difficult topics” that deal with social justice (Brown, 2004, p. 80), move these topics to a higher level of acknowledgement and then develop actions for these areas of interest within a critical transformative framework.

**Inclusive processes and practices.** The concept of inclusive leadership is characterized by the inclusion of everyone in the school community (Ryan, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2013) where processes and practices are focused on social justice goals. In his description of social learning and change, Wenger (2010) draws a clear distinction between processes or objects through the production of “...physical and conceptual artefacts – words, tools, concepts, methods, stories, documents, links to resources...that reflect our shared experience and around which we organise our participation” (p. 180), and practices which are defined by “...meaning making [that involves] engag[ing] directly in activities, conversations, reflections, and other forms of personal participation in social life” (p. 180). If inclusive leaders want to realize substantive, meaningful social justice outcomes for children in care, they need to use both processes and practices in their day-to-day work (Wenger, 2010).

Based on the principles in Ainscow and Sandill's (2010) work, and for the purpose of this study, inclusive processes represent intentional plans for action, which

include formal steps, documents and/or opportunities to meet, which indicate intentions and/or goals for collaborative consideration and critique of existing systems that provide barriers for marginalized students. From this standpoint, inclusive processes (e.g., committees, surveys) do not question students' inability to conform to existing school frameworks, but instead, re-examine and revise existing school processes (e.g., student schedules, attendance policies) to become more responsive. Inclusive processes always involve questions around the moral and values driven implications of the impact and outcomes a process will have on marginalized students (Ainscow, 2010). More specifically, this conception draws from the work of Theoharis' (2007) study, which provided specific examples of explicitly designed processes such as framing and guiding professional development for staff around the use of disaggregated school-based student data. This process allowed for the development of differentiated interventions for underserved students, and revisions of schools' stratified education model to foster more heterogeneous classes in Manitoba (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2014). Less overt processes were focused on regularly delivering structured, and focused staff training to develop common vocabulary around student support (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010), as well as improved knowledge and capacity around inequity and cultural student needs, including exposure to trauma, and the effects of family residential school histories for Manitoba's children in care (J. Katz, personal communication, September 29, 2017; Theoharis, 2007). These examples not only demonstrate the ties developed to connect students to the school environment, but also validate the wrap-around community philosophy supported by Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) for Manitoba's children in care.

Inclusive practices, on the other hand, refer to school leaders' day-to-day practical

efforts (e.g., individual staff coaching opportunities, building relationships with students) to engage and destigmatize underserved groups (Theoharis, 2007). Informed by the work of Ainscow and Sandill (2010), as well as Wenger (2010), inclusive educational leaders' practices are focused on socially creating and translating processes through practices, which are based on informal interactions and discussions between groups of people as they go about their daily work in the organization. Examples from Hoppey and McLeskey's (2013) work include inclusive educational leadership practices such as intentional development of personal and professional relationships with teachers, which allowed inclusive leaders to demonstrate and model trust and a caring and compassionate environment, all necessary for a successful socially just education of children in care (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). Hoppey and McLeskey's (2013) also suggest that inclusive leaders practise creative ways to shield school staff members from accountability demands peripheral to the school, so that they can focus on developing internal accountability measures that take into account the strengths and needs of diverse student populations. Although these strategic practices are more covert in nature, they address the willingness and moral courage that many successful inclusive leaders demonstrate when they practise the (mis)interpretation of policies to create contested spaces where advocacy action for underserved students can take place (Apple, 2001; Young & Levin, 1999).

Even though distinct operational definitions were developed from the literature (Ainscow, 2005; Theoharis, 2007) for both processes and practices, the literature itself demonstrated some overlap in their use. In their work with inclusive educational leaders, researchers use these terms but do not always assign them operational definitions (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Ryan, 2006b; Shields, 2013). That suggests that this trend

may also become evident in the data collected, as principals and vice principals in this study may not follow specific definition guidelines, but instead use the terms more organically as they are used in their context. However, the definitions developed in this conceptual framework will help researchers to listen for cues in participants' comments to help assign participants' inclusive leadership advocacy work as processes or practices during data analysis.

### **How Key Concepts Connect to Form the Study's Framework**

In this study, social justice outcomes represent equitable access to both the positive academic and social opportunities and outcomes for Manitoba's children in care. The leadership praxis of Manitoba's inclusively minded principals and vice principals generates two layers of leadership advocacy, inclusive processes and practices. These two layers have the potential to support the development of social justice outcomes for children in care. Inclusive processes used by principals and vice principals help to develop social justice outcomes through the creation and revision of systemic structures that allow a wide variety of voices, beliefs and values to engage in the change process (Ryan, 2006b; Shields, 2013). Newton and Riveros (2015) situate educational leaders as, "...relationally constituted in the interactions of the socio-material realities they inhabit and cocreate [sic]" (p. 333), through their practices. Inclusive practices thus represent the social interactions that result in local creation, application and interpretation of processes, in the pursuit of social justice outcomes for children in care (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Wenger, 2010).

Inclusive educational leaders cannot forward social justice outcomes using processes or practices; the two are inherently joined and must be utilized simultaneously (Wenger, 2010). Through daily use and refinement, practices are transitioned into

concrete processes, and processes are clarified and contextualized through practice and application (Ainscow, 2005). Processes outline the goals but also reflect the social justice beliefs of inclusive educational leaders, while practices bring to life the day-to-day representations of those beliefs and goals through each school's individual contextual social interactions. Moving back and forth between processes and practices provides inclusive educational leaders with the opportunity to refine processes after they are instituted and evaluated through practices in the field. Working in tandem, these concepts have the potential to change the educational experiences of Manitoba's children in care.

I posit that inclusive principals and vice principals use specific processes and practices to increase their level of awareness of problem areas in education for children in care. They do so by honestly and openly acknowledging the problems they recognized in their context and then they develop actions in order to transform the outcomes for children in care. By interrogating the results of the interaction between social justice goals and inclusive leadership through the experiences of inclusive principals and vice principals and former youth in care, it will be possible to identify specific groups of processes and practices used to support social justice outcomes for children in care, and to explore how former youth in care understand the processes and practices school principals and vice principals used and intended to support social justice outcomes in their past educational experiences.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I described the two main theoretical sources that inform my study, critical theory and transformative leadership theory. My conceptual framework then introduced the concepts of social justice outcomes, inclusive leadership, inclusive processes, and inclusive practices, how each concept connects to form the framework, all situated in the

tenets of the two main theoretical sources. Together, the theoretical framework and conceptual framework characterize a more substantive and functional representation for theoretical application, which was used to analyze and interpret data in order to respond to the study's questions.



## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### Implications of a Critical Transformative Paradigm

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to better understand the ways in which Manitoba public school principals and vice principals are succeeding in their work to support social justice goals in education for Manitoba's children in care. Situated in a critical transformative theoretical framework, this rich case study design explores the experiences of inclusive educational leaders who support children in care, the voices of former youth in care, and information from government document analysis, which inform the understanding and actions of educational leaders who develop processes and practices for children in care at the school level.

The study's main question is: In what ways are successful inclusive principals and vice principals advancing social justice outcomes for children in care attending Winnipeg's K-12 public schools? Four sub-questions frame the interrogation of the data:

1. Which responsibilities and educational goals are outlined in provincial and district documents to guide school leaders in addressing intended outcomes for Manitoba's children in care?
2. What challenges/barriers do these inclusive school principals and vice principals face while trying to promote social justice outcomes for children in care?
3. What inclusive leadership processes and practices are school principals and vice principals using to advance social justice outcomes for children in care?
4. How do former youth in care understand principals' and vice principals' school-based inclusive leadership processes and practices, intended to support social justice outcomes, in light of their past educational experiences?

This study's main question and sub-questions interrogate a phenomenon that

involves a group of underserved children caught in a context controlled by overlapping social systems. The study questions are coupled with multiple sources of data perspectives, including the youth in care who see themselves as part of that underserved group. These study characteristics align with the ontological and epistemological principles associated with a critical paradigm, and led me to conduct a critical, exploratory case study that also reflects my positionality as a critical scholar.

### **A Critical Case Study Design**

As mentioned in my theoretical framework, this study is situated in the critical paradigm, informed by the theoretical underpinning of social constructionism. Here, I delve deeper into the implications of these assumptions in terms of taking a qualitative study approach and using the case study design informed by critical theory. In this way, I demonstrate coherence between my theoretical orientation and research approach.

### **A Qualitative Research Approach**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) outline several indicators that set qualitative forms of research apart from those in the quantitative paradigm. The authors summarize the most important normative signposts as, "...the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy and the end product of being richly descriptive" (p. 37). Indeed, it is the researcher's personal experiences, moral compass, transparency and capacity, as well as philosophical lens, which implicate themselves in the study's eventual resonance and credibility with its intended audience (Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2010). Additional components often integrated in a qualitative approach include sharing the research space with the voices of participants, analyzing words instead of numerical values for themes and patterns, leading to a spectrum of possible interpretations, yet all seeking insight into

participants' understanding of and interaction with a specific context, rather than merely stopping at description (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Most importantly, Creswell (2014) recognizes, what for me became the deciding factor for choosing a qualitative research design, the many layers of contextual information and overlapping social systems' variables involved in the exploration and description of the phenomenon understudy mentioned above as the prime characteristic of qualitative research.

### **The Qualitative Case Study**

According to Mills and Gay (2016), research studies that demonstrate a complicated context and phenomenon are best approached through a qualitative case study design. Yin (2014) adds that a case study design is appropriate for descriptive, explanatory, as well as exploratory research questions that study real-world situations and problems of participants, when it is impossible to separate and isolate different variables within a limited unit of study. Patton (2015) argues that case studies represent a distinctive socially complex problem that needs, "...a boundary around some phenomenon of interest...and that [the] boundary setting process determines what the case is and therefore the focus of the inquiry..." (p. 259). The "case", then, is the "unit of analysis", (Miles et al, 2014, p. 28), and needs to be strictly defined as to what will and will not be examined in the study. Case studies can vary widely, as their focus or topic of study can be, "...physically real...socially constructed...or historical/political..." (Patton, 2015, p. 259) in nature, and each of these could be interpreted in different ways based on the researcher's positionality and theoretical lens (Mills & Gay, 2016). Case studies stand alone among research designs in their ability to reach and resonate with a more diverse group of audiences, adding to the appropriateness of the design choice given the critical transformative aims of the study (Yin, 2014).

### **The “Critical” Qualitative Case Study**

The qualitative exploratory case study approach is consistent with the study's ontological, epistemological, and methodological underpinnings. However, the research design must also reflect the critical, transformative principles outlined in Chapter 3, e.g., developing supports for underserved groups of students unable to engage successfully with the context; developing and restructuring existing processes and practices that present challenges/barriers for these students; building connections and relationships that include all voices; developing opportunities for these students that integrate both cultural and real-world relevancy (Starrat, 2011). Implied here is that qualitative case studies grounded in, or shaped by, critical principles may include design elements that distinguish them from case studies grounded primarily in interpretivist sociological assumptions. For example, a qualitative case study “seeks to capture the diverse understandings and multiple realities” of a phenomenon (Patton, 2015, p. 122). A critically informed design, then, will purposefully incorporate the perspectives of those being marginalized or silenced, so as not to privilege one over the other. In this particular study, the inclusion of former youth in care as study participants is one example of how this study's design reflects critical principles, i.e., by making space for these voices, which are often absent in the available research. In the context of improving educational outcomes for Manitoba's children in care, this theoretical framework opens the possibility for all participants to communicate their experiences, and share their collective wisdom with policymakers, organizations involved with children in care, as well as other children in care.

### **Design and Procedures**

In the sections that follow, I describe the study's research design and procedures.

Wherever possible, I also identify and explain any additional design elements included to ensure that the approach is consistent with the core tenets of critical theory and supports the wider social justice aims of this project.

### **An Exploratory Case Study Design**

Yin (2014) indicates that exploratory case study research and its associated questions are shaped by the researcher's positionality and experiences, will focus on different aspects of 'what', 'how', and 'why' within the context of the unexplored phenomenon, and generates findings that may be considered as the basis for further research in the future. The fact that there is a scarcity of research, which considers and incorporates the views of Manitoba's inclusive educational leaders, and former children in care, further helped to refine the design of my research into an exploratory case study.

Patton (2015) indicates that the various units of analysis guide data collection during the study. These help the researcher bind the case, determine which data to include, and where to draw the line for data collection (Yin, 2014). Based on Yin's (2014) description and consistent with the critical aims of this study, I employ an exploratory case study bounded by inclusive school leaders and former youth in care who currently live and/or work in Winnipeg public school districts. The inclusion of principals, vice principals and former students in care provides a new lens for this phenomenon, and, to the best of my knowledge, was previously not utilized in other research. The characteristics that allow the study to reach and resonate with different groups (i.e., educational leaders, policymakers, children and youth in care) are implicated in the transformative aspect of the study's theoretical framework.

### **Case Context**

There are 37 public school districts in Manitoba. The context of the study was

purposely selected as Winnipeg's six urban school districts. School leader practices to support the social justice outcomes for children in care represented the case for study (primary unit of analysis). The case was further bounded by the following sub-units: inclusive school leaders, former youth in care (both currently living/working in Winnipeg), as well as government and school district documents developed to guide principals' and vice principals' actions. The case and its sub-units of analysis were purposefully selected because i) there are 242 public schools and principals and vice principals in the six urban school districts (Manitoba Government, 2015), providing a broad population for sampling; ii) the second group of participants, former youth in care, is concentrated within urban Winnipeg, based on available, affordable housing, and programming that directly targets members' basic needs for education, skills, and employment (Office of the Children's Advocate, 2006); iii) proximity for the researcher to conduct the research and also familiarity with the school system helped to facilitate access to participants and enabled greater insight during data collection and analysis.

### **Data Sources**

To understand the socially complex layers involved in this study, three sources of data – interviews, focus groups, and document review – were identified to gain insight into the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2001; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2014). As I already indicated, my social constructivist perspective around the co-creation of knowledge between participants and researcher, as well as my critical theoretical stance, impacted all aspects of the study's design, including the data sources, procedures for collecting data, etc., which are explained in detail below.

### **Participants**

As the purpose of this exploratory case study is to add information about

participants personal insights into processes, practices and perspectives, Mills and Gay (2016) suggest that it is most important to utilize participants who are well versed in the nature of the phenomenon under study. That positioned current school leaders who are successful in supporting social justice outcomes of children in care, and former youth in care living and working in the urban Winnipeg area, as ideally situated to relay their first-hand experiences and strategies.

**Successful school principals and vice principals.** The first population of participants consists of inclusive school leaders who are successfully supporting social justice outcomes for children in care. Purposive sampling based on group characteristics was used in their selection Patton (2015). Using this strategy intentionally, Mills and Gay (2016) add that, "...a primary goal: [is] selecting participants who can best add to the understanding of the phenomenon under study, not participants who...represent some larger population" (p.149-150). Hence, the study limited the sample to successful inclusive principals and vice principals in K-12 urban schools in Winnipeg, as that is where most of the youth in care are located. Although not every school has a vice principal, those that do often designate the vice principal directly to intervene in concerns that surround student behaviour, attendance/academic struggles and symptoms created by systemic barriers. To be eligible for study inclusion, school principals and vice principals worked in urban K-12 Winnipeg public schools for at least two years or more, to allow for adequate experience with social justice processes and practices. There were no other inclusion criteria for two reasons. First, no other criteria (e.g., gender, age, sexual orientation, or race/ethnicity) were created for the sample, because the literature has not indicated that these are acutely relevant for my study. Instead, the focus specifically related to principals' and vice principals' effective use of inclusive processes and

practices to improve educational outcomes for children in care. Second, the grade levels at the schools involved were not consistent in the sample selection, as the grade level distribution found at different schools, i.e., early, middle, and high school, were not coherent within or across school districts, and were determined by factors such as building capacity, neighbourhood population changes (e.g., shifts in the number of English vs. French Immersion track students). There was, however, an aim to include representation from both the K-8 track and the 9-12 track, because of the differences in terms of needs.

Ryan's (2010) study exams school principals' use of political strategies to advance social justice in schools, while Theoharis (2010) study examines inclusive principals' strategies for disrupting school injustice. Similarly, this study's focus was about identifying successful school leaders in terms of their inclusive leadership actions that resulted in strong inclusive actions and social justice outcomes for children in care. Given the purpose of this study, it was also essential to select principal and vice principal participants who were self-aware and, "...thought about these issues [of inclusion and social justice for children in care] and, as a consequence, could talk about their efforts [and struggles]" (Theoharis, 2010, p. 362). For this reason, snowball sampling was used to identify as "inclusive" leaders (self-identify, then identify similarly minded colleagues).

Broadly speaking, the snowball sampling technique begins with one knowledgeable participant who then identifies additional individuals within a network of like-minded professionals who share resources and strategies (Patton, 2015). To ensure rigor and reliability in the sampling process, I considered similar techniques employed by Griffiths (2011), Hardy (2014), Ryan (2010), Shields (2010), Theoharis (2010), and



Winton and Pollock (2016). Collectively, these scholars recommend identifying other, like-minded inclusive principals based on how their counterparts perceived the success of their actions in terms of achieving social justice goals. In other words, principals and vice principals who were selected to participate were then asked to forward study information to peers they saw as inclusive and as fitting study criteria. If interested, they contacted the researcher by phone or email. Before being accepted as study participants, school leaders were asked to self-identify as inclusive by sharing a couple of examples of what they would consider successes or struggles in their social justice work (i.e., changes they created to a school's physical environments or scheduling, steps they took for a particular student/group to develop a more inclusive environment).

As previously mentioned, the only hard factor for inclusion was that principals have a minimum of 2 years of experience to ensure they are familiar with the processes and practices that make up their work; no other factor for inclusion/exclusion was identified based on the literature review. That said, it is not uncommon for researchers when interviewing principals/vice principals for most any study in education to aim for representation by gender, prior experience working at another school(s), and panel (i.e., K-8 or 9-12). The latter two, arguably, could be significant given the large gain made in terms of knowledge and skills when taking on a new role and given the difference across panel, e.g., student age, pedagogical approaches, educator emphasis on academic vs. care, parental engagement, etc.

The first run through the sampling process yielded 13 principals and vice principals who were eligible, but only 11 were able to arrange an interview due to their busy work schedules. In Table 1, the profile of each study participant is outlined according to the formal and informal factors that guided the sampling process. Notably, a

good balance of representation in each of the factor headings was achieved.

**Table 1:** *Participant Profiles*

Pseudonym	Gender Male Female	Years as Vice Principal (VP) or Principal (P) 2-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20+ years	Number of Schools Worked as VP or P	Level of Present School Elementary (E) Middle (M) Secondary (S)
Holden	M	2-5 years	2	E
Victoria	F	6-10 years	2	S
Gloria	F	6-10 years	3	S
Murray	M	11-15 years	2	M
Hannah	F	2-5 years	1	E
Joanna	F	11-15 years	3	S
Fontaine	F	16-20+ years	6	S
Amelia	F	6-10 years	3+	E/M
Megan	F	2-5 years	1	S
Golda	F	6-10 years	2	E
Liam	M	11-15 years	5	M

After all participants were identified, they received the letter of consent, interview protocol and interview questions via email. No one requested a hard copy format via mail. See Appendix D, Letter of Information and Consent for Principals, Appendix E, Principals – Recruitment Poster, and Appendix F, Email Script for Principal Recruitment, for more details.

**Former youth in care.** The participants in the second group were self-identified former youth in care living in Winnipeg, Manitoba. To be eligible for study inclusion, participants were aged between 18-23, and left the care system and public education system in the past 0 to 2 years, to support participants' ability to reflect on experiences retrospectively. Chilisa's (2012) suggests snowball sampling for groups such as the former youth in care. Specifically, snowball sampling, as taken-up in Chilisa's (2012)

study, begins the sampling process with someone like an elder, in the community, who understands the norms and knowledge systems in the community. Mertens (2009) also indicates snowball sampling as appropriate for vulnerable populations (e.g., female gang members), because their social status made them difficult to contact. A few mentors, from Voices: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network<sup>2</sup>, and 25 Not 21: Sharing Our Stories of Change<sup>3</sup>, who knew potential youth participants were approached in advance of the study and asked to share the information letter with former youth in care (see Appendix G, Letter of Information and Consent for Former Youth in Care, for more details). These organizations represent recreational and support groups in Winnipeg, and distributed recruitment information via email, social media posts and in hard copy format (see Appendix H, Recruitment Poster for Former Youth in Care, and Appendix I Recruitment Email Script for Former Youth in Care, for more details).

A sample of up to 15 youths was approved through the Western Ethics Board review and was not restricted by any other criteria. Several emails, phone calls and two pre-study meetings were held with the Voices mentor/counsellor in order to develop a plan for recruitment and the focus group meetings. After Voices posted the study information, participants responded directly to the organization, where they had access to the study's letter of information, focus group protocol and opportunity to ask questions with the support of the Voices mentor/counsellor team (see Appendix C, Focus Group Protocol and Question Guide for Former Youth in Care, and Appendix G, Letter of Information and Consent for Former Youth in Care, for more details).

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<sup>2</sup> Voices is a Manitoba based organization that supports youth in care and those who were previously in care with resources, skill building, counselling etc.

<sup>3</sup> 25 Not 21: Sharing Our Stories of Change is a grass-roots organization of former youth in care who want to increase the age that youth have to transition from care

## Data Collection

**School principal and vice principal interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were used because they allow for a more focused exploration of the phenomenon, but also because they give the interviewer/interviewee the flexibility to explore individual areas pertinent to a specific participant or context (Chilisa, 2012; Patton, 2015). This data collection method is commonly employed in similar studies examining principals' and vice principals' processes and/or practices (Griffiths, 2011; Hardy, 2014; Ryan, 2010; Shields, 2010; Theoharsi, 2010; Winton & Pollock, 2016).

To ensure the questions elicited appropriate data, Jacob and Furgerson (2012), as well as Patton (2015), suggest developing a detailed protocol to frame the experience for participants and the researcher (see Appendix B, Interview Protocol and Question guide for Principals, for details). The interview protocol included questions designed to capture a rich, detailed perspective that responded to the study's key questions, i.e., the processes and practices participants used in the pursuit of social justice outcomes aimed at children in care in schools.

To ensure the rigour of the protocol, three pilot interview sessions were conducted: two with critical friends from my program cohort, one with a principal colleague who was interested in the study and wanted to provide support. All three helped to further refine the interview questions and generate potential probing questions.

School leaders were also interviewed individually to provide an additional layer of confidentiality, not available in a focus group context. Each interview lasted for approximately an hour. After signing the consent form, in which participants agreed to be recorded and to use the secure OWL site for the exchange of transcripts and additional feedback, each participant was invited to share basic personal information (e.g., relevant

personal connections, education and professional history) to develop a rapport and ease the participant's comfort level. Each interview used the same 12 predetermined questions, while key probing questions were used as needed to follow-up on more specific details. Comments, suggestions, or silence were used as springboards to investigate topics using probing questions. During the interviews, field notes were taken to support the researcher's ability to accurately recall the sessions, to develop an audit trail that enhances the study's dependability, and to include in the analysis stage. I also used Merriam (2001), and Mills and Gay's (2016) recommendations to listen actively, and to question or check with participants, during the interview process, by repeating or rephrasing their comments, to enhance the reliability and validity of my understanding and interpretation of participants' comments.

**Youth in care focus group process.** Multiple academic sources (Chilisa, 2012; Creswell, 2008; Johnson, 2013, 2014; Mertens, 2010; Mills & Gay, 2016; Patton, 2015) agree that focus groups can provide both opportunity for individual responses, and interactions between participants. This study tries to establish how a group of participants views a situated problem, interprets specific language, and forwards personal experiences, all of which support the use of a focus group research method (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Sirin and Fine (2007) build a particularly strong case for using focus groups with Muslim-American youth experiencing prejudice. According to these authors, focus groups create a space for the voices of young marginalized youth who may benefit from the added support and opportunities for the co-construction of language that the inclusion of and interaction with other participants' perspectives provides.

In total, eight former youth in care participated in one of two focus groups. The focus group protocol included eight questions (see Appendix C, Focus Group Protocol

and Question Guide for Former Youth in Care, for details). The first group consisted of five participants, and the second group three participants. Before starting the focus group, all participants signed the consent form with the understanding that their participation was completely voluntary. Indeed, participants were reminded throughout the process that they could leave the focus group at any time and submit their completed question responses via a secure OWL link if they wished to do so. None of the participants chose this option. A mentor/counsellor from the Voices organization also attended each session, to provide social-emotional support for participants as they shared difficult or unsettling topics or memories.

The focus groups continued in rounds for each question, followed by probes or follow-up questions and lasted approximately 90 minutes. Chilisa (2012) and Johnson (2013, 2014) suggest that participants and the researcher share personal demographic and social information at the focus group outset in order to show their collective connectedness. Refreshments were offered to each group to improve the physical, social and relational aspect of the process (Chilisa, 2012). Participants in both groups shared why participating in the study's focus group process was important for them. The support of an experienced research assistant was important during the first larger focus group, as her note taking allowed me to gather field notes, while I engaged participants in the questions. Her attendance was not necessary for the second, smaller group.

Although focus groups provide more opportunities for co-construction of language, there also exist more opportunities for inadvertent identification of participants. As a result, participants were reminded of the need for confidentiality for all group members. The focus group conversation moved to the left, facilitated by the passing of a symbolic talking stick to indicate the person whose turn it was to speak. This strategy also

helped to balance the conversation and provided everyone with an opportunity to speak in a situation where the dynamic could easily shift to focus on one person's experience (Chilisa, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Mills and Gay's (2016) recommendation to check-in with participants during the interview process was even more important for me in this setting, as there were many voices, and participants did not always use the same terms or expressions to describe similar events. To improve the credibility and trustworthiness of the information, it was important to clarify the group's co-construction of knowledge, as well as my own understanding of what was shared by participants. Additional questioning, as well as repeating or rephrasing participants' comments enhanced the validity of my understanding and interpretation of their comments.

**Documents.** Yin (2014) indicates the importance of documents in case study research to "...corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (p. 107). As objects created within a specific environment, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recognize that the value of document analysis rests in the information the documents provide about their audiences, any biases the document creators may ascribe to (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.180) or inferential information that leads to further questions (Yin, 2016).

For this study, in addition to government documents, any documents developed or recommended by school principals or vice principals as helpful in guiding their practice were also incorporated in the document analysis. *The Child and Family Services Act* (CFS Act) (2018), the *Education and Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care (Protocol)* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013), and the *Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care Support Resources Companion Document (Companion Document)* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013b), are the three documents developed by the provincial Manitoba government to help guide the work of

principals and vice principals working in public schools with children in care. These documents were readily available for download from government sites.

Throughout the interview process, several participants mentioned reports by Brownell et al. (2015), and Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) as helpful in guiding their practice. As a result, these documents were also included in the document analysis. In addition, several participants also shared school-based and/or district documents that were created to guide their work and support social justice outcomes for children in care. These documents were also included in the analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

Rather than collecting, transcribing and then analysing these data, Creswell (2014), Merriam and Tisdell (2016) Miles et al. (2014), Mills and Gay (2016), Patton (2015), as well as Yin (2014) recommend a process of simultaneous data collection and analysis, so that initial patterns and themes can be identified while data are still being collected. Then, potential gaps in the data can be addressed through subsequent interviews or focus groups. Patton (2015) also identifies transcription as, "...another point of transition between data collection and analysis...providing an opportunity to get immersed in the data..." (p. 525) and begin to acquire initial understanding.

Once the data were fully prepared for analysis (e.g., transcription, etc.), they were organized into a structured data repository of interview transcripts, focus group transcripts and documents (Yin, 2014). This organization made it possible to retain a primary unaltered copy of the raw data, and to move between my study's framework, and different units of analysis throughout the process of analysis.

**Interviews.** Before I transcribed all 11 interviews verbatim, I introduced each section with a description of the participant and the context of the interview setting.



Based on a recommendation by Miles et al. (2014), this allowed me to immerse myself in the data, and begin a preliminary stage of data analysis, while maintaining the integrity of participants' words. In this process, I used digital files to listen to the interviews and transcribed the interviews verbatim, only omitting repetitive sounds or words that would interfere with the transcripts' readability (Miles et al., 2014). I also went back to listen to the interviews again to check for accuracy and then shared the transcripts in Word and .pdf formats with participants for member checks, via a secure OWL site created to maintain participants' confidentiality (Tracy, 2010). In this manner, participants were able to provide feedback around the accuracy of transcripts, as well as additional insights and reflections they constructed around the interview process, based on our conversation and the resulting transcript.

**Focus groups.** Similar to the process followed for the transcription of principal and vice principal interviews, I included a description of the focus group participants and the context in my transcription. As before, I used digital files to listen to the focus group interviews and transcribed them verbatim, only omitting repetitive sounds or words that would interfere with the transcripts' readability (Miles et al., 2014). This allowed me to begin to consider the data and enter a preliminary stage of data analysis, while immersed in the raw data (Miles et al., 2014). This verbatim transcription method was important because it maintained the integrity of participants' words. I also went back to listen to the interviews again to check for accuracy and shared the transcripts in Word and .pdf formats, via a secure OWL site created to maintain participants' confidentiality, with the Voices counsellor/mentor. The mentor had access to focus group participants' contact information in order to share the transcript with them for the purpose of member reflections (Tracey, 2010). In this manner, participants were able to provide both

feedback around the accuracy of transcripts, as well as additional insights and reflections they constructed around the interview process, based on our conversation and the resulting transcript.

**Documents.** Qualitative content analysis, as described by Krippendorff (2004), is “...an unobtrusive technique that allows researchers to analyze relatively unstructured data in view of the meanings, symbolic qualities and expressive contents they have and of the communicative role they play in the lives of the data’s sources” (p. 44). Kohlbacher (2006) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also add that it is differentiated from its quantitative counterpart as it recognizes an inferential or hidden component within the data that sets it apart from the largely numerical and statistical characteristics of quantitative document content analysis. As a qualitative case study, framed by a critical transformative theoretical framework that stressed a constructivist worldview and acknowledged the importance of the co-construction of knowledge, the content analysis process aligns itself with Kohlbacher (2006) and Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) definition.

The content analysis component of data analysis began simultaneously with transcription and coding of interviews, as many of the documents were already available on government websites. Digital copies were downloaded into the NVivo program for ease of coding and analysis. Rather than focusing on quantifying words for meaning, the analysis of provincial documents focused on the purpose, assumptions, biases, symbols, context and ideological stance conveyed by the text (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This according to Kohlbacher (2006) allows for researcher interpretation to fit the local context of the case study. Likewise, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also stress the importance of recognizing the researcher’s position in driving the interactive cycle that determines, acknowledges and interprets assumptions and bias that may be present in the documents’

content, what is chosen as relevant, and what is missing from the documents. Given the critical orientation of the study, the latter analysis work was of particular importance.

To help structure content analysis, Kohlbacher (2006) also stresses the use of both inductive and deductive category development. Inductive and deductive category development allows for two levels of category improvement; first, an inductive stage, where categories are constructed and situated within the research questions, as well as theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Second, a deductive stage, where categories are tested against new document text, to see if the categories remain reliable.

When applied within this study's context, the rationale behind the first sub-question in the study was to determine which responsibilities and educational goals are outlined in provincial and district documents to guide school leaders in addressing intended outcomes for Manitoba's children in care. However, the inclusion criteria for principals and vice principals determined that those participants who volunteered for the study use an inclusive leadership lens, and it is an assumption of this study that participants also used this lens to interpret the responsibilities and goals found in documents. This is where I applied Kohlbacher's (2006) and Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) suggestion to interpret the local context in the application of the document analysis process. For this reason, the same codes and categories that were used for the principal and vice principal interview transcripts were used for document analysis, while also allowing for the addition of codes that developed from the documents.

Utilizing data from the interviews, focus groups, and document analysis process allows for comparison and cross-referencing of data collected through these different means and sources. The potential for "slice-of-life" or "raw" data mentioned by Mills & Gay (2016, p. 556) was relevant to the feedback I received from participants regarding

their experiences and perceptions as they went through the data collection process. These comments and reactions also allowed for later testing of referential adequacy, described as a critical reflection on a compelling accumulation of evidence that supports the whole (Creswell, 2007). My detailed audit trail, modelled after suggestions from Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, K., and Spiers (2002), and Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), includes field notes, memos, and annotations, and supports structural coherence and rigor through this framework of researcher implemented strategies.

**Triangulation.** Mertens (2009) points out the need for methodological rigor in order to avoid researcher bias in studies that "...attempt to be part of the process of social change" (p. 89) as they explore complex social phenomena in their natural context. Normally triangulation (e.g., using multiple data sources that touch on similar outcomes, methods, and multiple theories) improves a study's credibility within certain qualitative paradigms (Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tracy, 2010). Triangulation of data sources in this study therefore included three sub-units of analysis: school principals and vice principals, former youth in care and analysis of government and district documents. Creswell (2008) and Mertens (2010) indicate that triangulation of data sources is supportive of a critical transformative framework if the purpose and goals both reflect empowerment and social change on an individual and/or collective social level. Tracy (2010) adds that:

...triangulation does not lay neatly over research from interpretive, critical, or postmodern paradigms that view reality as multiple, fractured, contested, or socially constructed...just because data all converge on the same conclusion, this does not assure that this specified reality is correct. (p.843)

For example, for this study Tracy (2010) suggests that it would be unusual for two groups

of participants and government documents to demonstrate the same responses and interpretations given the contextual variety from within which the information was constructed and collected. Instead, she introduces the concept of member checks, "...less as a test of research findings as they are an opportunity for collaboration and reflexive elaboration" (p. 844). This joint consideration of the research not only validates its disposition of co-construction, but also improves the credibility of findings. In this manner, research is not done "on" the former students in care community or principals and vice principals, but rather in collaboration with the community (Chilisa, 2012; Johnson, 2014; Mertens, 2010).

**Computer software.** For this socially complex case study with many contextual layers, computer software provided an additional level of support. Although Miles et al. (2014), Patton (2015) and Yin (2014) do not recommend a specific form of computer software to aid in the process of data analysis, these authors do insist that Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) helps to structure and speed-up the process of data management and retrieval. Mills and Gay (2016) also caution that CAQDAS, counter to the implication of its name, does not analyze raw data, but rather supports the researcher in organizing, retrieving, and coding the data. For myself, the large number of transcript, document, field note and memo pages, along with the need to retrieve in vivo quotes provided the basis to choose a CAQDAS program. After trialling several different programs, and realizing that time to learn the program was also a limiting factor (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015), I chose NVivo for Mac, as it was easy to learn, felt most intuitive, and allowed me to work with a wide variety of documents, including Word, .pdf and .jpg files collected by myself or submitted by participants.

**Coding the data.** As possibly the most complex and significant aspect of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mills & Gay, 2016), coding represents the bridge between raw data, its analysis and its interpretation or transformation into specifically and coherently worded, clearly outlined new findings. The results demonstrate their credibility by, "...summarizing data in a dependable and accurate manner...[that] leads to the presentation of study findings in a manner that has an air of undeniability" (Mills and Gay, 2016, p.563) for its intended audience. Even though qualitative studies are designed to intentionally connect the problem under investigation, data collected and type of analysis (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014), the raw data collected along with the intentional selections and choices made by the researcher will ultimately shape a unique interpretation for the final case study report (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mills & Gay, 2016). The study's conceptual framework and research questions work to filter and distil useful data (Miles et al., 2014). Patton (2015) adds that "purpose drives analysis" (p.526), where purpose is based on the audience and utility of the final case report. To support this iterative process, I created a 'Study Bones' file, which included my study's problem, and research questions, as well as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This organization was important as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) point out that qualitative data analysis is "primarily inductive and comparative" (p. 201) and consists of a modified form of the constant comparative method within, but also across data sets (Merriam, 2001; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Further connecting design and analysis, Patton (2015) advises that a single "high-impact case" (p. 274), such as this exploratory study for improving the educational outcomes of children in care, can identify important themes and considerations, which can highlight, "...the effects of trauma and the challenges and possibilities" (p. 275) of providing supports.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) initially suggest a process of “open coding” that allows for an unrestricted examination of the data to identify patterns and themes. As new sources of data are added, past information and themes are continually compared, grouped and regrouped with new information before codes are applied (Merriam, 2001, Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Further interpretation leads to analytical codes or categories that connect back to individual research questions, keeping in mind that the codes and categories may reflect aspects of the critical theoretical framework, researcher assumptions as well as potential bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process continues until all data selected as important are categorized to look for common themes and understandings about the phenomenon.

From the outset of the coding process, I immersed myself in the structure of Mills and Gay's (2016) “three iterative or repeating steps” (p. 565). The steps include first reading and reflecting on the raw data, and second working to communicate the nuanced context through memos or field notes. These were important components for capturing reflexive researcher considerations, appraisals and connections that were later incorporated in the analysis and final report (Miles et al., 2014). The final step was coding pieces of text based on patterns that could be grouped into themes (Mills & Gay, 2016).

Once I realized which styles of coding would be best suited for the purpose of my study, I also reflected on the original list of codes created for the first interview, including both a priori codes, as well as codes that emerged from the data. Going back to my study bones, and forward to a second interview, I drew heavily on the indicators of successful inclusive processes and practices outlined in Ryan (2006b), along with aligned social justice factors suggested by Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) in their report to the

province to develop codes. Since the work of these authors represents both a focus on the practical success of inclusive educational leaders, as well as educational social justice success for children in care, I felt more comfortable using this revised set of codes as a beginning platform. When I compared data and codes through the next few interviews, it became clear that the list was much more balanced (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).

This initial list of codes was still quite lengthy at over 50 codes but creating and grappling with different matrices and labels allowed me to narrow down the codes into a more concise list that continued to develop as additional codes emerged during data collection, transcription and coding (Yin, 2014). As part of this process, I also considered Creswell's (2014) advice to note three different categories in the development of all codes. These include codes that develop based on threads drawn from the existing context, and academic literature, unexpected codes that emerge from the data, as well as new codes that may reveal potential for novel theoretical constructs or new categories. As a result, this second set of codes was representative of the literature, as well as the local context, opinions, actions and concerns held by the participants in this study (Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014).

After first cycle coding was complete, Miles et al. (2014) suggest a second cycle of coding to further distil themes and categories. Patton (2015) proposes using two criteria to guide this second cycle. He references "internal homogeneity" (p.554) and "external heterogeneity" (p. 554), where the first criterion, internal homogeneity, inventories categories of codes internally to ensure that all codes situated in the same category maintain a common consistency or focus; whereas external heterogeneity ensures that clear differences or goals exist between different categories, so that it is easy to recognize in which category a coded piece of data belongs. Continuous critical



reflection during the coding and analysis process resulted in some codes being amalgamated while others were discarded. Patton (2015) also mentions the process of divergence or trying to connect the data outward in different ways that could result in new categories, which are reflected in the data. These bridges between different categories became more noticeable and relevant when I compared data and codes from the three different units of analysis. At this point, a more deductive approach was appropriate to investigate the applicability of codes for the semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and documents; an approach which in effect tested the legitimacy and trustworthiness or dependability of the categories, as they were applied to additional sources of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Although the coding process was time consuming, the result of rigorously following these methodological steps was evident, even in the early stages of analysis. For example, I began to see that the process coding method outlined by Miles et al. (2014) as developing "...observable and conceptual action in the data" (p. 75) aligned itself with the action oriented aspects for creating change mentioned in my critical transformative theoretical framework. In addition, I noted the similarities in purpose for in vivo coding, relevant for "...studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (p. 74), which supports the critical transformative ontological and epistemological aspects of my theoretical framework (Mertens, 2010), as well as the concept of creating a third space for the voice of former youth in care in the research process (Keenan & Miehl, 2008).

### **Thematic Analysis**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Miles et al. (2014), and Saldaña (2016) recommend thematic analysis of the data, as this allows for cross-referencing of categories between

the interview, focus group and document analysis data, and the overall purpose of the study. It quickly became apparent that codes within the large coding dictionary applied to specific participants, i.e., the principal and vice principal interviews versus the youth in care. For example, whereas principals' and vice principals' comments were centered on the action-oriented processes and practices of creating inclusive change (consistent with sub-questions two and three), as well as the barriers and challenges to change, former youth in care comments were based on their understanding and perceptions of those actions (fourth sub-question). Again, drawing from the triangulation process described by Tracy (2010) as, "Multiple types of data, researcher viewpoints, theoretical frames, and methods of analysis [that] allow different facets of problems to be explored, increases scope, deepens understanding, and encourages consistent (re) interpretation" (p. 843), provided greater depth and breadth of understanding for the phenomenon under study.

The next step of the analysis phase encompassed moving from the development of descriptive patterns to the more conceptual abstract elaboration that represents the study's themes (Merriam & Tidsell, 2016; Patton, 2015). The four themes for this study were developed based on the interactions found between the different patterns. For example, some of the patterns that were used to conceptualize Theme 1: Reconciling Dissonance Between Provincially Identified Responsibilities and Personally Defined Roles included: descriptions of the broader education context; the influence of provincially mandated documents; personal education; personal roles in schools; recognizing and filling gaps in knowledge; recognizing feelings connected to advocacy; recognizing the impact of their own personal history and experiences; and recognizing their own moral stance and its impact on their responsibility to advocate.

Although this was a highly inductive process at times, as new data sets were added, more deductive thinking allowed me to critically reflect on whether or not the new data patterns still supported the themes. Going back and forth in this iterative process meant that patterns and themes both were refined multiple times as part of this analytic process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton 2015).

**Researcher bias and assumptions:** In a qualitative case study and during this analytic process, the researcher represents the main research instrument (Patton, 2015). To minimize the effects that my biases and assumptions had on the interpretation and presentation of findings, I remained cognisant of my position as an educational school leader located in a white dominant social culture, while also affiliated with the academy. Mears (2009) and Miles et al. (2014) suggest the concept of poetic transcription or display as useful for extracting relevant quotes, while also maintaining the confidentiality and intention of each participant. Miles et al. (2014) caution that even though participants' voices can be more authentically represented through this method, the process of choosing and displaying the data segments is inherently open to researcher bias and influence, and thus needs to be developed with that in mind. Procedurally, this method of analysis utilizes extracted excerpts, which the researcher uses to organize participants' words into themes and then arranges to draw out the speaker's intentions and feelings. The reader's attention is drawn to the concentrated collection of in vivo terms and phrases, which help to capture and illustrate the essence of each theme (Miles et al., 2014).

This was an important consideration for presenting all participant voices, but particularly those of the former youth in care. As I began to select and distill the speakers' terms and phrases into a concentrated version of a text that would capture the heart of

each theme, I realized that each individual's voice was lost in the process. Although poetic transcription pulled out vivid and powerful words, these words were not representative of individual experiences anymore, and "it is important to remember that not all voices are yet represented accurately – or at all – in scholarly literature (Mertens, 2009, p. 298).

Consistent with this study's critical theoretical orientation, and information communicated by the Voices' mentor, which shared focus group members' frustration in relation to feeling silenced by past research studies, it was essential to ensure that each individual's voice was not lost in the process of reporting findings (Mertens, 2009). As an underserved group in the education system and society, broadly speaking, each member of the focus group needs to be individually heard and included. To address this, I chose instead to select direct quotes, for principal and vice principal participants as well as focus group members. Using this method placed the data shared by the former youth in care on an equal footing with data from educational leaders. This validated the knowledge and experiences they shared. This method also allowed for improved member checks, because participants were reflecting on the meaning of their own spoken words (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As a beginning school leader with less than five years of experience, working hard to remaining open-minded during data collection, and trying not to impose my own experiences, was always at the top of my mind. To avoid this potential for researcher bias, I used memoing, field notes, critical friends and reflexive researcher practices (Tracy, 2010) to develop a credible case study report.

### **Study Quality and Data Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, Mills and Gay (2016) forward the concept of

“trustworthiness” as a comparator to the term “validity” used in qualitative research. With reference to Mills and Gay (2016) and Guba’s (1981), validity in quantitative research, put simply, is concerned with measuring what is being set out to measure. In the qualitative context, the concept has an ethical core, emphasizing the researcher as being credible, and dependable within the research context (Mertens, 2010). More specifically, the following trustworthiness components were considered: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and replicability.

**Credibility.** Research studies designed within a qualitative paradigm do not exist in a singular objective world, but instead are comprised of a reality that is complex and dynamic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 242). How then do we determine if “... the study findings make sense? Are they credible to the people we study and to our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we were looking at? (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312).

The nature of transformative research supports this study’s credibility in that the process begins and ends with collaboration between researcher, community, participants and critical friends, thereby allowing for consistent debriefing and reflection. The process of developing the necessary relationships in order to enter and work within the context supports the long-term relationships that avoid any distortions caused by researcher presence.

Dey’s (1993) six questions for determining data quality served as a guide for my critical reflection on the data collection process, data quality and analysis.

Is it a product of our own observation, or a result of hearsay?

Have any other people made or reported the same observation?

In what circumstances was the observation made or reported?

How reliable are those making or reporting the observation?

What motivations may have influenced how the observation was reported?

What biases may have influenced how the observation was made or reported? (p. 232)

Because this study involved the reflections of former youth in care, it is important that these questions are considered in the study's design. The fact that participants' personal experiences cannot be wholly corroborated is being explicitly expressed here with the additional assertion that they are considered valid personal experiences and interpretations. The study's credibility is also supported by the use of data sources that are triangulated in order to develop depth and breadth for the phenomenon under study (Tracy, 2010).

**Transferability.** Quantitative methods for isolating variables and decontextualizing the phenomenon under study do not apply to qualitative studies, Hence, these studies are not usually generalizable to other contexts (Mertens, 2009; Tracy, 2010). As a result, Tracy (2010) recommends the concept of transferability, or transfer of knowledge to "...other settings, populations, or circumstances" (p. 845) as more appropriate for qualitative studies in general, and also this study more specifically. Strategies such as gathering rich descriptions, connecting the reader to stories that resonate, and producing a report that is clear and understandable in its form and language, all help to achieve in-depth knowledge and study transferability (Mertens, 2009; Tracy, 2010).

Taking time to collect specific details about my research context was more difficult because it did not take place in one specific location or on one specific date in time. Instead, the description involved a thorough analysis of the discursive space created by the intersectionality of experiences and strategies shared by former youth in care who

navigate system barriers in Winnipeg public schools and educational leaders who act within and upon these system constraints on behalf of children in care. Great care at this stage supported much better reader understanding of the context in the final report.

**Dependability.** According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and Miles et al. (2014), dependability, also sometimes specified as reliability, refers to the whether or not the study's plan and process are "...consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312). In other words, to be considered dependable, the study's frame (e.g., research questions, methods, methodological paradigms, data collection procedures, researcher transparency regarding their positionality and potential bias, memos, field notes etc.) should provide enough information so that another researcher can replicate the study and its findings. For this study, overlap occurred between the above-mentioned context description, as well as individual interviews, and focus group data collected. See Table A1 in Appendix A, Cross-reference Matrix for Research Questions/Probes and Data Collection Methods, for details. To improve a study's dependability, Mills and Gay (2016), Morse (2002), Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), and Tracy (2010) also suggest an audit trail that represents a structured copy of field notes and reflections, as well as other relevant government and school district process documents. Implementing this process at the beginning of the study was appropriate, considering the fact that this collection of documents provided a trail for other researchers to replicate and/or assess my study's rigor.

**Confirmability.** In a qualitative study, confirmability does not represent an absence of bias but rather depends on the researcher's forthright disclosure of personal potential bias (Miles et al. 2014). Mills and Gay (2016), Morse (2002) as well as

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) suggest that confirmability of a finding can be strengthened by using as many different methods, perspectives, and sources of data, as methodologically appropriate, to develop a view of the phenomenon that is as comprehensive as possible. Along with the above-mentioned procedures, participant and focus group member checks of transcripts worked to support a purposeful excavation of potential underlying assumptions that could be embedded in my interpretation of participants' comments.

**Replicability.** With reference to this study, replicability would imply that the study could be repeated in a different context with similar results. This is important for studies that initially have a small number of participants but see an improved level of confidence when different contexts produce similar results (Mills & Gay, 2016).

Although this research is grounded in very context and experience specific details, by providing enough environmental, sample, and methods details, the potential may exist for replication in other Canadian provincial contexts, such as Saskatchewan, as their foster care, Indigenous population, and educational contexts are similar to those in Manitoba (Statistics Canada, 2011). However, the main goal is not to transfer or generalize the findings for use in other environments, but to draw analytic generalizations that could inform other contexts.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In qualitative research, the ethical imperative is that researchers protect the human subjects that participate in their study (Yin, 2014). Protection includes, but is not limited to, maintaining the anonymity of study participants, responsible data management, ethical reporting of the findings, ensuring that participation does not place the subject at risk of harm etc. Regarding the latter, when conducting research with an already vulnerable



population, as is the case in this study, Yin (2014) stresses the importance of taking whatever additional steps are necessary to protect vulnerable groups. Moreover, within a critical transformative research study, Chilisa (2012) and Mertens (2010) indicate that integrating participant and community needs, goals, concerns, and opinions takes on additional ethical concern, because if any of these are excluded or dismissed, the study becomes in effect another method for silencing voices. This section outlines the ethical procedures followed and any additional steps taken to ensure the ethical integrity of the study.

First, the study was approved by Western University's Research Ethics Board, and their adjudication is guided by the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 (TCPS2) guidelines. The principles contained in these guidelines support ethical and respectful communication and collaboration with diverse, vulnerable, and/or underserved groups of participants, thereby ensuring their respectful treatment and freedom of choice in granting consent to participate in the study. This study adhered to all requirements, such as providing a letter of information to all potential participants that explained the purpose of the study; why they are being considered for participation; receiving copies of the interview or focus group protocol well in advance of their session to ensure they were already familiar with the questions; participants reviewed and signed informed consent letters, a procedure that was repeated verbally just prior to the interview; received reminders that participation was voluntary during the focus group process; use of pseudonyms for anonymity; depersonalized tracking and secure storage of information and data, etc. In addition to the full ethics review through Western University, additional ethics reviews were required by each individual school district, as well as the Voices community organization. These acted as important external ethical balance components

that provided multiple opportunities and levels of local, educational and academic community ethics review during my application process.

In terms of specific steps taken, for school principals and vice principals, I considered the potential that their responses to questions could make them feel vulnerable to repercussions within their work environment, if their responses were critical of provincial or district policy and their identity became public. For this reason, approval was sought from each district's MASS (Manitoba Association of School Superintendents) representatives, as approval from the superintendent's department helped to confirm the support of school districts for principal and vice principal participants.

With regard to focus group participants, all of whom identified as having Indigenous ancestry, a key concern was that participation could result in emotional trauma. As discussed in the literature review, Indigenous students endure challenging circumstances while enrolled in K-12 schools, and many youth in care cope with intergenerational trauma stemming from Residential Schooling, etc. To protect study participants, the immediate support of a mentor/counsellor connected to the organization facilitating the focus group process was available during the interview (Voices: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network) along with contact information for external counselling services if they preferred (see Appendix G, Letter of Information and Consent for Former Youth in Care, for details). For this reason, I considered the pre-existing relational issues and power differentials mentioned by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) between researcher and participants, or between participants. These relational or power issues could have made participation in the focus group uncomfortable or impossible for some, thereby indirectly but effectively, silencing their voices. As a precaution, all participants were given the option of responding to the focus group questions using the

secure electronic OWL site format. Thereby removing the potential impact of relational power imbalance. Other, more traditional steps taken included offering a \$20 gift card in appreciation of their participation in lieu of cash payment and making participants aware that they would receive this gift whether they completed the focus group interview or chose to leave early.

### **Limitations and Challenges**

As for limitations and challenges, these were either contextual or individual in nature. The nature of these and how they were addressed is discussed in detail below.

Positioning myself in the research was both a challenge and a potential limitation. Because principal and vice principal participants were recruited from all Winnipeg school districts, there was a chance that some participants could have been from my own district. For that reason, and to avoid participant bias with potential colleagues from my own district, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest using open-ended questions in the interview protocol and probing beyond surface-level agreement for deeper explanations. This was also followed up with the same question reframed in a different way or a summary of the participant's response. Triangulation of data also supported coherence in the findings across different data sets.

One possible limitation for the study is that the data gathered through the focus group process in particular, but also the semi-structured interviews, required participants to draw from memories and experiences that occurred years ago. This limitation was addressed by providing the interview and focus group protocols to participants well in advance of the interviews and focus group process to allow them the opportunity to reflect prior to the session. Arguably, the triangulation of data sources contributed to mitigate these effects, since any key finding emerging from this study is supported by

multiple perspectives (Tracy, 2010), and not grounded in a single data source.

Recruiting principals and vice principals also turned out to be more difficult than initially anticipated. After making initial contact with individual school divisions in Winnipeg, I quickly realized that several districts were under the impression that this research was being conducted by someone located in Ontario, which meant that an extra layer of explanation was required for those districts in order to garner access to their school leaders. Once approval through the superintendent's department was accomplished, principals and vice principals were comfortable volunteering for the study.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the small sample in this study is not considered a limitation. Firstly, there are not strict rules about representative sampling in qualitative research. Second, exploratory case studies typically have smaller numbers of participants because the nature of the research itself is to generate findings that can be built upon in future research.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) document that vulnerable populations often demonstrate concern about how they will be depicted or (mis)represented in a research study organized by a researcher who has outsider status (i.e., someone who does not belong to their group or community, e.g., class, gender, culture, sexual orientation etc.). A lengthy history of researchers using data collected from these populations for their own purposes (and gains) exists, while conditions for many of these vulnerable groups (e.g., Indigenous, sex workers, people who are homeless or suffer with mental health and substance issues) remain either status quo or worsen. Aware of this reality, when I first approached the community of former youth in care, I was careful to include and engage potential mentors or gatekeepers to minimize the potential for community pushback. As mentioned earlier, communication and two planning meetings took place prior to

recruitment and data collection, and in each I was asked questions connected to the purpose of the study and why it was essential to have youth participation. And, on each occasion, I took the time to stress the value of adding their experiences with potential mentors and gatekeepers, as most research that speaks to the educational experiences of youth in care is grounded in the viewpoint of actors whose formal role and scope of action are framed by legal and or policy requirements (Brownlee et al. 2010; Brownell et al., 2010; Day et al., 2015; Hedin et al., 2011; Martin, & Jackson, 2002; Stone et al., 2007; Sydow & Flango, 2012; Vacca, 2008; Zorc et al., 2013).

The mentor at Voices did indicate that she would facilitate recruitment by sharing project information, collecting participant names, forwarding interview dates/times to the youth, etc. This positive outcome, however, meant that my plan to conduct a pre-screening phone interview with potential focus group participants to ensure they understood study criteria and goals did not develop, as none of the former youth in care contacted me directly.

As a secondary goal, pre-screening phone interviews were also intended to provide clarification about participants' ability to recall and connect relevant school experiences from their time in care. In the end, all former you in care participants shared relevant experiences and reflections on their educational history while in care that connected to the study's purpose and questions. Having met and closely collaborated with the Voices staff members to communicate the study's purpose was likely helpful in their selection of and communication with potential participants.

A final challenge concerns scheduling interviews with principal and vice principal participants. School leaders in Manitoba, and across Canada, face heavy workloads and the nature of their work often requires their physical presence in the school. For these

reasons, interviewees found it difficult to organize their lives to accommodate one more priority. As a practising school leader, I can attest to the intensity of the workload with the added challenge of arranging interview sessions that “fit” with my school division’s timelines.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I lay the framework for my study’s research design, methodology, and methods used to complete the study. The framework outlines the reasoning behind using an exploratory case study design for an area of research that demonstrates a limited number of prior research studies, and also walks the reader through the boundaries of the case, population descriptions and sampling methods for principals and vice principals and former youth in care, as well as data collection instruments and procedures, including semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Data analysis for interviews and focus group transcripts, along with document analysis is also discussed. Embedded in all of these, and outlined at the end of the chapter, are components of the study’s quality and data trustworthiness, its integrated ethical constituents, as well as its challenges and limitations. The next chapter, Chapter 5, presents the study’s findings, as they are organized in the four themes that emerged during analysis.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

The research findings outlined in this chapter provide a rich description of the bounded context for educational leaders' descriptions of their responsibilities, challenges and strategies. Also included are the retrospective accounts of former youth in care, and their understanding of the inclusive leadership strategies they experienced while attending Manitoba public schools in the same districts that are the focus of this case study. As indicated earlier, interviews, focus groups and document analysis were employed to collect data from principals and vice principals, former youth in care, and government documents, in order to respond to the study's main research question:

In what ways are inclusive school principals and vice principals advancing social justice outcomes for children in care attending Winnipeg's K-12 public schools?

The data were further interrogated through four sub-questions:

1. Which responsibilities and educational goals are outlined in provincial and district documents to guide school leaders in addressing intended outcomes for Manitoba's children in care?
2. What challenges/barriers do these inclusive school principals and vice principals face while trying to promote social justice outcomes for children in care?
3. What inclusive leadership processes and practices are school principals and vice principals using to advance social justice outcomes for children in care?
4. How do former youth in care understand principals' and vice principals' school-based inclusive leadership processes and practices, intended to support social justice outcomes, in light of their past educational experiences?

The analysis of the data was guided by my conceptual framework, and four major themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes were further distilled into

subthemes and explored in this chapter.

The first theme, *Reconciling Dissonance Between Provincially Identified Responsibilities and Personally Defined Roles*, demonstrated that all participants understood the guidelines outlined in official government documents but also experienced tension between what they recognized as their professional responsibilities, and what they felt needed to be done to support children in care in public schools. In the second theme, *Challenges and Barriers Faced by School Leaders Advocating for Children in Care*, educational leaders identified systemic, interpersonal and personal barriers, both in and outside of the school/ school system. For educational leaders, these barriers complicated and confounded their advocacy actions. The third theme, *School Leaders Flexing the System to Support Children in Care*, outlined strategies that participants used to move their advocacy intentions to action by using processes and practices to create individual, relational, and systemic change. The final theme, *Former Youth in Care: The Layered Effects of Misaligned Interorganizational Processes and Practices*, revealed focus group members’ understanding of the impact of educational and interorganizational processes and practices. These themes and sub-themes are also summarized in Table 2, below.

**Table 2:** *Summary of the Four Major Themes and Their Sub-themes*

Theme	Sub-Theme
Theme 1: Reconciling Dissonance Between Provincially Identified Responsibilities and Personally Defined Roles	Provincially Assigned Roles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of Documents that Guide the Work of School Leaders</li> <li>• Constraints in Principals’ and Vice Principals’ Collective Advocacy Work for Children in Care</li> <li>• The Socially Complex Lives of Children in Care and Their Impact on Schools</li> </ul> Principals’ and Vice Principals’ Individual Influence and Impact



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principals' and Vice Principals' Professional Context</li> <li>• A Social Justice Leadership Stance</li> <li>• Knowledge Gaps</li> </ul>
<p>Theme 2: (Inter)Organizational Challenges and Barriers Faced by School Leaders</p>	<p>Systems that Cannot Accommodate the Socially Complex Lives of Children in Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers to Interorganizational Collaboration &amp; Communication – Education &amp; CFS             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ (Mis)Interpreting Complicated Systemic Guidelines</li> <li>○ Impact of Ambiguous Responsibilities and Commercialization of Group/Foster Homes</li> <li>○ Inconsistent Elaboration of Processes and Practices that Characterize the Social Worker Mandate</li> <li>○ Inconsistent Practices Associated with the CFS Intake Form</li> <li>○ Education and Aging-out of the CFS system.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Policy Process Practice – Challenges in Education</li> </ul> <p>The Source of Social Perceptions and Assumptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging Negative Community &amp; Family Perceptions of Children in Care</li> <li>• Challenging Staff Assumptions &amp; Mindset Around Children in Care</li> </ul>
<p>Theme 3: School Leaders Flexing the System to Support Children in Care</p>	<p>Maximizing the Impact of Relationships to Improve Collaboration and Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing Cross-system Connections and Capacity             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Intake Meeting Process</li> <li>○ Professional Conversations to Build Relationships and Capacity</li> <li>○ Engaging Experts and Mentors</li> <li>○ Positive Connections with Families and Social workers.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Children in Care - Developing Opportunities for Success in Schools             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fostering Intentional Trusting, Healthy Relationships</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teaching Positive Personal Choices, Goals, and Self-Advocacy Skills.</li> </ul> <p>Flexing and Shaping the System Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Harnessing the Potential of External Resources</li> <li>● Stable/Inclusive Environments that Honour Students' Experience             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Responding More Intensely and Intentionally.</li> <li>○ Deliberately Shaping the Environment.</li> <li>○ Identifying Markers of Success for Schools and Children in Care.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Flexing and Reshaping Systemic Borders</li> </ul> <p>Models for the Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Developing New and Trusting Partnerships</li> <li>● Common Accountability for Success</li> <li>● Schools as Service Hubs</li> </ul>
<p>Theme 4: Former Youth in Care: The Layered Effects of Misaligned Interorganizational Processes and Practices</p>	<p>CFS Processes and Their Effects on School Readiness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Commercialization of CFS Process and its Effect on Children's Self-Perception</li> <li>● Cumulative Effects of the In-Care Experience on School Readiness.</li> </ul> <p>Education Processes and Their Effects on School Readiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Connecting Staffing and School Readiness</li> <li>● Impact of Rigid School Policies</li> <li>● Social-Emotional Needs of Children in Care – Assumptions &amp; Misinformation</li> <li>● Academic &amp; Social-Emotional Programming – Impact of Misinformation</li> </ul> <p>Successful Supports and Programming: The Impact of Positive Relationships</p> <p>Suggestions for the Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Educate All Staff on the In-Care Experience.</li> <li>● Make Relationships a Priority.</li> <li>● Include Student Voice to Develop School-Based Resources.</li> </ul> <p>Centralized school for children in care.</p>

### **Theme 1: Reconciling Dissonance Between Provincially Identified Responsibilities and Personally Defined Roles**

To try and make sense of the growing complexity around the lives of children in care in Manitoba schools, principals and vice principals' comments fell into two general sub-themes that included 1) Provincially Assigned Roles, as well as 2) Principals' and Vice Principals' Personal Influence and Impact.

#### **Provincially Assigned Roles**

All principals and vice principals indicated that their roles and responsibilities were specifically and formally defined by government legislation and district policies. For example, the *Manitoba Education Administration Act* (CCSM c E10) and the *Public Schools Act* (CCSM c P250) outline leadership responsibilities and roles for all principals and vice principals in Manitoba. The circumscribed areas mentioned in these documents relate to providing student support services (e.g., programming for students with exceptional needs ), teacher supervision (e.g., supervision of teachers' goals and professional growth), managing part-time teaching assignments (e.g., assigned to teaching vice principals to round-out their full-time assignment), instructional leadership (e.g., planning, development, and modelling of research-based instructional practices and data analysis to support continuous student and school improvement) , as well as managerial areas such as budgeting and staffing allocations.

The guiding information contained in the *Manitoba Education Administration Act* focuses on the needs of Manitoba's general K-12 student populations, and allows for wide interpretation by educational leaders, based on a specific school's situation. Importantly, student groups who may have particular or specialized learning needs, i.e., newcomers to Canada, students who identify as LGBTQ, children in care, etc., students

who have exceptional learning needs, or children in care, are not referenced in the government's legislation. The provincial government did, however, publish key legislation and documents connected to their strategic vision to guide the work of school leaders in support of the learning for children in care. The three representative documents include, *the Child and Family Services Act (CFS Act)* (2018), the *Education and Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care (Protocol)* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013), and the *Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care Support Resources Companion Document (Companion Document)* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013b).

**Influence of documents that guide the work of school leaders.** At this time, both historic and socially complex trauma situations continue to affect Manitoba's children in care. The *Protocol* and *Companion Document* form the basis of a framework designed by an interdepartmental committee of the ministry, the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet (HCCC). Its purpose was to help mitigate the effects of this trauma, by integrating services and supports between the education and child welfare departments.

Together the *Protocol* and *Companion Document* outline a variety of mandated areas of action, including but not limited to steps for information sharing, privacy concerns, roles and responsibilities for registration and programming, suggestions for collaboration and planning to support the best interests of children in care, as well as a process for problem resolution. Not only do these documents orient and scaffold educational leaders' responsibilities on a school based and systems level, but they also attempt to add clarity to educational leaders' obligations as outlined in the *CFS Act*

(2018) in areas such as planning for success and framing associated actions to support children in care in schools.

Excerpts from the *Protocol* (Health Child Manitoba, 2013) outline the government's intention in designing these documents, which were meant to guide professionals in education and child welfare departments.

In the Preface:

A protocol is an agreement between two or more departments, agencies or authorities that describes how they will work together to achieve a common goal. It identifies who is responsible, individually or jointly, for specific tasks and their timelines.... This protocol committee is co-chaired by Manitoba Education and the Healthy Child Manitoba Office... These protocols mandate a co-ordinated approach by the staff of departments and related organizations (schools, health regions, Child and Family Services Authorities and designated agencies) who work with children, youth and their families. (p. 5)

The Background:

Every child in Manitoba has the right to an education. The well-being of children and youth in care is the shared responsibility of many government and community partners. Beyond family and community involvement, two significant means of support for children and youth in care are the education system and the child welfare system. (p. 6)

The Purpose:

This protocol will improve information sharing, promote effective communication, and strengthen joint planning among educators, school-based

teams, child and family services workers, family members and students. Further, the protocol promotes consistency of practice across Manitoba. (p. 7)

As part of its Guiding Principles:

Manitoba Education is committed to fostering inclusion for all people. Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. In Manitoba we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. (p.8)

The guidelines contained within this protocol [indicate that they] are consistent with the five guiding principles of trauma-informed practice:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Empowerment (p. 9)

Although the documents sometimes use the term “school staff” to outline responsibilities at the school level, the *Manitoba Public Schools Act* (CCSM c P250) indicates that the final accountability for student progress and success lies with the principal of the school. Hence, for the purpose of this study, any references to “school staff” in these documents was taken as an indication that the principal carried the final responsibility, as the school’s instructional leader. The following quoted examples help to illustrate some of these obligations. From the *Protocol* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013):

School staff is responsible for:

- Facilitating programming within 14 days of pupil seeking enrollment
- Developing and implementing programming with the child and family services worker/agency/region, caregiver(s) and/or parent(s) as appropriate, in order to support the child or youth in:
  - fostering a personal sense of belonging, security and acceptance (e.g., connection to Aboriginal support staff and programs, or other cultural opportunities)
  - meeting the expectations of the educational program, and
  - achieving his or her learning outcomes (p. 5)

Quoted examples from the Companion Document (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013b):

The school principal must forward the pupil file, including the cumulative components and all files which comprise the support file component, when the pupil transfers out of the school and enrolls in another school (subsection 29(3) of the Education Administration Miscellaneous Provisions Regulation). (p.9)

In this study, most participants acknowledged the role that these guiding government documents played in formally framing their professional roles and responsibilities in relation to children in care.

While all educational leadership participants were aware of the Manitoba legislative and policy/protocol documents for children in care, only about half of the principal and vice principal participants referred specifically to the documents to inform their daily practice. Several veteran principals commented on the fact that the *Protocol* and intake form both represent authoritative documents to ensure compliance with departmental process, but they also conceded that the two documents were a good place

to start for novice educational leaders, who were unfamiliar with the process.

*There is...a nice little government printout about how to deal with children in care...It's the Child in Care Protocol...it's pretty old now, but originally, I would have started there as a new principal going...Oh I think I'm supposed to follow the rules. (Murray)*

*There's our children in care document...the provincial document...it's helpful for a read for any administrator to just look at...a lot of it logical and common sense...but there's a form there as well...a checklist of things to consider and make sure that you're doing those things...so until they become second nature I think it's extremely helpful for people to have...it's a good document to go back and forth...even the writers of it are pretty prominent people who had a lot of experience in our system. (Joanna)*

Participants' also recognized dissonance between the mandated responsibilities outlined in the government documents and what they felt was a deeper necessary understanding of the areas of concern and action that would help participants to develop process and practices to support children in care in schools.

*We get passed down documents from the department that say...Yes you have to do this...you have to have inclusiveness...you have to follow this children in care guide but I don't know that getting a document that enforces what the rules are is the same thing as learning about something and having critical conversations like this one. (Joanna)*

*...then there's the In Care of Agency Protocol and Forms that we have to filled out. Those are certainly system things... going through research that's been done by the province, in particular on high school graduation rates and...[what are] the three most important markers [to predict contact with the care system]... I'm trying to find all that research 'cause I want to be able to share that with my staff, because...that just absolutely opened up my eyes. (Murray)*

Additional guiding documents that some participants reported using included two reports commissioned by the Manitoba government, *The Educational Outcomes of Children in Care in Manitoba* (Brownell et al., 2015), and the *Manitoba Task Force on Educational Outcomes of Children in Care: Report for the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning and the Minister of Family Services* (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). Participants mentioned that they received the latter report through their division, studied its contents and/or used the report to actively guide their work with children in



care. Interestingly, most participants who reported using documents and resources, other than the primary government documents, also shared more than one additional guiding document, often indicating that they did additional research, or intentional development or sourcing for documents that informed their work.

*Trauma-informed practice...there's a new free webinar that New Directions put up [a local organization that provides both counselling and residential programming for youth in care]... it's free...it's online... so when you provide information like that to schools...we're in a much better position to respond to kids... I think it's called...Making Sense of Trauma. (Golda)*

*We also looked at the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action for all that related to children in care...when I talk with a social worker...I will literally quote from the Task Force report and from Bring Our Children Home saying, "It really says here that continuity in schools is important...how can you justify taking this kid out of school right now? (Amelia)*

Participants reported using other documents, including information developed or obtained locally through school districts, but this information was not always specific to children in care. At times the information did highlight Indigenous and culturally specific needs, which participants believed were relevant to the needs of children in care.

*[The] Circle of Courage [Martin Brokenleg's work] is our foundation...the school division has another circle of care...that has a student in the centre...every circle is another level of support all the way out... Brokenleg's work is very much a divisional thing. (Gloria)*

Despite the existence of the above mentioned legislative and policy documents that helped to delimit participants' professional responsibilities for children in care, most participants reported that outside sources, not directly provided through government legislation or policy, had the greatest impact in developing their understanding of the situated problems faced by children in care, along with processes and practices that helped to develop their inclusive leadership roles.

**Constraints in principals' and vice principals' collective advocacy work for children in care.** Both the *Protocol* and *Companion Document* list processes such as timelines, meetings and forms that serve as inter-departmental responsibilities and potential points of collaboration between the different stakeholders that support children in care. Participants also felt that the school experience of children in care rested on the collective actions of individual team members from different organizations involved with a particular child.

*That team that's assembled around the child...amazing teachers, amazing social workers, amazing principals. It's everybody that does that work...all of us have a role to play in being our best and advocating ferociously for that kid. (Amelia)*

*When it comes to daily practice...I think it is child by child and you have to be thinking outside the box...and you really have to be working as a team...collaboratively to benefit kids. (Golda)*

One participant noted the siloed existence of educational organizations, such as different departments and unions, as the precursor for a lack of intra-organizational integration, communication and growing policy constraints. Beyond the formal structure of educational organizations, Liam described the tension between inclusive education legislation, legal pressure of contracts and collective agreements. He felt these binding components of educational professionalization indirectly shape the environment and experience for children in care. As some of these documents do not account for the needs of children in care, they create tension when educational leaders' have to consider them when shaping inclusive processes and practices (i.e., in the areas of hiring staff members and fulfilling contractual obligations).

*Different systems even within the same organization, different entities within the same organization, [but] I'm not sure [they] always function on the same guidelines within that organization....the school system, Child and Family Services...you're experience in dealing with one particular entity in that organization is not the same as dealing with another entity in that organization and that in itself is a challenge. (Liam)*

*I'm an advocate for MTS [Manitoba Teachers Society – principals are part of this union]...I'm an advocate for being part of a union and I want our union to work to its full potential for both children and staff...because once again there is a variety of systems that are trying to work together and play nicely...one of them is the collective agreement[s]...the other is provincial legislation...the other is inclusive education...and they all have to find their space. (Liam)*

Further exploration of this topic is of great interest as it impacts educational leaders' social justice work, it is at this time beyond the scope of this study. Although this participant was the only one to offer comments around the impact of contracts and collective agreements, I include this information here, because educational leaders' work in schools in Manitoba relies heavily upon the support and skills of staff members that belong to unions other than MTS (i.e., CUPE – Canadian Union of Public Employees for custodial staff, MANTE – Manitoba Union of Non-Teaching Employees for administrative assistants and librarians).

**The socially complex lives of children in care and their impact on schools.**

Growing social complexity, poverty, addictions, and justice involvement in all students' lives were mentioned by principals and vice principals in the Canadian ATA and CAP study (2014), as well as study participants, as concerns affecting Canadian schools, and, accordingly, their professional roles. In their comments, participants described the provincial educational landscape and their own school context as being extremely complex and fluid, due to the school community's growing diversity, and contact with a growing number of support organizations that facilitate students' day-to-day functioning. Participants felt that this was particularly true for the growing number of children in care registered in schools, many of whom face additional social complexities in their day-to-day lives. The following quotations from two participants describe the nature of these complexities:

*We had groups of children with health needs, we had children who have a sick parent...affecting them emotionally...students with anxiety...anybody with any addictions or addictions at home...so we added children in care as a [vulnerable] category [for students in need of service] during our meetings...and sometimes things overlap and that's OK. (Joanna)*

*I think we were talking about poverty and attendance and other pieces that come up... now I would see maybe more children who are in care, or children in the systems, but here it is. It is overt and growing and absolutely a reason why things are breaking down for kids... agencies that I'd be referring to are the multiple child and family services that are here, but also probation services, justice concerns for kids...we're now calling JIV [acronym for] Justice-Involved Kids, and the complexity of that and the safety concerns that come up because of that. (Victoria)*

Even though students in care only represented a fraction of schools' total enrollment, ranging from 1-10% according to interviewees, participants remarked that the needs of this student group were a major factor impacting the environment and their professional roles at school. Many principal and vice principal participants commented that most in care students have an Indigenous ancestry. As such, the participants associated the students additional support needs with specific events in Canada's historical narrative of colonization. About half of the participants identified specific educational and social services/programming that in care students should be receiving, but also noted that it is becoming increasingly difficult for educational leaders to simply manage these supports due to the siloed nature of the educational system for delivery of such services.

Participants recognized the unpredictable nature of the connections between the broader educational, cultural, and historical contexts that are at play in the socially complex lives of children in care:

*So when you talk about some of these issues, I just find it's hard to separate it from Indigenous issues, and kids in care...because that's really so interconnected...the fact that they're in care is just a symptom of a much larger problem...Why are they in care? Why have they been taken from their families?...It's a societal breakdown...we need to fix the actual root of the problem, which...I don't have an answer for that...how do we fix that? (Megan)*

*...the other thing is that this is generational...that there's a lot of kids in care from kids that grew up in care, and along the way and understandably so, don't have a clue how to parent. They were not parented themselves...they're grandparents may have been in residential schools and taken away from their families, so they don't know how to nurture or care for [their children]. (Murray)*

*...everything else around us is morphing...society morphs...political structure morphs...How can you stay static?...How can you say you know it all? (Liam)*

One experienced participant described the many small systemic and organizational pressures, such as funding allocations and timetabling, that serve to structure the school context. The rigidity of the structure, i.e., regulatory requirements concerning funding allocations and school timetabling, provide little leeway or flexibility that participants reported necessary to meet the complex, changing needs of children in care in Manitoba.

*...kids with huge behaviour issues, in care for the most part, manage their anger, manage their frustrations, cope...and oh yah do school all at the same time...kids sort of forgotten by the school system ... foster parents...social workers...probation [in the justice system]...so those are the two main systems involved...that system the way it is... the government gives these guys [school district] money, these guys give us the money, but then they tell us...how to use the money...so far the decisions are so far removed from the day to day workings in the school... I don't think that system works...I think that's part of the reason we end up with 10 000 kids in care in the province. (Murray)*

Reference to the education or social service system having gaps or not working emerged repeatedly in the interviews. When probed to provide examples of these gaps, most principal and vice principal participants were able to specify areas of breakdown between the needs of children in care and the provision of programming and services being offered by the public agencies and other community organizations involved. Inadequate resourcing given the volume of students, communication barriers between agencies, insufficient lead time to prepare reports, were frequently reported by school leaders:

*Children who are in care...it is overt and growing and absolutely a reason why things are*

*breaking down for kids, because agencies are not necessarily communicating... blown away by the number of kids...it's change of semester...14 kids that require all of those reports that I mentioned...resource, counselling, clinical team, digging up, figuring it out. (Victoria)*

*We actually identified 3 years ago an increasing need for...support, funding, permission to kind of think outside the box...it's one of the things that's impacting us most in this building right now...just the sheer numbers...we have 50+ children in care...40+ are new to us this year and new to the school...we're getting slammed. (Fontaine)*

### **Principals' and Vice Principals' Individual Influence and Impact**

Educational leader participants experienced dissonance between wanting to adhere to their provincially mandated responsibilities and follow their own personal, moral compass as inclusive educational leaders. This dissonance led to a sense of frustration and the desire to create a better educational experience for children in care. In determining their ability to impact the problems affecting equitable education for children in care, all participants indicated that their own context – professional and personal - played an important role. Beginning with professional, one participant described the drastic change in his ability to control equitable changes, after changing schools.

*I had carte blanche [in a previous alternative school setting] to build a school however I wanted and...we had won an award for dealing with kids in care...so having all that leeway to create that and then come here[to a standard public school] and I go...holy 55 minute classes...that's setting kids [in care] up to fail. (Murray)*

He also added:

*It's a very old [school] system and our kids [in care] don't fit into it very well...and the fact that the school division's divisional plan says 100% of schools will...100% of schools will...100% of schools will...what's left for us in our school and our particular situation that we can do? (Murray)*

**Principals' and vice principals' professional context.** Participants mentioned the necessity to bridge the gaps they perceived between their provincially mandated roles, which focus on K-12 students broadly speaking, and the individual differentiated needs of children in care. Within their frequently shifting professional situations, vice principal

participants reported a growing awareness of the variable and unpredictable nature of their responsibilities and the vast and growing discrepancy between the legally directed aspects of their position in schools and the actual iteration of their role as it is characterized by the day-to-day needs of the school:

*When I began as a vice principal, in my second year, I was half-time teaching in the classroom and half-time admin., so new division, new grade level, new everything, new role. (Holden)*

Whereas he reported the following for his present situation.

*I guess I'm qualified as a teaching VP... I've been half time admin and half time student services... We are allocated at 2.5 units [for student services support staff], I'm the .5...you respond to the needs whether they be social, emotional or academic in nature...I'm on the ground shall we say, doing reading, resolving conflicts, developing social skills with the kids in the building. (Holden)*

*On paper it's .75 vice principal...and .25 in TL...teacher librarian, but I say on paper because mostly it is vice principal.... We have lots of students with lots of needs...[the] vice principal part of my role is usually dealing with behaviour, and understanding that...usually kids in care have had trauma [...] there are considerations you have to make around...discipline or whatever you want to use in that case. (Hannah)*

Lone principals worked in smaller schools where the administrative functions were not shared but left solely to the principal participants' roles, and the construction of their roles was affected by government and district priorities, as well as less predictable contextual priorities related to school size and staffing. Developing mechanisms to understand and address the problems that children in care face in schools was also more complex for those participants who were lone principals in a school.

*I guess my technical role is...I'm the principal...It's a very fluid role where I'm very much a part of the everyday of the students' lives...and play a big role in a lot of the social justice activities...That was really my passion to start with. (Megan)*

*We're a K to 5 school...very small...so I'm principal on my own...it's important in my role to create the conditions that are gonna support all kids and the staff who work here as well. I have always felt that...schools need to be first off, all safe for kids and for staff and they need to be engaging. (Golda)*

Given the much larger size of other schools, some participants, typically in larger high schools, developed more compartmentalized roles. As a group, their comments created a complex picture of daily managerial priorities that pulled educational leaders in different directions, making role characterisation and a clear picture of influence in problem areas more complicated.

*There're three administrators in this building with over 1300 kids, we have portfolios that we work within and my portfolio includes... the Math program area, English program area, social sciences, and student services, and the student services piece is more my background, so...that's [working with kids in care] a good fit, and so much of my time is spent in that area. (Victoria)*

*One of my degrees is a Special Ed degree... so we kind of call it...different portfolios. I do staffing...I do hiring...obviously working with kids, but one of my main areas of focus is student services, just because of that. I would say that's a big part of my life...working with the team and then with kids [in care] that...are at risk...(Fontaine)*

*We have 1200 students and about 130 staff, 3 vice principals, and 5, 6, 7 full time student services that have different job descriptions throughout. So, we oversee different aspects of it. I oversee any kid...grade 10 is what I have this year. I do all of our...school of choice things...and then high-level regular HR [Human Resources] and budgeting stuff, but then I also...oversee all the kids in care that come in, 'cause of the complexity of that...and just my background and that is why I'm a little protective of that portfolio. I have 3 VP's that do different programming from alternative Ed to a workplace program, to programs for kids that have cognitive delays. (Gloria)*

Study participants clearly outlined how they integrated their own experiential and/or professional history with the portfolio of support for children in care. They actively sought out formal and informal portfolios and tried to connect this expanded social justice role-construction into a greater area of influence for children in care.

All participants also commented on the fact that they recognized their own potential and limitations to impact the lives of children in care. Their comments were focused in two areas. First, they assumed a strong social justice stance, based on personal experiences that allowed them to consider the experiences of children in care. Second, participants recognized their own gaps in knowledge and training in this area, and



developed practices using personal or work experiences to mitigate this effect, so that they could expand their area of influence to spaces where children in care would be affected.

**A social justice leadership stance.** All participants mentioned advocacy for children in care as a non-negotiable action and took on that responsibility based on their own moral social justice constituents, in addition to being mentioned as a responsibility in government documents. Specifically, the Companion Document (Health Child Manitoba, 2013b) mentioned advocacy as one of several important protective factors, representing "...those supports and actions that position children and youth for success in school and in the community" (p. 7). Participants reported feeling that something was "not right", or something was "broken", and that the current situation needed to be "challenged" or "fixed". Frequently, this feeling was connected to an internal struggle to find the balance and courage to move from realizing the scope of the problem to advocacy for children in care. Leaders social justice stance to help youth in care was often grounded in the realization of their own privileged life, which was used as their starting point for advocating for change with their staff and other members of the school community:

*With my work at [the alternative school] I started to recognize that I had a pretty special life...and that I really needed to help these kids [in care]...and lots of teachers have already made that change, but there's still those who really need to live and come to grips... (Murray)*

*I recognize that...I have a lot of privilege...in my life, and it's kind of one of those things I've learned over the years. It's not about feeling guilty about having privilege...And so my role is very much about recognizing that I have that privilege and using it in ways that are going to advocate for people who have not had that; who don't have the kind of voice that I've always been able to have. I think you need to recognize that the lived experience of a child in care may be vastly different from your own...or from most kids...I think that*

*recognition is important and...there needs to be some more effort there and some more advocacy because those kids often...had no voice. (Golda)*

*My philosophy...is to bring everybody around the table... The balance comes from your own ethical leadership. The balance comes from what you feel is right...and that feeling that you get when something isn't right that you need to correct...correct maybe is a bad word...that you need to address...that you need to challenge...because as a principal, I would argue that a principal that's in a building that doesn't have those feelings [of ethical conflict] from time to time...is not challenging themselves with ethical leadership...is not challenging themselves to think beyond what they see. (Liam)*

**Knowledge gaps.** Participants were very forthcoming about the gaps that they saw in their own understanding around children in care and reported that the gaps in knowledge affected their ability to plan and provide support for these children. Most principals and vice principals indicated that they had a very narrow or nonexistent schema for trauma and topics related to the in-care experiences of children in care, which made it more difficult for them to respond appropriately to children in care in schools:

*They're just coming from everywhere, right, and...so that's another barrier. I feel like...I'm a white woman...what do I know, and they're absolutely right. I don't know, and because I'm drawing connection between...mostly kids in care are first Nations and Indigenous kids...90%. (Victoria)*

*What I would honestly like...as someone who for example came from a nice quote unquote stable family...and really liked school and things like this, I'm still looking for...some sort of beautiful wonderful info-graphic which sort of demonstrates [CFS] central intake is connected to you know MATC [Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre], which is connected to the WRHA [Winnipeg Regional Health Authority], which is connected to some sort of diagram or visual, because we end up as administrators...as administrators for different reasons because we bring different strengths. (Holden)*

*I'll just talk about me personally...I don't have clear understanding of...if children are coming from the north what experience has looked like, so then talking about maybe doing some kind of a visit...going up and having a chance to really see. (Victoria)*

Several participants also mentioned how their knowledge gaps potentially limited their advocacy efforts while working with other organizations or directly with children in care in schools.

*So, part of the collaboration effort comes from people knowing and understanding each other's jobs. If you don't know the right question to ask...like social history is not something I would have asked. That came out of watching a social worker ask those questions, so now I will, but I'm out of my element in some cases. (Victoria)*

*He was living in a group home situation. I had no idea what a group home was...I had no idea why he was in a group home, I had no real idea about the history, and I knew there was a very lengthy dossier behind this young boy. But here, there was a sense of overwhelming for me in so far [as] it was just a couple of months into my new position, new division, new grade level, new school. Everything!...So this time, you're the VP and you have no experience in any of this but you've got to know about stuff like this.... and then it's the pressure of you don't know what you don't know. Right? You don't know to ask this question or that question, but I listened a lot, I got a lot of information...and maybe because it was my first year in admin in this division...no one put me in a place of...you need to be a leader when it comes to this guy. I think everyone was trying to ease me in...so I don't think I could really contribute at that point to social justice for that guy. (Holden)*

*I'm learning about the justice piece that I didn't know before, like there's these ISSP workers [Intensive Support and Supervision Program workers supporting high risk young offenders]. What did I hear the other day - something else that was a new term and I went wow that is such a big system that is impacting on education, and I know there's efforts to build partnerships there, so [another] division has justice transition teachers in place. I probably didn't make a friend there, because I just didn't understand how that role is being helpful right now, so I've been critical - a little critical - about a pretty big resource. I'm not understanding of the value in it yet, so we've had a couple of conversations about that. (Victoria)*

*You have to be willing to say - I don't know. You have to be willing to say that "I need help" and use the system, however that might look, to give you that assistance, because you don't know everything. (Liam)*

With reference to the last quote, knowledge gaps were most prevalent with those principals and vice principals who had less experience with children in care, and yet every participant shared concern, about knowledge gaps they still had.

## **Theme 2: (Inter)Organizational Challenges and Barriers Faced by School Leaders**

This theme delves into the systemic and contextual circumstances that create challenges for educational leaders, and as a result, barriers for school leaders to support children in care. The first major sub-theme, Systems that Cannot Accommodate the Socially Complex Lives of Children in Care, has two areas of focus including Barriers to

Interorganizational Collaboration and Communication for Education and CFS, and Policy, Process, Practice – Challenges in Education. The second major sub-theme outlines the challenges of social perceptions and assumptions in educational leaders' work with children in care. Its two areas of focus include challenging negative community and family perceptions of children in care and challenging staff assumptions and mindsets around children in care.

### **System That Cannot Accommodate the Socially Complex Lives of Children in Care**

The *CFS Act* (2018), the *Protocol*, the *Companion Document*, and the Christensen and Lamoureux's (2016) report all indicate explicitly the need for coordinated and integrated services between CFS and schools. However, questions connected to this topic elicited comments of frustration, confusion, and misunderstanding among principal and vice principal participants, as well as focus group participants.

### **Barriers to Interorganizational Collaboration and Communication – Education and CFS**

The challenges that participants associated with trying to communicate and collaborate with CFS stakeholders included (mis)interpretation of complicated systemic guidelines, the impact of ambiguous responsibilities and commercialization of foster care and group homes, the inconsistent elaboration of processes and practices that characterize the social worker mandate, inconsistent practices associated with the intake process form, as well as processes and practices related to the aging-out policy that releases children in care out of the system at age 18.

*I thought of a whole bunch of systemic conditions that make it more difficult, and those are transiency of students from different foster placements...transiency of social workers...large gaps in schooling with the kids coming in...lack of time, money and resources at the school. (Joanna)*

*We have a girl who's moved to [name of street redacted]...well she might as well go to [name of school redacted] because that's too far, and she's never going to get here. The worker is dragging her feet about that...don't drag your feet, make a decision, get the girl into school, or bring her back to us and get transportation for her every day. (Victoria)*

**(Mis)interpreting complicated systemic guidelines.** Participants' comments suggested that organizational policies, processes, and practices were often the reasons why each principal, vice principal, social worker, clinician, foster parent and group home worker appeared to interpret the information in the *Protocol* and *Companion Document* to meet their own needs and small picture perspective of responsibilities and organizational mandates. This means that participants were often hampered in their advocacy work towards social justice for children in care. Starting children in a new school without all the forms in place or demanding additional time to gather information when a child's history is uncertain are two practices shared by participants based on their personal interpretation of CFS processes that did not align with the interpretations of the social workers involved.

*Lots of times it will be one of us [who takes control]...'cause sometimes the social worker won't come when they're told...this is what we're doing, and other social workers will organize it all, so it just really...it depends, but in the end we know here that regardless who the legal guardian is...if it's CFS, the people that influence that kid's life on a day to day basis are us, and whoever the foster home is, so...I don't need the legal guardian to tell me I can do this...'cause they don't...it's just paperwork at this point. They're not the influence in that child's life. (Goria)*

*Right now if we don't have a social history on a student we're saying, "Whoa wait a minute", even though there's the two week window [to get children in care back into school]....If we don't have enough information about that student...what they're history is, we're kinda putting the brakes on, so I think we're gonna get some pushback on that. (Victoria)*

Educational leaders in this study voiced that a lack of trust between education and CFS systems still affected relationships between school and CFS staff members.

Especially those participants who worked at the middle and high school level provided

examples where CFS workers did not share students' complete history, to ensure a speedy registration. As a result, students received inappropriate programming that later represented personal or group safety concerns.

*The justice piece is interesting too, because I understand Fippa and Phia and privacy but it's really interesting if a child [in care]'s been arrested 4 or 5 times for assault with a weapon and they refuse to tell you that...I don't really think you're doing anyone any good...so some of those are challenging... (Fontaine)*

*So you'd have social workers come in and they would kind of forget about the mental health piece and now the kid's involved...they're embraced in the school and all of a sudden you start to recognize all these mental health pieces, and when you dig a little deeper...oh yah, they've been at MATC since grade 3, so this really isn't the place for them, and then...well they're here...and that's the real frustrating thing...dealing with the other systems that aren't quite there. (Murray)*

*Lots of times I'm more concerned about mental health pieces...there's the stigma around that still...to me again, you're gonna send someone to school that has cancer and is doing chemo and you wouldn't tell us?...Of course you'd tell us, but then if someone has some serious mental health concerns...where they're actually perhaps medicated or self-harming or any of those things, and you don't want to tell us? That's crazy talk...but it would be good to know that if we see a change in baseline behaviour and we're a little suspicious about that or you lock yourself in the upstairs bathroom and smash [name of object redacted]...yah that's when we kick the door in...all of these are things that have happened just this year with children in care. (Fontaine)*

All participants commented on the fact that providing children in care with access to assessment, trained clinicians, or addictions workers was also more complicated, as children in care usually receive those supports through interorganizational processes from agencies outside of the school, and outside of principals' and vice principals' area of influence. Whereas, clinical services are available to children not in the CFS system through an internal school referral system. The resultant backlog of children in care who waited for clinical services was a real concern mentioned by about half of participants.

*When there's substances abuse in the mix...that's another really big one that is out of our control and trying to get whether AFM [Addiction Foundation of Manitoba] involved or how we do that. We have our own clinical services unit here, so we have social workers and psychologists...they have a bazillion things going on as well and we don't double-dip in services, so if a child [in care] has a...social worker or psychologist outside of school,*

*we don't double-dip and use ours as well. We just found there were too many conflicting messages that way. (Gloria)*

*Social workers, justice, AFM, Mental Health supports...I find it harder...when I have kids that have mental health issues that are living with their parents for the most part...the whole idea of social capital...they feel that they can reach out and demand more supports...especially around things around mental health, where again sometimes [for children in care] it takes more time...it takes more effort...you've got more fingers in the pie...the social worker has to have time to fill out the referrals...there's that extra step in there...I don't see that at all as being equitable either...to me it's a real issue...services around health and mental health...and of course addiction is a mental health issue too. (Fontaine)*

### **Impact of ambiguous responsibilities and commercialization of group/foster**

**homes.** In Manitoba, foster care homes represent private homes where single adults, couples, or families, approach CFS to support no more than four children taken into care in their home environment (CFS Act, 2018). In return, the families are provided with financial support for the children. Group homes, on the other hand, represent independent fee-for-service organizations, contracted by the government to hire staff members that provide care and support in eight-hour shifts, around the clock, for a group of five to eight children in a house setting (CFS Act, 2018; Manitoba Advocate for Children & Youth [MACY], n.d.).

According to respondents' comments, one of the most frustrating aspects of the CFS system outside of the control of educational leaders is the structure, function, and related transitions connected to foster and group homes. The layered effects of using this complicated network of processes to house children in care makes communication and planning for students in the care system more complicated and unpredictable for schools.

*It's often because their whole life is turned upside down. They're in an emergency shelter. There's so many factors there that make them feel like life is just not predictable and so sometimes it can be worse, sometimes it's better, but I want our social workers [to know] that we will hold on to kids if that is the right decision for them. That we're not trying to gate-keep in any way as principals in the work that we're doing here in the school. (Amelia)*

*Why move them midyear? But I get it. Placements break down. Something happens, or this is the place they've been waiting to come, like a home or something. But they're not always great educational decisions, but maybe better or a good decision in the other facets of their life. (Fontaine)*

*So, making contact with a group home is very difficult sometimes...you don't know who you're talking to and they may not even know who you are talking about...they're like...the kid in Room 6...it definitely makes things more difficult for communication purposes. (Joanna)*

*What's a group home, what's a foster home, what's [the] status of adult in charge, who's running the show and how do they operate...[this new neighbourhood] seems a magnet for people to build a home and then have a bunch of kids come into it. And so, we have...really affluent communities where kids in care are living and there are a bunch of them in a house, and I'm just trying to figure out the people who run those homes. (Victoria)*

Participants also added that students' lives appeared to become more, and more commodified, with few avenues open for educational leaders to improve communication and collaboration. The comments represent both elementary and high school examples of how processes, connected to the funding and monetization of foster homes, appear to encourage practices that objectivate children in care.

*I think our greatest challenge for our children...[is] when you say this child can earn you this much money...and...being a principal of a school where I see people taking in 4 or 5 level 5 kids and how much money people are making on the backs of our Indigenous kids. (Amelia)*

*These kids are all coming from [neighbourhood names redacted] ...it's almost like a business...I know a couple of them that live in one house and [the foster parents] have a second house and the kids live in that and yes they spend time there but they also have respite and...they have staff...it's almost like a business...like a group home, but not a group home...maybe to make ends meet, and so that's impacting it...a lot of our kids in care are coming from there. (Fontaine)*

*I think they're being manipulated honestly in their placements...because if they're in school, someone else is still getting money for them and that sounds kind of blunt but that's the facts and so I see some not good things sometimes...and I think if someone was responsible for that specifically, you'd see a lot less of that and a lot more responsible parenting of kids in care. (Joanna)*



Intended to resemble an integrated triangle of support and care between foster/group homes, social workers and schools, educational leaders in this study found it difficult to communicate and collaborate with these extensions of the social work system in order to develop and implement academic and social-emotional programming for children in care.

**Inconsistent elaboration of processes and practices that characterize the social worker mandate.** All provincial legislation and guiding documents, including the CFS Act (2018), *Protocol* and *Companion Document*, mention social workers as critical participants in all facets of the life of a child in care. Most principals and vice principals also noted social workers as a crucial member of the interorganizational team. As the guardians of children in care, social workers are mandated to liaise with schools and thereby directly impact the educational experience of children in care. In their responses, participants related their interactions with social workers in the pursuit of information, or development of programming for children in care, as inconsistent, frustrating and difficult. Participants commented on the fact that a growing number of social workers were inexperienced professionally, unfamiliar, or disconnected from the students and situations they were trying to support.

*...a lot of it [educational outcomes for a child] really hinges...on who they're tied to as a social worker....So, if the kid's file has been moved to a new social worker or an inexperienced social worker, or someone who just doesn't have the organizational skills that other social workers have, it really, really hinges on that key piece when they're the legal guardian....There's gotta be someone driving the ship. (Gloria)*

*Everything is new to them...most of the time they have a brand new social worker that lots of times hasn't even met them...[the social workers] just come to the school intake 'cause we make it mandatory and that's the first time they've seen this kid or maybe it's the second time or the third time or they switched during the year...the foster parent obviously is usually brand new. (Fontaine)*

This made it difficult to build relationships and communicate shared information about children in care with social workers. The government's own documents, the *Protocol* and *Companion Document*, both set out relationships and communication between all stakeholders as being of the utmost importance. Participants felt strongly that true advocacy should not be characterized by service delays, and at times saw school transitions as being hindered by day-to-day CFS organizational barriers.

*I say that different agencies are in different systems. I would argue in some cases [they] work in isolation of each other or when they try to work with each other are stymied by their own policy and [that] doesn't allow for the transition from one agency to the next to be seamless...it becomes more of an additional request that has to go through the proper channels...rather than seen as a holistic [process]. (Liam)*

*Social workers will say...I have this many kids on my caseload and I'm just trying to get them registered for school...Why is it that all of our children in care are all of a sudden being registered for school in the first week of September when everybody else gets to start on those first days? Is it because you just can't seem to get your act together? Is it because the schools don't open their doors until the last week of August? I don't know what it is, but those kids are starting the year one step behind. (Amelia)*

**Inconsistent practices associated with the CFS intake form.** To facilitate interdepartmental communication, the CFS intake process and forms were highlighted by both the *Protocol* and the *Companion Document* as important for planning, and integration. Yet, participants comments emphasized that the practices in place for the CFS school registration process and forms used for sharing information between social workers, schools and other organizations developed into a barrier for their social justice advocacy work.

The CFS school registration intake form, which is part of the *Protocol*, represents an early point of interorganizational contact between CFS and a school, often before a child in care is registered in the school. Completing the intake form is a mandatory step for social workers, so that the receiving school has all the academic and personal details

about a child to help support a successful transition. For children in care, school leaders used the form to develop the personal programming that supports children in care; yet at times, these plans were based on snippets of information that represented an incomplete collection of information that did not do justice to the child's strengths and needs.

*...it takes more time...it takes more effort...you've got more fingers in the pie...the social worker has to have time to fill out the referrals...there's that extra step in there...I don't see that at all as being equitable either. (Fontaine)*

*I think it [the intake form] just gives us a little bit more information or a starting point to ask more questions, because it talks about students' strengths...students' interests, but also their challenges...some social workers don't fill them out very well or they don't have enough information...they just don't really know the child. (Hannah)*

*Well the identification for the kids in care is pretty easy, because of the child in care forms that the social workers have to fill out, which is a pet peeve of mine, because they don't really tell you anything, so you're left interviewing the kid and then you only get their perspective...you don't get others. (Murray)*

**Education and aging-out of the CFS system.** Although this sub-theme was touched on explicitly by only three of the five high school participants, their compelling comments form a separate sub-theme that continues to endure in the media because of the long-term potential implications and impact that the associated policy appears to have on the life-trajectory of all children in care. The recent report of the Legislative Review Committee, *Transforming Child Welfare Legislation in Manitoba: Opportunities to Improve Outcomes for Children and Youth* (Manitoba Families, 2018) recommends an extension of support for youth in care beyond the age of 21. Based on the Manitoba Child and Family Service Standards Manual (Manitoba CFS, 2017) in effect at this time, children in care who reach the age of 18 no longer have access to CFS support services, unless their case manager developed an Extension of Care Agreement with them prior to age 18. This plan provides children in care with supported access to treatment, training or education programs that encourage a successful transition to independent living to the age

of 21. However, the agreement does not continue past the age of 21 (Manitoba CFS, 2017), and expires abruptly on the youth's birthday, regardless of educational programming in place. As noted in the manual, planning for these agreements begins at the age of 15 for all youth who are permanent wards of the CFS system, or when a youth becomes a permanent ward after the age of 15. The final agreement is based on the plan prepared before the youth reaches the age of 18.

Despite these detailed characterizations for a successful agreement, extension plans/agreements, and their potential positive impact on the education of youth in care at the high school level, were not part of principal and vice principal participants' experiences.

*A lot of kids are worried about leaving high school that are in care. Then they're faced with aging out. I can't imagine not having any supports, [or] any structure around me. Even if I did have a job, [and] housing, I just really feel for them. It's a scary place out there for a lot of them. (Fontaine)*

*Once they become 18, they're left absolutely not in a good spot, and they're doing things that they don't want to do and they're trying to manipulate the system in ways that aren't healthy quite often. (Joanna)*

The only school leader who was familiar with the aging-out process and Extension of Care Agreements, outlined an additional barrier she faced in her attempt to advocate for a student who she felt would benefit from an Extension of Care Agreement. In this case, the social worker and educational leader had different interpretations of the process that would lead to an extension of care agreement. To the detriment of the child in care, this led to conflicting practices around the development of an extension of care plan:

*So I'm gonna talk about [name of student redacted], because our team...felt that...his care should be extended, and...the child and family agency may have felt like we were imposing and telling them what to do, and I thought how unfortunate that we've come to that...we actually have this young man in our school, and we actually know him...you're not talking to someone who doesn't know or understand this young person. We're saying he wants to stay in care and we're saying it's in his best interest, and he had strained that*

*relationship [with the social worker] and burned some bridges and so the worker had done a lot for sure, but they weren't prepared to have him extended, so it became letter writing, [getting the] Children's Advocate involved...that's a social justice issue I think, when you have people advocating for something you think should be happening automatically. (Victoria)*

### **Policy Process Practice - Challenges in Education**

All participants mentioned that policy, processes and practices in education also challenged their ability to support children in care. Staffing and funding constraints, fixed schedules, as well as inflexible rule and policy interpretation still found in many schools, structured the school day based on a one-size-fits-all framework that has the same expectations for all children. The overwhelming consensus from participants was that children in care need different considerations and measures in education to succeed.

*It's a little harder in the regular school system to manipulate that much to accommodate the kids in care...the school system is not built to deal with the kids we have today...I really don't care about the rule book. Whenever you have those strict rules...people that just follow the rules, that's what creates all the cracks, and kids bounce around and fall through those cracks. But I think when we talk about kids in care, there really should be a different set of rules that we work in the best interest of those kids and for them to meet the goals of graduating high school. (Murray)*

Several principals and vice principals provided specific examples that demonstrated how rigid student behaviour policies increased the zone of personal impact for children in care, when rigid policies created negative emotional and/or social consequences.

*If schools start to put up barriers like...Oh, you didn't get this piece of paper in. You can't start them yet. Oh, we have to have the team of 10 people around the table before they can come into school. This kid's not gonna start school for a month, and that again does not happen to children who often are coming with their biological parents. (Amelia)*

*At [name of school redacted] everything was about cause and effect. So, if you couldn't understand cause and effect it wasn't very effective. If you had FAS (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum)...not really the place for you. You can't really understand the world. You don't understand consequences, and kids [in care] with mental health...I would argue the same thing. (Murray)*

*We have a zero-tolerance policy around drugs and alcohol, so that's an automatic five-day suspension for those kiddos...and those types of policies...although I think they are well-intentioned...they can affect the relationship between the child and the foster parent negatively. They put a lot of strain on the system. (Hannah)*

Outside of the shortcomings and disconnect that all participants saw in and between the CFS and education systems, most participants recognized the added burden that the need for additional resources required to support children in care placed on their schools. Additional resources included quantifiable resources, such as a significant lack of time, which was required to create relationships and programming that children in care need in order to thrive. Shortfalls in other more tangible areas included funding, to develop welcoming programs and spaces, as well as hiring skilled staff members for targeted academic or social-emotional programming. These resource shortfalls represent for principals and vice principals the core of an overburdened education system in Manitoba, as they added one more layer to a K-12 public education system across Canada that is stretched to its limits in an attempt to support the individual differentiated academic and social-emotional needs of students (ATA & CAP, 2014).

All participants recognized the additional needs that children in care have for connection, counselling, Indigenous cultural programming, AFM (Addiction Foundation of Manitoba) and mental health support services. Participants knew that socially complex trauma affected the lives of children in care. They understood the need for additional resources, and were often frustrated by their own inability, to revise and rebalance systemic educational processes and practices that affect the introduction or redistribution of resources (e.g., such as staff members with specific skills, or specialized programming) to help forward social justice goals for children in care.

*Why [are] the system rules trumping what's good for kids [in care]?...People pretty far removed from the kids make those decisions.... We're spread so thin that to take on*

*student specific things becomes really challenging...You have to have this and there's a technology push and there's a this push. When do we take care of 'kids push'? When's that coming? (Murray)*

*Lack of time, money and resources at the school...I think it's wonderful that my guidance counsellor wants to start this new group for incoming students [in care] but she's already running a Sources of Strength group, [and] a girls group....So, we can all come up with these new strategies we want to do but we're not willing to say - but I also don't want to run this - what am I gonna give up - and no one is throwing more resources at us. So, it's not that we don't have the intuition and the desire. It's just that at some point it's 10 O'clock at night and you need to go home. Resources are huge. (Joanna)*

*When I first arrived...the school had never had a youth care worker in the building before. Someone to help do temperature checks with kids and touch base with them as they arrive at school...follow-up on things. (Murray)*

*As far as having role models that look like the kids...Aboriginal teachers...kids wanna see themselves represented in people and people in power and control kinds of positions. (Golda)*

Participants struggle with this redistribution of resources is evident in their comments above, when they had to move funding or staffing or other resources from existing priorities such as the Sources of Strength (i.e., a school-based program for positive mental health promotion) to develop programs for children in care. Although the struggle for redistribution was common, participants' responses were widely different in what they saw as relevant resources based on their individual (in)experience and context.

### **The Source of Social Perceptions and Assumptions**

In their efforts to challenge systemic, resource, and knowledge gap barriers, all participants openly acknowledged the need and benefits of working in a collaborative environment. Participants indicated that the resistance and discomfort that come with addressing social perceptions and assumptions head-on, originated from outside the school, i.e., interactions with social workers, families and the wider school community, and from within the school, i.e., fueled by staff perceptions and mindset. In both cases, principals and vice principals felt compelled to engage in the emotionally challenging

work that addressed pre-existing biases and overall negative attitudes towards children in care.

### **Challenging Negative Community and Family Perceptions of Children in Care**

Some principals and vice principals came into a new position already aware of a socio-economic or ethnic divide that manifested itself in the school's community. Added to this challenge were the pre-conceived views that families in some school communities had about the impact that supporting a large group of children in care might have on their catchment school's ability to support the rest of the student population.

*For me, my big worry was that because you have this great divide here in this community, you have all of these folks who are from a different culture and then you have children who are in care who are Indigenous...that have lived in so many ways, such hard circumstances that they can often present in a certain way in a school, and if you aren't being very intentional about how you're helping children appear, and the culture that you're creating in classrooms, you're going to have a real problem with people looking at "Those Kids". (Amelia)*

*Our kids in care are actually...very welcomed here by our student population...our student population is very inclusive and very...some of the stories I've heard from other administrators...just about...even parents...with "those kids"... (Joanna)*

*In this community... "Why are you putting all of your emphasis and doing so much for those kids?"...you're doing it for the right reasons, but it's also not just us alone...all of [the district name redacted] is working at these priorities. (Amelia)*

Participants connected this type of resistance from families in the school's community to classism, racism, and other demographic labels or profiles. These perceived social hierarchies originated in systemic structures and became engrained and perpetuated in smaller, more intimate family settings. Examples situated in these perceived hierarchies included examples where knowledge from someone with a university degree is deemed more legitimate than cultural knowledge shared by an elder, or someone who was previously associated with the criminal justice system.



*A group of parents who might feel that the classroom environment should look a certain way, and advocate for that strongly within the political arena, but knowing as an educator there's a philosophy of what an educational environment should look like and should be encouraged, and those two can clash and that could be an example of resistance because the political arena can be a very powerful arena. (Liam)*

*Is there still some frustration, absolutely...there's still folks in the system and we still hear things come out of a kid's mouth. You think - I don't even know how you would say that if you didn't hear it at home at the dinner table. So...we still live in a hierarchical system, and people still believe that some people are higher up than others, and I don't know. So, there will always be that challenge and that barrier, always until we don't live in a society where it's hierarchy. (Gloria)*

### **Challenging Staff Assumptions and Mindset**

At the high school level, some educational leaders' efforts were also challenged by staff members' misinformation and assumptions based on a deficit lens informed by negative social stereotypes, which set a lower social and academic skills threshold for children in care. Although participants were aware of resistance to inclusive educational leadership that originated outside of the school, they were even more concerned about barriers, challenges and discomfort they recognized in the staff members within their schools. Along the way, it was also necessary for participants to break down their own assumptions about children in care and to realize the impact this change had on their future practice.

*...despite the fact that I find this to be a very inclusive environment, there are still some teachers who will say...oh this kid can't do Chemistry or this [kid] can't do Physics. They don't have the background for this, this and this, which I feel is totally not on par with my goal of social justice, which is creating that level playing field. No, they're not there, so what do we need to do to get them there? (Joanna)*

*Some people [teachers] would say, "Why does the social worker put the kid into school for 2 months when you know that they're in an emergency placement?" Well what else should they be doing? And, we can accommodate that [at the school]... (Fontaine)*

*One girl...wants to go into pre-Calculus Math and I'm looking at her stuff. If that kid pulled off a legitimate 76 [% in Essentials Math] while she's been in and out of care and in the criminal justice system, maybe I should be doing a diagnostic[math] assessment....I think we do look at it from a strength-based approach but sometimes there's still a little*

*bit of a stigma with the eyebrow raising...and to be quite honest in that situation it's because there's no way I could have been there[in her situation]....If you've gone through all that, how could you possibly? Did someone just give you that grade?...So, to actually do the testing if you have a willing participant, why wouldn't you? (Joanna)*

Most participants felt that staff members' resistance or reluctance could generally be tied to the fact that they had very different personal lived experiences than children in care and were often unaware of the 'why' behind specific student behaviours or school-based strategies used to support children in care. This difference in lived experiences drew attention to a gap between the expectations staff members had for student behaviours in school, and the behaviours demonstrated by students who were in care, as these students' behaviours often did not represent teachers' normative expectations for students in schools. That made it an imperative for participants to reconcile staff members' understanding of the needs of children in care, and the children's actual capacity to respond to different attempts to support those needs. According to participants, in many cases staff members did not recognize that one size does not fit all.

*...three-quarters of our staff really understand [complex lives of children in care], but not all of them do, and you really have to get people that have that empathic view of trying to help these kids - not just teach them math...Lots of teachers have already made that change but there's still those who really need to live and come to grips with...so I would say it's just one small segment and we struggle with those teachers...'cause they can't see it themselves, and so it's hard for them to change. (Murray)*

*I think there is still a population in our staff that doesn't understand and just believes that for the child there needs to be consequences, [the] child needs to be suspended...and so we find that sometimes the way that we may give a consequence or whatever, it may not seem sufficient for some staff, because they don't understand the bigger picture. (Hannah)*

*I would say staff can sometimes be a bit of a problem when it came to social justice because they wouldn't necessarily, after a certain while, agree with certain opportunities that were given to certain students. Or they would say...hey it's nice that you're doing this, but it's just not working...so why do we keep doing it? (Holden)*

One participant's description outlined how a staff members' preconceived attitudes towards children in care formed a barrier that created a point of contention

within a leadership team. In this situation, the personal philosophy and practices of one member of the leadership team led to a very different interpretation of the school's discipline policy. This led to tension in the leadership team and disrupted the inclusive social justice intentions of the other member of the team.

*So my previous vice principal...was very much..."If we all just play by the rule book, we'll all be fine." So, you can imagine the two of us didn't get along very well, 'cause I really don't care about the rule book, and so we struggled as a pair here overtime, 'cause [in her opinion] if the kids broke the rule, they should be out of school. Well he shouldn't be out of school. We should be caring for him. We should be helping him change. (Murray)*

Although this comment describes one participant's experience, the potential fallout to other areas in the team's functioning made this an interesting point to note for future research. Unfortunately, pursuing this point was beyond the scope of this study.

### **Theme 3: School Leaders Flexing the System to Support Children in Care**

The purpose of this research was to explore and better understand the processes and practices used by successful inclusive educational leaders to advance social justice outcomes for children in care. Not only did participants in this study work to understand the complex nature of the children's in care experiences, they also used a variety of inclusive leadership strategies to revise existing processes and practices and developed new discursive spaces that facilitated the creation of innovative opportunities for collaboration. The ability to recognize and utilize a school community's strengths, while also supporting its needs relies heavily on the educational leader's ability to build a conceptual bridge that allows doubters in the school community to understand the needs of children in care, along with required supports. One participant articulates the concept of bridging:

*Every school has its own culture. Every school has its own social undercurrent....What are some of the challenges? The challenges are recognizing that culture, recognizing the current, and figuring out the best way of - I'm gonna use the term - putting placeholders,*

*where you have different entry points to move in and figure out what is the best way of entering into that, and helping to be a catalyst for change that you see as necessary. Entry points is a good way to put it. There are many different entry points. Where do you start?...I'm gonna say that sometimes we're living in a world that is only familiar to us, and as soon as you take that familiarity away there comes almost an automatic resistance, because it's something that is not comfortable. (Liam)*

In their efforts to understand, design, and utilize inclusive processes and practices, by resisting, manoeuvring, and disrupting the interpretation and application of existing processes and practices, principal and vice principal participant data led to two sub-themes: Maximizing the impact of relationships to improve collaboration and outcomes, as well as flexing and shaping the system experience for children in care.

### **Maximizing the Impact of Relationships to Improve Collaboration and Outcomes**

In their quest to improve social justice outcomes for children in care, participants (un)intentionally situated themselves as the relational link between the different organizations, groups, and individuals who support children in care. To realize change, they worked first to ensure that all stakeholders, inside and outside the school, felt informed, connected, and capable to support children in care in schools. The second element of their work dealt with creating change through direct interactions with children in care that developed skills that allowed the children to function more successfully in schools and in their social community.

**Developing Cross-system Connections and Capacity.** The intake meeting process is formalized in the *Protocol and Companion Document* as a process that supports planning for children in care and is situated as the joint responsibility of the education and CFS systems. Participants provided a unique perspective on how they used this process to

build both connection and capacity with organizational stakeholders who support children in care.

Other than the intake meeting process, participants did not mention any connections between their work to build relationships and capacity and guiding information they found in the *Protocol* and *Companion Document*.

***Intake meeting process.*** All participants used the intake meeting process, with slight variations, to develop cross-system connections. Its purpose was to integrate the education and CFS systems, and connect the foster family, as well as all other relevant organizations, groups and individuals to begin the process of sharing information about a child. Several participants named this formalized process as an important space to gather information, and ask questions, so new staff members and those not directly connected to the decision-making process benefited from background information and supports in place.

*...one of the processes that we use is when a child registers and they're in care...the social worker comes in [and] fills out the forms. We have an intake meeting. Our school, we always like to invite the child and the foster parent in for a tour, so they can see the school, maybe meet their teacher. We might meet as a student services [team] if the child has some significant needs...we may meet as a team with the guidance counsellor, resource [teacher], whoever else is needed, consultants, psychology, social work, whatever, and talk about what the next steps might be - what the plan is. (Hannah)*

*...having a formal welcoming process...more of a formalized process that we meet as a team to discuss and put together would be helpful...even for new staff coming in...to kind of see what we do at [our school]...so developing something like that. (Joanna)*

*So initially it...the [internal school form] for children in care was just for children in care, we've now added justice involved at the top, and so realizing [that] having students come into our school who may be accompanied by a worker is just not enough [information]. You need more people at the table. All of those folks need to be there to talk...(Victoria)*

***Professional conversations to build relationships and capacity.*** Although the intake meeting was the only formal process used consistently by all participants, most

participants also described the benefits of professional conversations as a practice used to engage in relational change. Principals and vice principals used both formal and informal conversation processes and practices to connect with staff members to gather details about their understanding of the child in care situation. Participants then used this information to guide and facilitate individual and collective processes and practices in professional learning, and capacity building. Participants described how educational leaders look for “openings” and “teachable moments” to use conversations in order to personalize capacity-building for staff members. At other times, inclusive educational leaders use these interpersonal opportunities to introduce background information, student specific strategies and vocabulary or a common language to staff members, in order to personalize individual student support.

*As an educational leader, I think that you have to always look for the opening. You have to look for the hole, and that can come out in a conversation, that can come out in an action, but you're looking for the opportunity to broaden the perspective of the people around you by seizing the teachable moment....Can we look at this in a different way?...There is point where it becomes more of a formalized structure, and what I mean by that is, if that isn't working then it's a more direct piece and I think the direct piece is sitting down and literally asking the question point blank. What about this and how does this affect that? (Liam)*

*I often talk about kids in care, kids in trauma. It's not ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder]. They're coming to school. They got lots of baggage. I had conversation again today. Two grade 8 teachers, “Well she's showing up but she's sure not doing much.” “Well here's the story boys. She had to run away from mom...so the fact that she's at school, and the fact that she's getting some things done, that's success. (Murray)*

*...you might think a bit more about how you formulate a sentence or...engage in a certain interaction or correction of behaviour...With children in care I think specifically, with an EA...I'll say, “This is what this student needs, this student needs that extra explanation. The student might need this, and these are certain trigger words we've noticed this student doesn't respond well to”, without divulging that the child is in care. (Holden)*

In order to build capacity and equip staff members to support children in care from an inclusive leadership standpoint, most participants were adamant that all adults

working in the school needed historical and contextual student information. That included educating staff members about the connection between residential schools, the 60's Scoop and today's in-care crisis affecting over 10 000 children in Manitoba. Two participants below explained their thinking.

*The more our staff may know about residential schools and the impact of systemic trauma, or the impact of generational poverty, or those types of thing, [it] help[s] people just gain some other strategies or skills on how you work with a kid that has that level of trauma in their life. (Gloria)*

*So systemically I know in our school division...working with our children in care...it is not just a [school name redacted] priority...it is a really strong priority divisionally...and there is a lot of work being done...and know that [topic] is on the front burner in the division [with] Indigenous education...those two things...those repeated messages as a division...that empowers us....(Amelia)*

Additional, more formal, process oriented professional conversation opportunities that also helped to build relationships with and capacity for school staff members included book studies, webinars, student profile meetings and closer examination of gray literature at the school to build knowledge around context and behaviour, as well as trauma. Participants confirmed these opportunities as steps that helped to support the capacity-building process within their schools.

*One of our book club studies this year was 'Calm Alert and Learning'...and we knew that the book thinks about behaviour in a different way...so when we look at our children who are in care and when their behaviour is presenting in challenging ways...that is understood with compassion rather than looking at that behaviour in moral terms...good or bad. We look at it as brain-based and that book club study was a way that we did that as a whole school...which is initiated in the leadership...as principal you set those priorities. (Amelia)*

*We have two PD's [professional development] next year...one is trauma-informed care that we're going to provide with students...or with the teachers, and there is a 'Living Life in Poverty' exercise that you can do, and so those are the two things that we're going to do with our staff next year to kinda really have their eyes opened up to the kind of kids that come here. (Murray)*

*Let's just say sometimes when somebody has done something the initial response may be a consequence or a threat...well you did this...you're not going to be able to do this...that*

*is not how you respond to a child who has been traumatized in any way...will you have a consequence...oh probably, but not in that moment...in that moment that's just gonna escalate the behaviours...it's being able to share documents [Trauma-Informed Practice] like that with staff that's been helpful I think. (Golda)*

**Engaging experts and mentors.** Participants also described how they came to realize capacity building benefits through the process of introducing outside expert perspectives and relationships. Although formally sourced and funded through applications, grants or school funds, as they are in most public schools, these opportunities were seen as important to participating in the change process, towards a more inclusive environment in this case. One participant also highlighted the additional layer of relational comfort that was added to staff learning through a less formal and structured transfer of information as a result of on-site mentorship.

*Sometimes learning together but from an outside source of someone who has expertise for professional development helps to facilitate those critical conversations about what we need to [do]...as a staff...When you're in your own little space, you tend to get stuck on...well this isn't working and that isn't working so what are we going to do with this, so it's really nice to have someone from the outside...to say - well have you thought about trying this or have you thought about trying that...that breeds new life into a population to cope and to deal with things. (Joanna)*

*Sometimes my voice isn't the best voice to help move people along. Sometimes it is the voice of a student services administrator, sometimes it is the voice of a clinician or an outside agency worker that has direct knowledge of the particular point of view you're trying to change. (Liam)*

*People that you're comfortable with...in the field...in a building long enough to model...how to work with youth [in care] and with all the different agencies at one time, that is...you just have to watch somebody else try to navigate it all and then learn how they talk to people...learn how [a] mentor or somebody that spent time with folks that needed it in this particular realm, and were there long enough, 'cause you...just really need to learn from other people that are better than you are. (Gloria)*

Although many experts mentioned were located in the educational support services realm, some participants brought up the value of inviting members of Voices, the youth in care advocacy organization supporting this study, to share their first-hand in-care



experiences with the school community. Two participants indicated that they connected directly with Voices in order to inform and humanize the conversations around children in care.

*We've had Voices come into our school twice now...and having those stories come forward from adults who were in care...those stories help our teachers to really understand...what is the life of a child in care. (Amelia)*

*We have stuff we've been doing professional development-wise as a staff...and we've had this group called Voices... (Megan)*

***Positive connections with families and social workers.*** As noted above, participants did not situate themselves as the only voice of persuasion, encouragement and influence when it came to finding information and answering critical questions. They realized that a collective understanding develops shared relationships, experiences, a common goal and hence a more detailed contextual understanding and a wider network of adult supports for children in care. School leaders mentioned the fact that as a practice, they often reached outside and looked outside the school context purposefully to create and extend connections with foster families, and social workers of children in care. Participants believed that all departments and organizations involved with children in care had good intentions and wanted to improve the circumstances for children in care. Beyond building relationships, participants also recognized the value of connecting directly with foster parents, social workers, and other outside support organizations, because they had very different perspectives on the children's lives, resulting in a more complete picture for all adults in a caregiver role.

*Supports in so far as [foster] parents are concerned, I think that the biggest support is to let a parent or a caregiver know that we care about their kid, that we can be people who will work...in good faith, to try and respond to their student's...their child's needs, but that we also are mandated to respond to the needs of all of our students. So, number one I think it's important that we develop a connection with the parent or the caregiver in question...that we're here for you. (Holden)*

*Just knowing each other, each player in the system better. Teachers don't know what social workers do; social workers don't know what teachers do. Administrators don't know what social workers do, so if people could get together and have a shared experience about a child and perspective of what a day looks like. [For example], a teacher working with this child. What it looks like to have 17 000 people on your caseload as a social worker vs. the principal or vice principals, dealing with [situations]. Then we get frustrated that somebody else hasn't done their thing. Everybody has to have trust in each other, and the only way you do that is to spend time together, and just having a relationship with people. It's usually a distrust of anyone of those facets that causes a breakdown for the child. (Gloria)*

*We need to connect with social workers I think...that's often a challenging thing. They are busy. They are not always able to get to the school...sometimes they're not coming to fill in the paperwork and that kind of thing. They're hard to get a hold of sometimes...but it does us no good to be judging them. We have to have a partnership because we're working on behalf of that child. Sometimes it's some perseverance in getting to know those social workers and including them...making sure they're included and welcomed and not judged and work from there. (Golda)*

*We do our best but it's not perfect by any means...reaching out to communicate attendance and stuff with social workers and foster parents and those things as well and asking for input from them about...the people who are supposed to be there as caregivers who might know them better than we do...is another part of that approach. (Joanna)*

The abovementioned strategies used by participants to connect and build capacity with staff members, foster families and representatives from different organizations were not unique in their structure or application within the education system. What made them unique in this case is the fact that principal and vice principal participants adjusted existing processes and practices, so that they could be used to specifically serve and improve the educational experiences and outcomes of children in care.

**Children in care – developing opportunities for success in schools.** To support children in care directly, inclusive principals and vice principals in this study recognized that they needed to consider options outside of the current model of education to support the needs of children in care. Participants noted a variety of processes and practices that directly involved them in building relationships and collaborating with children in care in

their schools. The strategies utilized most often by all participants included facilitating and fostering environments that help children in care build intentional, trusting, and healthy relationships with self and others, cultivating positive/flexible attitudes, and developing students' independence and self-advocacy skills.

***Fostering intentional trusting, healthy relationships.*** In education, relationships between students and adults represent the cornerstone of a positive educational experience. For children in care, this element of their educational experience is most critical, because their past complex social histories often make the development of trusting attachments difficult, because transient and unpredictable in-care experience introduces social-emotional fractures through inconsistent adult relationships and a shortage of time-in-place. In the study, almost all participants identified relationships as being the most important criterion for success with a child in care. Without quickly establishing a trusting relationship, participants felt there was no foundation to move forward. All most all participants also indicated that there must be an intentional aspect to building the relationship. Although children in care need to buy into the connection with a mentor, the opportunities to develop connections and relationships became a purposeful aspect of educational leaders' planning process for children in care.

*Actively checking that students are encouraged and have multiple opportunities to make connections with peers and adults...that's part of being on that profile...we wanna make sure that every one of them has one specific adult that's working to build a relationship with them because we're very aware that some of them are transient...and so their peer group has changed and shifted, and sometimes a lot of the adults have...so social worker changes, or the area they live in changes, or then their foster placement changes...and especially those...who live in group homes...so we think that's number one priority when we talk about our children in care...is knowing that a responsible adult is trying to establish a communication/relationship with them. (Joanna)*

*We...look at the other students in the class, and the possible...mismatches there, or relationships that could really form and also just the best match...especially if child has lots of behavioural needs, then we really need to match up the child to the teacher.*

(Hannah)

*...you [any child in care] are assigned a case manager when you come here. We want someone to have a person no matter what and not get lost in this big building. There's lots of kids, and people and programs and classes and, it would be easy to feel alone here on top of already having all these other changes in your life, so I think that's a big #1 and they [the case managers] stay with them throughout their schooling here and they're often who the kid will go to, to process something. (Fontaine)*

*If children say 'No' to connection...Well they do...all the time...you keep trying...you try a different way...you maybe try a different person...sometimes it has to do with the gender of the person...sometimes it has to do with the type of approach that's taken...things get shuffled depending on what's gonna work...or someone else might say at the meeting if it's not working...like this child is refusing all supports from adults then Ok...what are they into...what are their interests...how are we gonna find out what some of these things are? Can we be observational in our approach to find out things. (Joanna)*

Participants in general felt an urgency when working to build relationships with students in care who needed direct support to begin to level the academic and social-emotional playing field. The students' lives already demonstrated fragile academic and/or social-emotional skills, and participants' experience confirmed that the amount of time the school staff members had to develop trust with a child in care was always uncertain, as the length of enrolment in participants' schools could not be guaranteed or accurately predicted. Some participants described a multifaceted approach that included building formal relationship processes with school staff members and integrating informal practices that placed students in safer situations where they could build relationships. Other participants developed processes that created opportunities for protected spaces, such as reverse integration into classes that provide a lower stress threshold, smaller group or class sizes, and one-on-one informal meetings to talk but mostly listen. Principals and vice principals described these as particularly helpful in building trust with children in care.

*We've had kids come into school for little bits at a time, even though they're not registered [yet], we know they're coming, [and] don't want to punish the kid for that, so*

*in you come. [You] can't go to class for now, but here's our resource teacher. You're gonna get tested for reading and you're gonna join the grade 6's for Phys. Ed., 'cause that's a nice way to sit back and look at all the kids and figure things out. And our Youth Care Worker (YCW) is in there with them to just show them how the school works and make them feel comfortable. (Murray)*

*...what we've started to do is have the student come to the table on their terms, so one of my first questions is, "we have this big conference room here, this is where all these meetings happen", so I describe that for the student and say, "we're gonna go in a room where there's a lot of people and they're all adults. I don't know how you feel about going in there, but I'm gonna give you a choice. You can go on a tour of the school because it's a big place and it'll take you a while and the adults can do their blah blah blahing, or you could come in and actually listen to the conversation". And mostly kids will choose the tour. And then they get a chance to come back to where we're meeting, and often at that point ...we now have some members of the team leave the table...like we don't all need to stay in here. (Victoria)*

*So the problem with hearing their story from their account is that they won't trust you to tell...it right away, and so trying to set up a structure in place so that you can continually give time to hear that story [is important], because the story won't come in a meeting with six adults...you have to hear enough of the story to know where we're going to ask the questions. You know...what is their background, where are they connected to, what is their safety place, is it culture, is it a person, is it something that's not positive? (Gloria)*

*Especially on...[job placement] days, you have that time...you can really devote to that student. Even...it's this little thing...driving to and from [job placements] with students...you get this quality time and there's something about being in a car with someone...I have a theory about it...it's because you're not making eye contact as you're talking...kids are able to open up more. (Megan)*

**Teaching positive personal choices, goals, and self-advocacy skills.** Once most participants felt confident that even a tenuous relationship was beginning to form with a child in care, they infused self-management strategies (e.g., making positive personal choices or developing resiliency to problem solve), by cultivating engagement with the school community/activities, and an open positive attitude towards academic challenges. In fact, most participants demonstrated that they understood and honoured the fact that children in care had hopes and goals. They practised this informally by accepting the responsibility to outline both goals and pathways to success in education that were often not visible to the children in care. At the elementary and middle years levels, participants

used intentional teaching of self-regulation strategies, students' increased engagement in school leadership activities (e.g., welcoming or student leadership committees), and commitment to school clubs (e.g., sports, gardening, technology), to offer choices based on students' strengths, which introduced them to, as Gloria mentioned below "voice", "choice" and "control".

*...what kinds of practices are we going to use that show them...Ok, in that moment you were angry. A lot of it is around teaching feelings, vocabulary, and self-regulation, and just being able to respond rather than react. (Golda)*

*Some children in care...in my experience...have bounced around a lot from place to place...and they haven't had a lot of choice in what's happened...so it's up to us to provide them with the voice and the choice and the control. I remember working with a child...who had very little control in what happened to him for many years...so his behaviour was sometimes a little alarming to the staff in the building and...he is doing these things...it's to seek control...which we'd figured out by then as a school team. (Golda)*

*[We] bring in those types of things [different programs], just so different kids with different strengths have different opportunities to show their strengths and their leadership opportunities or their engagement opportunities. (Holden)*

To build on the components of voice, choice and control introduced at the elementary and middle school levels, several high school principals and vice principals indicated that they used formal meetings as well as informal opportunities to intentionally communicated to students that they had a fresh start, and that they were seen as an individual with personal strengths and needs. With the main message being that the *in-care* label did not define the youth in care or their goals, nor did it predict their success at school. Again, participants often worked one-on-one with children in care, and focused on positive learning behaviours, like perseverance, as well as embedding school values, like being your authentic best self. This helped youth in care at high school to make positive choices and set more personal and realistic goals.

*The message to the student needs to be...welcome, we've been doing some talking, we*

*understand...you're pretty academic and we can see you moving forward, you might come into...our resource room and then a couple more days working with the resource teacher doing a little bit more assessment. That could be the plan, or we might be saying we need some more people at the table, we think a work experience piece might be necessary. We're gonna have another meeting, or we understand that school hasn't always been your level...you haven't always been committed to school, so we're gonna have you come in three times over the next week and a half just to see if you can make that commitment and how that goes for you. And we're finding those kinds of individualized plans, meeting kids where they're at, is really a good fit for kids, and then if adults can watch and see how that looks, then who could argue with that right [laughs]. We already have data to support that planning and so now we're introducing it to the student and getting their investment in that. (Victoria)*

*I started talking to them about what we believe. The one girl just looked at me like I had four heads, but she really sat and listened. We didn't expect her to be perfect, but we just wanted her to try her best to be a part of that community and it totally changed the tone of our conversation. (Joanna)*

*... you know we don't suspend kids anymore...we're not kicking kids out anymore, so you have to program...when we keep bringing kids closer you've gotta figure out what you're gonna do when you bring them closer, and still try to influence the negative behaviour that you don't want to occur anymore, without just pumping out a bunch of little robots, which is what you don't want either right? (Gloria)*

### **Flexing and Shaping the System Experience**

Once participants recognized the importance of intentionally connecting and building relationships with children in care and building capacity to support the needs of children in care with adult stakeholders, they purposefully set out to identify, design, and influence systemic layers in and beyond education and CFS, to create specific environments for children in care. To increase their ability to advocate and positively influence the lives of children in care in schools, participants identified four areas of action for flexing and shaping the system. These included extending their understanding and leveraging of resources available beyond the school, developing stable and inclusive environments in the school, flexing and reshaping systemic borders, and envisioning models of inclusive education for children in care in the future.

**Harnessing the potential of external resources.** Unlike resources located at the

school (e.g., materials, or funding), participants found it more challenging to critically assess the potential support and impact of outside organization and resources on the needs of children in care. Often, participants had little experience with these external systems (e.g., such as healthcare, mental health services and the justice system), making it more difficult to appreciate the goals and practices of people in these organizations, as well as the potential benefits for children in care. In these cases, participants purposefully invested more effort and diplomacy into negotiations that invited representatives from these organizations into the school in order to access information and to better understand the services offered for children in care. Although the situations below are supported by individual participant comments, each situation addresses the tension that exists between understanding and harnessing external resources and negotiating the needs and pressures of each participant's individual school context. One principal described the practice of doing the work required to achieve coherent understanding along with finding a balance of power with people working in different organizations.

*For me it's about being deliberate. It's about taking a look [at] what the system is offering at that point and then how you can reach out with as many people as possible in the same room to address what that need is....I'm not gonna say that it's difficult to bring the resources together all the time. I'm gonna say that the challenges are first about recognizing what resources are there, getting those resources into the fold and then having the meeting. Once the meeting or the process has started, therein lies the challenge where you are trying to figure out the mandate and the ability or the power that each one of those resources has on the process of meeting those needs of the child in care. So, you have your systems meeting, you have your people there, but everyone is functioning under a different section. (Liam)*

Beyond understanding the different ways in which external organization might arrange and manage their resources, participants also commented that they found it difficult to continue their advocacy work when student priorities (e.g., students with additional needs transitioning into the school mid-year) and government funding



commitments were not aligned. A particularly relevant example was the exceptional needs block funding model, revamped by the provincial government for Manitoba schools during the 2017-2018 school year. Rather than being tied to specific students who received L2 (half-time funding) or L3 (full-time funding), schools received block of funding that could be distributed at the school-level based on school priorities and student needs. Some participants mentioned an anticipated potential shortfall in educational support services funding, as block funding for the upcoming school year was based on the previous year's funding for this new model and would remain static rather than changing based on increased student needs in the upcoming year. One participant forwarded her concerns.

*It really depends on how each school is using the funding they have now...so just because you are in care hasn't meant that you would automatically receive funding, and in many cases all the social-emotional pieces didn't meet criteria...there had to be some aggressive behaviour and for a lot of the students it was more...a lot of internal struggles, so there was a lot of things that were kind of buried, so the new funding model...I mean yah, we have a little bit more flexibility, but you just wonder whether there will be enough money and enough support there to spread it all around to whoever needs it. (Hannah)*

Another participant recognized an opportunity for a shift in the power and mandate of this block funding resource. In the quote below, Murray investigated the potential benefits of hiring student interns and recognized the need to hire them based on needs in his context.

*Up until now it's been the level 2 and 3 funding dollars, and so we as a school can [now] look at all that money [in the block funding] and say, "How do we want to do this?" And we have some kids, who are labelled EBD....They do OK in school, and when they struggle, they know to come to us, and so they don't need an EA on them all day long...and then that frees up money to hire student interns. And then they're able to support us. (Murray)*

In the next quote, Murray also identified plans for additional, targeted staffing to support children in care directly, and indirectly. He saw the need to recognize the impact of

historical and social inequities, by supporting biological parents of children in care through staffing changes. In the quote below, he initiated conversations with other interested schools to determine the feasibility of hiring an additional clinical staff member who would be dedicated to supporting children in care and vulnerable families.

*I know the province has changed how they're funding...[students], so we don't know what that's going to look like yet, but we are rubbing our hands going, "Just give us the money and we'll take care of kids...and we'll account for every penny of it, and we can rationalize why we did what we did" ....I've been in conversation with [names of feeder schools redacted]....The three principals, we are all on board for let's hire a social worker, let's hire a therapist, because mom needs family therapy. Many of our moms either grew up in care or grew up in poverty and they don't know any better, and we are forever helping them parent. (Murray)*

Some participants investigated and identified school programming that intertwined with local organizations, job placements and post-secondary institutions, and offered different ramps into life skills or job-skills. One high school vice principal outlined her work with different program choices that helped to reengage youth in care disillusioned with the system.

*So those are the kids that need that someone who's going to say...Ok, I'm gonna make it my problem...and I'm gonna do what I can [to] connect you with the right people...so it's helping them to navigate the system, because they're very frustrated with the system and they hate the system...and they don't have the patience or the time or the energy to want to navigate the system...they're often very disillusioned and so helping them with that when it's really needed at this age...whether it's Villa Rosa [pre and postnatal care and life-skills program]...or an employment [program]...helping to get a job or transition to adulthood or some kind of work-experience program or whatever could possibly work for them...or post-secondary school...but helping them to navigate those possibilities is huge. (Joanna)*

Another principal described success for a student, when she used her own deeper understanding of a post-secondary job skills program that she was able to access for a youth in care at her school. The fact that he received the opportunity for multiple attempts in a program, which allowed him to earn a high school diploma and college certificate concurrently helped to bridge social and academic gaps caused by frequent transitions in

the care system.

*When you're still enrolled as a student here [at the high school] that seat is paid for. That's like a \$10 000 seat every year at [name of post-secondary institution redacted]. Anybody would wanna do that, but why not a kid in care? After you graduate you get 4 free months at [name of post-secondary institution redacted] too....one of my boys, he tried [name of post-secondary institution redacted] in grade 11. He blew it, but he's back a year later now and he's loving it....Some of that was reading levels, some of that was getting bounced around. He's plenty smart enough. (Fontaine)*

**Stable/inclusive environments that honour students' experiences.** Within the school, leaders in the study purposefully used processes and practices to create more inclusive environments for children in care by developing three areas. The first area consisted of responding more intensely and intentionally to the specific needs of children in care in order to provide flexible and timely support to their programming and also to make these needs visible systemically through formal processes (e.g., like including students' growth and needs in clinical discussions more often, and disaggregating school data for children in care). In the second area, participants deliberately shaped the physical and philosophical environment for children in care (e.g., by purposefully embedding information and opportunities for discussions with staff members into the school's day-to-day functioning in order to improve their understanding of children in care). As part of the third area, principal and vice principal participants identified formal and informal markers of success for children in care they served in their own school. While the processes, practices and implementation route of each tier was different for every principal and vice principal in the study, the existence of the three tiers was common to all participants.

***Responding more intensely and intentionally.*** This first level of support was mentioned by most participants as developed and integrated into the school's day-to-day functioning. Participants identified purposeful processes and practices (e.g., such as

following the data of students in care more closely, and ensuring they had information from as many sources as possible) as the most common response at this first level to support children in care. Although participants mentioned multiple scenarios with steps and supports similar to those used for students not in contact with the care system, they added the proviso of acting more intentionally (e.g., purposefully setting aside time, money, or by generating a formal process) and intensely for children in care. Participants themselves felt responsible and wanted to be more closely involved, so that they had as much information as possible to help inform actions that would build success for children in care.

*When it comes to children in care, I think it's all of those things just amped up, more intense...more scrutiny shall we say, not more scrutiny but more closely followed, and I think...we need to follow more closely just because we don't want anybody falling through the cracks and just in case you know CFS people are busy as well, so...what can we do to ensure that this kid has the safety net...has the support. So...honestly, I think it's all of the things we would do for...non-in-care children...just with more intensity. (Holden)*

*We've got kids that we know, that if we don't do some real intentional work, they are going to not graduate, which is what this whole thing can equate to. You see them move through middle school into high school and all of a sudden, where are they? And kids in care, you look at our stats (emphasis). It's alarming. It's alarming. (Amelia)*

This practice of intentionality, or purposeful planning, was also evident in more peripheral support areas such as new staffing positions, reallocating and planning for professional development that benefited children in care, developing an inclusive school community that knows how to respond to the behaviours of children in care and honours their personal stories by making cultural clubs and experiences available to all students.

*We also spent a lot of time staffing our schools through the CTEP [Community Aboriginal Teacher Education Program] that is in a couple of school divisions I think in the city. As far as having role models that look like the kids...Aboriginal teachers...kids wanna see themselves represented in people and people in power and control kinds of positions. (Golda)*

*Deliberately shaping the environment.* While participants wanted and needed to understand the histories and lives of children in care outside of school, almost all participants focused most of their efforts on developing environments and interventions that supported children in care when they walked through the school doors. To do this, they used processes and practices that deliberately surrounded children in care with supports. Although participants did not differentiate between their use of the terms process and practice, for the purpose of this study, processes were operationalized as more formal systemic structures that deal with the strategic planning, organization and methods of leadership. Whereas, practices are the habits, customs, and routines focused on organizational goals in a school that are socially integrated and enacted through peoples' day-to-day interpretation and interaction in the organization (Ryan, 2006b).

In the day-to-day school environment, these supports were deliberately structured to develop individual success for children in care. Almost all participants shared detailed examples to demonstrate the importance of student specific supports based on their knowledge of a child's in care experience. What these supports shared in common was the notion of repatriating the children's 'space'. Dedicated physical and emotional space allowed children and youth to feel safe and work through problems so they could begin the process of rebuilding trust and connecting with adults. The children were also provided with introductions to cultural spaces through the integration of cultural knowledge and ways of knowing that honoured their heritage. Finally, flexible academic space was established through more flexibility in scheduling to allow for the development of academic, social and behavioural skills and competencies.

*Shaping physical and emotional spaces.* Shaping the physical environment with more formal processes was mentioned as necessary by many participants to help children

in care cope with the stressors of school and the complexity of their personal lives. This became an intentional goal for school leaders. Often these physical spaces were directly connected to the development of emotional safety for children in care.

*Next year we'll have a learning assistance room...where we can either shorten kids days and lengthen kids days, build in some... counselling time...where YCW's [Youth Care Workers] can take 30 minutes...40 minutes...before they go back to class, because that's what they [kids in care] need lots of times...just to let it all out and with someone who is nonjudgmental. (Murray)*

*We added...some plans around guest teachers...what that would look like...when he needs a break and walks away...there's communication to the rest of the staff to just leave him be and don't interact...he's trying to test the relationship...he wants to see if you still care about him...but he'll come at you and use really foul and inappropriate language or just gestures and so part of our strategy is just to kinda give him space and have him go to a calm area and have him go with a trusted adult. So, we changed the adults around a little bit. (Hannah)*

*We don't always know what the roots of the behaviour are but we see what we see and it's Ok...what are we going to do...maybe that child just needs some space for a little while...we just need to give him some space and over time when he feels that we're going to be consistent and predictable and our responses...the language that he's going to hear from all the school personnel is going to be similar. (Golda)*

*It always depends on the child and what they're getting out of it and what they want out of it, and what they need out of it... 'cause sometimes if we try and shove the curriculum too much...then they don't want to come...they won't show up...all of it involves food...hot chocolate...have a little breakfast...settle in...unpack your day before...do some work...and so you can spread this out over a whole year and maybe only earn a half credit in something but that's a bonus too...that's kind of the lowest thing on the priority list. (Fontaine)*

*Developing cultural spaces.* Many participants felt that including Indigenous culture in meaningful ways in the school provided positive exposure to a cultural dynamic for Indigenous children in care in unobtrusive and personal ways. For example, making available more formal processes that embedded opportunities to join powwows, as well as informal practices in the school around understanding a student's First Nation community, helped to honour cultural ways of knowing, mitigated the presence of existing social biases and assumptions, and also encouraged positive feelings of self-

worth for children in care.

*[We do] not force things on them but give them opportunities to explore that with us...trying to reach out to the elders to...not just [for] cultural activities but land-based education is something we're exploring...both as a course and just as a point of view...part of our wilderness program...courses like...Topics in First Nation. (Fontaine)*

*We have a Powwow Club going on here...we have a drumming group. We feature art and music and we have a big medicine wheel study right now on our bulletin board and we've woven in the 7 sacred teachings into that...we've done a lot of work in mindfulness...and self-regulation as well...and yoga...we've been able to kind of weave in all these aspects of what we value and want to promote here...and Indigenous perspectives is a major part of that...but I think it is having kids in care see their culture...whether they're connected or not...see it promoted. (Golda)*

*We decided for Powwow Club that we wanted to start singing and drumming...and we do a lot of work where we ask our foster families to make sure that our children in care are coming to Powwow, because it is one of the ways to tap into culture. (Amelia)*

*If a kid says...I'm from...[name of First Nation community redacted]...you should know that they're Anishinaabe, so those are things that we always try to work on that really tells a kid that you care about them if you know at bare minimum what part in a Manitoba map that is in and you can kinda guess if they're Oji-Cree or they're not...and you can see a kid's eyes light up if you ask them first of all what community they're from...it makes a humungous difference connecting with a child. (Gloria)*

*Establishing flexible academic spaces.* All of the high school participants indicated that their efforts for shaping and flexing the system to accommodate and personalize education for children in care were mainly located in the scheduling process. The comments they shared demonstrated that they specifically tailored students' school day to build in opportunities for success and skills acquisition in areas connected to basic academics, social relationships, and personal goals. What most participants termed as flex programming referred to a process generally used in high schools that includes a deliberate scheduling process with a variety of modifications such as a reduced number of classes or credits, a shorter school day, structured opportunities for social skills building and/or smaller groups that work on basic academic skills development. Structured to be accessible outside of the regular semester system at high school, these flex program

opportunities are made available to all students who may need them, but in this case, they were differentiated by participants to specifically meet the needs children in care.

*That boys group...we timetabled them together in gym and they have a little extra support in there and they have workout plans...and then they all have lunch together, and then they have a separate class again after lunch...and then they're all together again...they prefer to just be together and not have other people around, and we're trying to broaden their horizons a little bit...plus have them meet other people... (Fontaine)*

*[Flex programming is] successful in that it provides an instant community. It's like putting them on a basketball team first. There's a group of 15 kids in a smaller space...just not a 30-kid class for them, and there's always food, that always brings people together. There's the same teacher that's in there...she's very versed in many social services and ways to support kids. We have a community liaison worker as well who connects and can do that type of work. So, the advantage is that they always have a place to go....they know that room in this very large building is where they would go....so there's always that soft spot for them. (Gloria)*

*One of the resource teachers took on 3 boys and then 2 others...besides his caseload...all with the same foster dad...new this year...and he's basically helped them build a community...none of them had been in school for 2 or 3 years...so they are coming every day...they meet with him for about half an hour on everything from social skills and how to get the swearing and the rest out of their system...process if they had a bad night the night before...they're actually working on job skills now...so they're working on that career and exploration credit at the grade 9 level and a half credit just to do that. (Fontaine)*

*I have a student who meets with their parents twice a week and it has to be scheduled based on whatever they've worked out between their schedules and the schedule of their social worker and everybody else's...she has to miss the last period...twice a week...at high school that's the same class every day, so she misses 2 out of 5 periods every cycle...which is definitely going to be a detriment to her...through no fault of her own...I tried to work with her social worker who tried to work with the parents, who tried to work with maybe their jobs...but it didn't work. ...It's not gonna come down to - she doesn't get to see her parents...or she doesn't get to do that course...because part of it was...maybe we'll just pull her out of last period all the time...but she didn't want for that to happen, which was a viable option if that's what the student wants, but it wasn't. It's a very highly motivated student who wants to get that credit this year...so we found a plan for her to come two other days to homework period after school...where she has the assistance of a teacher and an educational assistant to help her get caught up on work...I do check-ins with her every couple of weeks just to see where she's at...she's also very capable so if she does fall behind...her teacher is aware of the situation and so he makes me aware to help get on her if she does fall behind on things...and we try to work. (Joanna)*

Specific to one participant, was an alternative course that focused on helping



youth in care with physical and/or cognitive challenges to “navigate the system” and develop “self-advocacy skills” beyond the school. Mentioned as essential for success in the literature given the bureaucratic and complex nature of the systems, such as education, CFS, mental health and criminal justice, governing the lives of children in care at this time, this participant indicated that the creation of this specific course credit helped the youth to develop these necessary skills.

*We have some very individualized programming as well, just because of sheer numbers... kids who are profoundly handicapped in some ways, non-verbal, [or they] have physical disabilities, but it's amazing how many of them are in care. One of the resource teachers again decided, “There's a good 10 kids. We are gonna do a class in slot #1”, and they earned that skills credit. They're learning self-advocacy, how to talk at their own ITP's [Individual Transition Plans], how to set goals, and personal safety. (Fontaine)*

***Identifying markers of success for schools and children in care.*** The *Protocol* lists general markers for both academic and personal success for children in care, to provide some guidance to educational leaders and social workers. However, the list only includes indicators that would also be used for a student not in contact with the care system, such as report card data and completion of projects or programs. In this study, participants' comments reflected markers of success that included both traditional formal process indicators mentioned above, as well as less tradition and/or informal anecdotal evidence. None of the markers of success mentioned represent new formal processes with tested validity and reliability. Instead, these comments point to the fact that participants in this study saw the need and had the intention to measure both the effectiveness of school programming for students in care as well as the students' resultant level of success. At high school, the focus was often on reviewing more formal data about how or why students left a school, and reviewing processes and practices to improve the program, so

the school could individualize what's best for each student.

*The disadvantage of doing that [flex programming] is that you group a lot of kids that have a lot of needs all in the same spot, but you've also put your resources there too. So, you know...it can...depends, no one kinda lives in that flexible programming their entire schooling, unless they need to...some kids need to...that's all they can manage...is that type of schooling, so it's kind of like bookmark learning, so if you do miss a lot of period time, you do come back...you're ready to go, it's not like regular class, where you would come in...you have zero idea what they're talking about, so yeah. There's successes for sure...yeah, we still lose kids. (Gloria)*

*Every kid influences what we do. So, the kids that aren't here...that are supposed to be...are influencing what we're gonna do each year. Like how do we get them back in, how did we...how did we lose them in the first place, and that sort of thing... 'cause you're battling with...trying to figure out where someone is on a cognitive standpoint, in order to provide the best program that would engage them without feeling like they're bored or babied or it's too much or it's going too fast, right? So, yah! It's a constant. (Gloria)*

Many participants recognized that students' level of academic and social-emotional success could reach beyond their time in school and in the education system to affect their wider social and life trajectory outcomes.

*The next time they called somebody up she went up and our whole group... got up and stood up and cheered her on...that was her highlight of her trip...it was everybody cheering her on...that never happened before in her life...so remarkable things like that. (Joanna)*

*It's a challenge, but I think we could go back to the number of days kids are in school. I think that's important. I think looking at marks is important and of course the graduation rate is ultimate...and how many kids we keep out of the other systems [justice, mental health]...I think in a bigger picture...in a 20 or 25 year study...how many kids grew up in care have their own children and who aren't in care because we have to stop the cycle at 10 000...we gotta be maxing out. (Murray)*

In the end, the overall consensus was that there may be pockets of success measured by more traditional markers such as graduation, and attendance of children in care. Although some participants felt that there were indications of success, there is still much work left for participants who see themselves in a position of privilege, where they can advocate for continued change in support of children in care in schools.

*Particularly for children in care...those are the ones we really have failed for a long*

*time...and we need to do something differently...and I think we are seeing the results...I know we are in our school division...there is data showing that our efforts are resulting in higher graduation rates...in better attendance of kids in care...when you hear things like that, then you know that you're on the right track...so I think it's coming from people in positions of privilege and that's where it needs to come from...it needs to be privileged. (Golda)*

*I have to say, I'm not completely satisfied with the number of kids we've had go into classrooms here. And the satisfaction comes from...I think we could be doing more, but I think we also have 1300 kids and [almost 3 dozen] kids in classes [on average], and so this level of need...it's unfair, and so we end up with plans where kids are in the resource room or they're coming into credit recovery and continuing ed, which are low enrollment [courses]...they're not low enrollment anymore. They're huge, now attendance is sporadic and [there are]...[about 2 dozen] kids in an at risk classroom. That's a lot of kids. They don't come all at the same time, so the continuity gets lost, and different kids come different days, so I think...we need to do more. (Victoria)*

**Flexing and reshaping systemic borders.** In some instances, inclusive educational leaders found that communicating, collaborating and negotiating with outside organizations was not enough to bridge the services gap for children in care. Instead, some participants felt compelled to flex or shape systemic borders. In other words, they recognized that the concerns and problems they saw were not addressed by existing processes or practices. As an alternative, they utilized a more direct and dynamic approach to develop reforms in the system specifically aimed to improve the situation for children in care. The strategies used by participants below represented a wide continuum for shaping participants' area of influence.

Fontaine, Gloria and Murray, all indicated that they used processes and practices that created new opportunities for advocacy to specifically support children in care. Fontaine used her school's size strategically in a process that reallocated funds to create grade 9 course sections that developed opportunities specifically for children in care. Although her school was designated a grade 10-12 school, she made deliberate choices around programming, staffing and physical space that purposefully restructured program

funding and helped to level the academic playing field for children in care.

*We're a [grade] 10-12 school so 90% of our kids in care that have come in this year might be 16, 17, 18, 19 and even 20 and they do not even have their grade 9 credits...so we had to have a way of helping them get those grade 9 credits that didn't involve [regular gr. 10-12 classes]...so small class settings...a lot of support...a lot of adult bodies in those rooms, because a lot of them...might have a 2-3 year gap in schooling.... We try to be influenced by data...our own data...what we're seeing everyday...and some of it can be soft data... We have the ability to be flexible and say we see an emerging need...we're gonna shift some resources over there. It doesn't mean they don't get taken from somewhere else, but if they're priorities...they're priorities, so 4 sections of grade 9 credit acquisition...a section is basically worth \$12 000. That's \$48 000 right there in one year that wasn't there before. (Fontaine)*

Several participants mentioned that they “wouldn't make a fuss” or insist on having all the forms before starting a child in care in their school. Gloria's approach goes even further as it runs counter to both school district and CFS policies.

*[What] I created as well was a house parent letter...which was a way to skirt-around when I was saying some of the stuff about the legalities...like a kid is supposed to live with their legal guardian...and so a kid in care...sometimes there's kids that aren't necessarily in care...in terms of CFS care, but they're often living with auntie or someone that may or may not be biologically their family member [kinship care]...but that is the best choice for the kid...so we did that...just a form that says...the house parent is doing [signing] the day to day stuff...legal guardians will still be called if they get hit by a bus or whatever, right? And so...it was that sort of connection between...a lot of times it was the First Nations...someone coming from up north...and is benefitting from the wrongs of the past [the Indian Act, residential schools, the 60's Scoop]...So if you look at guardianship that makes no sense in First Nation culture historically anyways...people were raised as a community, not as...who was in the hospital at the time. So we do those kind of things. (Gloria)*

The internal document process she developed took into consideration the overlapping impact of district policies affecting children in care and historical trauma that continues to complicate the lives of Indigenous families. In creating this process, she took advantage of the more complex social and kinship systems that exist and go beyond the nuclear family in many Indigenous cultures.

Most outspoken and active in the area of pushing back and shaping the system was Murray, a veteran principal with experience in alternative education settings. He

outlined creative ways to use funding for both professional and support staff, but also re-allocated school spaces for student programming, and integrated students into the school before their official registration and intake meetings. He mentioned refusal to comply with certain district administrative initiatives, and at times participated in covert policy translation (e.g., by overstating the need to remain behind at the school for potential emergent situations). He insisted that this helped to support the needs of children in care from a preventative standpoint when he felt school needs outweighed the pressure of administrative meetings called by the district's senior administration team. In his mind, there was no other choice. He believed preventative support best serves all children, but especially children in care, because of their unique histories and often difficult to predict needs. In his opinion, the education system was not yet designed to adequately account for the cycle of trauma that affects children in care, both before and during their time in care. He commented several times that his past experience allowed him to recognize the necessary steps, and that his veteran leadership status made him feel less vulnerable to professional censure than might be the case for his less experienced counterparts.

*We're not really going to do everything that they've asked us to do and we're just gonna build our own little thing here that works best for our kids. We'll document stuff so that we can prove to people that what we did was wise, and mature of us, and good for kids, which is my mantra here....If it's good for kids we're gonna do it. (Murray)*

### **Models for the Future**

Most principal and vice principal participants' expectations for the future highlighted some of the areas in which they saw opportunities for processes, such as organizational partnerships, and a common accountability measure, to help improve the educational outcomes of children in care.

**Developing new and trusting partnerships.** Important to all principal and vice

principal participants was a focus on the crosspollination of ideas and understanding to help grow trusting relationships between organizations, shared service delivery, along with an external position that represents an objective locus of control and accountability for both the education and CFS systems in their pursuit of improved support for children in care. Participants appeared to recognize the finite capacity of resources such as money, and staffing, and the comments below suggested that the missing component is a more coordinated and targeted approach to prioritize needs and connect existing people and resources.

*[I] am not privy to and this likely has happened but I just don't know the outcomes of conversations that may have occurred with the agencies involved, and talking specifically about partnerships, so I'd like to hear the outcomes of those, if they've happened and if not can we begin to have these conversations to build trust, to build common understanding. Maybe we're missing pieces of the protocol from another perspective [indicates internal intake form]. That may be helpful. (Victoria)*

*It's not a money thing, it's not the amount of really smart people, really well intentioned people...it's just taking the time to build those relationships with all the partners...is really the biggest thing, and then someone to coordinate that time together...'cause that's where it really takes somebody to say...Ok this is what's happening and get whatever, 200 people from there...just all of that right? But it's just...the commitment and the time to be together that's really what it comes down to...we have good people, but good people have lots of stuff. It's about prioritizing. (Gloria)*

**Common accountability for success.** Participants also did not see a common locus of accountability for children in care, where both education and CFS systems could turn to access shared information or to report measures of success relevant to both systems. School leaders commented that the creation of a new position or central agency would provide a less isolated space for shared conversations and planning between the education and CFS systems about interdepartmental needs as they relate to children in care.

*I would like to think that it doesn't have to be something external...I would like to think that it doesn't have to be some sort of entity, created to manage that [children in care]*

*like a general contractor manages the building of a house. I would like to think that it doesn't have to be somebody like that, but in my own head I wonder if it would be worth it to have a coordinator of services that acts as a focal point for everyone in the structure of the meeting...that helps bring everyone together. (Liam)*

*We've put in place Indigenous Education Support Teachers...we've put in place literacy and numeracy coaches...what are we doing for children in care specifically...and maybe I'm being ignorant to something right now but I can't think off the top of my head who's profile that falls under to keep the checks and balances and I think it's a huge check and balance...especially because the system itself...I think that there almost needs to be a liaison between education and the CFS system and I know we have that...they're called social workers but I almost think something more...if we had someone that could help manage that [connection] between our schools and our social workers and come in and take a role. (Joanna)*

*And when you talk about [a case manager situated in the school], people say you don't want that one person just dealing with kids in care, I don't know. We have one person doing AFM, so let's talk about that...why not, or why would we? Is that detrimental...is that effective...or do you want someone as a consultant helping case managers do their job? So what are the questions people are coming up with most often around this and what other resources could they use? So I don't know what that's going to look like. (Victoria)*

**Schools as service hubs.** Both the *Protocol* and the *Companion Document* stress the need to connect services and supports for children in care between CFS and the education system. With this focus on collaboration, many participants planned to pull services and organizations specific to children in care into the school. The idea of schools as community hubs for neighbourhood populations, where social interactions, language, as well as interactions with other families are encourage, is not a novel idea in Manitoba. Yet, the idea of pulling services specific to Manitoba's child in care population into the schools has not been explored in local communities or in the academic literature.

To provide timely, proactive support for children in care, participants mentioned examples of bridging opportunities like integrating mental health and Manitoba justice services into the school. Although often seen as more expensive at the outset, if offered inside the school these services would help to integrate preventative benefits, usually

provided to children in care outside of the school, into the school day. Participants also planned for processes that aligned services such as weekly or monthly probation officer or social worker meetings into schools for children in care.

CFS, justice and health care service delivery, offered in siloed or compartmentalized conditions, where there was no sharing or integration of information for children in care, negatively affected the continuity of service delivery and as a result the children's academic and social-emotional success. To improve efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, and as a result social justice outcomes, school leaders encouraged the idea of schools as central service hubs that provided children in care with services integrated into their school day. These small grass-roots actions create new opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration, conversations, and more formal processes to supported children in care.

*There's often a connection with kids in care and mental health. In terms of supports I think that's the biggest thing...I think we need more counselling available for kids...more on going regular therapy available...and it's hard to get that regular consistent treatment, and not just sitting down with the guidance counsellor having a chat...but therapy to work through the trauma...I think [services at the school] would be great. I think...bringing together these services and having...better...easier access. (Megan)*

*I believe schools should become hubs for neighbourhoods, and that some of the other systems should become connected to those hubs, so that a social worker who's working with a family in the elementary school remains the same social worker when they come to junior high...then it's only two or three social workers over a 10-12 year period as opposed to five, or six or seven....well if you [the social worker] were based out of the school you would see them every day...If I look at a high school, virtually every high school would have at least some kids who have been in touch with the justice system, and to have a probation officer, paid for from probation money, to be in the school, but supporting the school as well as checking up with the kids. I think those kinds of things are critical for moving forward...social worker, therapist, and just getting settled into neighbourhoods...I think [that] would be a pretty powerful thing, in particular for kids in care, [because] it minimizes the number of adults they have to deal with and...the stronger connection they have with the school, and the better the school can work with*



*the foster parents, then we're gonna keep kids in the same school for a long period of time, and I think that's the goal. (Murray)*

*I'm checking in with [name of high school redacted], because...it seems counter intuitive but it's not because it works with the police...they actually have probation officers in their schools...just like AFM they're probably not full time but I don't know how many kids of mine miss school to go down...'cause they gotta go see their probation officer once a week and then they go to AFM or they go to therapy...again...if this was based closer...right in the school...they would miss less school...they would be more connected to school...like it or not...if your probation officer is right at school and one of your things is 'Must attend school'... you can celebrate the successes more often and be validated more for that.*

*(Fontaine)*

#### **Theme 4: Former Youth in Care: The Layered Effects of Misaligned Interorganizational Processes and Practices**

Given the purpose and mandate to develop inclusion, mentioned in the joint departmental *Protocol* and *Companion Document* in Theme 1 above, it was important to include the perspectives and understanding of focus group participants about their shared education and in-care experience and understanding of inclusive leadership processes and practices. Much like principals and vice principals in this study, former youth in care focus group participants also recognized that there was a connection between their complex life experiences and systemic challenges that developed in educational support plans. All focus group participants reported different inconsistencies in the application of CFS processes and practices, as they affected their school experience. Although their comments are part of this case study's rich description, they are presented here in an isolated section in order to demonstrate the patterns that appeared to affect their understanding and education outcomes.

#### **Cumulative Effects of the In-Care Experience on School Readiness**

Focus group participants did share some positive anecdotes in different sub-themes below. Yet overall, the former youth in care who participated in this study indicated that the in-care experience did not mitigate the effects of their complex social history, nor did it help them prepare for school. In fact, focus group participants indicated that the in-care experience often compounded trauma, did not make them feel cared for, and negatively affected their level of school readiness and as a result their school experience. Often this included emotional and physical conflict as part of the environment for children in care. Instead of helping to integrate children in care into the school environment, these comments suggest that the very social systems (e.g., CFS) assigned to support their needs

increased the confusion, alienation and isolation they felt.

*Basically, the phrase 'Youth in Care' in my opinion feels contradictory because...yes, you're a youth, but you're being forced to grow up, and the title says you're in care but you're far from care...you're alone. (Focus Groups)*

*We're taught that we're not anything. It messages around...we're basically just like that thing there...just a file number. (Focus Groups)*

*I think about the stability piece...for myself...I know what that attachment and separation did for me, because it's been really evident in my adult life...I think I went through life still thinking I was a foster kid...not knowing if I introduce my mom as my mom or my foster mom because to them I honestly feel like I'm their foster kid but to me that's my family...that's my world...those are my brothers and sisters...that's my mom and dad...and so I think about the stability piece and not knowing if tomorrow you'll be at the same school...well at least you want to be left with a positive impact, instead of that negative experience...which will really affect you in adult life. (Focus Groups)*

*So, when I was in care, I was well known as the foster child...the kid in the community in care...I grew up in a predominantly Caucasian neighbourhood and being Aboriginal I experienced a lot of judgement. I didn't feel very understood by the teachers or the parents. It kept me from joining clubs like sports. I did not feel included and I think back when I was in the system it was harder for me because there was lots of rules I guess...(Focus Groups)*

*...school wasn't an escape at all because going to school I was subjected to a lot of different types of violence...and then I go home being subjected to all the violence that was happening inside that home...a lot of emotional and manipulative abuse that was going on...(Focus Groups)*

For focus group members, the unknown (e.g., such as which family, how long will I be there, which school, will I be Ok?) weighed heavily on them during their time in care. As a result, the social-emotional impact of the unfamiliar, unspecified, undetermined and unpredictable spilled over into their lives in school. Continuity of appropriate education was also a concern, as timely registration and transportation processes associated with CFS foster home or group home transitions were seen as a source of distress for focus group participants.

*All through school I never got the help that I needed, and I began seeing therapists...but I didn't know how to speak about myself...no one ever even wanted to know about me...so for me to share anything about me was the most difficult thing. You know I didn't know...I*

*thought it was pointless...I'm like...I don't need this, and then when I got switched into a group home in the city that's when no one told me to go to school. No one said...hey you need to finish school...you need to graduate. (Focus Groups)*

*Starting off in a new city, and then starting off in a new school where you don't know anyone. You're not even sure how many of these kids are in the same situation you are. Do they feel this awkward starting?...I definitely needed someone to talk to about all these changes their making and things that I had to get used to. (Focus Groups)*

*...I got switched... from a French school to an English school 'cause I got taken away from my foster family. Then I was put in a whole new different language...it was a culture shock for me...and I had a lot of difficulty...with speaking the language 'cause my family had switched me straight to French and...it affected the way that I was...and it was difficult for me to relate with people...All through school I never got the help that I needed. (Focus Groups)*

*When I got switched into a group home in the city that's when no one told me to go to school. No one said...hey you need to finish school...you need to graduate...you need to go to this school...you got to get yourself registered and you got to get going and get started...and not having that was really difficult. (Focus Groups)*

Focus group participants' comments indicated that frequent transitions to new foster homes, emergency placements, or group homes often made other gaps and barriers in academic and social-emotional continuity more visible. Transportation to and from a school became a concern when children transitioned to new homes, as accessing transportation changed the actual school experience by extending the child's day and brought to the forefront a low level of foster parent engagement.

*Just what you were saying about the lack of transportation...when I first got into care...I was going to [name of school redacted]...but when I was put into a temporary home in [name of neighbourhood redacted], it was an hour bus ride to get to school every day and I had to wake up two hours earlier than I normally would have, so I could get ready and so that I could leave at the right time...and I would arrive half an hour [earlier]...because there were not proper supports for actually getting to the school. (Focus Groups)*

*At first I was moved to a family friend's house, and they didn't really care if I was in school, and then I was moved to a home that was too far...then the mother of the home didn't really care if I missed school...Well it wasn't my school and so I wasn't...I just wasn't gonna go back to school. (Focus Groups)*

The layers of negative experiences in the cycle involving education and in-care transitions appeared to reach a tipping point as focus group participants transitioned to adult living and were released from care on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Unprepared to navigate the world of adult education and living, the affected youth transitioning from care reported negative life experiences based on their lack of readiness to manage day-to-day living.

*Then I tried to finish my grade 12 when I was 18, and I was gonna do it at the Adult Ed. Centre [school district name redacted]...I ended up becoming homeless and I had to quit school, because it was...how are you supposed to go to school in the evening when you're homeless all day long and then once you're done school, where are you supposed to go? It just became too much and I didn't get the support I need from my schooling. (Focus Groups)*

*I was told to pack a bag...and especially as you're aging through [or out] I skipped the step where my parents were to teach me what I needed to be a young woman in society...basic needs...needs for a woman...I never learned that from my parents...I didn't feel comfortable learning that from my foster mother...no one really asked me what I needed and how they could help me...and yah you learn sex-ed in school but without that image in your life...the person who can really support you and help you learn from their mistakes...it can be hard...really hard. (Focus Groups)*

A more specific concern forwarded by focus group members was related to the operation of the CFS system, as it is based on a provision of care for financial compensation model. Developed with a purpose to mimic the nuclear family home experience, so that children in care feel supported, nurtured, and ready to attend school, the present foster/group home experience did not attain its goal according to focus group participants. A specific example includes the financial payments provided to group homes and foster homes, which were intended to enhance or specialize the children's experiences and treatment. Enhanced social-emotional programming was funded in some foster/group homes to help mitigate some of the trauma induced feelings and behaviours that affected focus group participants' lives and school experiences. Yet the actual

experience did not always match the program's intentions.

*...you're assuming we're in care doesn't necessarily mean we're getting that care [in group homes]...we're not necessarily getting that family that we should...that everybody should have, because we're not...sometimes it feels like we're just placed there and they have to take care...you know, instead of actually wanting to take care. (Focus Groups)*

*The last group home I was in before I finally got out of care...specialized in anger management, [but] they did once a year an anger management [program/focus]...just for a month...but if you're sent to a group home specifically for anger management...once a year is not enough, because...that's not care, that's doing your minimum amount so that you can get paid more to be an anger management specialist group home... (Focus Groups)*

### **Education Processes and Their Effect on School Readiness and Success**

Although children in care are not generally party to behind-the-scenes planning for their school-based programming, focus group participants' comments provided insight into some novel challenges that were visible to them, and corroboration for themes that were similar to those noticed by inclusive principals and vice principals in the study.

**Connecting staffing and school readiness.** When they recalled their school experiences, several focus group members' comments indicated that there was no process in place that connected the youth to a specific staff member in the school. Focus group members noted this as an area that impacted their ability to navigate problems they faced while at school.

*Often I tried...I went to the vice principal to talk to her, and the biggest problem I found is that every time I talked to the vice principal...I was always referred to the guidance counsellor instead...and then guidance counsellor either...at some schools I was at...didn't care, or at my most recent school...didn't have enough power to do anything about it. (Focus Groups)*

*You gotta find that one person who's not concerned about everybody in the system...it's hard when the teacher has 35 kids...or in high school when you have the teacher for an hour and they've got 500 students that they're worried about, and they can't worry about everybody. (Focus Groups)*

Some focus group participants in this study recognized the additional needs that children in care have for connection, and counselling. Their remarks offered insights into why a specific differentiated staffing process that includes staff members with trauma-informed training, or a counselling background, is necessary in schools to support children in care.

*Child youth-care workers working with kids in care [in schools]...they know what the kids need...emotionally and can recognize things that are going on outside the education...the child youth-care workers can recognize a lot of what's going on with the kids [beyond] what they're just experiencing academically. (Focus Groups)*

*I think kids in care are just going through a lot more at home...and need somebody who understands them and not be like...make sure you do your work...you're not doing it right...work isn't the problem...it's not the class that's the problem...it's that they're going through some stuff and need help going through something else. (Focus Groups)*

**Impact of rigid school policies.** Several focus group participants also provided specific examples that demonstrated how rigid student behaviour policies impacted different areas in the lives of children in care. The experiences left participants feeling dehumanized, excluded and ashamed.

*I was in the office every day. I had my own desk in the principal's office so I had two sets of everything, so that way when I had difficulty in class, they would send me there. I never had anyone who actually cared about me. I was never viewed as a human being...I had a lot of learning disabilities and I was going through a lot of trauma at home too...a lot of abuse...and so it made school a lot more difficult...there was no escape for me... (Focus Groups)*

*I had a lot of difficulty and I ended up going to school intoxicated during a school play...I ended up getting suspended and that was for 2 weeks...I didn't see those kinds of measures being taken on anyone else...but for me being the troubled kid...the one that has a lot of emotional disregularities because of what I went through...they really excluded me that way, and I always felt so much shame...Oh, I need to leave class early. I come in late. It was always like a spotlight on me...and that totally deteriorated my health...I ended up going to rehab and I couldn't finish rehab...With all my emotional difficulties, I got kicked out...and then I got kicked out of my foster family...and that's when I ended up not having school. (Focus Groups)*

**Social-emotional needs of children in care: assumptions and misinformation.**

Misinformation was also a topic that several focus group participants mentioned as an invisible barrier for building relationships in schools. For example, well-intentioned practices in schools developed to maintain the privacy, and limit contact with children in care, for their own and staff members protection, were mentioned as harmful. Children in care need to have transparent, real conversations and healthy relationships with adults at school, so they can thrive (Christensen & Larmoureux, 2016).

*I feel like they [schools] have the potential...they're thinking about it, but one thing is they're afraid...I feel like...they're afraid to reach out to a child [to talk about how they feel] because of how the child will react...it's inappropriate to hug the child in some cases...they're just afraid of the law and...they don't want to harm the child more than they already are and they don't want to hurt themselves in the process legally. (Focus Group)*

Here one participant's analogy, was finished by another participant.

*Everything is too much by the book...it needs to be...not every child fits into that book...it needs to be what the child wants... (Focus Groups)*

*...because I'm the book. (Focus Groups)*

*You cannot touch the kids...or you can't...[then] the relationship is not real...if you can't go up to a kid and go...I want a high-five or good job or commenting on their life...that's not a relationship that's beneficial to the kids, and that happens more than you would even imagine. (Focus Groups)*

Although there are no official policies in schools regarding high fives or hugs, it would appear that the implicit messages sent by the practices and actions of staff members in schools, indicated to focus group participants that they were being avoided. Possibly a misunderstanding on the children's part, as students with past trauma experiences, it is not unlikely that staff members were careful or reluctant to enter into a mode of communication for which they had little background information, and so tried to avoid doing more harm. Less open to interpretation, most participants reported that they



regularly experienced negative personal interactions with school staff members and that they regularly encountered both implicit and explicit negative messages from staff members at school, based on their in-care status.

*Why isn't educators getting more education on how to treat these [kids in CFS]? They're people like me who didn't want to come forward and say...Haha, I grew up in CFS...I always said I was adopted 'cause that was better than saying...My family is a screw-up and I'm in CFS...because there wasn't the education...people had a tendency of looking at...kids who are adopted more normal than kids in CFS...because there isn't that education. I feel like...educators need that. (Focus Groups)*

*I had faced a lot of stigma and stereotypes throughout that [high school], and just for myself, I felt like garbage. I felt really humiliated, really embarrassed and the feedback was...Well of course, we knew that [getting pregnant] was gonna happen. It's a given...and that was actually really hurtful because it didn't help my experience. (Focus Groups)*

*It was almost every teacher...it was even my guidance teacher [Mhmmm] [agreement from others]. Our guidance teacher was even telling me... "No"...I graduated when I was 17...my guidance teacher came up to me and was like...Ok so we're applying you for disability through welfare...What?...They go...Yah we're filling out welfare papers for you right now...and I go...no that's not what I want...I wanna go to school...so that option of going...getting a scholarship to my school was gone 'cause they already had it in their mind...this is where you're going, and I was like...No I'm not following in my Mom's footsteps...I'm not going on welfare. (Focus Groups)*

Most subtle and notable were self-imposed barriers, where focus group participants indicated that over time layers of stigma, isolation and exclusion resulted in self-removal from social and academic opportunities at school.

*I remember being in school and the teachers they always liked the ones [students] that did good...but the ones who had difficulties...the ones who had trouble at home...the ones who couldn't focus as much...they treated us [kids in care] just like the other kids [the kids who had trouble focusing]...it was almost like...if they were to be nice [to us]...they would lose the respect of those kids [who were always good] and the teachers wouldn't be what a teacher's supposed to do...and that really affected me...knowing that no matter what I do, I'm never gonna be the one that the teacher's gonna help because I'm not the type for it. (Focus Groups)*

*What you're saying with clubs...I was never in them because...I guess because I felt like I could never open up to anyone...It really affected how I connected with people...especially at school. Throughout the entire year, I was never really in extra-curricular activities. (Focus Groups)*

*...basically the sports and stuff...the only clubs they had were sports...with people not liking you...and you know no one is gonna want you on their team...and you are required to be vulnerable with them to create that teamwork kind of thing...I was never able to go and do that. (Focus Groups)*

**Academic and social-emotional programming: impact of misinformation.** The most frequently mentioned challenge in education forwarded by focus group participants was not a specific systemic barrier, but rather a lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of school staff members, including principals and vice principals, about the social-emotional and academic needs of children in care. Although programming in this area might be developed through the school's educational support services staff, the principal and/or vice principal would be consulted and responsible for the program's development, and success. Assumptions about how to determine what students need, and how to deliver the necessary programming, were cited by focus group members as difficult hurdles.

In the area of academics, several focus group participants indicated that they received very limited information about the availability and access of differentiated academic programs. Mid-year transitions were not uncommon for focus group members, and that meant participants who arrived after the start of semester were left with limited resources and information.

*There actually was an Adapted English programs that they don't tell you about unless you get really bad marks, which is a very big problem and they should have that available from the beginning...but that program was available, which is why that last year was a lot better. (Focus Groups)*

*It's also helpful to know what's available... 'cause not only are you joining the classes late, but you're behind, 'cause your last school...started at a different part in the curriculum, so you know...you're missing out half of the curriculum...there's nothing really in school that helped me in any of my schools. (Focus Groups)*

*I had a lot of difficulties in school...I even failed a course in grade 9...I had to redo it the*

*next year and I didn't have any supports in school...there was no option for me to even know that I had an option or that I even had rights [and] that if I needed help with something that someone was willing and able to [help]. (Focus Groups)*

Most focus group participants also expressed the need for more structured social-emotional programming to help them integrate into new surroundings, based on their complex life experiences. Although the root of many negative experiences was traced back to CFS transitions by participants, they also recognized a related gap for potentially supportive social programming in the school system.

*There was no programs when I was in school at all, and the hardest thing to do when you're going from school to school and from house to house, you don't have like relationships at home...it makes it really hard to make friends if you're going from school to school and you're showing up in the middle of the year and everybody has friends. There's no way to make friends because you're going to leave again...so there's no way to easily make friends, and there's no programs for that. (Focus Groups)*

*We had programs at our school but none for kids in foster care. We had programs for everything else...just none [for] the CFS system. They [children in care] could go to the other groups but there was not a specific group just for them. (Focus Groups)*

On the other hand, focus group participants' comments also suggested that school staff members' assumptions and misunderstandings about the types of supports and programming necessary for children and youth in care directly affected the children's level of comfort and success. Focus group participants stated that they felt torn between receiving social-emotional supports and feeling more vulnerable, as their in-care status could become public.

*When I first started the program, I was really surprised because I didn't expect them to have anything like that [a special program] for kids in care, but then when I first went...I didn't like it very much 'cause then everybody knew that I was in care...and I didn't want that attention and didn't want to be known as...like that [being in care]. (Focus Groups)*

*...it's really hard to go to school and say...everybody in care can go to this group...you want to make friends for everybody, but it's really hard to be included if you're just bouncing around. You're not included in anything but it's also hard...you don't want to be like that weird person that's in care either...so a program for just kids in care doesn't really help either. (Focus Groups)*

The most striking aspect of focus group participants' comments was the fact that they believed that their misunderstood, and unsupported complex social-emotional needs and concerns were both the underlying and overwhelming reason why they did not succeed in schools.

### **Successful Supports and Programming: The Impact of Positive Relationships**

Although focus group participants had an overall negative perception of their in-care/in-school experience, they shared a number of comments that demonstrated their understanding of positive interventions and supports at the school level. These comments indicated that the need for attachment and healthy relationships was a significant central theme for all focus group participants and that positive relationships had the greatest impact on the success of children in care.

*The principal there...We had a really good connection. I was skipping classes a lot...I had a lot of depression...and a lot of difficulties and things at home, and one day they sent [principal name redacted] to come and find me, and he knew where to come find me. He knew I was skipping, and he came and talked to me... You know I can see that things aren't going so well. What's going on?...I told him...I just don't feel like being [here]...I had that attitude, I'm so indifferent...He didn't even look at that...but for me that was the first real connection I had...and it's almost making me teary right now because he did a lot for me. The first person to ever look at me and actually care. I just remember that...it's actually good to remember it. Just to have the school principal take personal interest.*  
(Focus Groups)

*I have a good relationship with my vice principal, because he was the person who took me to all my classes...who met me on my first day...assigned me to my classes and he remembers my name...and every time he sees me in the hall, he greets me. [a different participant adds] I can second her saying...just knowing your student personally...even if they're not your student...just knowing them and encouraging them every now and then.*  
(Focus Groups)

Focus group participants also recalled conversations that were seen as turning points or pivotal moments for their social-emotional and self-advocacy growth.

*I had a librarian I really liked...who really understood me...but she couldn't be there all the time. One day she pulled me in the office and she said...you're stronger than*

*this...what's wrong with you...She says...I know you don't got a lot going on right, but you got a lot of stuff, and you've been through a lot, and you're just a little kid...you're better than them because you have more experience than them...and you're smarter than them and...it stuck...just one conversation...(Focus Groups)*

*An interaction I've had is with my graduate coach...Shirley...she said...she wasn't scolding me...she definitely wasn't pushing fear into my head...if you don't come to school, then you're not gonna graduate...you're gonna become homeless...you're gonna have job working at some thrift store for 30 years or so...No...she just told me what I could do then and not worry about the past...because that's the past and she said...what I like about you the most is that you guys keep coming back...other students might give up...but you guys just keep coming back...so that interaction with a person at school has definitely lifted my spirits. (Focus Groups)*

*We were talking earlier about teachers we could trust...the teacher for the adapted English was...is now still one of my most trusted confidants...a person that I speak to if I have something going on...and that helped that I had someone to talk to. High school was hard for me. (Focus Groups)*

*I think that when it comes to the vice principal and principal...you guys are more of the observers, 'cause you're not in the heat of it all...you're not on the sidelines...you guys have to report kids but you're there...so you guys can actually see the interaction as you guys stand in the hallway and look. That's how I remember it. I think it was through that...the principal that I had...saw some things and was like...Ok this one...when I think about it we all have our inner child right, and I think he catered to that part of me...I think maybe he knew that I'd never got to experience this...so if you're able to stroke that side...that's what brought out that goodness in me...that made me feel good. (Focus Groups)*

Although a few participants mentioned specific academic supports they found helpful, the supports were always mentioned in conjunction with a trusting supportive relationship, where someone listened, took the time or noticed something.

*I was talking about the adapted English program that I had not known about, and it was very nice to have that because I have a panic disorder and it was very nice to actually leave the class when I was having a panic attack, because they could come at any moment for no reason at all, and before I was in it...I would try and tell the teacher I need to leave the class...so that was a very big problem for me until I got into the adapted courses, and I was finally able to...if an attack did come actually leave the class. (Focus Groups)*

*They [supportive teachers in the school] give me tools to help me do it...so they didn't have to necessarily be beside me and go...Ok this is how you do it. Now you do it on your work. So it [only] looks like you did it [on your own] kinda thing...Ok well maybe you should do this first and then you figure out this. (Focus Groups)*

### Suggestions for the Future

The most enthusiastic commentary came from focus group participants when they felt they were affecting the lives and experiences of children in care who are still in the CFS and school systems today. The majority of their suggestions were not at all related to processes, physical resources, or systemic policies. Instead, they felt that the most important areas of focus going forward should be sharing detailed information about the lives of children in care with staff members, ensuring stable and healthy relationships, as well as including the voices of children in care through choice and collaboration.

**Educate all staff on the in-care experience.** Focus group participants' suggest that all stakeholders in the education community, but especially principals, vice principals and teachers, should know more about and better understand the lives of children in care.

*It's that positive interaction [with staff] and it's the awareness that [they have about] the circumstances of being in care...the child didn't ask for that...especially in the elementary school and the middle school. (Focus Groups)*

*I think that people in the education system need to be educated on what it's like to be in this position...whether that comes from people who have gone through it themselves or whether that comes from the system itself...for them to understand not to label us and not to mistreat us, they have to understand why we don't like it and why it's not right. (Focus Groups)*

*I know the EA course now actually does offer...I think it's like a month training...how to deal with kids who are growing up in CFS...but if they're now starting to offer that in the TA course, they should offer that to everyone...I believe everybody should be educated on CFS...instead of just assuming, because that's where the assuming part comes from...you know they're not educated on it or they choose to ignore it...so I feel like there needs to be that education...they need to know...you know this is going on...this isn't something you can ignore...especially in Manitoba. (Focus Groups)*

**Make relationships a priority.** All focus group participants suggested that learning about healthy relationships was a main concern for children in care. Participants' comments indicate that the majority of the CFS experience made it difficult to build and maintain relationships, including with educators. Their suggestion was that educators

should develop relationships with children in care in schools with intentional goals to develop success, inclusion and feelings of belonging.

*I'm gonna love the heart [should be the goal]. I think that's the thing with the schools. I think the teachers really need to be...not biased at all...I'm not saying they should favour the ones who have difficulties but make more of an effort to be like...Hey, I see that you might be struggling...is there anything you need help with? (Focus Groups)*

*Just to have someone...here's your welcoming person...just someone who can be like...Ok, I get it...first days...first weeks is hard. Anything you need a hand with...right now you might be feeling this...I have a connection with this one person...and then you always have that go-to person...and to have that I think is really necessary...things don't seem that heavy anymore, because you know you have someone to bounce stuff off...now I can focus on what needs to be focused on....someone that you can look up to...Hey, I trust this person...this person can help me...this one can help me figure out my issues with school...not be your therapist, but school stuff right. (Focus Groups)*

*Even when you go to a new school, or you go somewhere else...you're gonna have these fears... but if there was someone who did that welcoming thing and then went...hey you might be feeling anxious, you might be feeling this...here's some ways that we can help you get through this...just to know that when you're there, you're immediately supported. You're not like...Oh my god I don't know anyone...I'm just gonna wait for the teacher to come. (Focus Groups)*

*To be honest, the teacher could be shut down...4, 5, 6 times...but eventually when we see that the teacher kinda cares...you know what...I think I'll give it a shot...maybe I'll open up a bit, because you're kind of trusting him now because you shut him down how many times and yet they're still coming back to give you a hand. That right there is what would really help. I think that's what would have helped me...(Focus Groups)*

*Remember the kids name every day...Hey, have yourself a great day today...Ok I hope you had a good evening...I hope you do well...Just something that shows that...Hey, I'm not just a head in the crowd...They know my name...that's pretty good, and it doesn't even have to be for being a bad kid...it's just because you took the time to know their name...Hi. I'm the vice principal. Hi I'm the principal. I don't think I've ever formally met you...I think right there it gives a little bit of a sense of belonging...Then you wouldn't just look at the vice principal and principal as authority...It's like oh no...They're not as scary anymore...It's just so that there's more belonging I guess. (Focus Groups)*

**Include student voice to develop school-based resources.** Comments about creating specific programs and bringing resources into the school all centred around adding the voices of children in care. Although the potential for stigma was still a concern with being identified as in care in a public school, both former children in care, as well as

children still in the care system were cited as legitimate sources of information by this group of participants.

*I think...VOICES [the community organization hosting the focus groups]...we all come here and we all work for the same purpose but if we had mini-versions of VOICES at the schools, where the kids could go and then they could do the same kind of thing that we do here...but work towards things they want in the school...so that they could all go forward to the principal or...meet every couple months or something to give their opinion...so that their voices are being heard...but as a group...(Focus Groups)*

*Really help students advocate for themselves. [General agreement] If there's gonna be a program for the students...let them be a part of that...of the construction of it...of the development. (Focus Groups)*

*Collaborate with the student to build whatever program or whatever that student might need...They need to be directly involved...for them to be passionate about it...otherwise it's just gonna be a program that's there for them and they're not gonna feel connected to it. (Focus Groups)*

Several participants felt that this lack of student voice could be rectified if principals and vice principals stopped to consult with children in care about intended programming ideas.

*If the principal or vice principal sits down with the kid going...Ok what do you need from us?...What can we help you with to get to your goal?...Instead of assuming we know what we're doing or that we have somebody there...and from there they can decide if there should be a program or not if a lot of the kids have the same concerns or same wants...they can put a group together...and be like...Ok you guys all said that you guys needed this, so let's try to make that happen, and...give us that opportunity to be. (Focus Groups)*

*Instead of assuming we know what we're doing or that we have somebody there...and from there they [principal and vice principal] can decide if there should be a program or not, if a lot of the kids have the same concerns, or same wants...they can put a group together...and be like...Ok you guys all said that you guys needed this, so let's try to make that happen...give us that opportunity to be normal. (Focus Groups)*

**Centralized school for children in care.** After specifically focusing on strategies to banish assumptions and stigma, several focus group participants suggested the idea of a centralized school for children in care in Winnipeg. This was also supported by one of the principal participants, who saw it as an opportunity to centralize resources from different



departments and agencies, such as CFS, health care, and justice. His vision identified a school for children in care as a haven where every process, policy and practice would be based on the needs of this group of children. His comment is included here because it mirrors the opportunities mentioned in responses forwarded by the former youth in care focus group participants that follow.

*All the systems work independent of each other for the most part...so I've often pitched the idea to other people about a school downtown for kids in care that have been moved more than 6 times, or have been in more than 6 schools[...]research would say they're not gonna connect...and if it's downtown it doesn't matter which house you get moved to or what part of the city. It's the same teachers. It's the same staff. Kids are often in and out of the Youth Centre, so you could have probation officers connected to that school, who double as EA's [educational assistant] in a classroom. Instead of having one kid with a respite worker...you can hire two respite workers for 20 kids and be playing ball hockey from 4 o'clock until 6 o'clock, before the foster parents come to pick them up. So it becomes a hub of all those things...social workers could work out of there, so when the school is having a parent teacher interview night...the social worker is there, the foster parents come in, and...it can happen. Pretty easy for a probation officer to stand at the front of the school say good morning to all the kids...check, check, check, check, check...they're all at school...they're all doing what they're supposed to, and at lunch I'm going to be at lunch playing with you guys. And so foster those really nice relationships when you play with kids and they see you in a different light. So that would be my ideal goal...for the province to recognize that these are the throw-away kids that no one wants...that if we can all work together then I think we can make a big difference for these kids... (Murray)*

Focus group participants also did not see a centralized school for children in care as a holding area, but rather envisioned it as a voluntary opportunity to claim their collective histories and experiences as legitimate, while also receiving specialized services, counselling and programming.

*I think that if you made it [centralized school] an option or a choice...I think that it would open up a lot more opportunity...and I think that the media would change from the negative to the positive...this would be something to celebrate...this would be something that's successful...because you know the numbers of youth in care...and it's really sad and it's our right to have education and a lot of us are not continuing education for whatever barriers, but if you made a safe haven for us...something that we can go and learn and flourish and become the best potential. (Focus Groups)*

*I think if you were to make a school that was all about...[the] child in care...that would*

*actually work and could be part of the care community...they're actually all CFS...you're not going to offend anybody...but they could have a course that they take that would teach you about emotional regulation...distress tolerance...just learning about vulnerability...shame...just all these different aspects that would really help us develop as a person...and integrity...with values and morals...to help us build that core foundation.*  
(Focus Groups)

*I would make a school for children in care...well I think that you gotta be with your people [agreement from others]. No but seriously...why is being a foster kid so negative? Why shouldn't we be with our people...that's where I feel the most comfortable...I think that's what this network [Voices] has done for me...and I formed some life-long bonds here at the network. I think that we all learn off each other...we all share our experiences...we're all here for the same reason and...you have these specialized group homes...you have these levels [of group homes to support varying levels of needs]...well why not just make a school where we belong, because it's really hard right now.* (Focus Groups)

### **Chapter Summary**

To provide a rich description, Chapter 5 used comments from principals, vice principals, and focus groups, along with information from guiding documents. Although the four sub-questions are examined independently, this format allows participants' detailed and rich experiences to begin to describe the case context. Chapter 6 will connect the themes outlined in Chapter 5 to the study's research questions. It will also delve more deeply into their analysis and implications to show how the themes were generated through the use of the conceptual framework.

## CHAPTER 6: INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

This study's literature review demonstrates a significant gap in the academic literature concerning inclusive processes and practices utilized by successful educational leaders to support children in care in schools. In Manitoba, the educational and general life outcomes of children and youth in care, particularly Indigenous youth in care, are an important policy topic in two recent government sponsored reports (Brownell et al., 2015; Christensen & Lamoureux 2016). Yet, there continues to be a scarcity of relevant academic, policy, and grey literatures to support educational leaders working in schools with students in care. As indicated earlier, the purpose of this exploratory study was to identify and better understand the processes and practices used by inclusive school principals and vice principals who are successful advancing social justice outcomes for children in care attending Winnipeg's K-12 public schools.

The previous chapter offered a rich description of the study's findings based on triangulated data from interviews with inclusive principal and vice principal participants, focus group discussions as well as document analysis organized according to three meta-themes that emerged from the analysis. This chapter provides interpretation and discussion of the key findings and implications for academic, policy, and practice communities. I start this chapter by returning to my conceptual framework commenting on the framework's conceptual utility. Next, I address both academic and policy findings as they relate to this study's four main research questions. Finally, I comment on the study's methodological functionality and effectiveness as it may be considered relevant for similarly structured research. All of these findings are situated in the existing and relevant academic and policy literatures – confirming and challenging existing claims and advancing new knowledge to help fill existing knowledge gaps.

### **Theoretical Insights: The Relationship Between Inclusive Processes and Practices**

In order to frame this discussion, it is important to draw on the operational definitions set out in the conceptual framework. The two main concepts, social justice outcomes and inclusive educational leadership, are terms used extensively in the academic educational literature and, expectedly, are contested terms having multiple, sometimes conflicting, definitions. For the purpose of this study, Ryan (2006b, 2013) frames social justice outcomes as being comprised of rights, fair treatment and wellbeing. In practical terms, the literature in this area of the field situates social justice as the (re)distribution of tangible resource (e.g., food, shelter, water), along with the (re)distribution of a multitude of intangible benefits (e.g., access to healthcare and democratic process, opportunity for self-advocacy) for groups in society that are (un)intentionally marginalized (Nussbaum 2002, 2003, 2004; Ryan, 2006b; Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Tutters, 2014, Shields, 2004). The inclusive educational leader, then, focuses on the layered and cumulative effects of improving academic, social-emotional and behavioural outcomes for children in care (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). This was confirmed by participants in this study; social justice represented both tangible elements (e.g., higher report card grades, graduation certificates), as well as intangible elements (e.g., soft skills such as problem solving and critical thinking skills, opportunities to develop trusting relationships), equitable access to resources (e.g., support from trauma-informed staff), opportunities (e.g., access to individualized differentiated courses and schedules), and success in education and beyond.

Ainscow (2005), Ryan (2006b), Shields (2013) and Theoharis (2007) define the second concept, inclusive educational leadership, as work that develops or shapes school-based processes and practices so that a wider range of successes, needs, and goals for

underserved students become visible and actionable in the education context. Participants in this study, chosen for demonstrating an inclusive education leadership mindset, understood that children with in-care experiences encounter challenges and barriers in education. As a result, they worked to adapt the system, so it would better meet the needs of children in care. Adaptations in the system were enacted through processes and practices that addressed the redistribution and enhancement of the above-mentioned social justice elements in schools.

As indicated in the conceptual framework, scholars in the academic literature and practitioners in the field used the terms process and practice interchangeably. For reasons explained in the conceptual framework, these two concepts are seen as interrelated but distinct. Working with two different concepts while cognizant of a key underlying assumption of the study to not impose my power (even definitional) on the participants and to co-create knowledge, I balanced this potential tension by introducing the study's operational definitions in the introductory literature, and also individually to participants prior to the start of each participants' interview session. Participants indicated their understanding of the separate definitions, but during the interviews, principals and vice principals in this study regularly did not differentiate between processes and practices in their description of the strategies that they used to support children in care. The conceptual framework became an essential tool to help support my ability to differentiate and describe processes and practices during the analysis phase. In the end, distinguishing the two concepts resulted in information and patterns that confirmed the utility of the conceptual framework. For example, one participant described both a process and practice in her comment here:

*[An example of a process] I think the biggest thing that can help children who are in care appear in a good way in schools is...first and foremost to understand their life circumstances...so the [professional development] work that we've done...for example Voices...We've had Voices come in to our school twice now...they've worked with us divisionally as well, as administrators...but just the work with Voices and having those stories come forward from adults who were in care...those stories help our teachers to really understand...what is the life of a child in care.*

*We've been looking at inclusive practices...including bio families whenever there are concerts...conference times...we did a two night drum making workshop where we made sure we're inviting all...saying to social workers and foster families...If it's appropriate invite any family member that the child is connected to... ..if it's an auntie...if it's a grandma...bio siblings could come to their concerts...so that we're not just always talking about foster parents...because these children have real families...biological families...and that you acknowledge that as a regular part of their life. (Amelia)*

As indicated in the conceptual framework, this participant's comments clearly differentiate between processes and practices. In the first comment, more formal steps underscored by inclusive intentions develop collaborative social justice goals (i.e., in this case leading to a process of planning for staff professional development to improve staff members' understanding of what it means to be a child in care). The second comment reflects an inclusive practice as outlined in the conceptual framework. Here the inclusive educational leader uses informal social interactions and discussions to develop the empathetic environment necessary to destigmatize and include marginalized groups (i.e., inviting biological family members to join school events). Even if she did not label the process, her more prescribed wording mentions intentional planning for professional development. It conveys more formal steps, as she used the term "work" three times to connect the process to her professional context and obligation. For the inclusive practice example, she used less definitive and formal phrases, "we've been looking at" and "if it's appropriate", to describe the inclusive practice, and appeared to concede some of the choice and power around its existence into the hands of the social workers and foster families. Her example effectively draws the connection between inclusive educational

leaders' work around processes and practices and confirms the work of Ainscow and Sandill (2010), Hoppey and McLeskey's (2013), Theoharis (2007), and Wenger (2010) used to develop the conceptual framework. The findings from this study also add to the literature, as processes and practices scaffold the day-to-day actions and interactions of all educational leaders. By framing the distinction between processes and practices here, and nuancing the interplay that takes place between them, it becomes clear that inclusive educational leaders need and use inclusive processes strategically to plan and execute their goals, and they use inclusive practices to socially engage, elaborate, and operationalize processes using contextually specific strategies.

**Research Sub-Question 1: Which responsibilities and educational goals are outlined in provincial and district documents to guide school leaders in addressing intended outcomes for Manitoba's children in care?**

Although Manitoba's inclusive educational leaders' professional role characterization is framed by provincial government documents, this role is enacted by school leaders who draw from their personal experiences and moral dissonance created by conflicting events in their day-to-day work context.

**The influence of government documents on role characterization.** To foster more inclusive, socially just outcomes in education for children in care, the Manitoba government developed the *Child and Family Services Act (CFS Act)* (2018), the *Education and Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care (Protocol)* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013), and the *Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care Support Resources Companion Document (Companion Document)* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013b).

The *Protocol*, and the *Companion Document* represent the manifestation of agreed

upon responsibilities that CFS and the Department of Education developed to better serve children in care in the province. Participants did not feel that the professional responsibilities outlined by these documents fully engaged and aligned with their own feelings of moral responsibility, or their day-to-day reality, as they tried to support the needs of children in care.

Participants in this study did not know enough about the lives of children in care, or how to respond to information they learned, in order to bring the guiding principles that underlie the *Protocol* and *Companion Document* to life. Principal and vice principal participants made references to indicate that they were aware of the government documents, and their place in helping to develop consistency in educational leadership roles to assist and advocate for children in care in schools. Principals and vice principals did not initially understand the impact that frequent home and school transitions had on the children's academic, and social-emotional well-being, and were therefore unable to translate these suggestions into actionable changes until they acquired that knowledge. Topics such as collaborative short and long-term planning for students or measuring success, which are mentioned as important in the relevant literature and two main government documents (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013b; Stoddart, 2012; Wang, 2015), were not mentioned by participants as being described in detail in the government documents. Instead, participants focused on the information they were missing about the lives of children in care (e.g., how to navigate connections with group home staff, how to effectively gather information about children's needs from social workers). A lack of background information about planning and program implementation strategies added to participants' diverse individual professional role conception that resulted in inconsistent development



of supports and inappropriate pairing of processes and practices to support children in care. Instead of using the *Protocol* and *Companion Document's* process guidelines and elaborating these through locally developed practices, participants' planning and responding to the needs of children in care was often delayed, fragmented, ineffectual and, most concerning, at times inappropriate.

Similar to findings in the ATA & CAP (2014), participants confirmed an imbalance in privilege and power between students who demonstrate social, cultural and economic security and stability, and others who are situated as more isolated and underserved in previous research (Brownell et al., 2015). Like their counterparts in the ATA and CAP (2014) study, participants indicated that complex student needs were overwhelming schools, with educators trying to fulfill roles they were not trained to fill (Manitoba Government, 2014). More specifically, children in care added new and more complex layers to planning and programming at school, which involved related government departments, such as CFS, healthcare, and youth justice. Participants in this study freely acknowledged that they had a major gap in personal knowledge and understanding in how these government organizations functioned and what it meant to be a child in care, both essential to fulfill their role. Similar to Wang's (2018) findings, educational leaders were adamant that the situation needed to change, and that their 'moral compass' compelled them to advocate and lead these changes. This was confirmed by participants when they personalized their roles and acquired additional information about the lives of children in care to flesh out the guidelines listed in the *Protocol* and *Companion Document*. This role elaboration led participants to actively locate and examine evidence from a variety of sources (e.g., government reports, academic literature, gray literature, and community organizations), developed around the general

and educational outcomes of children in care. Given the variability in participants' experiences and training, it is not surprising that educational leaders do not, at this time have a common, coordinated approach to the recommendations Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) see as necessary in the education of children in care.

Government documents provide process guidelines that outline collaborative process opportunities for interorganizational planning. However, at this time, inclusive educational leaders are working to supplement their knowledge and understanding of the academic and social-emotional needs of children in care in order to develop appropriate programming for them. This led to inconsistencies in supports and programming. Right now, educational leaders are trying to negotiate the tension between their professional role as the school leader who is responsible for the success of all students in the school and improving educational outcomes for a group of students whose needs are not readily visible in the operation of the school. Educational leaders in Manitoba need to receive relevant and consistent information about children in care. This could best be accomplished when government documents such as the *Protocol* and *Companion Document* are purposefully supplemented with first-hand information from groups such as Voices.

**Other factors affecting role characterization.** Carpenter and Brewer (2014) indicate that school leaders are legally positioned to implement provincial and district plans. In this work, participants indicated that they experience on going moral conflict, as they try to manage the responsibility to advocate and intervene for members of their school communities in situations that require them to translate or even circumvent the very policies they are mandated to uphold. Educational leaders across Canada in the ATA and CAP (2014) study also experienced factors that created dissonance in participants'

role characterization and ability to advocate for children in care. The factors that make this work more difficult for participants included the additional challenges that came with supporting a growing number of children in care in their schools. As was indicated by participants, schools are the focus of accountability measures related to continuous improvement and budgetary constraints, and the educational leaders who lead them experienced increasingly complex managerial, social and financial situations (ATA & CAP, 2014; Jaafar & Anderson, 2007; Pollock & Hauseman, 2016). One of the side effects mentioned in the academic literature was that educational leaders found it difficult to maintain a focus on social justice goals, because their work becomes more disconnected and disengaged from working with students and teachers (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014, Ryan, (2007). This work was more challenging for participants for several reasons. Those who worked alone in smaller schools or in a more strictly defined position as a vice principal experienced restrictions in their ability to advocate due to a growing list of day-to-day managerial tasks (e.g., staff supervision, data analysis, and professional obligations such as teaching assignments), and the needs/demands of other groups in the school (e.g., newcomers to Canada, differently abled students). In larger schools where different tasks and duties were further subdivided based on managerial leadership responsibilities (e.g., budgeting, student support services, timetabling) and professional instructional responsibilities, participants' work was even more siloed, as information about and interactions with entire populations were often segregated by grades. In effect, participants' interactions with students were often limited to their assigned cohort grade. Prior research studies previously demonstrated that this lack of connection with the whole-school perspective adversely affects the amount and type of advocacy work that

principals and vice principals can do (Apple, 2001; Hill, 2004; Hursh, 2000, 2016; Pinto, 2015).

Connected to this role isolation, previous research studies outline the effectiveness of navigating advocacy work through interpretation, translation and circumvention of policy implementation that inclusive educational leaders see as restrictive or disconnected from their social justice goals (ATA & CAP, 2014; Ball, 2015; Hursh, 2016; Pinto, 2015; Ryan, 2007; Wang, 2018). Rather than allowing the above-mentioned restrictions (e.g., additional administrative meetings and budgetary restrictions) to sideline the advocacy component of their professional roles and responsibilities for children in care, participants chose to intentionally act as inclusive educational leaders and to develop their combined professional and moral role characterization.

Even though study findings demonstrated a considerable gap in knowledge about what children in care need in schools, along with professional isolation constructed by a growing number of responsibilities, reports, and instructional tasks that underlie the day-to-day functioning of a school, participants wanted to support children and youth in care appropriately and with respect. At this point participants do not have the information and training to meet all of the academic, cultural, and, social-emotional needs of the children. As part of their training, professional development, and role characterization all principals and vice principals require consistent and detailed background information from district or provincial sources about what it means to be a child in care.

**Research Sub-Question 2: What challenges/barriers do these inclusive school principals and vice principals face while trying to promote social justice outcomes for children in care?**

The most notable challenges described by participants in their work to improve

social justice outcomes for children in care related to the inconsistency in supports and programming. Misaligned and misinterpreted education and CFS policies saw children in care affected by delayed registration, inconsistent transportation, and inappropriate academic supports due to missing or inadequate sharing of information, as well as a lack of interagency collaboration. This finding supports similar evidence from Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) and Rutman and Hubberstey's (2016) previous research.

Although many education leaders working in K-12 schools focus on the day-to-day challenges of inclusion for their growing diverse population of students, Rottman (2007) and Ryan (2006b, 2014) indicate that the education system itself presents as a barrier to working with organizations outside of education, because of its hierarchical construction. As was previously mentioned, principal positions in schools are operationally and systemically situated as leadership positions based on embedded power conferred through the Manitoba Education Administration Act (CCSM c E10) and the Public Schools Act (CCSM c P250). This fact also became apparent to study participants, as they negotiated challenges beyond the education system, involving outside organizations that supported children in care, including CFS, the justice system and the healthcare system. Ensuring that everyone had the same information and the same priorities led to frustration, even though government policies like the *Protocol* and *Companion Document* mandate an interorganizational collaborative approach to support children in care. However, many of the individuals working with children in care worked outside of the school and education system and were therefore not subject to the same operational goals, guidelines, and power structure. The academic literature specific to how inclusive educational leaders negotiate the power balance, communication and collaboration across organization boundaries outside of education to support children in

care is scant.

**Interorganizational connection and collaboration.** The CFS support framework, developed to scaffold the needs of children and youth in care, includes a combination of foster or group home living arrangements, mental and physical healthcare professionals, youth justice supports and social worker supervision. This support framework is organized to approximate a nuclear family dynamic and guardianship that children not in contact with the in-care system would generally experience in more traditional family settings. The best intentions of organizational professionals were not enough to overcome the process and policy constraints that were the result of each organization's individualized mandate designed for children in care. Social workers are concerned with organizing the details associated with a child's in care guardianship, doctors/therapists are concerned with physical/mental health, foster parents are concerned with day-to-day support, behaviour, and health issues at home, and group home personnel is concerned with daily routines such as drop-off and pick-up from school. Each group's individual priorities and pressures often made it difficult for members to connect, collaborate, and reach out to the school to make time to integrate and align different group priorities. Participants in this study felt that an interorganizational locus or position was missing. The lack of a coordinated approach to measure, track, and implement the needs, successes and supports that affect children in care in Manitoba represented an important challenge to the children's success. Reutman and Hubberstey (2016) also outline this concern in their work with participants in British Columbia and Ontario. Similar to their findings, a provincially structured and implemented role/group is needed in order to encourage consistent and meaningful inter-agency collaboration and represents a central repository for tracking and sharing information.

Many of the partners involved with supporting children in care have different priorities, and the resultant complex relationships with different actors, guidelines, timelines and resources are difficult to encompass and maintain (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2016). In their report, Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) caution that, "...organizational bureaucracy and differing cultures among systems can create barriers that interfere significantly with the child's education" (p. 20). These cross-system concerns are mirrored in similar provincial situations in British Columbia and Ontario found in the academic literature (ATA & CAP, 2014; Roos et al., 2010; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). In this study, specific challenges, such as a lack of information about student needs and coordination around individual organizational mandates (e.g., who is responsible for day to day care, legal aspects and financial aspects), as well as growing accountability measures (e.g., paperwork/reports, understaffing, staff inexperience, staff turnover, and inflexible policies) were also evident across multiple systems in contact with children in care. Participants noted that organizational realities for CFS in Manitoba, like frequent youth/child home transitions, and unpredictable unstable transitions out of the CFS system for youth, made it extremely difficult to navigate their work with children in care, and mirrored those found in the academic and policy literature (Brownell et al., 2015; Burnside, 2012; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). As a result, the unpredictable and unresponsive structure of foster care systems made it difficult for educational leaders to understand, communicate, and collaborate with organizations and agencies in the foster care system, and hence made it more difficult for children in care to thrive in schools (Brownell et al., 2015; Burnside, 2012; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). Frequent foster family transitions, group home staff transitions, or shift-changes, problematized concerns for educational leaders around responsibilities,

role assignment and communication.

Findings from this study specifically noted delays in the forwarding of school and/or health records, as well as unclear expectations regarding procedures for enrollment. Furthermore, missing social history or lagging registration information often resulted in a lack of programming or inappropriate programming, where youth in care, peers, and/or staff members were exposed to potential physical and/or emotional harm that could have been avoided or mitigated (i.e., when students with potential to do physical harm or who struggle with suicidal ideation are not identified). Rutman & Hubberstey (2016, 2018) add that registration time delays and personal/programming information gaps also represent significant obstacles connected to the education of children in care, which overtime lead to gaps in academic and social-emotional competencies. When viewed on a case by case basis, delays and gaps in information and registration were at times rationalized by social workers and may not appear as significant social justice barriers. Yet, if the effects of these delays and gaps on a child are considered through a cumulative lens, the full impact becomes more visible in the children's academic, social-emotional and behavioural profiles.

Christensen and Lamoureux (2016), as well as Rutman and Hubberstey (2016) point out the challenges of interagency collaboration and the complex nature of extension to care agreements that provide funding for youth in care beyond the age of 18. This is particularly relevant when the agreements potential, for extended housing security and funding for education for the youth beyond age 18, is placed alongside extremely low graduation rates of only 33 % for Manitoba's children in care, compared to 89% of peers who are not in contact with the in-care (Brownell et al., 2015; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). The accounts of participants working at the high school level confirmed the urgent



concerns that accompany the CFS policy of aging out at 18. Considerations connected to the data from this study are two-fold. First educational leaders are unfamiliar with and disconnected from the CFS aging-out process and the value of the associated Extension of Care Agreements. This agreement can fund the education and maintenance of children in care after age 18. It is mentioned here as a concern because schools and educational leaders in this study demonstrated that they are connected with and knowledgeable about a wide variety of programs that could be made available to support the successful transition from high school to education and life after high school for children in care. Without close interagency collaboration, educational leaders will not be aware of the potential of the Extension of Care Agreement, and social workers will not be aware of additional opportunities available to the youth in their care.

When compared to the recommendations around tracking the success of children in care outlined in the Child and Family Services Standards Manual (Manitoba CFS, 2017), an additional concern seems to be that there are no provincially integrated checks and balances that connect CFS with Manitoba public schools during this process. Collaborative meetings and conversations with the youth should include both education and CFS staff members to outline potential options for education beyond high school to ensure that the youth in care have a more fulsome understanding of available resources. The process of potentially extending care involves future-planning and identification of possible opportunities for education and training for children in care. Only one participant mentioned significant experience in this area. She indicated that the sometimes contentious process between the education and CFS systems, would benefit from additional interagency support in the form of information and resource sharing, as well as joint planning with the children in care to make future planning more effective for the

youth; a recommendation echoed by participants in the work of Rutman and Hubberstey (2016). The compelling evidence in previous research, along with similar experiences shared by high school participants in this study, increases the importance of including the potentially positive impact of extension to care agreements here.

Not mentioned in other research were the challenges to educational support encountered by participants, the result of the increasingly commercialized context that characterizes foster and group homes. The distinctive challenges that were introduced include: i) trying to understand and navigate how the layers of privatized and financially incentivised management of foster/group homes works to best support children in care, ii) coupled with the inability to contact caregivers/group home workers when necessary, iii) the frustrating communication complications with social workers. Combined with the lack of understanding around the CFS Extension of Care agreement, and the lack of school involvement for the agreement's potential development, left participants in an unsustainable situation that encouraged them to look for ways to better connect and collaborate across organizational boundaries.

After documenting the interorganizational barriers and gaps in information that negatively impacted leaders' ability to educate children in care, it appeared that many of these areas overlapped. Busy schedules, and frequent transitions between different foster homes and/or different schools led to inexperienced and untried relationships between the children in care, school staff, foster parents and/or social workers. That in turn resulted in a lack of trust, information, and understanding about the academic and social-emotional needs of children in care, for the adults who were best positioned to act as their advocates. Recognizing the need to reach out beyond educational boundaries, participants began their interorganizational work to build trust, gather information, and co-construct a

common understanding and plan for children in care.

**Policies, processes, and practices in education.** Related to the education system, findings from this study indicate that the physical, emotional, cultural and academic spaces in schools are not designed, inventoried or staffed to adequately meet the needs of children in care (e.g., spaces that provide privacy and expert adult guidance to help youth in care to emotionally regulate, or flexible academic programming that supports the children's unpredictable life experiences and supports remedial skills acquisition). For example, findings from related research note that large physical spaces, unyielding time schedules, grade and course designations that segregate student groups benefit students whose families are invested in navigating this system, and do not honour the lived experiences or support the needs of Manitoba's children in care (Brownlee et al., 2010; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Neiheiser, 2015; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

Participants also indicated that many of the same resource shortages mentioned in the ATA & CAP (2014) study as relevant for schools across Canada affected other organizations supporting children in care and were seen as catalysts for an inward-looking and at times reactive mindsets for these organizations, as well as schools. Competing priorities mentioned above make it difficult for principals and vice principals to redistribute resources (e.g., targeted staffing, financial funding) in an attempt to meet all the different needs in schools (ATA & CAP, 2014). This is also true for inclusive principals and vice principals trying to keep the educational needs of children in care at the forefront (Reutman and Hubberstey, 2016). Even after participants recognized the need for trauma-informed training for staff members, or additional funding for clinical support workers, and spaces that allow for programming specific to children in care, they were frustrated by the effects of tight budgets, restrictive timelines, and negative

assumptions held by staff and community members about children in care. Not working in a common context and not knowing the extent or impact of priorities and resource shortages across other organizations made communication, and collaboration with outside organizations difficult for inclusive principal and vice principal participants trying to span those boundaries.

Brownell et al. (2015), Christensen and Lamoureux (2016), as well as Rutman and Hubberstey (2016) identified the unique and concerning nature of the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in provincial care systems in Canada as a barrier. Based on a similar reality where almost 90% of children in care in Manitoba have an Indigenous ancestry, participants recognized the impact and interplay between historical trauma within Indigenous families compounded for children in care through the in-care experiences, as well as the existence of deficit-based assumptions and misinformation that coloured the mindset and actions of staff members and community members. Although participants identified the ultimate goal as reunification with biological families, educators in Manitoba must have a better understanding of the complex behaviours exhibited by children in care, which are often seen as indicative of negative character flaws or choices not evident in more traditionally parented peers in school. Relevant for all educators, beginning teachers could access this information at the university level, while veteran educators working in the field could receive the information through district-level professional development. Although some participants mentioned a district focus on the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action*, this was not a common theme. Confirming Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) and Rutman and Hubberstey's (2016) findings, participants expressed that the education system was not designed with the background knowledge and flexibility necessary to support the complex cultural,

social-emotional, and academic needs of children in care. For those children in care with an Indigenous heritage, Manitoba's public-school experience has the potential to create an additional tier of marginalization.

Mirrored against a growing list of accountability measures from the province and school districts, participants in this study questioned the absence of any common reporting responsibilities to ensure the success of children in care. Ainscow (2005) previously added that, "Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers. It involves collecting, collating and evaluating information from a wide variety of sources in order to plan for improvements in policy and practice" (p. 118). At this time, Manitoba's systems and policies for children in care work within school environments that do not support the specialized needs of children in care, and function without measuring and reviewing the distance to the goals we want to achieve for children in care in schools. It is not that inclusive educational leaders do not understand the need for valid and reliable supports and measures, but as of yet, these are not available, or being formally developed by the Ministry and used intentionally for children in care. As a result, rather than benefitting from the skills, knowledge, values and dispositions that should be the take-aways from the education system, educational leaders in this study acknowledged that children in care were further marginalized by the very experience that was developed to help them survive the trauma that brought them into care. Participants indicated that going forward, the need to use measures of success that go beyond standard academic reporting and graduation data would be important. For example, they felt that opportunities to track social and community connections for children in care is equally important. Tracking to better understand why children and youth in care are not successful and/or leave the education system before age 18 would also provide additional

insight into the education system's success.

**Research Sub-Question 3: What inclusive leadership processes and practices are school principals and vice principals using to advance social justice outcomes for children in care?**

Participants revealed that the relationships between children in care and any adults responsible for their education and/or well-being were often tenuous, short-lived, and based on critical events in the child's life. Also well documented in the academic literature across Canada and here in Manitoba (Brownell et al., 2015; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, 2018), this reality is additionally problematic for youth in care because research suggests that adult connections and close monitoring provides consistency for better tracking the success of children in care (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

**Developing opportunities for success for children in care through relationships.** Participants recognized the importance and value of prioritizing and building relationships with children in care first. Given the children's history of trauma and distress, participants indicated that forming trusting connections with this group of children was a priority that had to follow an intentional plan through formal and informal small groups, or individual programming, and connections. Once a connection was established, participants created further opportunities for the children and youth in care to make personal choices, achieve personal goals and develop chances for self-advocacy. Rutman and Hubberstey's (2016) research clearly indicates that the foundation of successful educational interventions for children in care are built on trusted adult relationships and developing students' personal skills to allow different entry points for the strengths and complex needs of children in care. Personal choices, individual

differentiated goals and self-advocacy are also important features in the academic and grey literature designated as signposts on the road to successful high school completion (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

By nurturing and strengthening multiple intentional connections between the child and important adults in the child's life (e.g., leaders themselves, teachers, mentors, counsellors, work experience mentors in the community), participants ensured that a shift or change in any one of these adult positions would not cause as much distress or disruption in the life-balance of the child. Brownell et al. (2015) admit that although they did not have access to relevant data, investigating the relationship between adult mentors and the success of children in care in schools could have important implications. In addition, when more people are involved in tracking academic, behavioural, and social-emotional success of a child, there are fewer opportunities for gaps to develop. For this purpose, principals and vice principals in this study used both formal processes (e.g., internal forms, review meetings) to gauge success in relationship building, as well as peer mentorship, as a more informal check-in with students. By also nurturing these intentional connections, participants ensured that the needs and successes of children and youth in care became visible through connection to adult mentors.

**Differentiating the system experience for children in care.** Participants worked intentionally to design environments in their schools that differentiated supports for students in care based on their individual needs. Christensen and Lamoureux (2016), as well as Rutman and Hubberstey (2016) indicate that differentiated environments provide

children in care with the structure and predictability of a school experience more in line with the experiences of children not in contact with the child welfare system.

The areas seen as most impactful by participants included creating stable and inclusive environments, focusing on the development of soft skills, and engaging small “r”adical influence within and across organizational boundaries (i.e., creating change down to the people, physical spaces, cultural experiences, academic material, and systems that come into contact with children in care). This strategic support has the power to change the education experience for students in care and was deemed as critical in other studies (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

***Creating stable and inclusive environments.*** Participants in this study recognized the benefits in changing and challenging their school's environment and practices around negative labels (e.g., connected to race, culture, demographics, gender etc.) and students' self-perception. Inclusive educational leaders, who supported student groups identified in this way, recognized the benefits of developing a more equitable education experience for these students, because they realized that the “markers of distinction” described by Ryan (2006b), such as culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and social/financial characteristics, to name a few, continue to lead to a divided, disparate education system. As a result, participants developed and adopted diverse processes and practices that fell into three interconnected areas. The three areas seen as most impactful included i) increased intensity and intentionality by responding quickly and appropriately to the individual, differentiated needs of children in care, ii) deliberately shaping physical, academic, social-emotional and cultural environments to become more inclusive, and iii)



identifying or developing markers of success that allow for critical reflection on the whole process.

*Responding more intentionally and intensely.* The research study clearly demonstrated that students who initially participate on the margin of school communities can thrive in stable and inclusive environment where their cultures are honoured, collaboration is a focus, they have opportunities to take risks, solve academic and social problems, and set goals. Participants in this study also demonstrated a wide variety of strategies to create stable and inclusive environments that were similar to examples from previous research, such as structured school intake steps, maintaining student connectedness with a variety of supportive adults (e.g., such as teachers, counsellors, educational assistants, resource teachers, mentors etc.) (Brownlee et al., 2010), redesigning organizational structures to support students' needs, and using a wide variety of data (e.g., attendance, report card data, office visits) to inform decisions (Ryan, 2006b). The differences between previous research and findings from this study lay in the fact that participants chose to get personally involved in creating these changes by deliberately seeking out and taking on the responsibilities connected to planning for and responding to the needs of children in care.

A second distinction from the previous literature was evidenced in the intensity and frequency with which participants pursued connections and information about children in care. This richer, more detailed data collection allowed for more accurate programming and support plans. Study participants transitioned from practices to processes, when a growing collection of data prompted the development of internal formal school processes (e.g., school-based intake forms for children in care, formal school meetings that intentionally initiated and tracked the development of trusted adult

relationships for children in care). The resultant processes collected increasingly more accurate data about children in care. Ainscow (2005) also notes that when educational leaders develop structured and documented processes that standardize more informal practices, students' data becomes more measurable, and student outcomes become more visible.

In another example, schools held intake meetings followed by informal academic and social check-ins for vulnerable students. Over time, this practice transformed to include a formal documented process that characterised and documented the diverse needs, successful strategies used for support, and successes of children in care in some schools. A specific illustration of this was an internally developed school-based form that enacted a formal timeline for the first three months at school and tracked the success of students connected to the care system. These meetings presented multiple opportunities to connect, share strategies and develop contextual priorities, and affirmed a key component for support in Christensen and Lamoureux's (2016) findings. This purposeful increase in the contact, collaboration and influence of cross-organizational teams was characterized by the team's ability to better gather data around students' success and to scrutinize the strategies being used to support specific children in care in their school. As educational leaders gain more experience and perspective in unfamiliar areas, they were better able to recognize problems, their associated patterns, the origin, and possible ways to a solution (Ryan, 2003). Although not all participants mentioned this trend, there does appear to be a connection between participants' level of experience with the lives and educational needs of children in care, and development of processes like the internally developed school-based documents used to gather data. There was little information in the existing academic literature around the transition of practices into processes, but the evidence

from this study suggests that there may be a continuum or progression as practices develop into processes when events in the school context bring pressure to bear or when an experienced educational leader has previously implemented the process. This topic recommends itself for additional research in the future.

*Deliberately shaping physical, emotional, cultural and academic spaces.* Study findings suggest that educational leaders understood that children in care transition into school already at a disadvantage compared to their peers not in contact with the care system, and display lower levels of trust, personal coping mechanisms and feelings of personal safety. Authors of both academic and policy literature agree that regardless of how children and youth transition into care, either through voluntary placement or apprehension, they lose touch with the familiar physical, emotional, and cultural spaces that connect them to their community and family (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Johnson, 2014; Neiheiser, 2015; Roos et al., 2006, 2010; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, 2018) As in previous research (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Neiheiser, 2012; Johnson, 2014), participants in this study used an individual approach model with children in care, along with the necessary design of individualized physical/emotional, cultural and academic spaces where the children and youth in care were comfortable and able to take advantage of the supports provided. Based on the fact that most of these children lived through multiple traumatic events, establishing a safe space at school where they could work on better managing any associated emotions was a priority for participants, and a procedure recommended by trauma-informed education models (Brownell et al., 2015; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Neiheiser, 2015; Johnson, 2014; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). Participants affirmed that the children had improved academic, behavioural and social-emotional

outcomes in dedicated spaces (e.g., , small groups in the learning support centre, a room in the middle of the school and not a portable, so they know they belong) with professional staff (e.g., learning support teachers, youth care workers) trained to respond to their emotional needs. Mirroring findings from Brownlee et al. (2010), both principals and vice principals in this study recognized that children and youth in care needed guidance, modelling, and the opportunity to practise physical and emotional self-regulation before they were able to apply it in diverse settings.

Participants also realized that the social-emotional impact of the in-care cycle repeated itself in successive generations and spilled over into the school system. In the past, provincial funding was designated to support the needs of a few specific students with one-on-one adult support workers. However, the new expanded and revised power of the new provincial block funding model has a more general exceptional needs programming mandate. In this case, a group of principals and vice principals planned to hire a shared clinical staff member (dedicated to their three or four schools) who was trained to understand and support the individual trauma-filled histories of children in care and their families from a therapeutic standpoint. This shift in funding allocation opened up an opportunity to raise the social-emotional equity playing field for all students and families affected by the trauma of the in-care experience.

More recently, researchers are focusing on the importance of providing cultural spaces, both physical and philosophical, for Indigenous children, and especially Indigenous children in care (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Johnson, 2014; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, 2018). Not only do authors describe the need for cultural groups, but also the importance of including integrated Indigenous perspectives that infuse things like mentorship, school policies and approaches to mental health, and counselling.

Participants in this study exhibited a range of understanding in this area. Those with little experience working with Indigenous culture or children in care recognized the need and implemented it through surface level integration of culture, in the form of posters, clubs and special events. Those participants with more experience, either with Indigenous children in care, or Indigenous culture in general, demonstrated a more fine-tuned perception of cultural integration. Their shift provided more subtle influence for the day-to-day experiences of children in care, e.g. changes in practice for attendance and discipline concerns, and process developments for cultural course offerings available to all students. Some participants also mentioned the on-going support and guidance offered in this area through the policies, staffing and professional development provided by their district. This larger and more detailed district support base gave these educational leaders more self-confidence when responding to pushback or problems and thus an advantage over their peers from other districts, who received less comprehensive guidance in this area.

The need for flexible academic programming takes on a new level of importance at the high school, where researchers indicate that school success and high school completion are directly influenced by individual goal setting, programming and opportunities for youth in care (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). When 30% of youth in care between 14 and 17 years of age with complex needs are not attending school (Burnside, 2012), there is much room for improvement in how high schools approach school retention for youth in care. High school principal and vice principal participants recognized this retention gap as a concern and located most of their efforts in this area, as they took the opportunity to individually tailor daily scheduling, academic programming, and social-emotional support. Some examples provided youth in

care with course schedules that allowed flexible attendance during the day and week, extra time to transition to school from a remote location, time to attend meetings with birth family members without missing course credit hours, opportunity to complete missing prerequisite credits, and to acquire and practise soft skills and social norms in small informal group learning environments that helped children in care to transition to expanded academic options.

*Identifying formal and informal markers of success.* Review of disaggregated data and common characteristics for students in care who were not successful in the education system helped high school participants in particular to facilitate the development of criteria to help improve levels of student retention and achievement for future youth in care. Offering a Manitoba-based perspective, Christensen and Lamoureux (2016) mention the importance of broader measurement of success for children in care in their recommendations and highlight that “well-being and related indicators of success... [should] be tracked among children in care and reported...” (p.12). This study found that participants used measures of success beyond academics to determine the well-being and growth for students in care. These measures included the ability to maintain peer relationships, regular connections with a mentor, as well as consistent attendance and engagement with the school culture through teams and/or clubs, as markers of success. Although they represented qualitative, often anecdotal data points, participants believed that these criteria helped to measure growth for children in care in the social-emotional and soft skills areas deemed critical for future success. Participants who worked with high school students considered these measures particularly important, as they saw the impact when youth in care transitioned successfully and unsuccessfully into life beyond CFS and the education system. Previous research also identifies that children and youth in care do

not fit into the highly structured education system container, and the methods and indicators of success used to measure their achievements and growth must go beyond the criteria presently used for children in care and their peers who are not in contact with the care system (Brownlee et al., 2010; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Johnson, 2014; Neiheiser, 2015; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

*Focus on the development of soft skills.* Viewing the situation of children in care through a strength-based lens, participants indicated that children in care could attain the same academic success as children who were not in contact with the care system. These views are highly consistent with previous findings established in the literature in several different provinces across Canada (Brownlee et al., 2010; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, 2018). Although all participants noted improved academic outcomes as one of their main social justice goals for children in care, study findings indicated that participants' work in schools through direct interactions with these students was often based on developing soft skills, normally seen as personal traits and interpersonal skills important for everyday life. Heckman and Kautz (2012) explain that:

...soft skills [are] personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences that are valued in the labor market, in school, and in many other domains. The larger message...is that soft skills predict success in life, that they produce that success, and that programs that enhance soft skills have an important place...(p.451).

As such, soft skills include both personality traits, which may be enhanced or adjusted, and interpersonal skills learned through interactions in the school and classroom, but historically not outlined as part of the formal curriculum.

Participants believed that children in care would develop resilience, problem solving skills, social integration, and self-confidence in new areas, through soft skills

development that would ultimately lead to more successful outcomes in school and later in life. Participants considered the implementation of soft skills development pivotal for children/youth in care to succeed at school and into the future. However, they revealed that members of this socially isolated and complex group of children often did not demonstrate that they understood how to use soft skills to negotiate the new and often unpredictable academic and social aspects of school life and events.

Yet, not at any point during the study, did participants mention a process or policy focus on soft skills. Rather, their focus on soft skills appeared again to be an intuitive development that was initiated and directly affected by participants' role characterization, as well as by their successful hands-on style for working with children and youth in care. This misalignment between what participants referenced in their hopes for children in care (i.e., better academic outcomes) and the actions they felt they first had to take (i.e., focus on soft skills) to support success for children in care was of considerable interest, and significant for two reasons: i) almost all participants focused on soft skills intuitively as a marker of success for children in care; and ii) this area is not widely referenced in the academic literature. An expanded investigation into this finding was not possible given the limited exploratory scope of this study but this area recommends itself for future investigation.

***(Small) “r”adical influence within and across organizational boundaries.***

Although the actions of inclusive educational leaders in this study were not militant or revolutionary from an extremist perspective, participants held deep-seated beliefs and used small, intentional, and at times covert actions to purposefully bring the barriers that children in care face in education to the attention of all stakeholders involved. Working within the socio-economic and political forces that were already rooted in the community,



participants recognized that all of these forces were at an interplay in the schools. Their “radical actions were based on the fact that they believed everyone involved with the children had their best intentions at heart, and yet change was required.

The understanding and need to differentiate students' environments were so strong for some participants that they opened themselves up to potential professional criticism and censure as they took steps to develop processes and practices to reshape education system borders for children in care. Evidence from Theoharis (2010), Wang (2018) and Williams' (2011) work recognizes the impact that unconventional policy translation can have for improving inclusion in schools. This was confirmed when participants used formal processes that directly affected children's opportunity to experience more personalized kinship care, and repurposed thousands of dollars in funds to create course credits outside of the high school's mandate in order to backfill academic experiences previously lost to the complexity of the in-care experience. More informal practices involved policy translation and covert refusal to comply with administrative/managerial priorities, as well as the use of discourse that challenged and pushed internal relationships at the district level and external relationships with outside organizations.

Both the *Protocol* and *Companion Document* emphasize the importance of interorganizational relationships to enhance and knit together supports available to children in care in their schools. Because of the informal relationship and power balance that exists between actors from different organizations, many strategies used by participants appeared to result in more covert, unannounced, and negotiated actions than ultimatums. Participants believed it was important to transition students into schools as quickly as possible and used the “first this...and then...” strategy with social workers

when they pressed for a transition meeting. Although not as dramatic as other practices, participants made rapid transition and integration rather than paperwork the focus. This practice had the opportunity to develop a significant cumulative effect over the school-life of a child in care, as the number of days spent out of school decreased. More days in school, and more days in the same school also decreased the cumulative and layered effects of social isolation, fractured relationships, academic gaps, and increased the chance for the implementation of trauma-informed supports.

Outcomes from the ATA and CAP (2014) study indicate that educational leaders are increasingly more resourceful and innovative as they take on the roles of advocate and gatekeeper simultaneously. Participants in this study demonstrated aspects of subversion that involved less discussion, and more closely resembled practices of refusal and diversion. Some participants mentioned that they considered the potential negative effects on children in care that might result if they followed provincial/district policy blindly, vs. the potential for personal professional censure that might result if their decisions caused hierarchy backlash. One participant talked about trying to find “a way to skirt-around” legalities. Her decisions in this were largely influenced by the need to introduce an aspect of reconciliation into the school's environment for the many families and children in care with an Indigenous heritage. Without CFS consultation, she created an internal process document for adults supporting children in kinship care (where a relative cared for a child), giving them the ability to sign local permission forms. Her decision provided opportunities for connection and choice to the adults caring for the child and opportunities for the child to participate in the school community. Both seen as significant components for a positive school experience based on suggestions offered in the *Protocol and Companion Document*.

Theoharis' (2007) work suggests that in order to advance a social justice agenda, inclusive educational leaders need a detailed knowledge base and skill set in the area where they see a need to create change. Yet, that was initially not the case for the participants in this study. When faced with their own knowledge gaps and misunderstandings, participants surveyed the problems that challenged the education of children in care, and independently developed ways to gather information and resources. Seeing no large-scale solutions forthcoming, participants developed intra- and interorganizational processes and practices that expanded their own area of impact, by creating opportunities for improved social-emotional, and academic well-being for children in care, where previously the success of these students was constrained by policies and system guidelines.

**Advocating across organizational boundaries.** At its root, educational leadership is inherently hierarchical in nature, based on the accountability and formal power invested in the principal through the Education Administration Act (CCSM c E10) and the Public Schools Act (CCSM c P250). In this legally characterized iteration of educational leadership, working across organizational boundaries is difficult and often filled with tension (Williams, 2011, 2013). Findings from this study suggest that interorganizational pressures and a low level of trust between CFS and education professionals played a significant part in influencing and shaping the learning environment and success trajectory for children in care. Christensen and Lamoureux's (2016) task force report confirms this as a particular challenge faced by Manitoba's educational leaders who navigate and advocate within the complex systemic structures that affect children in care. Christensen and Lamoureux state that:

While there is no shortage of caring, competent, and dedicated professionals

across the public sector, working within those systems often involves navigating complex structures, policies, and limitations. These challenges are further complicated when trying to work between or across systems where policies or structural differences may force inefficiencies or inconsistent service delivery. (p. 21)

This is also identified in the wider academic literature as a challenge for organizations supporting children in care (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

When participants worked in this tension-filled context, they experienced stress and conflict based on the myriad of perspectives, relationships, and agendas that needed to be considered and negotiated without formal power. Theoharis (2010) and Williams (2011) recognize this advocacy work, as being situated in a complex environment of resistance and perseverance in the face of ongoing and constantly changing struggles. The resultant discourse and requisite actions between the actors that represent organizations inside and outside of education were often unpredictable and had the potential to jeopardize educational leaders' professional and social-emotional wellbeing (Wang, 2018). Participants mentioned numerous situations where they were questioned about their ability to plan effectively, challenged on their insistence to support children in care, and denied access to critical information due to a lack of trust or rigid policy enactment in external organizations. In their pursuit of social justice outcomes for children in care, participants presented very different levels of personal courage, capacity, and insight in these situations, based on each principal or vice principal's context, history, and past experiences.

Miller (2009) shared that in his research "...school and [homeless] shelter personnel [supporting homeless children] appear to want to collaborate with one another

but struggle to do so because of interorganizational hurdles and misperceptions, [hence] boundary spanners' collaborative capacities are especially relevant" (p. 623). In this study, interorganizational actors working with homeless children, all had similar mandates to support this group of children but were unable to collaborate and plan to provide effective support and programming for the same children, much like the children in care context here in Manitoba.

However in the present education environment where more collaborative and equity focused educational leadership styles permeate the organizational landscape (Leithwood & Harris, 2009; Harris, 2005; Mulford, 2003), and student support teams in Manitoba schools represent a wide variety of disciplinary specializations, there is more opportunity for social justice changes to become socially influenced by educational leadership strategies that focus on relationships (Ainscow, 2005; Ryan, 2010, Theoharis, 2007, 2010). Ultimately, some of the most effective strategies used by school leaders for supporting children in care appeared to be those that were broad, flexible, and socially oriented in their potential to affect different stakeholders. For example, neither the *Protocol* nor the *Companion Document* provided any indication of a preferred process for information sharing between different organizations supporting children in care. In the absence of such guidance, participants developed and shaped their own processes and practices to gather and share knowledge about children in care (e.g., school-based intake documents, reaching out to experts, inviting Voices – an organization supporting children in care in Manitoba), and thus increase capacity in the people and organizations they saw as jointly positioned to positively impact the lives of these children in schools.

In this study, educational leaders' capacity to advocate for children in care was initially limited by their knowledge and understanding of the problem's complexity (i.e.,

what it meant to be a child in care) as well as misunderstandings around interorganizational priorities and norms (i.e., for CFS and group homes). Demonstrating ongoing willingness and perseverance to maintain formal relationships in informal ways across organizational boundaries, participants sought to establish positive connections with foster families and group homes, social workers, health care specialists, and other organizational actors beyond education supporting children in care. Similar to Ryan's (2006b, 2010) and Theoharis' (2007) work with inclusive school leaders, participants reached beyond the school to bridge communication and collaboration with groups outside of the school.

An additional consideration that affected participants' work was the fact that other organizations supporting children in care (i.e., CFS, mental health organizations, youth justice) were also not part of the educational hierarchy, not subject to the positional power of educational leaders, and therefore may have been less easily influenced or swayed. Participants realized that they were working within a power imbalance, and they understood that professionals working outside of education were not bound by the same organizational priorities and mandates that underlies the education system. Not only did this realization introduce a wide variety of agendas that were not directly connected to education, but it also meant that inclusive educational leaders leaned more heavily on the relationship lever in order to accomplish their social justice work on an interorganizational level.

Participants developed their informal authority and influence through informal interactions, collection of information, meetings, setting plans, and collaboration with individuals from other organizations who often held positions of formal power as well as proprietary/confidential information about children in care. Some examples of

opportunities for influence included occasions when participants facilitated informal dialogue, meetings that shared information and children's social histories, priorities, and strategies, or professional development around common language to support children in care, both with school teams and professionals from organizations outside of education (e.g., CFS, mental health, youth justice). This shared information and dialogue provided a common understanding about the lives of children in care for all adults in a position to support the children. Without the support of their positional power, participants exercised their influence by utilizing civic engagement (Miller, 2009), along with influence, knowledge and experience to build relationships (Williams, 2011). Miller (2008) describes leaders working across organizational borders as:

...effective collectors and disseminators of information...trusted and respected by diverse [educational] and community constituents...[educational leaders who] understand and appreciate the social and organizational complexities...possess exceptional interpersonal skills...convene diverse, resourceful and often unfamiliar partners...unite seemingly disparate groups around a common cause...move freely and flexibly within and between organizations and communities (p.356-358).

An increase in knowledge and skills enabled all caregivers and professionals both in and outside of education to better meet the diverse academic, social, emotional, and behavioural needs of children and youth in care (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016).

**Suggestions for the future.** One suggestion made by participants, schools as service hubs, was not novel in its conception, but offered novel ideas in the iteration proposed. Public schools as service hubs for children in care would allow these students to benefit from the integration of services and therapies at school and during the school

day, so they are able to return and practise their new skills, rather than isolating the skills and services to a separate visit or office that is disconnected from the school. Participants saw great potential in using schools as the central hub for services specific to children in care, and indicated that it would be in the best interest of children and youth in care to tie many of the services now offered in isolation, such as mental health services, meetings with social workers and youth justice services, into the school and school day. This would allow children in care to better integrate different parts of their lives and return to the life of the school in a much more seamless manner (Burnside, 2012; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016).

**Research Sub-Question 4: How do former youth in care understand principals' and vice principals' school-based inclusive leadership processes and practices, intended to support social justice outcomes, in light of their past educational experiences?**

Across Canada, Christensen and Lamoureux (2016), Johnson (2014), and Rutman and Hubberstey's (2016) research includes the voices and takes a retrospective view of the educational experiences of children in care. This research study expands upon Rutman and Hubberstey's (2016) base by combining the perspectives of former youth in care in Manitoba with those of inclusive educational leaders and document analysis of relevant Manitoba government documents. Adding the voices of former youth in care, with a retrospective understanding of their educational experiences while they were in care, provided new information on the processes and practices of inclusive educational leaders in Manitoba's public schools. Although focus group participants were not sitting at the table when principals and vice principals and their school staff members planned for their school experiences, their retrospective accounts highlighted and supported, and in some cases challenged/contested themes brought forward in government documents and in the



interviews with principal and vice principal participants. The youths' perspectives give evidence to the fact that they are keenly aware of the complex interconnected nature of their education and in-care experiences.

**Cumulative effects of the in-care experience on school readiness.** As was outlined in the literature (Brownell et al., 2015; Brownlee et al., 2010; Burnside, 2012; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2018; Neiheiser, 2015; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016) a number of breakdowns in systemic integration (e.g., education, child welfare) affect the school experiences of children in care. More specifically, in this study, systemic processes and practices that originated within CFS and education affected school readiness for children in care. While focus group participants did not see the cross-system efforts, or experience the frustration felt by school leaders as they tried to connect and collaborate with other organizations that supported children in care (i.e., CFS), they did experience feelings of being objectified and 'getting lost' in the process.

Focus group participants often felt that their personal and educational experiences objectified them, labelling them with their diagnoses, or funding categories, as both foster/group homes and schools receive more funding when these children present more complex needs (Burnside, 2012). Focus group participants' experiences indicated that as younger children they were often not ready to participate in a therapeutic counselling process, and when they entered the group home system, they did not receive counselling support. The National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (2018) from the US suggests that early trauma/counselling intervention supports greater success at school, and the youth felt that their complex social-emotional and behavioural concerns became limiting factors for their school experience.

Rather than focus on one aspect of their experience as most detrimental, youth in care described the layered compounding effects of the in-care experience on school readiness (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). The findings from previous studies corroborate the experiences of focus group members in this study and indicate that the focus on day-to-day uncertainties associated with being a child in care, along with the effects of unresolved trauma overshadowed their pursuit of academic goals. In effect, the process of being taken into care added another line of critical incidents to their life trajectories and also worked to compound the abuse the children experienced before being taken into care (Brownlee et al., 2010; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Neiheiser, 2015). Frequent transitions, lack of therapeutic programming, unknown foster families and social workers, difficult to access transportation for school, as well as transitioning out of care at age 18, are some of the challenges that also came to the forefront for focus group participants as directly and indirectly affecting their readiness for school.

These themes were also well documented in the academic literature (Brownell et al., 2015; Brownlee et al., 2010; Burnside, 2012; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Johnson, 2014; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2018; Neiheiser, 2015; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). For focus group members in this study, the lack of continuity associated with their foster/group home and school placements, along with a feeling of uncertainty (e.g., such as, which family, will I be safe, how long will I be there, which school will I attend, how will I get there, will I be Ok) weighed heavily on their minds during their time in care. As a result, it was most often the distress and social-

emotional impact of the unfamiliar, unspecified, undetermined and unpredictable that directly and indirectly affected the lives of children and youth in care at school.

This overflow of negative life experiences into school reached a tipping point when the youth in this study transitioned out of care at the age of 18. The layers of difficult historical moments that, at minimum, included factors such as neglect and/or abuse, removal from the family nucleus, meeting and leaving new foster homes/schools, and new foster families, meeting with different social workers and other professionals etc., all added up for focus group members to result in feelings of social isolation, disengagement, school-avoidance, and school-leaving behaviours as they neared the age of 18. Published as relevant to most children in care in Manitoba and Canada (Brownell et al., 2015; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Neiheiser, 2015; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, 2018), some of these factors (e.g., removal from the family nucleus, meeting/leaving new foster homes/schools) are not immediately visible as having a negative impact because they were developed to alleviate the experiences that first brought the children into the CFS system. Nevertheless, these CFS and education processes and practices had a substantive impact on the social justice outcomes and quality of life of focus group members during the time they were in the care of CFS and schools, and were seen as factors that resulted in adverse educational and general life-outcomes (i.e., school-leaving before graduation or age of 18, homelessness, loss of a child to the CFS system).

In the US, the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education's (2018) work reveals that with extensions to care, children in care complete high school and transition much more effectively from the public education system to post-high school programs. None of the focus group participants in this study had an Extension of Care

Agreement plan. Not surprisingly, focus group participants felt unprepared to navigate and function independently day-to-day after their transition from care at age 18.

Even though processes that move youth in care from difficult foster home placements to more independent living situations exist, while they attend school (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016), there was little indication in the findings from this study that any of the youth received support or practical training on how to live more independently while going to school, or as they transitioned to a more adult life. In fact, Rutman and Hubberstey's (2018) findings suggest that youth in care are more preoccupied with trying to understand and unravel their confusing in-care situation than to focus on schoolwork and create a successful future path. Study findings supported this fact as some youth were moved to group home or independent living arrangements when a foster home placement broke down while the youth were still at school and before the youth were 18. In other cases, focus group members lived with caregivers that did not demonstrate a high level of interest or engagement with the youth or their future plans. In both types of situations, focus group participants indicated that they did not receive guidance to prepare for adult life from social workers, foster parents or group home staff. Without information and practice, the challenges and barriers that are part of the list of independent living skills (i.e., going to school but having to buy and prepare food, managing personal healthcare, paying bills, where to turn when problems arise) were not evident to the youth. When focus group members were on the cusp of transitioning just before turning 18, they experienced homelessness, long periods of school absence, episodes of leaving and returning to school, pregnancy, and mental health crises, while trying to attend school, and received little adult intervention. Neiheiser (2015), as well as Rutman and Hubberstey (2016, 2018) also forward that this conflict between living a stable life and

preparing academically, socially and emotionally for the future destabilizes the academic outcomes and school experiences for youth in care. Consistent housing, adult guidance and support represent critical characteristics for educational success for youth in care (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, 2018). The effects of inconsistent and unpredictable CFS and educational processes and practices impacted focus group members' school readiness and ongoing school experiences to compound and impact the life trajectory of these former children and youth in care.

**Education processes and practices and their effects on school readiness.** The most notable concerns with education processes and practices voiced by focus group members were that they were based on gaps, misunderstandings, misinformation and assumptions about the academic and social-emotional needs of children in care. In this study, when rigid education policy guidelines did not account for the life experiences of children in care, the negative effects of these education processes and practices overlapped with the layers of other socially complex in care experiences. Discipline policies were cited by focus group participants as an example of school policies that were often enforced without interpretation, even though the underlying root of the children's/youths' behaviour was unknown and/or often misunderstood. Unresolved trauma, anxiety, reactive attachment disorder, as well as physical and neurological diagnoses often coexist for children in care and manifest as defiance, refusal to comply, drug or alcohol abuse, or physical and verbal outbursts (Burnside, 2012; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). This misunderstanding of the purpose for the behaviours resulted in inappropriate and misplaced consequences for focus group members, and also in a more general sense results in a marked overrepresentation of children in care in special education programs or with long disciplinary records (Burnside, 2012; Rutman &

Hubberstey, 2016). Findings from the US demonstrate that children in care have suspension rates between 25% and 32% vs. 7% for their peers not in contact with the in-care system (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2018; Neiheiser, 2015), but overt behaviours such as acting out or school refusal are often the result of deeper-seated concerns (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). This was corroborated by focus group members, when they described their experiences with inflexible behaviour policies and the resultant ripple-effect as consequences like frequent suspensions and expulsions, based on misinformation or a lack of understanding about the youth's needs, affected the security of their foster home placements; thereby introducing additional instability into their lives. The literature supports findings from this study when focus group members as well as principal and vice principal participants noted that the roots of misbehaviours that resulted in disciplinary action regularly went unrecognized in schools where educational leaders and their staff members often did not have the experience or training to understand or intervene in an appropriate manner (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2018; Neiheiser, 2015). For children with a trauma history, "...providing inclusive, non-punitive responses to externalizing behaviours..." (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016, p.17) is critical, but this was not regularly the experience for focus group members.

Aligned with Neiheiser's (2015) research, focus group participants indicated that frequent transitions between different foster homes and changing schools made it difficult to maintaining academic and social-emotional balance in school, when missing (or mis)information during registration lead to inappropriate academic placements and supports. The research also indicates the importance of school engagement and participation in extra-curricular programs as supportive of social-emotional balance, and

academic success (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). Yet, focus group participants' experiences in the public-school system did not include specific programs, or practices that helped them engage with the school community or to cope with the academic and social-emotional gaps, insecurities and unknowns introduced by their frequent transitions. Rutman and Hubberstey's (2016) findings also forward evidence that suggests that some programs, specifically targeted to youth in care in schools, result in improved outcomes in both academic areas and social-emotional areas like bullying. Contrary to this finding, focus group members in this study revealed that school-based programs specifically designated for children in care were particularly problematic, because educational leaders and their school staff members made incorrect assumptions about what might be beneficial for the children (e.g., what they could learn, how much help they needed, which programs they wanted to participate in). Rather than feeling supported, the youth felt identified, and as a result intentionally sabotaged academic support, and withdrew from social programs, only to become more marginalized when they hid their in-care status. A need to hide their in-care status also resulted in a reluctance to request academic support. As a result, focus group participants felt isolated, misunderstood, and forgotten when the programming necessary to support their needs at the school was missing or misaligned, or they felt labelled if programs at the school were advertised as only for children in care; creating tension between the need to receive support, and the need to maintain privacy.

In general, CFS maintains strict privacy rules around the location and identification of children in care. These responsibilities are outlined for CFS and education professionals in the *Protocol* and the *Companion Document*. When these rules transfer into schools, practices evolve that help to limit the exposure and identification of

children in care. At that point, tensions develop between a child's need for privacy around their in-care status, so that they are not identified as being "a foster kid", and their need to connect with people who understand their complex situation and are able to provide appropriate support and programming. On one hand, focus group members shared that the "foster kid" label often led to exclusion, deficit-based perceptions, assumptions, as well as physical and verbal discrimination by peers and adults. On the other hand, focus group participants recognized that their academic and social-emotional behaviours in school often did not conform to normative classroom standards, and would have benefitted from additional formal and informal guidance and interventions. This was a consistent concern for focus group participants', who sometimes offered conflicting statements that presented merit for both sides of the argument. In the end, the youth recognized that without contextual information about their in-care experience, peers, school principals, vice principals, teachers and support staff members often misunderstood their behaviours. Once given the information, there was opportunity to build trusting mentorship relationships, and receive relevant supports.

Not surprisingly, focus group participants linked any successful programming and/or progress, academic or social-emotional, back to positive relationships with adults. This supports evidence forwarded by principal and vice principal participants in this study, who made trusting relationships with children in care a priority. Canadian research with youth in care demonstrates that relationships with trusted adults are a ground floor necessity that facilitates resiliency and success later in life in other areas (Burnside, 2012, Brownell et al., 2015, Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, 2018). Christensen and Lamoureux's (2016) report also linked connection through relationships as a critical factor that supports school engagement and high school completion. This was confirmed by focus group



participants, as well as the youth in care who participated in Rutman and Hubberstey's (2016) study, as they revealed that school staff members' concern and attention often filled the void left by biological family and community members, lost to children when they entered the in-care system. These young people identified adult mentors and mentorship relationships as critical connections, especially at high school. Focus group participants indicated that staff members, most often educational leaders and librarians, were seen to have more time for individual students, but teachers also played a central role in maintaining their morale, social-emotional balance, school connection and successful academic programming. These relationships were often the reason that focus group members attended school as they provided a safe place where someone listened, in an otherwise unpredictable environment. According to focus group participants, this contact with a mentor or trusting adult was often the only positive human contact during the day or the one conversation that helped the youth maintain a positive mindset. Specific conversations stood out as being turning points in the lives of focus group members, and some youth continue to maintain a connection with their mentors. Yet, the connections that developed for focus group participants were not part of a program or process that intentionally initiated or nurtured these relationships during the time that they were in school. Instead, focus group members recognized that the adults involved reached out persistently, even after being rebuffed multiple times by the youth, because they realized that the children in care were struggling academically, behaviourally or social-emotionally, and needed encouragement or social-emotional advocacy and support. This finding was also confirmed by principal and vice principal participants in this study.

Along with positive adult relationships, focus group members explained the importance of trauma-informed professional development and staffing in schools. In the

research literature this model is aimed at contextualizing the situation of children in care, in order to improve their sense of connection and success, while also avoiding the impact of uninformed assumptions that staff members may have about children and youth in care (Brownell et al., 2015; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2018; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). Johnson (2014) emphasizes that trauma-informed practice plays a role in helping to mitigate negative indicators like self-harm, lack of trust, anxiety and depression that often affect the families of children in care, as well as the children themselves, due to the impact of intergenerational trauma connected to residential schools, the 60's Scoop and the cyclical nature of the in-care experience in some families. Although this model was not part of focus group members' experience, they did mention their awareness that the model was becoming more customary in schools and noted that trauma-informed practices address many of the social-emotional needs for children in care.

**Suggestions for the future.** Although the *Protocol* outlines provisions for including children and youth in care in decision-making processes that affect their day-to-day lives and education, focus group participants mentioned that this was not part of their experience. This finding is corroborated in the research where Neiheiser (2015) suggests that when children and youth in care are included in discussions or decisions about their future and programming, they develop a positive perspective and soft skills useful for future success. Whether this omission in the lives of focus group members correlated with overburdened CFS and education systems, siloed departmental perspectives, or the need to make critical decisions quickly, the CFS and education processes used to plan for focus group participants' transitions and programming did not include the perspective of the young people affected by the choices. Christensen and Lamoureux's (2016) report and

findings from this study both suggest that children and youth in care want information about their situation and insist that their personal preferences should be considered when choices are made.

The most basic focus group member recommendation stressed that everyone who might potentially support a child in care in schools should receive details about the in-care experience and instruction on how to support children in care in schools. Primary recommendations were to make building relationships with children in care a priority, and to include their student voices in the development of any school-based resources or programming that might affect them. Although some professionals in CFS and schools might consider children not yet ready to provide insights into their future lives and programming, the *Protocol* indicates that a child's input level will depend on their "age, cognitive ability and developmental status" (p.9) and focus group participants supported this perspective.

Much like the youth in Rutman and Hubberstey's (2016) study, the youth in this study said that building and maintaining relationships with children and youth in care is the cornerstone for academic and social-emotional success (Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016). Based on their own experiences, the youth recommended that these relationships should be intentionally initiated and nurtured by adults responsible for supporting children in care, because looking back the youth realized that children in care are often in a state of social-emotional imbalance and would not recognize the importance of the opportunity that a trusting, supportive relationship offers.

Beyond programming in public schools, several focus group participants, supported by suggestions from an experienced school principal participant in this study, also advocated for a centralized school for children in care. Rather than making focus

group members feel identified or labelled, the concept of a school specifically for children in care generated ideas for supportive programming, along with comments of hope, and empowerment. Focus group participants saw this as an opportunity to centralize services and common stories, so that anyone who attends the school has academic, and social-emotional services at hand, and also feels comfortable, accepted and hopeful.

The findings in this section confirm similar findings in the academic literature, where all the suggestions made by youth in care centre on the importance of relationships and the notion of bringing their voices and stories into the conversation. Based on the fact that much of the information about, and the programming for, children in care is based on assumptions and knowledge gaps, including children in care in planning conversations is imperative, especially since some targeted programs caused additional isolation and distress, and contradicted some findings in the academic literature. Although focus group members' goals, questions and requests changed as they aged, they indicated that no matter how basic or simplistic a child's input might seem, the act of asking the question to solicit the child's participation provides opportunity for developing goal setting, self-confidence, hope, and most importantly it opens the door for trusting relationships. Each positive adult relationship not only contributes to social-emotional development but provides a better foundation for academic learning as the growing number of people engaged with a child in care makes it easier to collaborate and to measure the child's success.

### **Methodological Insights**

As was mentioned in Chapter 4, this study would have a very different ethical perspective, very different data and a different power balance if the units of analysis

included principals/vice principals and social workers, or principals/vice principals and group home managers, instead of principals/vice principals and former youth in care. In this case, the study's critical transformative theoretical framework informed the participant selection process, which was intended to bring the voices of underserved children in care in public education into conversation with self-identified inclusive educational leaders. Patton (2015) indicates that data collection is directly driven by the units of analysis in a study, so an exploratory study that investigates the improvement of educational outcomes for a specific group, like Manitoba's children in care, is best served if that group can contribute to the rich description of the problem. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña's (2014) findings specify that a case study design that uses the insights of children in care is appropriate because their contribution is not just based on description of events but also includes interpretation based on their experiences. The fact that there is little previous academic research that combines these three units of analysis affirms the use of a case study design.

An unpredictable challenge with this design was the fact that each school district that I approached in order to gain access to principals and vice principals designed its own ethical review. During the review, and given the design of the study's engagement material, the senior administrative teams for several districts mistakenly thought that I was a researcher based in London, Ontario. As a result, they were reluctant to expose their already extremely busy educational leaders to inquiry and analysis from a disconnected source. Greene (2014) and mentions that researcher positionality affects the level of trust based on the experiences that participants feel they share with the researcher. In her words, "...difficulties with gaining access may be the result of participants [and in this case senior administration] perceiving the researcher as a cultural

member but social stranger” (p. 6). This was evident as additional perseverance and clarification was necessary on my part, in order to gain the trust and resultant access to potential principal and vice principal participants. Once district administrators realized that I was an educational leader, also situated in Winnipeg, they supported the study enthusiastically. Including information about the researcher's connection or familiarity with the case study's context might help to mitigate this challenge in future research.

Rather than having superintendents or educational leadership peers determine the value of principals and vice principals' inclusive actions and social justice goals (Griffiths et al., 2011; Hardy, 2014; Shields, 2010; Winton & Pollock, 2016), study participants' were asked to self-identify as inclusive leaders for children in care and also share study details with like-minded peers. This strategy, also effective for Ryan (2010) and Theoharis (2010), was supported by a pre-screening process, which ensured that principals and vice principals who volunteered to participate in the study had relevant advocacy successes and struggles to share. Participants responded to a general prompt about sharing their personal experiences with inclusive, social justice-oriented actions. Although participants presented very different levels of experience and understanding around children in care and the processes and practices that support their success at school, the pre-screening process allowed for clarification about participants' interest in participating in the study, as well as their understanding of relevant successes and struggles. This sampling strategy helped to refine a purposive sample that was able to share specific, detailed, and relevant experiences that resulted in a richer data set and recommends itself for similar future research.

Initially, there were also ethical questions connected to the selection of former children in care as a unit of analysis, as they were seen as potentially vulnerable and

unfamiliar with the strategies used by inclusive leaders. Based on Chilisa's (2012) and Merten's (2009) work, critical transformative research is seen as potentially providing opportunities for underserved groups to participate in providing insight into their experiences and potential solutions. This study used snowball sampling through mentorship organizations that support youth in care in Winnipeg. Although study engagement materials forwarded by the mentorship organizations instructed interested youth to contact the researcher directly, the youth responded directly to the mentorship organization, where they had access to the study's letter of information, focus group protocol, as well as a counsellor who could answer questions. Although the letter of information indicated that there was also a pre-screening process conducted by the researcher for focus group participants, this did not happen. Instead, the mentorship organization's counsellor adopted that role, and informed me when she had participants who fit the study criteria and who were willing to engage in the focus group process. This situation was very different from the one described above for principal and vice principal participants, as I was working from an outsider perspective (Greene, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). I was not familiar with the social or experiential norms of the group I wanted to access. Even though I met several times in advance with the mentor/counsellor, the trust that was established existed only between the counsellor and myself. It did not extend to include the former youth in care. In her gatekeeping capacity, the counsellor became part of the focus group participant selection process, thereby introducing potential variability and uncertainty. Given the unpredictable nature of the lives of focus group members, it was important to have the guidance and support of the Voices mentor/counsellor. She represented a trusted contact and a constant in focus group members' context. Hence, the quality and value of future research will depend on the time

and care that is invested in developing relationships with mentors and gatekeepers who hold positions of trust in participants' lives.

In her work, Tracy (2010) suggests that triangulation from each of the different units of analysis in a qualitative case study design does not necessarily provide corroborating evidence for the others. Instead, as was demonstrated in this study, the different sources of data provide a richer, and broader perspective of the problem under study, thereby improving the credibility of the findings (Tracy, 2010). This is not research about principals/vice principals and former youth in care, but instead represents a collaborative effort where I had the opportunity to conduct research with inclusive principals and vice principals, as well as former youth in care.

This chapter offers a fulsome interpretation of key findings from Chapter 5, and also proposes suggestions for the academic, policy and practice communities that speak to the functionality of the conceptual framework, discussion and interpretation of key insights, as well as methodological insights that may have implications for other research that uses similar units of analysis (i.e., inclusive principals and vice principals and former youth in care).

The final chapter will summarize the interpretation and discussion offered here in Chapter 6 and will provide a study summary, summary of findings, study limitations, recommendations for practice, and future research, as well as a concluding statement.



## CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

**Thesis Summary**

This critical transformative case study examined how inclusive school principals and vice principals in Manitoba advance social justice outcomes for children in care attending Winnipeg's K-12 public schools. The purpose of this exploratory case study was to develop a better understanding of the processes and practices used by Manitoba's public school principals and vice principals who are successful in supporting social justice goals in education for Manitoba's children in care, and to add information about how former youth in care experience and understand the support provided by education leaders in Manitoba schools. This project examined the phenomenon from the perspective of school principals and vice principals working in Winnipeg public schools, while also including the voices of former youth in care, against a backdrop of relevant documentation (i.e., policies, guiding protocols). The narrative semi-structured interviews with principal and vice principal participants, along with focus group interviews conducted with former youth in care, and analysis of relevant government and policy documents revealed challenges faced by both participant groups, and also provided insights into successful processes and practices used by this group of inclusive principals and vice principals to improve social justice outcomes for children in care in their schools.

This study examined how educational leaders conceptualized their roles and responsibilities through information available in government documents and through their own histories and experiences. Although the study confirms other research with information about what educational leaders recognized as challenges and barriers in their work to support children in care, it adds knowledge about how inclusive educational

leaders manoeuvred and flexed the boundaries of the education system and developed processes and practices that helped them to work across organizational boundaries between education and other organizations (e.g., CFS, mental health, youth justice) to improve the educational experience and outcomes for children in care.

The finding developed around the processes and practices used by inclusive principals and vice principals to facilitate interorganizational work for children in care provided insight into the fact that their work to create relationships with children in care, with stakeholders who support children in care, and to reshape the education environment in the physical, academic, emotional and cultural areas, contributes to the continually increasing professional workload of educational leaders. Because inclusive principals and vice principals saw success in their processes and practices and felt that social justice outcomes for children in care were a critical and necessary part of their inclusive work, they were not willing to abandon inclusive processes and practices in favour of a decreased workload.

The voices of former youth in care added additional information about how leaders' processes and practices in Manitoba public schools, and in the care system, impacted their educational experiences by providing almost no examples of individual or differentiated planning or programming that was relevant for focus group members. Instead, focus group members often felt labelled and identified by processes and practices that were meant to improve inclusion at the school. Yet, principal and vice principal participants reported that they were advancing social justice for children in care in their schools. These conflicting perspectives underline the fact that further study is needed to determine how the academic and social-emotional strengths and needs of children in care can be more closely aligned and integrated with the plans, programs, and supports

developed and implemented by inclusive educational leaders.

Yet, these former youth in care recognized the positive impact that informal trusting relationships had on their life trajectory. Connections with a very few trusting adults served as a framework and beacon for focus group members' personal development and growth even beyond their time in the CFS system.

### **Summary of Findings Organized by Meta-Themes**

This study's findings revealed that the guiding legislation and government policy (e.g., *Protocol, Companion Document*) outline the professional responsibilities that educational leaders have towards children in care. Both principal and vice principal participants in this study identified these two government documents as containing key guiding information that outlined the responsibilities school leaders have to support children in care in schools. The determination from those participants who used them was that these two resources provided useful starting points for school leaders who need to understand how to navigate the formal steps for supporting children in care. Although these two documents were seen as providing a list of the most important mandated responsibilities around children in care for educational leaders, most participants did not feel that these documents provided important details necessary to understand how to navigate the CFS system or to understand the lives of children in care. For this purpose, participants augmented their knowledge base through additional academic, policy, and grey literature.

### **The Most Impactful Barrier: Layered Compounding Effects of the In-Care Experience**

In trying to support children in care, participants did not initially understand the scope of issues children in care were facing: i) the influence of previous childhood

trauma; ii) the negative influence of frequent foster home and school transitions; iii) the academic gaps created by delayed registration processes; iv) the impact of overlooked or inappropriate programming due to missing information in student files; v) and, most importantly, the combined impact that these factors had on the school readiness of children in care. In addition, study participants were often confused about how to navigate the CFS system (e.g., who to contact regarding a student's academic, social-emotional or day-to-day needs in case of illness or a missing lunch), and where to access resources/supports specific to students' needs (e.g., strategies useful for the school shared by the student's therapist), all factors that could be mitigated through more collaborative work with organizations external to education or structured through interdepartmental integration of resources. The hierarchical nature of the education and care system would require that this type of integration would be advanced by the provincial government.

As mentioned above, participants lacked knowledge about what it meant to be a child in care living in foster/group homes (e.g., effects of trauma, impact of dealing with day-to-day uncertainty) at the start of their inclusive leadership role development. That meant they were initially unable to flesh out the actions that would allow them to effectively plan and implement supports for these children. In this work, participants were also affected by the overwhelming concentration of administrative tasks at both the school and district level, the pressure to support the needs of other groups in the school community, the isolation of working as small school principals, or dealing with the fragmentation and siloed professional portfolios of working as principals and vice principals in larger schools. All these factors similarly constrain educational leader's role characterization across Manitoba and Canada.

In line with findings from Christensen and Lamoureux (2016), Neiheiser (2015), Rutman and Hubberstey (2016), the evidence gathered from principals and vice principals in this study agreed with information shared by focus group members, where the youth also listed the layered compounding effects of the in-care experience as the most impactful barrier for their school readiness. In general, the focus on the day-to-day uncertainties associated with being a child in care (e.g., high foster/group home and school transiency, commercialization of care and feeling like a number, not having access to appropriate educational programming), along with the effects of unresolved trauma (e.g., effects of historical trauma due to residential school history, untreated mental health concerns, untreated effects of emotional and physical neglect/trauma associated with being taken into care), overshadowed the pursuit of academic goals.

Focus group participants also indicated that the negative layers of the in-care experience worked to compound the trauma experienced, as the process of being taken into care itself, as well as the constant uncertainty of home and school life while in care, added additional critical incidents to their life trajectories. The focus group participants' situations became even more critical when the youth entered high school and felt disconnected from any skills or plans that might support their future. Consistent adult support in and out of school to provide guidance with social-emotional problem solving, life-skills, as well as stable and consistent housing, was not part of focus group members' experiences while in school and in care. Yet ongoing adult support was seen as critical to educational success by all focus group members.

The distress and social-emotional impact of the unfamiliar, unspecified, and unpredictable experiences, programs, and situations related to CFS and school also directly and indirectly affected the lives of children and youth in care at school. In

schools, this was largely related to programming based on problematic assumptions (e.g., children in care do not know what they need, educational leaders assumed they knew what children in care needed, children in care cannot and do not want to achieve high academic success) and gaps in information (e.g., lack of trauma informed understanding in the school community, partial CFS and school files, misrepresented and missing information forwarded by other organizations) and, therefore, often represented inaccurate planning and programming.

Both former children in care and educational leaders involved in this study emphasized that school leaders need more information about the lives and needs of children in care. Educational leaders stressed the need for professional development in the areas of understanding and navigating the in-care experience, along with a resource repository. Focus group participants' most compelling suggestions were for a focus on the development of trusting relationships and to include children and youth in care in the conversations that lead to future planning for their success. In line with this finding, focus group members also indicated that any success that they experienced at school was directly connected to trusting relationships with adult mentors (e.g., principals, vice principals, librarians and teachers) that helped to build a strong foundation for learning. Christensen and Lamoureux (2016), Neiheiser (2015), Rutman and Hubberstey (2016), as well as the *Protocol* and *Companion Document* support a relationship-based approach to developing academic and social-emotional success for children in care.

### **Successful Inclusive Educational Leadership Advocacy - Inclusive Processes and Practices**

Even though misaligned educational and CFS policies, and irregular interagency collaboration created a complex and confusing interorganizational environment, inclusive

principal and vice principal participants demonstrated that they in fact understood their provincially mandated roles for children in care.

Within their already demanding leadership roles, educational leaders accomplished two things. First, they used a two-pronged approach to work in the education system, where participants deliberately developed trusting relationships with children in care to introduce opportunities for soft skills development. At the same time, they also introduced and negotiated processes and practices that shaped and flexed educational systemic boundaries (e.g., participants' personal commitment to work with children in care, the transition from practices to processes with an increasing number of children in care, dedicated spaces to resolve emotional conflict with trauma-informed staff members, differentiated attendance policies, family activity nights where biological families are welcome, timetables that take into consideration the complicated family structures of children in care). These new and revised processes and practices created inclusive physical, academic/social-emotional, and cultural environments that honoured the children's personal histories and experiences, while also deliberately pushing back against policies and practices with actions that could negatively impact participants' professional relationships and their personal professional standing.

Second, they increased interorganizational collaboration, which resulted in the sharing of information between schools and organizations external to education, while also increasing interagency understanding of roles and mandates, as many of the other actors and organizations operated outside the education system's hierarchy. Thereby, participants simultaneously connected the responsibilities outlined for educational leaders in government documents and also realized the social justice goals they recognized as necessary for children in care.

This work outside of the education system often took place in an environment where principals and vice principals purposefully facilitated (Williams, 2011, 2013) advocacy work across professional boundaries to inform, gather and provide opportunities to collaborate with representatives from other departments and organizations, but also to provide opportunities for children in care to help them transition beyond high school (e.g., negotiating multiple opportunities for a post-secondary course placement for a student still attending high school, connecting them with residential prenatal/postnatal education programs). In order to facilitate this advocacy role, and to maintain essential relationships with these representatives, participants developed socially embedded influence, rather than relying on hierarchical power, to develop social justice change. They garnered this influence by initiating and participating in discussions, interpreting knowledge to try to develop a collective understanding about the needs of children in care, and utilizing these diverse connections to mobilize new and newly discovered resources for this group of children

Evidence from this study indicated that inclusive educational leaders in this study often positioned themselves as central or lead organizers and worked to consider and manage multiple interests. These included professional responsibilities for their own role and for other actors from different government organizations and departments (e.g., CFS, mental health, judicial systems), as they worked to shape processes and practices (e.g., negotiating and reasoning with external organizations to expedite psychological testing and/or therapeutic services that could improve the children's outcomes at school) using collaborative, rather than traditional hierarchical power structures.

In this study, the goal of working across organizational boundaries for inclusive educational leaders was to fulfill a broader definition of improved educational outcomes



for children in care that included academic, as well as social-emotional results. The study's findings demonstrated that in order to reach this goal, principals and vice principals focused on processes and practices that encouraged and supported academic as well as social-emotional results. for children in care in three areas. The tiers included i) the development of increased intentionality and intensity in their actions, ii) deliberate processes and practices that shaped the physical, emotional, cultural, and academic spaces and environments, along with iii) formal and informal measures or markers of success. To the best of my knowledge, inclusive educational leaders' advocacy actions have not been viewed through the conceptual lens of processes and practices in order to demonstrate the intricate interplay that takes place between the two terms in their application in the education context.

### **Missed Opportunities**

As youth in care entered high school and approached the age of 18, transitioning out of care at the age of 18 and the CFS Extension of Care Agreement, which has the potential to extend support for children in care to age 21, were two CFS processes that, according to participants, were missing from the interorganizational conversations between schools and CFS. Educational leaders and their school teams had little or no information about the benefits of pursuing these processes, or how the school might support students in navigating next steps to plan for education and training later in high school, and later in life as young adults. As a result, principal and vice principal participants were unfamiliar with how to best prepare youth in care to navigate and/or use these processes to prepare for successful education and living once they transition out of CFS. Principal and vice principal participants also felt that CFS organizational pressures (e.g., heavy workloads, frequent professional transitions) made it difficult for social

workers to connect, collaborate, and reach out to schools to make time to integrate and align their different priorities. Similarly, focus group participants indicated that they had no experience with a CFS Extension of Care Agreement, nor did they receive any targeted education or guidance from school staff about transitioning out of care into society. This example is just one instance where a lack of understanding around individual organizational mandates and priorities led to missed opportunities for children and youth in care. Focus group participants did not benefit from the program knowledge that high school educational leaders may have had about post-secondary programs. Nor did they have access to a bigger picture plan for their future where CFS and education staff members combined their expertise to help them transition to higher education, life skills training and/or successful adult living. Instead, most focus group members did not finish high school and indicated that this led them to other negative life trajectories (e.g., unplanned pregnancy, homelessness, substance abuse), which for some continued to be hurdles in their lives.

In effect, the lack of access to knowledge about the lives of children in care and lack of understanding and trust between CFS and education professionals lead to inward looking practices and mandates at schools that focus group members attended. The resultant environments encompassed physical, social-emotional, cultural, and academic spaces that were not designed with the needs of children in care in mind. Furthermore, because there were no checks and balances or specific measures to track a broader spectrum of outcomes (e.g., connection to school, soft skills development), and specific needs for children in care vs. their peers (e.g., counselling, trauma informed education, positive mentor relationships), when they failed to acquire the skills necessary to thrive in school and in day-to-day life beyond the CFS experience, no one took note.

### **Study Limitations**

Data for this study were collected through interviews and focus group sessions. The recollection of events and experiences for participants, and focus group members in particular, were examined through a retrospective lens. The credibility and trustworthiness of findings could have been strengthened by interviewing youth in care who attend public schools at this time, but this route was set aside due to a number of privacy concerns, as this younger group of students would not understand the need for confidentiality around participants' identities and experiences as completely as focus group participants who aged out of the CFS system. Also, CFS practices remain quite stringent around the release of information about children in care, because their identities and whereabouts are often confidential. The Office of Research Ethics at Western would likely not have approved this group for the same reasons. In addition, these youth would not have the benefit of having experienced education from K-12, and thereby potentially limiting the rich case study picture. Yet in the end, focus group members did not complete the K-12 journey either, as they demonstrated much higher school-leaving behaviours than their peers not in contact with the in-care system.

Focus group participants could have been reluctant to interact, participate, and share their experiences in the study given their previous negative experiences in education, and given my privileged position as a white female vice principal situated in the education system's hierarchy. To the best of my understanding, given the positive reception that I (and my study) received from both the mentor and focus group participants, this was not the case, but it is entirely possible some information was held back.

As an exploratory case study, the participant samples and scope were limited by time constraints that made it difficult to mesh with the complex lives of educational leaders and former youth in care. There was real potential in this study for participant participation to be restricted by principal and vice principal participants' busy schedules to such an extent that the small sample and limited perspectives would not provide a rich case study description. The looming summer break provided a hard deadline that would have made continuing in the new schoolyear much more difficult. Furthermore, focus group participants' complex lives were not located around the schoolyear. As there was no common pattern amongst focus group participants' day-to-day schedules, arranging a focus group meeting was extremely difficult. Given the complexities facing youth in care, in particular those facing the additional challenges of an Indigenous ancestry, along with policy and other contextual consideration, any analytical generalizations must be taken with caution.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Yin (2014) indicates that exploratory case study research and its questions are shaped by the researcher's positionality and experiences, is focused on different aspects of 'what', 'how', and 'why' within the context of the unexplored phenomenon, and generates findings that may be considered as the basis for further research in the future. That is the central tenet of my recommendation for future research as the questions around success in education for well over 10 700 children in care in Manitoba (HCCC, 2017, p. 47) are, of course, not answered by the findings in this study. Instead, the findings provide some insight into areas that would benefit from deeper study.

- Continue to investigate the conceptual and operational differences between inclusive processes and inclusive practices used by educational leaders, especially

how these two concepts are impacted by contextual needs and changes (i.e., some participants transitioned practices into processes as they saw a growing need to track data, develop plans, and review outcomes number for a greater number of children in care in their schools).

- Investigate further the barriers and challenges that develop for children in care as they arise from a lack of interagency understanding and collaboration between education and CFS systems.
- Examine the viability and potential contribution of researcher pre-screening of former youth in care focus group participant applications for a study. For this study, the Voices mentor served as the contact and organizer for snowball sampling, as she was the only one in contact with the different focus group participants. In this case, her understanding and efforts led to knowledgeable participants, but under what conditions would it be possible for the researcher to access the youth directly, and how would this affect the data collected? Would participants have the same comfort and level of trust? Would they share more, less or different information?
- Investigate the transformative aspects of research that include children/youth in care to determine how best to develop components of self-advocacy and self-efficacy in this underserved group.
- Research why and how principals and vice principals decide to transform informal inclusive practices into more formal inclusive processes in schools. In what ways was their ability to transform processes and practices connected to years of professional experience or contextual factors?

- Study the impact of both formal and informal boundary spanning roles, where educational leaders advocate for marginalized groups of students. Although not a part of my conceptual framework in this study, in using the two conceptual terms – inclusive processes and inclusive practices – as a lens for participants' work across organizational boundaries, the frames created by their operational definitions provided a scaffold that was reminiscent of Williams' (2011) boundary spanning framework. The framework allowed me to create a visual representation (See Appendix J, Table 3) of how I conceptualize and understand participants' actions and activities, as these are operationalized through the three tiers of advocacy action mentioned above. Hence, Williams' (2011) framework, as it relates to relational inclusive processes and inclusive practices utilized by inclusive educational leaders working with organizations outside of education, recommends itself for further research.
- Explore and test for the development of more effective markers of success unique to children in care in schools. Based on evidence from this study, inclusive educational leaders and focus group members recognized that markers of success for children in care should include social-emotional as well as soft skills to provide a more well-rounded measure of research-based factors (e.g., attachment, problem solving, resiliency after trauma), which children need to succeed at school and in society in general.
- Explore the significance of soft skills development for children in care, as a beneficial foundation for academic skills.

- Investigate the potential of existing public schools as more formal service hubs, with the intention that outside organizations situate their support services in existing public schools for children in care. This allows the children to receive support from outside organizations (e.g., mental health, youth justice, CFS) during the school day, and then return to class, rather than miss a half-day of school.
- Research the potential benefits of a voluntary centralized school site dedicated to supporting only children in care and offers the complete slate of services necessary for children in care as part of the infrastructure of the school. This would include a trauma-informed curriculum, as well as social-emotional, and cultural spaces specifically designed for children in care, as well as dedicated probation/youth justice workers, therapeutic supports and dedicated social workers. Regardless of where a child in care resides in the city, their school and any relationships and connections there would remain constant.

### **Recommendations for Policy**

- Investigate Impact of Educational Leaders' Increasingly Heavy Professional Role. In this study, Williams (2011) framework did not introduce evidence for radical new processes or practices used by educational leaders. Instead, it provided a visual account of the intensity and intentionality of educational leaders' actions. (See Appendix J, Table 3.) This concentrated and complicated body of purposeful actions, navigated by principal and vice principal participants, gives evidence of how the needs of children in care are superimposing additional pressures and concerns to the already dense list of administrative, supervisory, and instructional leadership responsibilities that educational leaders fulfill. The continuing

challenges faced by the more than 10 700 children in care in Manitoba (HCCC, 2017, p. 47) in schools demand that different approaches must be considered by the provincial government and school districts to better support principals' and vice principals' ability to maintain this high level of engagement with their professional roles. As a suggestion, it might be important to redistribute some of the processes and practices noted in Appendix J, Table 3, into a more structured, predictable format where the responsibility to collect, source and share information is centrally located in a provincial body or position shared between interorganizational partners.

- Support Interorganizational Collaboration and Planning. Much of the confusion and frustration felt by participants and focus group members was rooted in inappropriate staff and community assumptions, as well as (mis)information around the children's ability to succeed, their mental health status, and the root of their behaviours. All of these resulted in inappropriate academic/social-emotional programming and inadequate mental health supports for children in care. In order to support crucial improvements in this area, school district leaders and directors for the four CFS authorities need to explore immediate changes to the information sharing systems between organizations supporting children in care. At the school-level, a shared cumulative document that travels with a student's cumulative academic file, shared between the education and CFS systems could house information shared by social workers, school staff members, clinicians, foster families and biological families, if available. By improving the quality and quantity of information provided when students transition into new schools, the subsequent planning and programming offered by the school would be much more



relevant and specifically targeted to the student's academic and social-emotional needs.

- Investigate Heavy Caseload for Social Workers. Principal and vice principal participants also indicated that they felt that social workers found it challenging to connect and collaborate with schools. From their perspective, social workers had little time and were struggling to meet professional obligations (e.g., heavy caseloads, increasing pressure based on new policy implementation, frequent professional transitions) due to a lack of time. Although investigating the social worker role was outside of the scope of this study, the implications of fewer social workers handling more in care files does not bode well for an improved collaborative interorganizational process. This may well be an area that deserves a closer look from the Minister of Families.
- Develop Coordinated Opportunities for Professional Development for Educational Leaders - Specific to Children in Care in Schools. Both principal and vice principal participants, as well as focus group participants mentioned the extensive gap in knowledge in school communities, which included inaccurate knowledge assumptions about how the in-care system works, what it means to be a child in care, and what children in care need to succeed. Both groups mentioned that programming and planning, for academic and social-emotional supports, are often based on a lack of pertinent information about a child, along with deficit-based assumptions by educational leaders and staff members. This further positions the children in care as unable and unwilling to engage effectively in the academic and social work of schools. Christiansen and Lamoureux (2016), as well as study

participants who used the government developed *Protocol* and *Companion Document* indicated that the documents were a useful place to start planning for children in care in schools. A number of participants also indicated that Christensen and Lamoureux's (2016) report was helpful and set reasonable goals for educational leaders and school staff members. At this time, all three of these documents are freely available for download from the internet. However, they are not used in a coordinated approach and a more concerted effort informed by government information sessions is necessary, so that they can become integrated into the daily functioning of every schools. At minimum, this approach should involve representatives from both the education and CFS systems to work together in a lead role. Professional development for all principals and vice principals working in public schools located in the urban Winnipeg area is necessary, but a better strategy would make this a province-wide mandate. Any such professional development must outline for educational leaders why change is necessary for children in care and should include information about how to use the *Protocol* and *Companion Document* to start planning, who to contact with questions, where to find resources and how to begin to develop inter-agency collaboration.

- **Educators Need to Hear Firsthand Experiences from Youth in Care.** Both educational leader and focus group member findings indicated that in general, principals and vice principals do not understand the life of a child in care. This finding suggests that the coordinated learning approach for educational leaders proposed above should also include first-hand experiences with youth in care or former youth in care through groups such as Voices (as this organization

represents children in care across Manitoba), so that youth in care can share their experiences with principals and vice principals.

- **Digital Provincial Repository of Resources About Children in Care.** After initial training takes place, a digital provincial umbrella repository of contacts and resources relevant to supporting children in care was mentioned as an important enduring central source by principal and vice principal participants. As an electronic resource, this option would allow for continual updates and renewal of information in a timely, as well as environmentally and financially sustainable fashion.
- **Professional Level University Courses About Children in Care.** This recommendation also provides an opportunity for local universities, provincial decisionmakers, and senior district leaders to design professional learning opportunities that inform and increase the capacity of educational leaders in Manitoba's schools to better understand, plan and implement appropriate programming for children in care.
- **Align the Work of Educational Leaders and Professionals Connected to CFS Through a Joint Supervisory Body.** Development of a joint supervisory body would span organizational boundaries that represent education, CFS, youth justice, mental/physical health and voices of former youth in care interests and mandates. Developed to outline and measure the needs and successes of children in care in schools, the supervisory body's focus would be to align interorganizational policies, identify relevant and research-based success criteria for children in care, and develop and implement a critical evaluation cycle to

support integration of the success criteria for children in care, to track success, and to evaluate outcomes. This process would engage representatives and researchers from education and CFS already working in the field and invested in these areas, along with former children in care who are involved in collaborative advocacy work. The predicted end benefits would be a decrease in the day-to-day uncertainties associated with being a child in care and more valid and reliable measures to ensure growth and success for children in care. The implementation of such a supervisory body would also provide an opportunity for transformative advocacy work for representatives who are former children in care. Christensen and Lamoureux's (2016) report previously suggested the creation of a working group to develop a more detailed version of the "...composite reviews, such as those produced by the General [CFS] Authority, [to] be published annually..." (p.12). This more detailed version of the composite review would consider and include additional success indicators for children in care, based on the academic, social-emotional, and cultural growth of every child in care, as designated by the working group. This recommendation has not been realized.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

- Purposeful Planning for Appropriate Spaces – Physical, Social-Emotional, and Cultural. Differentiated practice is mandated in schools in Manitoba through a variety of different policies and documents from Manitoba Education (n.d.), collectively referred to as "Appropriate Education". Yet, specific planning based on the needs of children in care is not yet commonly understood or implemented in schools in Manitoba. This finding resonated with both educational leaders and focus group participants in this study. Differentiation for children in care

implemented by educational leaders in this study included physical spaces (e.g., rooms designed and designated for social-emotional regulation), social-emotional environments (e.g., trauma-informed schools where all staff members understand the root of behaviour), and culturally appropriate philosophies and programming (e.g., elder mentorship, differentiated school discipline policies, approaches to mental health). Given the fact that inclusive educational leaders in this study used a wide continuum of inconsistent processes and practices to flesh-out appropriate programming for children in care provides evidence that a more coordinated and informed approach is needed. In this study, participants' individual ability to develop appropriate processes and practices was often based on their level of experience with children in care. A provincially organized strategy that trains educational leaders around student-centred, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate practices for Manitoba's children in care would provide less experienced educational leaders with the ability to utilize the targeted interventions being used by seasoned participants in this study. In this way, success for these students does not wait until educational leaders amass enough workplace experience in this area. However, until such a strategy can be contemplated on a provincial level, every educational leader could implement strategies from these findings with staff members and children in care (if appropriate) in their own school context.

- **Focus on Relationships.** Although principal and vice principal participants made relationship development a priority, most participants enacted this priority through informal practices. Only a few participants created a process that intentionally sourced, nurtured, and reviewed the success of trusting adult relationships that

were developed with children in care. Their more structured and intentional process and documents represent a potential step-by-step model that could be implemented in schools alongside already existing student support models. Both inclusive educational leaders and focus group participants in this study agreed that trusting relationships were the foundation for any success they experienced with children in care, or as children in care in schools. This was also confirmed through the analysis of the *Protocol and Companion Document* and Christensen and Lamoureux's (2016) report. The importance of forming relationships with trusted adults for children in care is strongly supported in the academic and policy literature (Brownlee et al., 2010; Christensen & Lamoureux, 2016; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2013, 2013b; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). Both principal and vice principal, as well as focus group participants pointed out that this approach cannot be based on the premise that the children or youth in care will be open or accepting of a relationship. As each child comes to the in-care experience and to school through their individual trauma journey, it must be understood that although the relationship process cannot be left to chance, it must be initiated and perpetuated by educational leaders, because each child in care will come to the relationship on their own terms.

### **Conclusion**

Framed to explore what successful inclusive educational leaders do to support children in care, this study reveals information about how they accomplish their goals. In addition, the use of a critical transformative case study design provided opportunity to include and legitimize the voices of previously underserved youth in care, as every attempt was made to include their experiences and suggestions on an equal footing with

those of government documents and principal and vice principal participants. It is my hope that they will also have a more substantive role in driving the change process for educating children in care in Manitoba.

This study's purpose was to determine which processes and practices were used by inclusive educational leaders in their work to improve the educational outcomes of children in care. The findings confirm that the operationalization of the conceptual definitions for processes and practices demonstrated that they are closely interrelated, but operationally distinct. The two terms were used to engage the conceptual framework during data collection and analysis in order to realize the different features of inclusive processes and practices. Often conflated in the academic literature, the theoretical utility of a more detailed and structured definitions frame for the two concepts, as it is laid out in the conceptual framework was evident. This distinction helped to more clearly answer the study's main research question - in what ways are inclusive school principals and vice principals advancing social justice outcomes for children in care attending Winnipeg's K-12 public schools? This new conceptual understanding around inclusive processes and practices adds to the existing body of academic literature, because it more clearly describes how inclusive processes develop a frame for social justice outcomes, while inclusive practices operationalize the frame of social justice outcomes for children in care. This makes it relevant for policymakers, senior district leaders, and inclusive educational leaders in Manitoba, and possibly other Canadian provinces with similarly complex in-care and in-school circumstances.

So much of educational leaders' work is based on social practices and interactions that interpret and bring to life the formal processes, which frame the education system supports in place for children in care. In that light, the study represents an opportunity for

decisionmakers to develop policy that fits and supports positive education and general life outcomes for children in care. It also provides provincial decisionmakers, senior district leaders, and local universities with the chance to design professional learning opportunities that inform and increase the capacity of educational leaders in Manitoba's schools to better understand, plan and implement appropriate programming for children in care. Finally, the study provides educational leaders with the opportunity to question and enhance their own inclusive professional processes and practices to better meet the needs of the children in care in their schools, and it provides former and present children in care with a perspective on education that not only includes their story, but also looks to them for suggestions and solutions.

I came to this research not from a position of deep cultural Indigenous knowledge, nor a position of great professional power. Instead, as mentioned earlier, I came to this research as an ally, through the eyes of a young Indigenous girl in care who identified herself in my classroom as, "I am CFS, I have FAS, and I have ADHD. I come from a reserve and the more letters I have, the more money they get for me. I hate French, and I don't read. Every teacher I ever had hated me, and you're gonna hate me too" (Personal Communication, 2011). I stepped into this research, because I understood that the education community values research findings as an important part of constantly moving education practice forward to improve and find a better way. In this light, my hope was to share this study's findings and to move them back into the realm of future education research, improved policy development, and better practice with the help of policymakers, senior district leaders, inclusive educational leaders, and children in care. The best reason was put forward by Amelia. In her words:



*I think that the work that you're doing and the work that we're attempting to do...we're gonna be judged historically on the actions we take...we are going to be looked at like those people in the pictures in the residential school books...my picture is going to be there...I'm working with these kids...I think about how will I be judged and what will people say about my role in all of this...and I want to be on the right side of history on this issue. That's what I want...leading in that way...leading my staff...leading this community...that would be my greatest hope...that we can have a school...that our children can somehow become whole again.*

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Appendix A

**Cross-reference Matrix for Research Questions/Probes and Data Collection Methods**

The following table demonstrates the relevance of data collection methods and interview questions and how each of these responds to the study’s key questions.

Table E1					
Cross-reference Matrix for Research Questions/Probes and Data Collection Methods					
Research Questions	In what ways are inclusive school principals and vice principals advancing social justice outcomes for children in care attending Winnipeg’s K-12 public schools?	Which responsibilities and educational goals are outlined in provincial and district documents to guide school leaders in addressing intended outcomes for Manitoba’s children in care?	What inclusive leadership processes and practices are school principals and vice principals using to advance social justice outcomes for children in care?	What challenges/barriers do these inclusive school principals and vice principals face while trying to promote social justice outcomes for children in care?	How do former youth in care understand school-based inclusive leadership processes and practices, intended to support social justice outcomes, in their past educational experiences?
Data Collection Methods					
Critical Document Analysis		X			
Semi-structured Interviews	Could you tell me how you understand the concept of improved educational social justice outcomes of children in care?	Could you describe any documents or other supports made available to you by your district office or provincial ministry that you use to guide your work supporting children in care attending your school?	Could you tell me how you understand the concept of inclusive processes, and how it differs from inclusive practices in an educational/school setting?	Could you explain how you identify and develop, or influence the inclusive processes and practices you see as necessary to improve educational outcomes for children in care.	
	Could you tell me how you	How would you say these supports	Could you describe the	Could you share any positive occurrences you	

	<p>understand your role in working for improved educational social justice outcomes for children in care?</p>	<p>changed your ability to influence and develop processes and practices that support social justice outcomes for children in care?</p>	<p>inclusive processes you use to advance social justice outcomes for children in care?</p>	<p>experienced while trying to promote social justice outcomes for children in care?</p>	
	<p>What additional supports could be made available to better support your work advancing social justice outcomes for children in care?</p>		<p>Could you describe the inclusive practices you use to advance social justice outcomes for children in care?</p>	<p>Could you describe any challenges/barriers you experienced while trying to promote social justice outcomes for children in care?</p>	
	<p>How do you feel these additional supports could change your ability to influence and develop processes and practices that support social justice outcomes for children in care?</p>		<p>How do the processes and practices you use to advance social justice outcomes for children in care differ from processes and practices you use to support students who are not part of the care system?</p>	<p>Are there any other factors (e.g., resources, resistance, networks) that you believe influence your ability to navigate social justice outcomes for children in care?</p>	
	<p>If the department of education or your school district were to develop or</p>			<p>Can you explain what else you believe could be done to improve the educational experiences of</p>	



	expand existing resources, how could these resources better support you in influencing and developing the best available educational processes and practices for children in care?			children in care?	
<b>Focus Groups</b>					
			Could you tell me about any particular programs, procedures, and networks or routines, habits, customs, and ways of doing things that made it difficult for you to succeed or helped you to succeed while you were attending elementary or high school?	In what ways do you think your needs as a child in care changed as you moved between schools?	What did your school principal do while you were attending elementary or high school that made it difficult for you to succeed or helped you to succeed as a child in care?
					Could you tell me about any particular programs, procedures, and networks or routines, habits, customs, and ways of doing things that made

					it difficult for you to succeed or helped you to succeed while you were attending elementary or high school?
					In what ways do you think your principal(s) could have better supported your success as a child in care while attending public school?
	Could you tell me what you believe could be done better in schools to improve the educational experiences of children in care?				Could you tell me what you believe could be done better in schools to improve the educational experiences of children in care?

Appendix B  
Interview Protocol and Question Guide for Principals



Interviewee # or pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Protocol Script for Principals

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the diverse educational experiences of Manitoba's children in care, through the lens of former youth in care and inclusive administrators who use **processes and practices**, to address **social justice goals** in education for Manitoba's children in care. I would like to start by having you sign a consent form.

This interview will take about 60 minutes and will include 10-12 questions with sub-questions regarding your experiences with the processes and practices that you use to improve educational outcomes for children in care. I would like your permission to audio record this interview, so I may accurately document the information you share. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All of your responses are confidential.

The study is being conducted by myself, under the supervision of Dr. Brenton Faubert, for the research project: Using Inclusive Leadership Processes and Practices to Improve Educational Social Justice Outcomes of Manitoba's Children in Care – An Exploratory Case Study.

You and I both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, or revisit a question, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin.

For this research study, **processes** represent intentional plans for action, which include formal steps, decision-making processes, outlines or policies that indicate intentions or goals. **Practices**, however, are the day-to-day lived applications and implications of each process, as they are socially created through interactions and discussions between groups of people in the organization. Some processes and practices may support educational experiences for children in care, while others present barriers. Could you tell me how you understand the concept of inclusive processes, and how it differs from inclusive practices in an educational/school setting?

For this research study, **social justice** as a goal in schools includes processes and practices that improve learning outcomes, give students the sense that they belong, and provide opportunities to enjoy and participate fully academically, and socially. This includes, but is not limited to, an environment that allows students to make choices based on their own strengths and preferences, decreased social and academic stereotypes, and enhanced personal capabilities such as independent problem solving, cultivating an

awareness of personal strengths and developing an ability for self-advocacy. Could you tell me how you understand the concept of improved educational social justice outcomes of children in care?

I will now go through the interview guide that I shared with you prior to this interview. It outlines the questions that I will be asking you, but I welcome and encourage you to interrupt me at any point to discuss all experiences, observations, and feelings that you find meaningful around the use of processes and practices of inclusive administrators, as they relate to the improved educational experiences of children in care, even if they are not outlined in the interview guide.



### Interview Question Guide for Administrators

1. First, I would like to understand more about you and your life. Could you please tell me about your professional history?
2. Could you please tell me about your current role working as a school principal?

In these next questions, we are going to be targeting your experience with the processes and practices that you use to improve the educational outcomes of children in care.

3. Please tell me about how you understand the concept of improved educational experiences for children in care?
4. How do you understand your role in working for improved educational social justice outcomes for children in care?
5. Could you describe the inclusive processes and practices you use or have used to advance social justice outcomes for children in care?
6. Which processes and practices have you used or tried to use to improve educational outcomes for children in care?

Possible Probe:

- How do the processes and practices used to advance social justice outcomes for children in care differ from processes and practices used to support students who are not part of the care system?
7. Could you please tell me more about how you identify, develop or influence inclusive processes and practices?
  8. In your experience, what kinds of situations make it easier or more challenging to introduce, change or influence processes and practices?
  9. Could you describe some experiences you had while trying to promote social justice?

Possible Probe:

- What are some positive experiences while trying to promote social justice?
- What are some challenges/barriers while trying to promote social justice?

With these next questions, I hope to get a better understanding of your experience with coordinating the processes and practices you use to improve educational outcomes for children in care.

10. Could you describe any documents or other supports made available to you by your district office or provincial ministry that you use to guide your work supporting children in care attending your school?

Possible Probes:

- How do these supports change principals' ability to influence and develop inclusive processes and practices?
- What additional supports could be made available to better support principals' work advancing social justice outcomes for children in care?
- How could additional supports change principals' ability to influence and develop inclusive processes and?
- What other factors (e.g., resources, resistance, networks) influence principals' ability to navigate social justice outcomes for children in care?

11. We are at the final question of the interview. With this study I hope to make recommendations to educational leaders and government policymakers to improve the knowledge educational leaders have about processes and practices that are effective for improving educational experiences for children in care. Can you explain what else you believe could be done to improve the educational experiences of children in care?

Probe for:

- How could new or expanded resources from the school district better support principals in developing the best available educational processes and practices for children in care?
- How could new or expanded resources from the Department of Education better support principals in developing the best available educational processes and practices for children in care?

12. Thank you for all that valuable information, is there anything else you'd like to add before we end?

## Appendix C

## Focus Group Protocol and Question Guide for Former Youth in Care



Focus Group Member number # or pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

**Focus Group Protocol for Former Youth in Care**

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the diverse educational experiences of Manitoba's children in care, through the lens of former youth in care and inclusive administrators who use **processes and practices**, to address **social justice goals** in education for Manitoba's children in care.

Your participation in this focus group will help to gather information about the educational experiences of Manitoba's children in care. The focus group will take about 90 minutes and will include 8 questions with sub-questions about your experiences with in-school processes and practices that affected your educational outcomes while you were in care. All of your answers are confidential. I would like your permission to audio record the focus group, so I may accurately document the information you share. If at any time during the focus group you wish to stop the use of the recorder or participation in the focus group itself, please feel free to let me know. All responses shared here are confidential.

The study is being conducted by myself, under the supervision of Dr. Brenton Faubert, for the research project: Using Inclusive Leadership Processes and Practices to Improve Educational Social Justice Outcomes of Manitoba's Children in Care – An Exploratory Case Study.

You and I both signed and dated two copies of the letter of consent, certifying that we agree to continue this focus group process. You will receive a copy and I will keep the other locked and separate from your report responses. Your participation in this focus group process is completely voluntary. If at any time you want to stop, or withdraw from the process, please let me know. You can withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. If you have any questions, after the focus group finishes, you can email me [redacted]. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin.

For this research study, **processes** represent programs, procedures, and networks. **Practices** represent habits, routines, customs, and ways of doing things in school that influenced your educational outcomes. Some processes and practices may support educational experiences for children in care, while others present barriers.

**Social justice** as a goal in schools includes processes and practices that improve learning outcomes, give students the sense that they belong, and provide opportunities to enjoy and participate fully in the learning process, and in social situations. Some examples include an environment that allows students to make choices based on their

own strengths and preferences, decreased social and academic stereotypes, and improved personal capabilities such as independent problem solving, becoming aware of personal strengths and developing ability for self-advocacy.

In addition, I intend to make recommendations to educational leaders and policymakers on possible educational leadership improvements that improve the educational experiences of future children in care.

I will now go through the question guide that I shared with you earlier. It outlines the questions that I will ask you, but I welcome and encourage you to share all experiences, observations, and feelings that you find meaningful around the use of processes and practices as they connect to your educational experience while you were in care, even if they are not outlined in the interview guide.





### Focus Question Guide for Former Youth in Care

First, I would like to understand more about you and your life.

1. Could you please tell me about yourself and your educational history while in care. (e.g., age, geographic location history, length and timeframe for time spent in care, education history)?

In these next questions, we are looking at the processes (programs, procedures, and networks) and practices (routines, habits, customs, and ways of doing things) that you feel affected your educational experiences in schools while you were in care.

2. Thinking about your previous answer, could you tell me with as much detail as possible how different processes, including programs, procedures, and networks, or practices, including routines, habits, customs, and ways of doing things, affected you?

3. Could you tell me about any particular programs, procedures, routines, habits, customs, or ways of doing things in schools, that helped you succeed or made it difficult for you to succeed, while you were attending elementary, middle or high school?

4. Could you describe any observation, reactions or feelings you have about any processes and practices you mentioned?

Possible Probes:

- Could you share positive things you experienced when you were interacting with different processes or practices in schools?
- Could you share challenges you experienced when you were interacting with different processes or practices in schools?

4. How would you say these processes and practices changed your educational experience?

Possible Probes:

- Could you describe any factors that influenced the processes and practices you interacted with in schools?
- Could you describe any factors (e.g., resources, coping strategies) that influenced your ability to navigate educational processes and practices in schools?

We are at the final section of the focus group. With this thesis I hope to make recommendations to educational leaders and government policymakers to improve the knowledge they have about processes and practices that are effective for improving educational experiences for children in care. In these next questions, I would like you to share some thoughts about how you think schools can improve the educational experiences of children in care.

5. In what ways do you think your needs as a child in care changed as you moved between schools?
6. In what ways do you think your principal(s) or schools could have better supported your success as a child in care while attending public school?
7. Could you tell me what you believe could be done better in schools to improve the educational experiences of children in care?

Thank you for all the valuable information you provided in your focus group comments;

8. At this time, is there anything else you'd like to add before we end?

## Appendix D

## Letter of Information and Consent for Principals

**Letter of Information - Principals****Project Title**

Using Inclusive Leadership Processes and Practices to Improve Educational Social Justice Outcomes of Manitoba's Children in Care – An Exploratory Case Study

**Document Title**

Letter of Information and Consent - Principals

**Principal Investigator + Contact**

Brenton Faubert  
Western University  
[redacted]

**Additional Research Staff + Contact**

Regine Nuytten  
Western University  
[redacted]

**1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this exploratory research study about how Manitoba public school principals use inclusive processes and practices to support social justice outcomes in education for Manitoba's children in care, because you identified/were identified as a school principal in Winnipeg who successfully uses processes and practices to support social justice outcomes in school for children in care.

**2. Why is this study being done?**

2.1 Children in care represent one of Manitoba's most vulnerable, underserved groups, and both researchers and policymakers agree that their educational outcomes are not acceptable. Poverty, trauma, and systemic barriers affect educational outcomes for all of Manitoba's children in care, and about 90% of the province's more than 10,000 children in foster care have an Indigenous ancestry. These children are often also affected by family trauma rooted in residential school history. These details and data suggest that they affect the educational outcomes of Manitoba's children in care. Research and legislation both position public school principals as professionals who are best suited to advocate for and demand an equitable learning environment for these children.

- 2.2 The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding how inclusive principals are using processes and practices in schools to support social justice goals for children in care, what supports they use to develop the processes and practices, the successes and barriers they encounter, as well as what other supports would help them do this work.
- 3. How long will you be in this study?**  
It is expected that you will be in the study for one day, and participate in one interview during your participation. The visit will take approximately one hour.
- 4. What are the study procedures?**
- 4.1 If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview in Winnipeg at a place of your choosing (e.g., your school, library, or other location) facilitated by the co-researcher.
- 4.2 There will be 10-12 questions that will gather basic demographic information items (e.g., length of time as a principal, schools worked at), as these are criteria for study participation, and information about your experiences with inclusive processes and practices, as well as supports, challenges and barriers for this work.
- 4.3 It is hoped that you will agree to be audio recorded, but this is not a requirement for participation in the study
- 5. What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?**  
There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.
- 6. What are the benefits of participating in this study?**  
You may not directly benefit from participating in this study, but information gathered may provide benefits to society as whole, which include new information about the inclusive processes, and practices that inclusive principals use to support social justice outcomes for children in care in Manitoba, as well as barriers they encounter, and additional supports that would be helpful. This information may also provide suggestions on improved practice for other school principals, who want to support social justice outcomes for children in care in Manitoba, as well as improved educational experiences for future children in care in Manitoba.
- 7. Can participants choose to leave the study?**  
You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you, or you may choose to allow for the use of the information collected. No new information will be collected without your permission.

**8. How will participants' information be kept confidential?**

- 8.1 Only the principal investigator and co-researcher will have access to your study related records. While we do our best to protect your information, there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project, which may be required to report by law, we have a duty to report.
- 8.2 The researcher will keep any personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for a minimum of five years, and separate from your responses. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from your study file.
- 8.3 If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used, and any identifying quotes will be scrambled with those of other participants.

**9. Are participants compensated to be in this study?**

You will be compensated for expenses such as parking or bus fare for your participation in this study. If you do not complete the entire study you will still be compensated for expenses such as parking or bus fare.

**10. What are the rights of participants?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your employment status.

We will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study.

You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form

**11. Whom do participants contact for questions?**

If you have questions about this research study please contact:

Principal Investigator  
Brenton Faubert  
[redacted]

Additional Investigator  
Regine Nuytten  
Western University – Graduate Studies  
[redacted]

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).

**12. Consent**

Please see attached letter of consent.

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



**Letter of Consent – Principals**

**Project Title**

Using Inclusive Leadership Processes and Practices to Improve Educational Social Justice Outcomes of Manitoba's Children in Care – An Exploratory Case Study

**Document Title**

Letter of Information and Consent - Principals

**Principal Investigator + Contact**

Brenton Faubert  
Western University  
[redacted]

**Additional Research Staff + Contact**

Regine Nuytten  
Western University  
[redacted]

I have read the Letter of Information, had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am also aware that the researcher has an obligation to report information to outside agencies (e.g., information about abuse of minors to CAS, or other such information) that may arise in this study.

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research

YES  NO

I consent to the use of personal, identifiable quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

YES  NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

YES  NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (DD-MM-YYYY)

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Co-researcher Signature

---

Date (DD-MM-YYYY)



## Appendix E

Principals – Recruitment Poster

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR  
RESEARCH IN****Inclusive Educational Leadership / Processes & Practices Used to Support Children  
in Care**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of how Manitoba public school principals use inclusive processes and practices to support social justice outcomes in education for Manitoba's children in care.

Principals who meet the following criteria:

- Self-identify as highly successful in using inclusive processes & practices to achieve social justice outcomes for children in care
- Identify with the study goals
- Who worked, and continue to work, in K-12 urban schools in Winnipeg, for at least two years

If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to: take part in a one-on-one interview with 10-12 questions, lasting about one hour at a place of your choosing.

Your participation would involve one session, each session will be about 60 minutes long.

In appreciation for your time, you will be compensated for any parking or bus fare expenses you incur.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,  
please contact:  
Regine Nuytten  
Western University  
[redacted]

## Appendix F

## Email Script for Principal Recruitment

**Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research**

You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Dr. Brenton Faubert, and Regine Nuytten are conducting. Briefly, the study involves developing a better understanding of how Manitoba public school principals use inclusive processes and practices to support social justice outcomes in education for Manitoba's children in care.

You will participate in a one-on-one interview in Winnipeg at a place of your choosing that will last about one hour. You will be compensated for any expenses related to parking or bus fare incurred as a result of your participation in the interview.

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive a letter of information about this study please contact [redacted].

Thank you,

Researcher's name: Dr. Brenton Faubert

Researcher's affiliation: Western University – Department of Education

Researcher's email address: [redacted]

Researcher's telephone number: [redacted]

Student Contact: Regine Nuytten

Email: [redacted]

Phone: [redacted]

Affiliation: Western University

## Appendix G

## Letter of Information and Consent for Former Youth in Care

**Letter of Information – Former Youth in Care****Project Title**

Using Inclusive Leadership Processes and Practices to Improve Educational Social Justice Outcomes of Manitoba's Children in Care – An Exploratory Case Study

**Document Title**

Letter of Information and Consent – Former Youth in Care

**Principal Investigator + Contact**

Brenton Faubert

Western University

[redacted]

[redacted]

**Additional Research Staff + Contact**

Regine Nuytten

Western University

[redacted]

[redacted]

**1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this exploratory research study about how you understand the in-school processes and practices that affected your educational outcomes, because you identified/were identified as a former youth in care living in Winnipeg who attended schools in Winnipeg while in the care system.

**2. Why is this study being done?**

2.1 Children in care represent one of Manitoba's most vulnerable, underserved groups, and both researchers and principals are working to better understand what they need to become more successful, especially in the area of education. Very little is known about how youth in care understand and experience the processes and practices in schools, or how their educational experience is affected by the processes and practices that principals use in schools.

2.2 The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of how inclusive principals are using in-school processes and practice to support better

academic and social educational outcomes for children in care, the successes and barriers they encounter, as well as what other supports would help future children in care to be more successful in education.

**3. How long will you be in this study?**

It is expected that you will be in the study for the completion of one focus group session that will last about 90 minutes.

**4. What are the study procedures?**

4.4 If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in completing one focus group session in Winnipeg, at a youth centre or other community location. If you would prefer to provide a typed copy of your response, rather than attend the focus group session, you can return the answered questions via email. You can also contact the co-researcher at any point to ask questions or to receive more information.

4.5 The 8 questions will gather basic demographic information (e.g., age, length of time in care, number of schools attended, etc.), as these are criteria for study participation, and information about your educational experiences with in-school processes and practices, as well as any supports, challenges and barriers you experienced.

**5. What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?**

Potential risks and harm involve the recall of frustrating or unsettling information. For support we will have a youth centre mentor/counsellor on hand or if you prefer, you can reach out to: Voices: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network advocacy support (204-982-4956)

**6. What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

You may not directly benefit from participating in this study, but information gathered may provide benefits to society as whole, which include new information about the inclusive processes, and practices principals use to support children in care in Manitoba, as well as barriers children in care encounter in schools, and additional supports that would be helpful. This information may also provide suggestions for school principals, who want to improve their support for children in care in Manitoba and may also improve educational experiences for future children in care in Manitoba.

**7. Can participants choose to leave the study?**

You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you, or you may choose to allow us to use the information collected. No new information will be collected without your permission.

**8. How will participants' information be kept confidential?**

- 8.1 Only the principal investigator and co-researcher will have access to your study related records. While we do our best to protect your information, there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project, which may be required to report by law, we have a duty to report.
- 8.2 The researcher will keep any personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for a minimum of five years, and separate from your responses. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from your study file.
- 8.3 If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used

**9. Are participants compensated to be in this study?**

For your participation in the study you will be compensated for expenses such as parking or bus fare. If you do not complete the entire study, you will still be compensated for expenses such as parking or bus fare. Participants will also receive a small denomination gift card as a thank you for their time.

**10. What are the rights of participants?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your educational or employment status.

We will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study.

You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form

**11. Whom do participants contact for questions?**

If you have questions about this research study please contact:

Principal Investigator

Brenton Faubert

Western University

[redacted]

Additional Investigator

Regine Nuytten

Western University – Graduate Studies

[redacted]

[redacted]

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).

**12. Consent**

Please see attached letter of consent

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



**Letter of Consent – Former Youth in Care**

**Project Title**

Using Inclusive Leadership Processes and Practices to Improve Educational Social Justice Outcomes of Manitoba's Children in Care – An Exploratory Case Study

**Document Title**

Letter of Information and Consent – Former Youth in Care

**Principal Investigator + Contact**

Brenton Faubert  
Western University  
[redacted]

**Additional Research Staff + Contact**

Regine Nuytten  
Western University  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

**I have read the Letter of Information, understand the nature of the study and I agree to participate. All questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction. I am also aware that the researcher has an obligation to report information to outside agencies (e.g., information about abuse of minors to CAS, or other such information) that may arise in this study.**

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research

YES  NO

I consent to the use of personal, identifiable quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

YES  NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

YES  NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (DD-MM-YYYY)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Co-researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (DD-MM-YYYY)



## Appendix H

## Recruitment Poster for Former Youth in Care

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR  
RESEARCH IN****Inclusive Educational Leadership / Processes & Practices Used to Support Children  
in Care**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of how former youth in care understand inclusive in-school leadership processes and practices that affected their educational outcomes.

Former youth in care who meet the following criteria:

- Self-identify as former youth in care in Manitoba's Child and Family Services system (CFS)
- Left the care system 0-5 years ago
- Age 18-25
- Who identify with the study goals

If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to: participate in one focus group session that includes 8 questions.

Your participation would involve completing one focus group session lasting about 90 minutes.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,

please contact:

Regine Nuytten

Western University

[redacted]

Email address: [redacted]

## Appendix I

## Recruitment Email Script for Former Youth in Care

**Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research**

You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Dr. Brenton Faubert, and Regine Nuytten are conducting. Briefly, the study involves understanding how in-school leadership processes and practices affected your educational outcomes.

You would complete one focus group session that includes 8 questions. The session will last about 90 minutes.

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive a letter of information about this study please contact [redacted].

Thank you,

Researcher's name: Dr. Brenton Faubert

Researcher's affiliation: Western University – Department of Education

Researcher's email address: [redacted]

Researcher's telephone number: [redacted]

Student Contact: Regine Nuytten

Email: [redacted]

Phone: [redacted]

Affiliation: Western University – Department of Graduate Studies

## Appendix J

**Implications of Working Across Interorganizational Boundaries**

Both Katz and Kahn (1966), as well as Thompson (1967) address the concept of working across organizational boundaries in seminal texts that serve as springboards for a wide variety of research around this topic in both public and private organizations. In their comments, Katz and Kahn (1966), as well as Thompson (1967), explain that rigid organizational boundaries, like those found in education and CFS at this time, make it more difficult for educational leaders to recognize the limitations that a siloed organizational perspective places on the control and impact that leaders (i.e., inclusive principals and vice principals) might have on a situation (Corwin & Wagenaar, 1976; Katz & Kahn, 1966). Conversely, in situations with 'boundary spanning' activities, where organizational boundaries are easily crossed, and organizational knowledge, and cultural norms are shared, there is improved collaboration and translation of information (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

I also noticed that Miller's (2009) characterization of the work done by inclusive educators across organizational boundaries provides a beginning structure that helps to tease apart the advocacy actions of participants in this study. While Miller's (2009) work describes the actions of inclusive educational leaders and other actors working with homeless children, Williams' (2011) framework, not specifically designed with inclusion or social justice in mind, more explicitly appears to detail the different roles that I see as characterized by participants' advocacy work through processes and practices.

In his framework, Williams (2011, 2013) outlines four roles for boundary spanners. I try to outline the connections I made between Williams' (2011, 2013) work and the processes and practices exemplified through my conceptual framework.

According to Williams (2011, 2013) in the *reticulist role*, participants negotiated and made connections between policy, networks of actors from organizations outside of education, and also tracked, filtered, and distributed information to different stakeholders and organizations as necessary. In the *entrepreneur role*, participants encouraged others to take risks and looked for new ways to support children in care that developed spaces for sustainable advocacy in policy and process development, or that accessed new resources. In the *interpreter/communicator role* participants' awareness and appreciation of the intricacies involved in developing and maintaining trusting collaborative cross-organizational relationships was highlighted. In the *organizer role*, participants assumed responsibility for framing collaborative relationships that they developed through planned appropriate timelines, scheduled and chaired meetings, and collected and forwarded information.

Although, the four roles outlined in Williams' (2011, 2013) framework ascribe defined limits to the theoretical components of boundary spanning, I suspect that in practice the four roles and the three tiers of advocacy action integrate on a continually sliding scale, based on the environment, actors, and their goals. In Table 3 below, I try to summarize the characterizations of Williams' (2011, 2013) four roles and attempt to reconstitute them as I saw them as relevant and related to each of the three areas for stable and inclusive environments in the findings. In each area, I lists a boundary spanner characterization followed by an example of a strategy I saw as corresponding to that role. Table 3 offers a uniquely concrete and visual rendition of the work that inclusive educational leaders from this study did across organizational boundaries to create relational change, which affected the physical, academic, social-emotional, and cultural environments of children in care at school, broadening the definition and impact of

inclusive education for this group of children.

Table 3: *Summary of Boundary Spanner Roles Reconciled with Three Areas for Stable and Inclusive Environments*

Note: Children and Youth in Care (CYIC)

Boundary Spanner Roles	Reticulist	Entrepreneur	Interpreter & Communicator	Organizer & Co-ordinator
<p>Responding more intensely &amp; intentionally</p>	<p>Sustain relationship networks *develop trust and continuity by maintaining positive connections with and between student's support team</p> <p>Gatekeeping to collect &amp; filter info. *leaders situated as the rallying point; information is collected &amp; redistributed to parties deemed appropriate</p> <p>Create &amp; broker social capital *critical when trying to integrate different organizational perspectives, and try to include</p>	<p>Driven by desire to achieve public value *chose to advocate in the CYIC portfolio</p> <p>Proactive to broker between parties</p> <p>*negotiation between different organizations that meet to try to plan &amp; track student progress</p> <p>Need for new ideas &amp; innovation *develop forms &amp; other ways to track data *expand course credit offerings to underpin academic, social-emotional &amp;</p>	<p>Acutely aware &amp; appreciative of multiple interests *hosting meetings and negotiating between different organizations for resources that will benefit CYIC</p> <p>Initiate &amp; sustain effective inter-personal relationships *encouraging support from different organizations &amp; foster families through different means of contact re: positive news</p> <p>Trust recognized as fundamental *Indicate that honesty, transparency &amp; goodwill important to build trust</p>	<p>Comfortable &amp; knowledgeable with collaborative processes *set up formal &amp; informal processes &amp; practices to increase intensity of supervision for CYIC</p> <p>Planning &amp; coordinating to support *negotiating &amp; bargaining with all parties for the best outcome for CYIC</p> <p>Share information transparently *respectfully balance the individual need to know with CYIC need for privacy</p> <p>The hub of planning, monitoring &amp; managing knowledge *not only receiving &amp; sharing knowledge but</p>

	everyone's voice	soft skills development		<p>also storing and transferring if CYIC move on</p> <p>Outgoing, sociable, friendly, people oriented, positive, morally sound</p> <p>*Going out of the way to consistently check-in &amp; touch base with busy social workers, foster parents and group home staff</p>
Deliberately shaping the environment	<p>Political skills to influence actors with different power base</p> <p>*creatively &amp; courageously reshape system boundaries through dialogue, financing &amp; radical policy interpretation</p> <p>Create &amp; broker social capital</p> <p>*critical when trying to determine and honour CYIC perspectives, so try to be mindful of personal details &amp; include</p>	<p>Professional solutions based on relationships &amp; negotiations</p> <p>Experiment &amp; search for effective solutions</p> <p>Need for new ideas &amp; innovation</p> <p>* these solutions are focused on the physical, emotional &amp; cultural spaces (PECS) that students need</p> <p>Create spaces, staffing and policy changes &amp; takes risks &amp; creates opportunities</p>	<p>May be unconscious rather than deliberate action</p> <p>*focus on relationships &amp; soft skills often intuitive</p>	<p>Planning &amp; coordinating to support</p> <p>*working directly with CYIC to develop relationships, soft skills &amp; personalized PECS</p> <p>Outgoing, sociable, friendly, people oriented, positive, morally sound</p> <p>*reach out to CYIC without judgement, persevere when being rebuffed</p> <p>Commitment, persistence &amp; hard work</p> <p>*choose to do this work, hands-on</p>

	everyone's voice	*risk professional censure & breakdown of relationships with other organizations to change PECS		
Identifying formal & informal markers of success	Appreciate complexity *understand & work with trying to expand the markers of success for CYIC			The hub of planning, monitoring & managing knowledge *determining new markers of success & tracking data in formal & informal ways - commitment, persistence & hard work *feel that standardized measures are not accurate indicators of success, so look for other means *choose to do this work, hands-on

Appendix K

Western Research Ethics Approval



Western  
Research

Research Ethics

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board  
NMREB Amendment Approval Notice

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Brenton Faubert  
**Department & Institution:** Education, Western University

**NMREB File Number:** 108481  
**Study Title:** Using Inclusive Leadership Processes and Practices to Improve Educational Social Justice Outcomes of Manitoba's Children in Care – An Exploratory Case Study

**NMREB Revision Approval Date:** March 14, 2017  
**NMREB Expiry Date:** January 11, 2018

**Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:**

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Revised Western University Protocol		2017/02/20
Recruitment Items	Script for School Districts to Share Recruitment Materials with Principals and Vice Principals	2017/02/20

The Western University Non-Medical Science Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the amendment to the above named study, as of the NMREB Amendment Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of Dr. Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair  
EO: Erika Basile \_\_\_ Nicole Kaniki \_\_\_ Grace Kelly  Katelyn Harris \_\_\_ Nicola Morphet \_\_\_ Karen Gopaul \_\_\_



## Curriculum vitae

Name : Regine Nuytten

Post-secondary  
Education and  
Degrees: University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, MB  
M.Ed. Educational Leadership  
2014

University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, MB  
B.Ed. (A.D)  
2001

University of Guelph  
Guelph, ON  
Hon. BSc. (An. Sci)  
1987

Related Work  
Experience St. James Assiniboia S.D  
Winnipeg, MB  
Educational Leadership  
2001-current