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## Instructional Leadership Competencies as Interpreted by New School Principals

Arief Ebrahim

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Instructional Leadership Competencies as Interpreted by New School Principals

by

Arief Ebrahim

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Learning and Leading

University of Portland School of Education

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New School Principals

by

Arief Ebrahim

This dissertation is completed as a partial requirement for the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon.

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### Abstract

Over the years, changes in the complex responsibilities of principals have brought about greater demands to the role. This study examined new principals' (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year), perceptions relative to Instructional Leadership; an area of practice that due to the additional and complex roles of principals, does not get the attention it requires. Both the *quality* of the leader's Instructional knowledge and the capability of the leader *employing* this knowledge has also raised some questions (Robinson, 2010; Smylie & Bennett, 2005). The participants in this study comprised of a group of 19 principals who lead schools in Alberta, Canada. Six male participants and 13 female participants took part in the study. Four of the participants were in their 1<sup>st</sup> year. Six of the participants were in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Nine of the participants were in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year. This quantitative descriptive research included an exploratory analysis of disaggregated groups by conducting a crosswalk with two instruments; the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) and Competency 6: Instructional Leadership, from the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS). Descriptive statistics using SPSS were also calculated to see if gender and years of experience impacted principal perceptions of Instructional Leadership. The results showed the mean scores of the PIMRS subcategories of *frames school goals* and *promotes professional development* were rated the highest by the new principals as a collective group. Whereas, the mean scores of the subcategories of *provides incentives for teachers* and *provides incentives for students* were rated the lowest by the new principals as a collective group. In terms of the LQS and PIMRS crosswalk, the indicator (i) *Accessing supports, experts and resources to impact success* was rated the highest mean score. The lowest mean score in this crosswalk was indicator

*(h) Data analysis to inform instruction and enhance achievement.* Relative to gender, when performing the LQS and PIMRS crosswalk, female principals scored higher mean scores in all seven Competency 6 LQS indicators. When looking at years of experience, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year principals scored higher in all but one of the Competency 6 LQS indicators. Implications of this study revealed more research into the perceptions of new principals in the other LQS competencies could serve to enhance the pre-existing work of school districts. Further examination related to the underlying factors of the way gender perceptions influence the work of the principal. For example; why is it that female principals seem to appear stronger in their work as Instructional Leaders? Lastly, an inquiry could be made as to why there were two areas from the PIMRS that did not crosswalk with LQS Competency 6 indicators *(d)* and *(f)*.

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**Table of Contents**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Abstract.....   | i   |
| Acknowledgments.....  | iii |
| Table of Contents.....                                      | iv  |
| List of Figures.....  | vii |
| List of Tables.....   | vii |
| Chapter 1: Introduction.....                                | 1   |
| Expectations Versus Experience: A Problem of Practice.....  | 5   |
| Purpose of Research.....                                    | 9   |
| Research Questions.....                                     | 10  |
| Expectations Impacting Leadership.....                      | 10  |
| District Expectations of the Principal.....                 | 11  |
| Principal Expectations of the Staff.....                    | 12  |
| Expectations of the Community.....                          | 17  |
| Role of the Principal: Meeting the Standard in Alberta..... | 18  |
| Seek First to Understand: A Gap in Our Knowledge.....       | 19  |
| Grounding Framework.....                                    | 23  |
| Summary.....  | 24  |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review.....                           | 26  |
| Characteristics of an Effective Principal.....              | 26  |
| Leadership Styles.....                                      | 29  |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Instructional Leadership .....                       | 30 |
| Theoretical Models .....                             | 32 |
| Principal Performance Indicators.....                | 33 |
| Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale..... | 36 |
| Contributions of Current Studies .....               | 37 |
| Leadership and Gender .....                          | 38 |
| Summary.....   | 39 |
| <br>   |    |
| Chapter 3: Methodology .....                         | 41 |
| Purpose of Study and Research Question .....         | 41 |
| Rationale of Methodology .....                       | 41 |
| Participant Overview .....                           | 43 |
| The Instruments .....                                | 44 |
| Data Collection Procedures .....                     | 51 |
| Analyzing the Data .....                             | 53 |
| Summary.....   | 53 |
| <br>   |    |
| Chapter 4: Results .....                             | 55 |
| Preparation of Data for Analysis .....               | 55 |
| Gender.....  | 61 |
| Years of Experience.....                             | 64 |
| Summary.....   | 67 |
| <br>   |    |
| Chapter 5: Discussion .....                          | 69 |
| Introduction.....                                    | 69 |



|   |    |
|---|----|
| Discussion of Results.....                        | 71 |
| Principal Perceptions Relative to the PIMRS ..... | 71 |
| Limitations .....                                 | 78 |
| Future Research .....                             | 79 |
| Implications .....                                | 80 |
| Summary.....                                      | 82 |
| References.....                                   | 85 |

## List of Figures

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1. PIMRS Conceptual Framework ..... | 48 |
|--|----|

## List of Tables

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1. <i>Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=19)</i> .....  | 56 |
| Table 2. <i>Mean Response Rate and Standard Deviations per Subcategory of the PIMRS Questionnaire</i> .....   | 57 |
| Table 3. <i>Mean Response Rate and Standard Deviations per Main category of the PIMRS Questionnaire</i> .....   | 58 |
| Table 4. <i>Cross Comparison Between LQS Instructional Leadership Indicators and PIMRS Subcategories</i> .....  | 59 |
| Table 5. <i>Mean and Standard Deviations of the LQS Instructional Leadership Indicators</i> .....   | 60 |
| Table 6. <i>Group Differences in Gender for Leadership Self-Perception According to the PIMRS Subcategories Included in the PIMRS Questionnaire</i> .....           | 62 |
| Table 7. <i>Group Differences in Gender for Leadership Self-Perception According to the Main PIMRS Categories Included in the PIMRS Questionnaire</i> .....         | 63 |
| Table 8. <i>Means and Standard Scores for Each LQS Instructional Leadership Indicator According to Gender</i> .....   | 64 |
| Table 9. <i>Group Differences in Gender for Leadership Self-Perception According to the Ten Subcategories Included in the PIMRS Questionnaire</i> .....             | 65 |
| Table 10. <i>Group Differences in Years of Experience for Leadership Self-Perception According to the Main Categories Included in the PIMRS Questionnaire</i> ..... | 66 |
| Table 11. <i>Alberta LQS Instructional Leadership indicators' mean scores and standard deviations divided by years of experience</i> .....                          | 67 |

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Research on principal leadership in 1985 indicated that there were systemic problems resulting from principals having a weak knowledge in curriculum, unclear district expectations, and a broad scope of principal responsibilities that made attending to their role as principal a significant challenge (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). When examining the state of the principalship today, there is evidence showing that the problems identified by Hallinger and Murphy are gaining momentum over the past several years. This was evident in a 2014, pan-Canadian study involving 500 principals conducted by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and the Canadian Council of School Principals (CAP). This study included research conducted by Castle and Mitchell (2001) who referenced the problem of a lack of curriculum knowledge on the part of the principal. The principals in their study reported having to give up significant responsibilities related to the curriculum to their teachers. Principal responsibilities in this area of Instructional Leadership were given up due to the increased time principals had to spend on managerial tasks (p. 24). The Alberta Teachers' Association and Canadian Council of School Principals study (2014) referenced another investigation conducted by the Alberta Teachers' Association. Gleaned from this Alberta study was that autonomy of school-based decision making was something principals really enjoyed; however, they struggled with not being able to provide more input at the district level (ATA, 2009). Being unable to provide input at the district level negatively impacted those principals' ability to have greater clarity around district expectations for the work they do at the school level.

Referencing the broad range of principal responsibilities and the problems this presented in terms of their time allocation, principals in the ATA and CAP study felt their time in administrative and reporting tasks negatively impacted the time they felt was required to support

teachers and their school community (ATA & CAP, 2014, p.11). In addition to these systemic problems facing principals, Grissom and Loeb (2011) add to the complexity of these problems by claiming existing research does not tell us enough about the skills principals need to promote school improvement. This makes the design of policies and practices geared towards recruiting and preparing effective school leaders for this complex role even more challenging.

In the research pertaining to school leadership, the terms school leader and school principal are used interchangeably to refer to the role of the principal. With increasing complexities related to schools and the diverse communities they serve; school districts ask principals to carry out the responsibility of ensuring the different needs of the school community are appropriately met. In exploring those needs we need to address the research around the role of the principal including their impact on student results, impact of managerial tasks and taking care of the emotional well-being of those in their school community. Breaking down how the principal spends their time throughout the day illustrates how they attend to the traditional and shifting roles within the increased complexity of their work.

Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) highlight how a decade of research suggests that school leaders have a direct impact on a school's achievement results. They elaborate to say that principals today have a more all-inclusive role in supporting the school community that extends beyond managerial duties. They propose principals have experienced changes in their responsibilities to ensure that the academic and emotional needs of their students are being met in spite of challenges that may be present including: the low socio-economic status of families, a lack of funding for educational resources, and competing interests among staff and parents regarding the key areas of focus for the school. These are factors that have arisen since Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) claims of systemic problems preventing

principals from performing their roles and that speak to increases demand on the role. The expectations of the principal are clearly changing.

Examining the idea of expectations of the principal versus the years of experience in the role as determiners of their success, it is helpful to introduce a study conducted by Horng, Klasik and Loeb (2010) where they looked at the time invested, and tasks engaged in by the principal. The results showed that principals spent about 30% of their time in management tasks such as student discipline and completing documentation required from the school district and 21% of the day in organization management tasks such as budget allocation and staff related functions of hiring. Based on these findings it appears, almost half of the principal's school day is consumed with managerial type tasks as opposed to those focusing on instructional improvement. In the current context of leadership then, principals have additional responsibilities since 1985 around academic and social-emotional needs of students, as stated above by Leithwood et al. (2004), while still being required to perform a variety of managerial duties at the same time (Horng et al., 2010). These changes in leadership expectations identified by Leithwood et al. (2004) and how principals allocate resources of time articulated by Horng et al. (2010), support the problem stated for this work that bringing additional responsibilities to the role have also brought greater complexities for which new principals require preparation and support.

The aforementioned changes in what the principal must now focus on, depicts how they have moved from the role of just building managers to multi-faceted directors of a school community. The shift from managerial responsibilities to principals being multi-faceted directors of school communities is highlighted by Leithwood et al's. (2004) observation of the determinants of principal effectiveness. The authors state that in the past, a principal's success was reliant on the impact they were perceived to have on student test scores. More recent

descriptors of the all-inclusive nature of their role include how the principal impacts various outcomes such as: teacher behaviors, school culture, communication among the various constituents, building of teacher capacity, and collaboration between individuals and groups within a school setting (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2013). Learning how to impact all of these outcomes arguably takes time and experience.

The idea of experience impacting the success of the principal within the changing leadership landscape is addressed by Miller (2013) who suggests that schools who have new principals coming into the building will first experience a drop in the academic performance of their students. He claims significant improvement is actually not observed until a few years after the principal has been in place in their school setting. This highlights the challenge of new principals to make immediate impact on student achievement as they develop efficacy for the necessary leadership behaviors and their own leadership identity.

The new managerial and social-emotional demands contributing to the expanded role of the principal are only a part of what needs to be considered when looking at what makes them successful in that role. How principals bring who they are as an individual and who they are as a leader, their identity, conveys the morals and values they bring to the work they do and the decisions they make.

In addition to the observable and measurable behaviors of principals, Blasé (1987) indicates who they are as people is also evident in their work. Principals have a significant influence over school culture insofar as they convey their morals within their leadership. To highlight this point, Blasé's (1987) study of teachers' perceptions of their school principal concluded that the principal had a significant impact on the culture of the school; the principal could influence staff behaviors, making it clear as to the morals and values he or she saw as a

priority in the school.

The complex nature of school leadership and the ability to impart morals and values onto a school community that stem from the principal's morals and values can be a challenging role to fulfill for principals entering not only new into the position but new into a school community. This presents a potential problem of practice for beginning principals when the expectations of stakeholders are not aligned to their experience in the role.

### **Expectations Versus Experience: A Problem of Practice**

The expectations of the principal held by parents, community, staff and students often don't align with the experience of the principal in the role and the criteria upon which their effectiveness and success in that role are judged. Is it years of experience or a defined set of leadership skills that has a significant impact on success? Are these mutually exclusive aspects related to the role or do you need one to acquire the other? Gülcan (2012) contends that the role of the school leader is more than that of a manager of people and facility. He suggests that school leaders who possess positive leadership behaviors including engaging staff with shared decision making can establish visions, set goals, and problem-solve using methods reflecting a collaborative approach. Gülcan believes a school leader should be a talented and knowledgeable person with a positive disposition, practicing leadership focused on the development of effective instruction. Additionally, Gülcan states the school leader should navigate the school culture to ensure both teacher professional development and academic improvement of students have a chance to flourish. To further his point, he identifies five specific categories that encompass the complex role of the school leader. Gülcan's (2012) categories communicate the magnitude of responsibilities and accountability evident in the role of the principal:

1. Identifying the vision and mission of the school—Set the direction for the school with staff.
2. Programming and administering education—Ensure resources support executing a plan of learning.
3. Developing staff professionally—Ensure staff have access to opportunities for on-going learning.
4. Monitoring and assessing the teaching process—Ensure the supervision and evaluation of staff.
5. Creating and developing a positive school culture—Ensure the learning environment is conducive to learning in an inclusive setting.

Gülcan's categories are fairly comprehensive. The question remains, does a principal possess the skills necessary to fulfill Gülcan's requirements upon being appointed to the principalship or does that acquisition require experience in the role?

Recently this question was addressed by Azaiez and Slate's (2017) whose longitudinal study looked at the impact of a principal's years of experience on the academic achievement of students. The study concluded, that principals with more experience did in fact, positively impact student test scores more than new principals. Moreover, the authors recommended new principals receive additional support and guidance from their school district to create actionable goals that will enhance student achievement. The results of Azaiez and Slate's (2017) work affirm Gülcan's assertion that the actual leadership behavior of the principal, gleaned from years of experience are key component in the success of the principal as they work with their staff to improve student achievement. What is problematic here, and a focus of this work, is how do early career principals make sense of what Dennis Shirley (2014) called "heightened



accountability systems and their management and compliance features that distract principals from their core tasks of improving teaching and learning” (ATA & CAP, 2014, p.81). What should be the expectations of early career principals related to achieving the responsibilities identified by Gülcan’s (2012)?

According to Grissom and Loeb (2011) there are differences between recognizing that a principal affects school outcomes and defining how a principal affects these school outcomes. What are the behaviors or actions whereby a principal is actually making a difference in his or her school? How does this making a difference relate to experience? Relative to this question, Sinnema, Ludlow, and Robinson’s (2016) findings revealed the behaviors of the principal that make a difference in the progress of a school are to do with how they goal set, monitor data, and how they create high standards for staff and students. These behaviors also correspond to the actions that influence whether principals feel competent in their overall effectiveness as a leader. Sinnema et al. (2016) also contends that principal perceptions of effectiveness may not entirely depend on experience but suggests experience still plays a significant role. They claim success of the principal is also be influenced on how the principal dedicates themselves to the development of the skills needed to perform their role. The same study revealed, that principals felt they were less confident in areas where they were required to problem-solve, deal with teachers in difficulty, or support high academic improvement for all students. The authors suggest that principals may have less control in more unpredictable or less routine situations, thus impacting their perception of their effectiveness in moments of uncertainty. The School Leader’s Network (2014) revealed similar findings in their study stating, diligent attention by the principal towards their expectations can serve as a benefit in how they goal-set, plan and organize for school improvement. However, they also concluded that it takes an average of five

years for a principal to create a vision, improve systems and teaching staff, and implement new practices and policies to influence the performance of the school.

The research supports that awareness and the ability to perform behaviors directly related to enhancing the progress of the school is a combination of the principal's expectations and their experience in the position. Experience seems to be the more important variable as a determining factor of success. The importance of fulfilling expectations of the role is represented in how the principal sees themselves as leaders. This perception is also influenced how the staff views the principal as a leader within the school community.

When examining leadership, motivation plays a significant part in the effectiveness of the principal. The motivational factors of a leader depend on the person and the context of his or her leadership. According to Boyatzis and McKee (2005), leaders face uncertain and challenging environments involving rapid changes in physical, social, political, technological, economic, and organizational contexts. In Alberta, these environments exist in the form of schools, resulting in principals needing to be leaders who are highly equipped to work within these uncertain and challenging environments. Beginning in September 2019, the instrument used in Alberta, to evaluate and guide the work of principals, is the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS). The LQS provides a framework and structure to the manner in which principals should be attending to their work. Due to the complexities referred to by Boyatzis and McKee (2005) that are clearly evident within the context of this study, it seems necessary to examine the nuances impacting how and why leaders demonstrate a commitment to their work.

As to whether the competency of the principal is based on experience or expectations of the role, it is clear the role encompasses many aspects that the principal must be aware of and practice effectively to ensure positive outcomes. The role of the principal in general, and

specifically in Alberta, is changing, and with this change comes greater complexity in multiple aspects of the role. Based on these conditions, it seems beneficial to provide new principals an examination as to their perceptions of their abilities as Instructional Leaders.

### **Purpose of Research**

The research indicates that the work of school leaders is becoming more complex in terms of facilitating relationships, managing resources, and improving academic achievement. The impetus for this study comes from the important role a principal has in his or her school, including that of an Instructional Leader. The complexity of the principalship is a result of how it has significantly evolved in terms of the breadth of responsibilities needed to support the entire school community.

Relative to the work of the principal, the problems identified in the research are twofold: First, there is a misalignment between the expectations placed on beginning principals and their acquisition of the skills and abilities required to address the complex and constantly changing requirements of the role. Secondly, is there is the expectation for principals to improve as Instructional Leaders without the appropriate training or mentorship in how to accomplish this.

The purpose of this descriptive study examined the extent to which new principals perceive themselves as prepared to implement the expectations of Instructional Leadership outlined in Competency 6 of the new Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) for the province of Alberta. Within this study, 19 out of a total of 23 participants, defined here as principals in their first, second, or third years at a designated school jurisdiction in Alberta, were asked to self-assess their preparedness to attend to the indicators found in the LQS, under the competency titled Instructional Leadership. Although the LQS serves as an evaluative tool to assess the work of all school leaders, it is highly beneficial for new principals in particular, to see the use of it as

a reflective tool to gather evidence relative to their role as a principal. This would provide an opportunity for new principals to see themselves in relationship to the indicators within the Instructional Leadership competency. The conclusions drawn from this study may be used by school districts to inform future recommendations for new principal professional development programs and potentially serve as an impetus for the revamping of targeted support systems to assist new principals throughout the school year. Additionally, school district executives may use the findings and recommendations of this study when reflecting on their district's current practice for the selection of candidates best suited for the role of principal.

### **Research Questions**

As this study's purpose is focused on gaining a deeper awareness as to the perceptions of new principals, the research questions used to guide my inquiry into new principal preparedness relative to Instructional Leadership are as follows:

1. To what extent do new principals perceive themselves as prepared to meet the competencies of the LQS related to Instructional Leadership?
2. What effect, if any, do years of experience and gender, have on new principals' perceptions of their ability to meet the competencies of the LQS related to Instructional Leadership?

### **Expectations Impacting Leadership**

In this section, the notion of expectations directly impacting school leadership will be addressed in three areas: the expectations of the school district onto the principal, the corresponding expectations from the principal onto his or her staff and the expectations of the principal working with individuals both in and outside the school community.

### **District Expectations of the Principal**

School districts have a significant role in contributing to the quality of principals who serve their school districts. Examples of this can be seen in the way school districts select and appoint their principal candidates, delegate responsibility to them, and support them in aspects related to their work. The LQS for example, contains a total of 9 leadership competencies. Each competency contains indicators that reflect the actions of the principal. These indicators are what is expected, in terms of the delegated responsibilities coming from the province then espoused onto the principal. With 9 LQS competencies to attend to, each with their own set of indicators, principals will need on-going support and guidance as they perform their duties. Moreover, Herman et al. (2017) meta-analysis shows a connection between initiatives such as leadership development and training programs and in-school support targeting district executives' abilities to create leading conditions for principals, learning conditions for students, and teaching conditions for teachers. Selecting and developing good principals works to the advantage of the school district. To highlight the importance of the district's role in mentoring the work of the school leader, Haberman (2011) points out how a district's ability to define expectations for their executives, in turn, influence the effectiveness of principals in the operation of their schools. The more support provided for new principals at the district level, the greater chance for success at the school level.

Ultimately, school districts are responsible for supporting the work of school principals. This includes leader preparation, hiring, evaluation, professional development, and job-embedded support. Curtis and Wurtzel (2010) reiterate the important role school districts play in their ability to build on the qualities of individuals in their roles as school leaders, especially those entering into the principalship for the first time. The School Leaders Network (2014)

reports student academic success can be influenced up to 25% by the school principal. This being the case, it is important that school districts invest in the right leaders, leading to improved teacher practice to create equitable learning experiences for students.

Expectations of the role of the principal must be communicated from the school district to the principals themselves. Further to this point, is the importance of principals being able to reflect on their practice with clarity around these expectations. Washington University's Center for Educational Leadership provided researched-based reports to School Board Executives so school districts could better understand the best ways to use principal self-evaluations as part of an evaluation of principal performance. The reports provided two recommendations pertaining to the self-evaluation of the principal:

1. Principals' assessment of their own practice should be evaluated over a span of time, so reflections may include a variety of indicators.
2. Principals should have a clear and thorough understanding of what constitutes Instructional Leadership. It should not be presented as an abstract concept but rather as a concept that has tangible indicators such as those found in their Instructional Leadership Framework.

Implicit in the recommendations is that school districts should be intentional in collecting evidence that can be used to support the principal in their professional development. When principals are able to assess their work in a holistic manner and fully understand the criteria that encompasses their work, this information can then be used for them to make informed decisions about enhancing their leadership practice.

### **Principal Expectations of the Staff**

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) contend that teacher time for inquiry around their practice is

sacrificed at the expense of implementing unnecessary school-based initiatives. Although principals have significant say as to the initiatives started within their own schools, there are initiatives that teachers may not see as an urgent priority in the same manner as the principal. Despite the principal's good intentions, this may lead to teachers being trained and coached in a rush manner, thus, decreasing the intended results on student achievement. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) claim the importance of the school principal in facilitating improved student achievement is in developing teacher capacities through motivation and supportive working conditions. Creating the conditions for teachers to grow and feel safe to take risks with their own professional learning is a significant responsibility of the principal. The authors contend that a principal's role is not just imparting knowledge and skills to his or her teachers but to model appropriate behavior and provide the space and time for intellectual stimulation amongst his or her teaching staff. This again speaks to the complex work of the principal as the person responsible for creating the conditions for learning, for demonstrating the behaviors needed in support of Instructional Leadership and for modeling the appropriate values to provide motivation for the school community.

Bolman and Deal's (2008) human resource framework is used to uncover the relationship between the organization and the employer. As the principal serves as an agent of the school district, they often represent the larger organization within their own particular school setting. The authors reference the term "organization" as pertaining to a context larger than any one school. However, each school requires its own organizational structures within the larger structure of the district, as recognized by Bolman and Deal in stating:

Organizations need people (for their energy, effort, and talent), and people need organizations for the many intrinsic and extrinsic rewards they offer, but their respective

needs are not always well aligned. When the fit between organizations and people is poor, one or both suffer: individuals may feel neglected or oppressed, and organizations sputter because individuals withdraw their efforts or even work against organizational purposes. (p. 137)

The qualities of the principal impact the disposition of his or her teaching staff. His or her attitudes, beliefs, and actions serve as a motivating factor for the work that takes place in terms of the school community. In light of this, there must be alignment between a principal's actions and the qualities that are valued by his or her teachers. Failure to align their actions with staff needs could impact the principal's self-efficacy as an instructional leader as they encounter little response or even push back from staff. If a principal is unable to have a good read of their school community, the alignment of attitudes, beliefs and actions become more difficult. Being able to explore new principal perceptions as prepared to meet the competencies of the LQS related to Instructional Leadership (including by gender and years of experience), may assist principals in seeing themselves as leaders relative to how their school community may see them in their role.

Blasé (1987) discusses that it is important to identify the leadership qualities that resonate with the teaching staff. As a way to address this issue and to create a baseline standard in which principals can measure the expectations from his or her staff, Blasé identified nine task-related factors and five consideration-related factors. These factors were determined from a two-year case study he referenced highlighting variables that change teachers' work perceptions over time. The participants included 80 teachers from a High School in Southeastern United States. One of these factors revealed in the study was how teachers determined how effective a principal was in his or her role as school leader. The following is an overview of Blasé's task related factors,



which align to both the LQS Instructional Leadership competency indicators and the PIMRS subcategories.

1. Accessibility: How available and present is the principal to his or her teachers?
2. Consistency: How aligned are the actions of the principal with what he or she communicates and with the district regulations?
3. Knowledge and Expertise: How much does the principal know to be able to support teachers to perform their duties?
4. Clear and Reasonable Expectations: How does the principal demonstrate equity amongst his or her teachers?
5. Decisiveness: How well does the principal make decisions in a timely manner?
6. Goal Setting: How well does the principal set the direction for his/her teachers?
7. Follow Through: How well does the principal provide timely support and assistance to his or her teachers?
8. Ability to Manage Time: How well does the principal use the allotted time over a school year to plan effectively for his or her teachers?
9. Problem-solving orientation: How well does the principal use a problem-solving approach to work through complex issues with his or her staff?

The following are the consideration factors which determine principal effectiveness. These also align, (although not as directly) to both the LQS Instructional Leadership indicators and the PIMRS subcategories.

1. Support during conflicts: How well does a principal stand behind his/her teachers in times of difficulty?

2. Participation/Consultation: How inclusive is the principal of involving staff in decision making?
3. Fairness/Equity: How well does the principal respect the professional rights of teachers?
4. Recognition/Praise and Reward: How well does the principal acknowledge the work of his/her teachers?
5. Willingness to Delegate Authority: How well does the principal find the right people at the right time to do the right job?

In examining his research, Blasé (1987) states, “When a principal is weak in a particular factor, he or she is most likely to be perceived deficient in a number of other factors” (p. 606). Blasé concluded that a principal cannot be considered effective unless they have the ability to practice a variety of leadership qualities concurrently. In support of Blasé’s factors that focus on the expectations teachers have of the principal, Onorato (2013) sites five duties of the principal that overlap and add to Blasé’s thinking around principal’s responsibilities towards his or her staff. They are:

1. A clear mission and goals
2. Maintains relationships with staff
3. Manages classroom practice
4. Coordination of curriculum and instruction
5. Ensure congruence in how students learn and perform

Although the terminology may differ amongst the research, the overall responsibilities and duties convey the necessity of the principal in attending to similar types of behaviors and attitudes with regards to their teachers. Hattie (2009) reinforces this stating how the principal as a

catalyst in supporting teacher success to impact student success is apparent as a school-based determinant. Moreover, the comparison between findings demonstrates how these principal behaviors are linked to Instructional Leadership. This adds credence to Leithwood et al.'s (2004) assertion of the importance of the role of the principal in effective school leadership.

### **Expectations of the Community**

Hauseman, Pollock and Wang (2017) suggest that for the school principal, the school-community partnership is a somewhat new job demand for principals. Today, principals serving their school are also serving their school-community. Tschannen-Moran (2014) implies that the unconditional trust principals once received from their school community, is no longer the case today. This suggests, principals now have to earn the trust of their community through the ongoing evidence of their work. The importance of a school community and its connections is echoed by Sergiovanni (1992) who claims one critical part of leading a school is working in alignment with the wider school community. This implies how the principal reflects the larger school community's values and goals.

Le Fevre and Robinson (2014) suggest that the idea of working with the larger school community in the manner stated by Tschannen-Moran (2014) and Sergiovanni (1992) can even extend outside the school community. This includes volunteer community partners that work directly with children such as; elected officials and support agencies who assist low socio-economic schools. In terms of the teachers, they too observe the principal's interactions with these aforementioned partners. The responsibility of the principal to develop and foster positive relationships with those outside the school community is important in getting the additional and necessary support for students that cannot be provided by the teachers or staff alone. These ideas suggested in the literature of school and outside community engagement, is also highlighted in

the LQS which states: “Whereas principals...have an important role in fostering collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all partners in the education system to enable all students to achieve their potential” (Alberta Leadership Quality Standard, 2018, p. 2). The new Leadership Quality Standard suggests a need for the school principal to work alongside all key stakeholders to ensure quality education for students is maintained: “Whereas Alberta’s teachers, students, parents, educational leaders and members of the public have a strong will to ensure all Alberta students have access to quality learning” (Alberta Leadership Quality Standard, 2018, p. 2). Where the principal is not directed in their role within this statement, it is implied that that school-community partnership is to be seen as having great value in the overall success of the school.

### **Role of the Principal: Meeting the Standard in Alberta**

Beyond the expectations of district, staff and community, provincial mandates also place expectations on school leaders. In the context of Alberta, the Education Ministry embarked on a curriculum redesign that was originally to be implemented by schools (Grades K-4) as early as September 2019. Although the implementation date is delayed, preparation for this implementation came with expectations for teachers, principals and Superintendents as per the competencies of the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS), Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) and Superintendent’s Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS). If the LQS requires principals to create the optimal conditions for teacher practice and student learning, I would argue it is essential to understand the dispositions (feelings and attitudes) and motivators (areas of professional interest) of individuals entering into the principalship. Understanding these two areas related to who the principal is becomes essential if districts are to provide the support needed by new principals as their practice is assessed and evaluated against the competencies of the LQS. Evidence provided

in the form of revised versions of the LQS, TQS, and SLQS reflect the complexity and change in the roles and responsibilities now required in the areas of both leading and teaching. The LQS itself has undergone numerous revisions prior to being enacted in 2019 and with each change new competencies and indicators were added to address changes in societal values, educational values, and system. There is an openness granted by the province for how principals achieve the indicators listed under the Instructional Leadership competencies, which shows that there is recognition that the principal will seek out and implement a variety of tools and processes to attend to the competencies within the Leadership Quality Standard. Principals being responsive to the context in which they lead is going to be a key characteristic that assists the effectiveness of their practice. Provision of training in implementation of the competencies by the district, as advocated earlier, will help principals respond to the needs of their school and community.

This study was undertaken to inform school districts in the selection and more importantly, support of people new to the principalship. The training of school leaders has been an area for challenge for districts as they seek the most effective supports and relevant understandings to continue to meet the ever-changing needs of a complex and diverse school system. This research sheds light on the LQS Instructional Leadership indicators, so an opportunity for better alignment between the activities and supports provided to new principals and the issues and concerns they face day-to-day may be addressed. This study may work hand-in-hand as policy makers, researchers, and educators try to develop the best behavioral indicators to guide the work of the principal.

### **Seek First to Understand: A Gap in Our Knowledge**

As articulated by Alberta's LQS, the competencies required of a school principal are by no means confined to traditional concepts of building management such as budget and facility

maintenance. Tschannen-Moran (2014) contend how the principal carries the responsibility for lifting the vision of the school as a trustworthy environment for all constituents (p. 254). It stands to reason as to why there are eight additional LQS Leadership Competencies reflecting how the principal's role impacts the success of a school community. Aspiring leaders seek to enter into the role of the principalship for a variety of reasons including encouragement from colleagues who see their leadership potential. It is not until they are in the role, however, that they actually begin to develop their own true sense of principal identity. The gap in the research is in the lack of information about how much the principal knows about their practice as well as how capable they are in implementing any knowledge they have relative to Instructional Leadership. This notion is captured by Smylie and Bennett (2005) who state, "We contend that knowledge of effective leadership practices is not the same thing as knowledge of the capacities required for enactment. Our understanding of effective school leadership practice has grown tremendously in recent years. . . However, our understanding of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for school leaders to be effective is much less well developed" (p. 141).

The motivations of the principal who enters into the position has a great deal of impact on the staff they lead. The literature identifies different ideas related to the concept of inspiring and motivating leadership. Azaiez (2017) contends school principals affect teaching and learning most by motivating staff members and through exhibiting commitment to improve their working conditions and Deal and Peterson (1999) view the school principal as the architect of a school's teaching culture in how they impact the behaviors of the school staff as well as their motivations and inspirations. As cited in the literature prior, principals who have a strong sense of identity within their leadership role find more opportunities to have the impact on their school community. The gaps in understanding how much principals know and what they do with what

they know as Instructional Leaders creates an urgency to explore further the importance of the interactions they have with their staff and school community. The individual personalities of principals bring a unique set of beliefs and values. These will have a direct impact on the way the principal leads their school community.

Applicable but not exclusive to the role of the principal, Lord and Hall (1992) declared a need to reconsider the individual differences explaining leadership behavior. They suggest the need to look at leadership behavior from the viewpoint of the style of leadership principals use to lead as well as the quality of their relationships they have with staff. Both are reflected in the LQS Instructional Leadership competency indicators as well as the PIMRS subcategories. Before an examination of the variables that contribute to how and why a leader leads, it is important to look at the fundamental underpinnings of leadership that are reflected in the actions of the leader. Two of these underpinnings are the social interactions of the principal with staff and the emotions they may espouse onto those they lead. Yukl (2009) defines leadership as a process of social interactions in which leaders attempt to influence the behavior of their followers. Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) propose that leadership is an intrinsically emotional process, in which leaders display certain emotions and attempt to evoke and control other emotions in their followers. There is a component of school and community leadership built on a mutual exchange of deep emotional connections with the people the principal leads. Tschannen-Moran (2014) reinforces this stating, that trustworthy leaders promote the norms of conduct that positively impact the well-being of all members of the school community (p. 256). The emotions of people within the school community will be positively impacted if there is trust in the principal.

Motivation is at the root of why people make choices in many areas of their lives, and

this is no different when referring to school principals who through their work, impact their staff and school community. Chan and Drasgow (2001) define motivation to lead (MTL) as an individual differences construct that affects a person's decisions to acquire leadership training, assume leadership roles and responsibilities, and his or her intensity of effort in leading and persistence as a leader. If principals struggle to understand or connect with their own MTL, they may not reach their full leadership potential. At this time, it is important to refer to Bandura's (1997) claims of self-efficacy stating that it is formed through mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasions, and emotional and physiological states. As this study looks at the readiness of new principals as Instructional Leaders, it is necessary to show how both the motivation to lead and self-efficacy (although different) both contribute to the overall perceptions formed by new principals.

As this study's focus is to seek to understand the perceptions of new principals, an important practice is how knowledge is acquired and applied by the principals. Chan, Rounds, and Drasgow (2000) determined that MTL affects participation in leadership training and roles leading to the acquisition of leadership knowledge and skills. New knowledge and skill acquisition forge one's leadership experience, increasing an individual's MTL. A principal new to their assignment must want to first seek out and then want to apply their knowledge to improve in their practice. Participation in these kinds of behaviors are what create a fair opportunity for new principals to accurately form an opinion of their work.

Clemmons and Fields (2011) acknowledge that leadership is a thoroughly researched area of study, while at the same time being an area that is very misunderstood. This misunderstanding of leadership calls for more inquiry into the area of how principals conduct their practice. Although Burns (1978) assertion of leaders being irresponsible in their practice now seems



outdated, the fact that leaders are not reaching their full potential in his claim does hold merit today. With this being the case, it is imperative that new principals are given the chance to reflect on their intentions, motivations, and core purpose, all of which contribute to the leadership style they will bring into their work. Moreover, new principals need to be in tune with shifts and changes in the way they stay motivated in their practice and the way they motivate others in their school setting. Principals who are able to do this would be filling the gap identified in the literature with regards to being able to determine how much they know and how effectively they are applying what they know to their leadership practice.

### **Grounding Framework**

Two theoretical models are used to explore the work of the school leader in this study. The first is Role Theory and the second is Motivation Theory. The rationale for including these two theories was how they both include relational aspects depicting how groups of people interacted with one another.

The school context is filled with opportunities to build and form relationships that range from collegial to deeply rooted personal friendships. Many times, these relationships are influenced by the roles individuals have both within and outside the school setting. Hunter (2001) suggests Role Theory is defined by a set of normative expectations. These expectations add clarity as to defining a position or status of a particular individual as they interact with other people in a social context. Hunter's claim, although not intended specifically for principals, has a place within the school setting. The principal, even by his or her title carries a set of normed expectations when in the position of school leader. Members of the school community have preconceived notions on how the principal should enact their role. This perspective is important in that principal perceptions of how they attend to their work, including that of an Instructional

Leader, may be influenced by the feedback and responses they receive from members of their school community. An assumption I carry into this study is how the nature of a principal's relationship changes based on how they are viewed by their staff in their role. Moreover, the principal's practice may be impacted by the way they see their role through the eyes of others.

In looking closer at the part Motivation Theory plays in the work of the school leader, the research of theorists such as Amabile (1985) and Miller (1988) is drawn upon. Although their research is not specific to school leadership, these researchers look closer at the idea of *flow* to examine the factors impacting both internal and external motivating behaviors. They assert when there is *flow*, people have greater confidence and enjoyment in what they are doing within their work environment. New principals, having a sense of flow as described by Amabile and Miller, creates not only confidence but a sense of enthusiasm in the principalship as they engage in their challenging and complex work. According to Deckers (2014) a motive is a disposition that pushes an individual along multiple channels in order for them to adapt to the environment. She adds how being able to see an end result through goal setting is a feature of motivational behavior (p. 10). Within the LQS Instructional Leadership competency and the PIMRS subcategories, goal setting, incentives for teachers and students come up as areas that are needed to be addressed by the principal. Therefore, motivation presents as a clear factor in assisting principals achieving the results required as Instructional Leaders.

### **Summary**

The primary individuals intended to benefit from the findings of this study are emerging leaders considering the role of the principalship. That emerging leaders can better understand their readiness is important, as districts, like the one that served as the focus of this study, seek to find motivated and capable candidates in terms of leadership skills, abilities and the

psychological dispositions to handle the demands of the position. Having self-awareness with regard to one's own psychological and emotional dispositions can be key in helping emerging leaders determine if the principalship is right for them. Due to gaps or deficiencies in their leadership training in critical areas such as visioning, building a learning community, and Instructional Leadership, individuals moving into the role may need to gauge their willingness and ability to develop these skills while in the role. As a result of this research, it is hoped that Superintendents and district executives have more information from which to identify potential candidates and select capable people to move into the role of the principalship. School communities will benefit from leaders who have an increased knowledge of what their role entails as they handle the shift from building managers to Instructional Leaders and changes in their relationships with their school community. With more first to third-year principals understanding their role and their corresponding demands, schools are better positioned to serve their staff, students, parents, and community.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 looks into the research that adds context to key terms: School Mission, Managing Instruction, and Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate. Chapter 2 also contains information related to the PIMRS, how it is used, and the instrument's purpose. Additional information as to the background of the newly developed LQS is also provided. Chapter 2 offers deeper analysis as to the notion of effective leadership, leadership practices, theoretical models, and principal performance indicators. This chapter will conclude with information relative to gender within the role of the principalship.

In order to understand the foundational elements of the role of the principal leading up to an individual's motivations to lead, this section begins by uncovering the characteristics of what it means to be an effective principal. The literature shows a variety of contradictory ideas relative to methods of leadership that can be used to achieve the goals of the principals. In so, there is an examination of differing leadership styles that are practiced by school principals. Following this is an overview of two theoretical models that could have implications for the practice of school leadership, along with a comprehensive overview of nine assessment instruments used to measure performance. Lastly, there is a conclusion linking transformational leadership practices as a potential motivator to lead.

### Characteristics of an Effective Principal

In a study conducted by Herrmann and Ross (2016), principal effectiveness was measured by using a *principal practice* instrument. It was found that principals were rated more highly when they had input into setting clear goals for teachers, which then transferred to improved student learning. The research claimed this could be a result of teachers and principals setting achievable but not very challenging goals. Another important observation from this

research was that the rating for principal effectiveness improved when principals set goals in collaboration with their teachers, thereby adding credibility to both relational and school vision quantities practiced by principals towards their teachers.

Leithwood et al. (2006) identify seven *strong claims* shedding light on the qualities of effective leadership. An important finding in this research was that principal leadership was considered second only to teacher effectiveness in impacting student achievement. This shows how at times, principal leadership may work as a catalyst for other good things impacting positive school outcomes to occur.

In the following research, self-efficacy comes to the forefront when looking at the qualities possessed by the principal as well as those who evaluate his or her work with the teachers. Self-efficacy seems to have a natural fit when examining how the qualities of one person can potentially impact the feeling, mood, or productivity of another individual. How the principal and teacher feel about themselves in relation to their work impacts how effective they are in their roles. In highlighting the power of self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) concludes that an increase in self-efficacy (leading to improved behavior choices) in a particular area can often lead to improved behavioral choices in different areas where that person is practicing similar skill sets. In a study conducted by Kirk (2004) where he used Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as a theoretical framework, the correlation between teacher efficacy and principal leadership was tested. The conclusion of the study reported only a moderate correlation between principal leadership and the impact it had on teacher efficacy. Furthermore, in Bandura's (1977) analysis of self-efficacy and the concept of expectations, he concludes that expectations alone would not be enough to impact people's behavior. Kirk uncovers only a moderate correlation between teacher efficacy and principal leadership. Bandura further shows that people's efficacy is

impacted by how the expectations differed in magnitude (how big a task is) and generality (how common the task is) compared to other people who share the same roles and responsibilities. Another variable, related to expectations, is strength. Bandura suggests that when expectations are weak, they hold no strength, especially during a person's negative experiences. However, when expectations are strong and mastery is high, the person will be able to work through difficult situations. Therefore, surmising how a teacher feels about his or her competency and ability to demonstrate resiliency will have a greater impact than the teacher's reliance on the principal. In spite of this information, Bandura's research validates the importance of a principal demonstrating specific qualities to be considered as effective by his or her teaching staff.

There are models found in the research to show the interplay between the principal and those he or she leads. Hallinger and Heck's (1998) research identifies three different assessment models used to evaluate the qualities of an effective principal. These models convey implications of how the principal acts with his or her teachers. The Direct-Effects Model validates the claim that the actions of a principal impact the school's outcomes. However, this model does not consider in-school variables such as culture, instructional organization, or teacher commitment. The Mediated-Effects Model surmises that the principal is able to impact the school but his or her influence is eclipsed by other factors, such as other people, events, and teacher attitude. The Reciprocal-Effects Model assumes the relationship between the principal and the school environment is interactive. This model implies that the principal adapts his or her behavior to fit the constructs of the school. The principal makes decisions by "interacting" with the school on a day-to-day basis. Hallinger and Heck (1998) find that "Principals are more likely to influence the school level of the organization more directly than the classroom" (p. 180). This dichotomy in how and what the principal influences may add to the complexity of accurately evaluating the

effectiveness of the principal.

### **Leadership Styles**

Goleman's models of leadership (2000) identify multiple principal leadership styles.

The *Coercive* leadership style has the lowest impact in terms of principal effectiveness. This model is a top-down approach where teachers are not allowed to voice or state opinions as to the direction of the work for which they are ultimately responsible. This model of leadership destroys the culture from the inside out. Nothing can flourish as the spirits of the employees are broken. The *Authoritative* style suggests principals using a strong and clear vision to lead their staff. Decisions are thoughtful and deliberate. Goleman claims this is the most effective leadership style to make an impact on staff. There is an air of respectful confidence where the teachers know they have a trusted leader guiding the work. The *Democratic* leadership style attests to the importance of spending time to get the buy-in of people. Individuals have a say in the decisions and direction of how a school operates, thus increasing trust amongst the employees and employers. The *Pacesetting* style of leadership described by Goleman asserts that the principal creates his or her own pace by setting things to his or her standard, with the expectation of every person reaching his or her potential. The end result, however, is frustration on the part of the employees. They become too hesitant to do things or too reliant on the leader to make all the important decisions. The final model Goleman brings to light is the *Coaching* style. In this style, the development of school- and teacher-based goals becomes the priority. Delegation of tasks that employees are willing and able to handle is evident and appreciated by the employees. These leaders understand the need to deal with short-term dips in progress for long-term gains.

The principal's ability to self-reflect was highlighted in the work by Raja and

Palanichamy (2011), who studied what principals see as effective school leadership qualities.

Their study involved 46 randomly selected principals from the Madurai School District in India.

The tool used to evaluate their perceptions, the Conceptualized Leadership Questionnaire, addressed what principals perceived as measures of leadership effectiveness in schools.

Principals were able to rate on a scale what they saw as effective leadership traits impacting a school. The authors concluded that the area principals saw as most important in determining their effectiveness was the relationship between the leaders and the followers. Principals viewed communication between themselves and staff as more significant than any one quality possessed by a principal. The lowest rating given by the principals related to their overall ability to perform their role. The principals in the study felt their special skills (intuitive abilities to respond to people) could be used to overcome any deficit in their actual abilities. This study supports Goleman (2000) and Bandura's (1977) claims about the importance of relational connections within the work setting.

### **Instructional Leadership**

The complexity of the particular dimension of Instructional Leadership speaks to the changing contexts of what schools and learning look like today. Iman (2000) states that leadership is the power to influence others to achieve intended goals and outcomes. Calik (2003) furthers this point, claiming that leadership is a way to provide inspiration to others while working through change as a collective unit of people. Concerning the research specific to Instructional Leadership, Calik (1999) emphasizes how Instructional Leadership is directly focused on aligning the way teachers teach to ensuring the best methods of improving student achievement. Gülcan (2012) suggests that Instructional Leadership should be broken into two specific components. One focuses on the desired results and goals within a concerted plan. The



other reflects how a school leader creates the conditions for learning through the relationships and support provided for his or her teachers. Gülcan's claims reinforce how Instructional Leadership is based on results and goals and effective teacher-principal relationships. Senge (1990) claims that leaders are the designers of organizational behaviors, validate Gülcan's two assertions.

When dissecting Instructional Leadership into its small nuances, Gülcan (2012) shares five specific categories that reflect the role of the school leader:

1. Identifying the vision and mission of the school
2. Programming and administering education
3. Staff development
4. Monitoring and assessing the teaching process
5. Creating and developing a positive school

Furthermore, Stein and Nelson (2003) suggest that Instructional Leadership can be summarized under five prescribed headings:

- a) Understanding the learning needs of the individuals
- b) Organizing social and interactive environments
- c) Encouraging learning expertise and appropriate tasks
- d) Motivating individuals to improve themselves and impose sanctions
- e) Providing sufficient source support for learning.

Without the ability to receive support and the opportunity to self-reflect on their practice, any one of these ten categories would be challenging for a new principal to engage with at the school level.

## Theoretical Models

Williams' (2017) research focuses on the impact roles have on relationships and identifies Role Theory to make sense of the interpersonal dynamics found in the relationships between people. Landy (1993, 1994, 2008) notes that Role Theory is defined by the belief that people are not one-dimensional; rather, the individual performs a compilation of roles. People play out a particular role they have, based on the context and situation. The individual becomes who they need to be at the time they need to be in that particular role. Landy (2008) cites this mixture of roles as something called role system. This term refers to the entirety of roles that one may play out during their day. Williams (2017) suggests there are some roles that are accessed more than others due to varying factors including environment, social interactions, and family dynamics.

Motivation Theory contends that motivation is an important factor when evaluating the quality and connectivity of a person's commitment to their work. Specifically, intrinsic motivation may serve as a valuable component among teachers, yielding desirable outcomes. These outcomes show up in the form of creativity, flexibility, spontaneity, enjoyment, quality of work, increased attention, persistence, and study skills (Amabile, 1985).

Millar (1988) contends that people have fundamental needs for self-determination and confidence. Intrinsic motivation is what helps individuals meet those needs. When there is *flow*, an individual has greater confidence as well as enjoyment in what they are doing. Swanson (1995) asserts that intrinsic motivation can be built upon by increasing an individual's perceptions of success and competence. This means involving individuals in decision making, providing feedback, and setting realistic goals. Vallerand et al. (1992) contend that intrinsic motivation has three parts: a wanting to know (learn more), a need for an accomplishment (have

a tangible outcome), and a need to experience stimulation (have pleasure in what you are doing). Conversely, extrinsic motivation relates to activities undertaken for reasons other than inherent interest in the activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The relevance these aforementioned research theories have is how they reflect the importance of relational interactions between principals and their school community. The relationships between the principal and others associated within the school community impacts a principal's success in the area of Instructional Leadership.

### **Principal Performance Indicators**

A study measuring the rigor of principal performance assessment instruments conducted by Condon and Clifford (2012) revealed 8 out of 20 instruments measured met the criteria for rigor, meaning that the assessment development was transparent, and contained a certain amount of psychometric testing and indicators that could actually be reviewed. They stated that two out of eight assessments that met the criteria for rigor were developed in the past 10 years, and the other six were developed anywhere from 10 to 20 years ago. The following are the eight assessment tools that the researchers concluded passed the criteria for rigor:

1. Change Facilitator Style Questionnaire: Vandenbergthe (1988) developed this questionnaire to measure the amount of change that could be facilitated by a school leader. In this survey three different approaches to change leadership were identified: initiator, manager, and responder.
2. Diagnostic Assessment of School Principal Effectiveness: Ebmeir (1992) developed this tool to identify the strengths of a school and its leader. This tool included surveys that could be completed by multiple stakeholders to provide their different opinions of the school and the school principal.

3. Instructional Activity Questionnaire: Larsen (1987) created this tool to address Instructional Leadership aspects of the work of the principal. This measure was created through a review of research pertaining to principal effectiveness.
4. Leadership Practices Inventory: Kouzes and Posner (2002) developed this interview and survey tool that contains the following domains reflecting the work of the leader including: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging processes, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. It is transferable outside the school and is applicable to a business context as well.
5. Performance Review Analysis and Improvement System for Education: Knoop and Common (1985) developed this tool through a review of the literature specific to the effectiveness of the school leader. The domains in this tool are not necessarily aligned with professional standards. It is to be completed by the principal and his or her supervisor.
6. Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale: Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed this tool that assesses how well a principal conducts themselves in the area of Instructional Leadership. The three main categories of this tool are improving instruction, coordinating curriculum, and evaluating instruction.
7. Principal Profile: Leithwood and Montgomery (1986) referenced this tool that uses intense interviews and dialogue with a number of educational stakeholders. The instrument is used to validate principal practice based on student growth and consistency of actions.
8. Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education: Developed by Murphy, Goldring, and Elliot (2006), this instrument was and uses a collection of feedback from multiple

stakeholders to deem the capability of the principal. The diagnostic profile resulting from the assessment is linked to the ISLLC standards which convey specific dimensions of principal effectiveness.

Condon and Clifford's (2012) study revealing the eight principal assessment instruments concluded that in the area of school leadership, there is an inherent interest in determining the level of competency in how a principal attends to his or her work. Moreover, authors of the study depict the interest in exploring accountability measures to track effective leadership behaviors. However, Goldring et al. (2009) state that many of these principal assessments differ in their quality. They contend that many older principal assessment measures, unless adapted, do not capture the full range of the responsibilities conducted that are now found to be in the current practice of school principals. Another complexity with the principal assessments is that the assessments do not fully assess all the roles of a principal. Goldring et al. point out that the way data are interpreted differs from one assessment to another. Some are more detailed, while others do not provide great depth of interpretation. Lastly, Goldring et al. advise that principals and their supervisor have to work together to go over the results of any principal assessment results. The feedback from the supervisor and principal self-reflection piece are essential in determining the next steps leading to desirable leadership practices.

An additional tool that needs attention in the context of leadership assessment is the Administrator Perceiver. This assessment tool created in 1993, was developed by Selection Research Incorporated (SRI). The firm's goal when developing the assessment measure, was to find the best leadership candidate based on personal and professional qualifications. Individuals responsible for the selection of up-and-coming leaders are trained to use this measure to try to select the best candidates to lead organizations. The 12 administrator life themes (Gallup

Corporation 1976) in the instrument are those deemed to be found in effective leaders. Zakariya (1983) critiques that the 70-question theme-based survey makes it hard for anyone to avoid showing their true leadership characteristics. As with the eight instruments covered previously, the researchers suggest caution in using this as the only measure of finding suitable leadership candidates.

### **Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale**

Although there are a number of instruments and tools that allow for evaluation and subsequent reflection on the part of the principal, this study will use the PIMRS survey to capture the perceived notions of their leadership practices related to three specific areas under the category of Instructional Leadership: Defining School Mission, Managing the Instructional program, and Promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). It should be noted that the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), which is used in this study is cited as an instrument that was constructed in 1983. However, it has gone through many iterations making it a relevant assessment instrument for use today.

As described by Bridges (1982), historically the literature on Leadership did not yield instruments that could adequately measure the work of the principal. This was even more so in the practice-based area of Instructional Leadership. Around the same time Bridges uncovered his findings, Hallinger (1983) started the design of what ended up being the PIMRS. This instrument was developed with the intention of instituting measurable standards to a particular area of focus the principal is responsible for in their leadership practice. In order to do this, the instrument focuses on job-embedded behaviors. The instrument allows principals to see the definition of their role as tangible behaviors. It describes the behaviors of the principal as Instructional Leaders. Additionally, the instrument would meet the requirements used by districts interested

who are interested areas such as; needs assessment, research, and policy analysis. Although Hallinger (2015) contends that Instructional Leadership is generally a North American phenomenon, within the survey's components PIMRS addresses transferable elements found in the work of the principal all over the world. A detailed breakdown of this instrument is provided in an overview in Chapter 3, in the Methods section.

### **Contributions of Current Studies**

Almost 40 years ago, Burns (1978) claimed the crisis of leadership today is the mediocrity or irresponsibility of so many of the men and women in power, and that leadership rarely reaches its full potential. Today's research on the school leader does not reflect this same sentiment. Research today reflects more Clemmons and Fields (2011) conclusion that leadership is a thoroughly researched area of study, while at the same time it is an area that is very misunderstood. Given that the role of principals has shifted, not only in their assigned duties but also in how school districts are trying to identify the nature of individuals best suited for the position, it is important to consider who these individuals are. Azaiez (2017) finds that school leaders are expected to be Instructional Leaders and visionaries to influence student performance and meet these high stakes accountabilities. As a result, the daily tasks of a principal are becoming more complex and more difficult to accomplish (p. 15). This is very different from suggesting principals do not have the skills to carry out their job duties. Allowing principals to engage in more reflective exercises where they can examine who they are as individuals as they work alongside their school community, may shed light on the motivation that drives their work.

Relationships between the principal and the teachers are an essential component of ensuring that goals set out for students are met. For schools to be successful, there must be a shared set of values that is modeled by the principal and demonstrably aligned to the entire

school community. Since there are a number of different leadership styles, there are a number of assessment instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of the principal. The motivation of school leaders and the corresponding motivation of teachers is a cornerstone in the school improvement process. The motivations to lead and to be led have great implications on Instructional Leadership. Therefore, examining leadership practices in the first three years of a principal's designation may help principals achieve greater success in their work over an entire career.

The current available information on motivation to lead in the area of the principalship is limited when looking at motivation over a period of time. Research has focused more on specific models of leadership or on how a leader influences his or her staff based on individual characteristics. Understanding what drives the intentions of principals as they enter into the role, and then looking back at how and why changes in their motivation to lead may occur over a two- to three-year time span, may assist with more effective school leadership practices.

### **Leadership and Gender**

Research related to gender and the principalship has been first explored since the early 1960's. Just as others expect men and women to act differently in any number of roles and situations, they expect men and women to behave differently in leadership positions (Perez, 2012). Aligned with Perez's belief, is Eagly and Carli's (2007) conclusion where they acknowledge how women in leadership roles tend have traits such as; ethics, emotional intelligence and empathy, which they assert make them stronger leaders. Hallinger, Dongyu & Wang (2016) conducted a meta-analysis that included 2800 principals that looked to see differences of males and female principals in the patterns of their Instructional Leadership practice. Within their study, Hallinger (2011) cites that over time, a growing amount of research has demonstrated anecdotal references to female principals engaging the instructional leadership



role more than male principals. Further, Eagly and Carli (2003) described the leadership practice among females being more task focused and democratic in nature. Additionally, female leadership included more features related to transformational rather than transactional leadership. Eagly et al. (2003) suggests that men and women do in fact lead in different ways. He conveys that the ways in which women tend to lead are more strongly linked with leadership success than the styles preferred by men. There is evidence here to suggest who a leader is and how the lead is also influenced by their personality.

Although in the United States there is evidence of a shift favoring the opportunities for females entering into the principal position, it is limited to the elementary school setting. High Schools are still overwhelmingly male dominated in their principal positions (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013). The in the area of gender differences pertaining to leadership the differences between the genders are small. Males and females in these positions have more in common (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003). Regardless, the research is definitive in demonstrating that females are leading in a manner that is generally more advantageous for their school community.

### **Summary**

The research outlined in this chapter reinforces the role and importance of the principal. The research identifies Instructional Leadership as being a significant area of practice that can help teachers support students in improving results. School districts continue to look for methods to identify the best ways to select and then support principals moving into the position. If principals in general are struggling to navigate their role within its changing complexities, it follows that new principals will need an opportunity to enhance their knowledge, skills, and practice within the dimensions of the LQS. One of the ways in which school districts can assist

principals in doing so is through continued targeted professional development, that focuses on a principal's understanding of where he or she needs to improve in relation to indicators found in the PIMRS and LQS Instructional Leadership competency. The PIMRS and the LQS are two tools that draw comparisons in their expectations of principals, with a focus on Instructional Leadership. Providing principals with these two tools as a way to self-reflect and then perhaps design a plan of improvement in their practice may support the motivation and the efficacy of the principal. It is important to look at the topic of gender and leadership relative to the results gained from a tool that evaluates the work of the principal. It is also helpful to understand the impact gender traits may have relative to methods of leadership styles males and female choose to lead from.

Principals are also guided by the perceptions of what their key stakeholders think they should be doing to lead and support a learning community. There are many expectations put upon principals by individuals who have differing views about what the role of the principal should entail. Tools such as the PIMRS and the LQS, may assist a principal in seeing gaps or identifying strengths in his or her leadership that could be leveraged to create a more productive transformational learning community.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter covers the following topics: An explanation of the design of the research (which includes the research questions and purpose of the research), a rationale for the study, a participant overview (which includes the targeted individuals in the study), and an overview of the process of data collection. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive description of the PIMRS and the LQS, the instruments used to gather the required data in this study.

#### **Purpose of Study and Research Question**

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which new principals perceive themselves as prepared to implement the expectations of Instructional Leadership within the competencies of the new Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) in the Alberta context. Participant perceptions were measured using Instructional Leadership indicators of the Principal Instructional Management Scale (PIMRS) which align with the Instructional Leadership competencies from the LQS. The LQS is the standard for school leadership practice in Alberta. The following research question guided the research: To what extent do novice principals perceive themselves as prepared to meet the competencies of the LQS in the area of Instructional Leadership?

In addition to this query, the study investigated a second and third research question that focused on years of experience and gender on new principals' perceptions of their ability to meet the competencies of the LQS related to Instructional Leadership.

#### **Rationale of Methodology**

This quantitative descriptive research project focused on school principals in either their first, second or third year of principalship. Quantitative descriptive research is supported by Fawcett and Garity (2009) who contend that the main purpose of this approach is to identify a

phenomenon by naming things, or to classify characteristics of things being explored.

Additionally, Ivey (2016) suggests that descriptive research serves to add clarity to the specific characteristics of a phenomenon, from which theories may emerge. From this point, it is possible to then look for things to compare the phenomenon to, or ways to test emerging theories against the reality of a particular situation.

Grove, Burns, and Grey (2013) advocate descriptive research methods, adding that it is used to formulate theories and identify problems that may exist in current practice. The authors suggest it is a method to make judgments and to validate current ways of operating in the context participants may be working within. Relative to this study, the characteristics of the phenomenon uncovered are directly related to Instructional Leadership practices of new principals. The ability to make judgements comes from the collected perceptions of these new principals, in the hopes of future investigations revealing theories to explain the results gained in this study.

Since this research examined the extent to which new principals perceive themselves as prepared to implement the expectations of Instructional Leadership within the new LQS, and since the research examined the specific phenomenon of their ability relative to Instructional Leadership, the use of descriptive research was the most appropriate method to conduct this study. Additionally, this research also allowed the perceptions of new principals to be aggregated based on factors such as gender and years of experience. An analysis of how each participant responded in the three main categories and 10 subcategories related to Instructional Leadership was uncovered in the descriptive statistics. This research methodology allowed for the mean score collection of data that provided insight as to the perceptions of the principals participating in the study. These perceptions showed how the principals rated themselves as Instructional Leaders. Although quantitative descriptive research may not uncover all information relative to

principal self-perceptions, it is certainly a good entry point in terms of gaining a baseline understanding of where future research on this topic may need to still be explored.

### **Participant Overview**

Proposed participants for this study included principals in their first to third years within an urban school district in Alberta. Purposive sampling was used to identify the participants for the study. This was in part due to the need to collect generalizable information with a specific purpose in mind, including the perceptions of new principals. The target group of new principals, defined as first to third year, also fit a category unique to this study. For the purpose of this study, it was decided that the participants would be no further along in their principalship than three years. This criterion was set to ensure the participants were as novice as possible in their experiences as Instructional Leaders within their roles as school principals. Based on the need to gather perceptions from individuals still growing into their practice as school principals, it was important to keep the years of experience to a limited amount of time. A detailed breakdown with regards to gender and years of experience of the 19 participants is provided in the results section. A 50 question PIMRS survey was made available for all (23) first to third-year principals in this school district.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted, and permission from the school district was secured prior to sending out invitations for participation. The school district received an explanation of the research along with the purpose and benefits of participation for the new principals. The school district liaised with the participants who were eligible to participate in the survey. Although the survey was available to all the identified participants, participation in the study was completely voluntary as stated on the introductory message accompanying the survey. In addition, participants understood that any time they could decide they did not want to

complete the survey and had the option of asking for their responses not to be considered in the analysis of the data.

### **The Instruments**

The instrument used to assess the perceptions of the school principal, with a focus on Instructional Leadership, was the PIMRS. This rating tool was first developed by Hallinger (1983) and has been used in over 250 empirical research studies in over 30 countries (Hallinger, 2011). The PIMRS is a psychometric Likert Scale consisting of 50 questions. The respondent's choices on the survey are in the range of 1 (almost never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (frequently) and 5 (always). The survey contains items related to three main categories of Instructional Leadership. These three main categories are the following:

1. Defining School Mission
2. Managing the Instructional program
3. Promoting a positive school learning climate. (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985)

The PIMRS instrument has been used for over 30 years to evaluate the work of the principal. Its longevity as a valid and reliable tool in the field of Instructional Leadership is conveyed by Hallinger (2015), who recognizes that Instructional Leadership is entrenched in the roots of policy and professional practice in the work of the principal. Additionally, PIMRS has gained merit as an instrument for those researching Instructional Leadership as a practice. Each of the aforementioned dimensions of the PIMRS makes up its conceptual framework. Hallinger, Wang, and Chen (2013) performed a meta-analysis of the results of 135 empirical studies that used the PIMRS over a 30-year time span in a variety of countries, including in North America and East Asia. This study gathered 52 data sub-sets from 43 independent studies. Ultimately, the results yielded only minor variations in reliability results, showing that the type of school or

geographical location did not create noticeable variations in the accuracy of the results. The importance of this is conveyed by Lathem and Wexley (1981) who suggest that valid measures of reliability represented in the PIMRS scores should be evident regardless of when the PIMRS is taken or who is actually taking the survey.

The appropriateness of using this instrument for this study is summarized in the following three points:

- 1) The PIMRS instrument has a focus directly related to the job of the principal.
- 2) The behavioral components of the instrument are taken from the most recent research related to effective leadership. PIMRS items also address the field-based leadership activities required in principals' daily work.
- 3) The results of the instrument can be used by the participant in a variety of ways including as a self-evaluation tool, as an indicator of areas for professional development, and in identifying personal areas of further research.

The PIMRS contains 10 subcategories that reflect the job functions related to Instructional Leadership, depicting the areas of responsibility of the principal abstracted from research related to effective school leadership. The 10 job functions described below are found in the behaviors reflected in Instructional Leadership. The PIMRS three main categories of Defining school mission, Managing the instructional program and Promoting a positive school learning climate along with their corresponding subcategories are represented in Figure 1 and serve as a conceptual framework for this study. Below is the overview of subcategories found within the 3 main categories of the PIMRS survey.

1. Framing the school's goals: This job function focuses on how the principal determines where the focus of resources will be for the school year. This subcategory

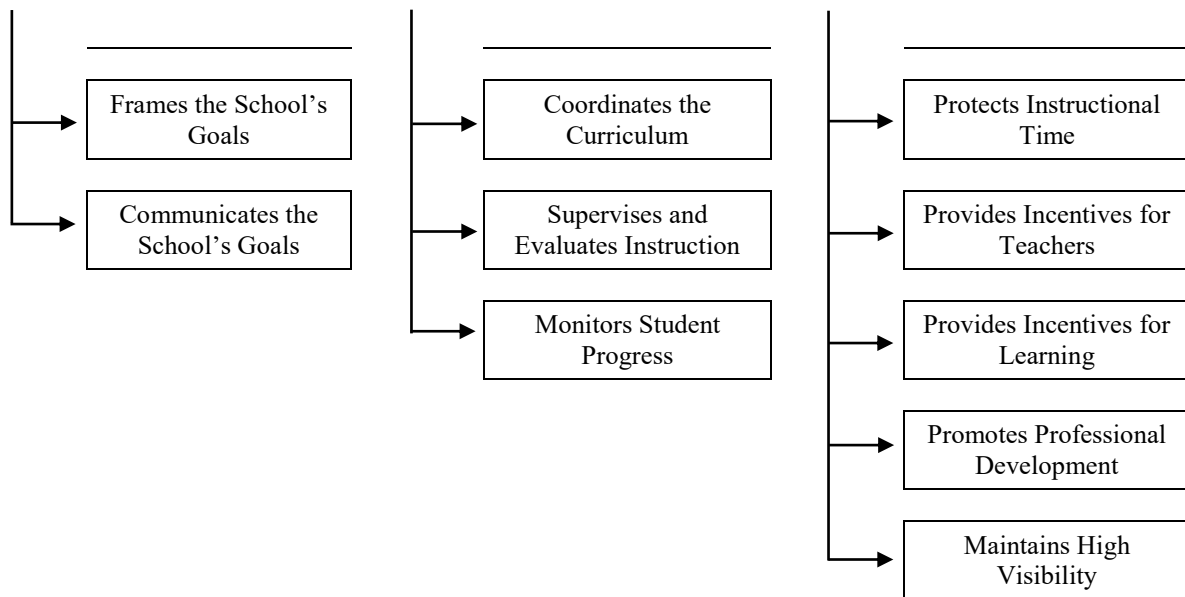
- includes a mission and goals related to student achievement. These goals incorporate past data as well as in-the-moment analysis of what to focus on. Input to support the direction of these goals is collected from parents, staff, and students. These goals should be measurable and should include teacher professional development strategies.
2. **Communicating the school's vision:** This job function is to do with how and how often the principal shares the school's goals with key stakeholders. This sharing should be done on a consistent basis, using a variety of written and verbal communication methods.
  3. **Supervision and Evaluation:** This job function focuses on how well the principal monitors and supports staff in putting the aforementioned goals into practice. This is done through formal and informal classroom visits which include principal feedback to the teacher.
  4. **Curricular coordination:** This job function pertains to how well the principal ensures the curricular learning outcomes are aligned with the actual assessments that take place during the school year. Effective practice in this area is also seen in the form of different teachers working alongside one another to learn more of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed at the grade levels across the school.
  5. **Monitoring student progress:** This is done through the principal sharing academic results gathered prior to or during the school year with their staff. The principal should have intimate knowledge of these results and the likely impact of staff on future results.
  6. **Protecting instructional time:** This job function pertains to how well a principal ensures that his or her teachers are not suffering intrusions that cause starts and stops



- to instruction throughout the day. These may be students who enter late, announcements, assemblies, fire drills, and other intrusions to the natural flow of the workday.
7. **Maintain high visibility:** This job function relates to how often the principal can be seen within the normal operational day: how much he or she interacts with students, parents and teachers in and out of the classroom setting. With increased visibility comes decreased behavior issues and a deeper connection with all stakeholders.
  8. **Incentives to improve teaching:** This job function focuses on the quality and consistency of praise a principal gives his or her staff for their work. The idea is that the more meaningful the praise that is given, the more motivated teachers are to attend to their responsibilities in a positive manner.
  9. **Promoting instructional development:** This job function relates to how well a principal matches the staff's professional development needs with the school goals. The principal works to ensure each staff member has awareness of where they can access key learning opportunities that will enhance their work with students.
  10. **Providing incentives for learning:** This job function focuses on how well the principal creates opportunities for recognition of student efforts, which may take place within and outside the classrooms. The point is that students are publicly recognized for their efforts and contributions to the school.

## PIMRS Framework





*Figure 1.* PIMRS Conceptual Framework

A strength of the PIMRS lies in its behaviorally anchored rating scale. The language and descriptors in the survey serve to create a common understanding for both the participants and other individuals in the field examining the results. The focus of the PIMRS is specific to the work of the school principal. The PIMRS questions and categories have a direct focus on Instructional Leadership as does Competency 6 of the Alberta LQS, thus making the crosswalk between the two instruments an important and worthwhile task. For the purpose of this study, three major validity measures are identified for PIMRS:

1. Content validity: items in the subscales of the PIMRS are relevant to the role of the principal with an 80% agreement within a group of individuals rating the tool. These individuals were a small group of principals and teachers and a Superintendent who all independently assigned the indicators they felt best suited the three main categories of Instructional Leadership.
2. Discriminant validity: If used as a comparison, the subscales within the PIMRS allow for accurate dissemination between principals who work in different schools

3. Construct validity: the PIMRS has groups of items within each subscale that inter-correlate more strongly with each other than with other subscales (Hallinger 2015).

In terms of ensuring reliability of the instrument and the degree to which the PIMRS rating scale consistently measures the targeted phenomenon being evaluated, 10 subscales met the standard of 80% agreement among all participants during field testing of the survey. Latham and Wexley (1981) suggest that potential items should achieve at least eighty percent agreement among the raters in order to be considered a valid measure of a given functional category (p.61). Additionally, Latham and Wexley (1981) indicate that a minimum standard reliability for behaviorally anchored rating scales should be set at .80 when assessing the internal consistency of the instrument (p. 66). The size of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from 78% to 90%. Furthermore, the items in the PIMRS ensure that there is an ability to draw clear discriminations between the ability of the principal and the indicators listed in each of the subscales. This may be helpful when wanting to isolate the specific areas where principals show their strengths and areas for growth.

The PIMRS was accompanied by a written component, not part of the PIMRS, where each participant was invited to answer the question, "Did participation in this survey serve to raise any questions for you as a school leader?" Although a closed-ended question, the 10 participants who did respond, provided additional insight as to their perceptions or questions they have in their role as a principal. Due to this being a predominantly qualitative research study, the written feedback from the principals was used only for general knowledge and is not included in any interpretation or analysis pertaining to the study's results or discussion. Written responses, however, will be a recommendation to use in any follow-ups to this study.

The 10 job functions reflected in the subcategories of PIMRS were mapped to Competency 6: Instructional Leadership, of the LQS, which was implemented in Alberta in September 2019. The purpose of crosswalking the PIMRS with the LQS is for new principals to develop perceptions related to their success in implementing behaviors consistent with the skills of Instructional Leadership.

LQS Competency 6: Providing Instructional Leadership states that “A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences” (p. 6)

Achievement of this competency is demonstrated by the following indicators:

- a) Building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students.
- b) Implementing professional growth, supervision, and evaluation processes to ensure that all teachers meet the Teaching Quality Standard.
- c) Ensuring that student instruction addresses learning outcomes outlined in programs of study.
- d) Facilitating mentorship and induction supports for teachers and principals, as required.
- e) Demonstrating a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and curriculum.
- f) Facilitating the use of a variety of technologies to support learning for all students.
- g) Ensuring that student assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate, and evidence informed.
- h) Interpreting a wide range of data to inform school practice and enable success for all students.
- i) Facilitating access to resources, agencies, and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development. (p. 6)

There are parallels when comparing the PIMRS’ three main categories of Instructional

Leadership: defining school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate, with the statement anchoring Competency 6 of the LQS which states, “A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences” (p. 6). The parallels between the two instruments (LQS and PIMRS) in the area of Instructional Leadership involves the principal setting the conditions with his or her teachers to ensure that student growth and progress are occurring within the school setting. This research includes a comparison between the PIMRS Instructional Leadership qualities and those found within the LQS to shed light on the preparedness new principals have relative to how they lead in their school districts.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Since time was limited in which to collect and interpret the participant information, the decision was made to administer a survey which consisted of 50 closed questions. In June 2019, the PIMRS was reviewed by five new principals from a different school district who were not part of this study. This step in the study was not a requirement but an opportunity to gain further information as to the appropriateness of the survey. In an informal debriefing, the five principals provided insights as to the questions and terms used in the survey. The informal debriefing with this small group of principals allowed for generalized feedback assessing the instrument. These five principals reported that the instrument should be able to be completed and understood by the participants in this particular study. During the post-survey interviews of this group of five principals, each participant’s understanding of each item was checked to confirm a common understanding among the participants. To ensure the integrity of the survey was kept, permission to use the PIMRS was granted by Dr. Hallinger under the condition that no changes or adaptations would be made to the survey items.

To assist in having an opportunity to get the most possible participation from the new principals, the survey was administered earlier (October 2019) in the school year. This time of year was selected to avoid many competing interests that could impact the time principals had to complete this task. The benefit of this using this particular time to share the survey was that many principals were formulating ideas around their own professional growth plans, a mandatory requirement of all principals practicing in Alberta. The correspondence inviting participation in the study, pointed out principals could use the survey and reflective question to identify areas of leadership they would like to pursue over the school year. The opportunity to hand out a printed copy of the survey to each participant occurred while they were in one location attending a regularly scheduled principal meeting. Two weeks prior to the administration of the survey, a letter was delivered to each participant conveying the overview and providing the opportunity for each participant to sign off on their willful participation. This exercise would be a way for new principals to self-reflect and support their future leadership practice. It was realized at the time of the first administration that not all participants had access to getting the survey at the predetermined principal's meeting. This occurred as a result of a last-minute district event which pulled some principals away from the opportunity to complete the survey on the intended day. Therefore, a follow-up measure of having district office staff send it to out to principals who did not receive the survey was conducted. District office staff ensured that the expectations of voluntary participation in the study was communicated again to the new principals who required a second opportunity to participate. Principals were asked to send the completed survey back in a sealed envelope back to the district office where it was kept with the other sealed surveys until collected by the researcher. The confidential nature of the responses was secured throughout the collection procedure. The response rate for the survey completion

was 83%. This represented 19 of the possible 23 principals in the school district who were in their first, second or third year.

### **Analyzing the Data**

Due to the quantitative nature of the data and the low number of participants, statistical analysis of the data was limited to descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics allow for interpretation of the data as a way to explain the phenomenon being explored. The central tendencies of the participants led to generalizable conclusions specific to these participants' perceived notions of how they see themselves as Instructional Leaders. Analysis of participant responses included mean, median, and mode related to the PIMRS main categories and corresponding subcategories. The data collected is presented in Chapter 4 in the form of charts, tables, and written descriptions. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used as a tool to calculate the statistical information derived from participants' responses. To assist with the crosswalk analysis between the two instruments (PIMRS and the LQS Instructional Leadership competency), an exploratory analysis of disaggregated groups was conducted. In referencing the second research question, using SPSS, the data collected were aggregated based on gender and years of experience.

### **Summary**

This study focused on examining the extent to which new principals perceive themselves as prepared to implement the dimension of Instructional Leadership relative to the Alberta LQS (2018). This was first measured by gathering the principal's mean scores representing the PIMRS main and subcategories. Next, the subcategories were aligned by crosswalking them with the LQS Instructional Leadership competency indicators. The behaviors from both instruments that showed strong similarity were matched together. The completion of this task revealed a

separate set of mean scores reflecting principal perceptions representative of the LQS Instructional Leadership competency. This instrument was used to assist new principals in reflecting on their Instructional Leadership practice with a focus on the following question for research: To what extent do new principals perceive themselves as prepared to meet the competencies of the LQS related to Instructional Leadership? A second and third question was investigated capturing the mean scores of all 3 main and subcategories of the PIMRS and the LQS Instructional Leadership indicators. A second and third crosswalk was also conducted to see how gender and years of experience influenced new principal's perceptions in how prepared they are to meet the LQS Instructional Leadership indicators.



## Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 provides a detailed analysis of the results of the PIMRS survey as well as responses to the additional written question completed by participants. This information is shared in the form of charts, tables, and written descriptions. A full discussion of the descriptive statistical analysis and what it means regarding the research questions posed is presented in chapter five.

The present study examined the extent as to which new principals in their first, second and third years within an urban school district perceived themselves as prepared to implement the dimension of Instructional Leadership relative to the Alberta LQS (2019). The perceptions of the principals were measured from their participant responses to the PIMRS questionnaire. The following results include mean scores and standard deviations as a measure of variability of the data. Data illustrating responses for the 10 subcategories of the questionnaire are presented first, followed by results generated for the three main PIMRS categories. Additionally, subgrouping of the data by gender and years of experience is presented for a more in-depth analysis of the results in relation to the second research question. The descriptive analysis includes a cross-comparison between the PIMRS and the LQS.

### Preparation of Data for Analysis

Answers from the PIMRS questionnaire were evaluated in this study using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 25, to apply a number of statistical techniques and procedures producing frequencies and descriptive statistics of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD).

Analysis of frequencies identified one outlier in the data set for most of the responses. Nevertheless, due to the small sample size of the study, the outlier was included in all the subsequent analysis of the data.

Participants of the study were grouped by gender and years of experience. Table 1 shows the frequencies of participants by gender and years of experience. In general, participants identifying as female are represented in the sample by a 2:1 ratio over participants identifying as male. Results also show that the largest proportional group within the sample is females in their third year (32%), followed by females in their second year of experience. Conversely, males in their first year of experience represent the smallest sub-group (5%) of the sample, with only 1 of 19 participants possessing those characteristics.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=19)*

| Gender | 1 year of experience | 2 years of experience | 3 years of experience |
|--------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Male   | 1 (5%)               | 2 (10%)               | 3 (16%)               |
| Female | 3 (16%)              | 4 (21%)               | 6 (32%)               |

Female principals were solidly represented within the participant group of this study.

**Question 1. To what extent do novice principals perceive themselves as prepared to meet the competencies of the Leadership Quality Standard related to Instructional Leadership?**

The results are organized by the 10 subcategories of the PIMRS questionnaire first, followed by the results from the three major PIMRS categories.

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviations of the answers given by the principals for each of the 10 sub-categories addressed by the PIMRS questionnaire. Recalling the PIMRS works on a 5-point scale with a score of 1 representing *Almost Never* and a score of 5

representing *Almost Always*; results indicate the majority of the subcategories presented high scores with a mean above 4 out of the 5 possible points. Only three subcategories have a mean score below 4 points: Protects Instructional Time, Provides Incentives for Teachers, and Provides Incentives for Learning. The last of these has the lowest score ( $M = 3.38$ ). Conversely, results show that the subcategory of Frames School's Goals presents the highest scores, with a mean of 4.68 and a very low variability ( $SD=0.3$ ). The two subsequent categories with the highest scores are Promotes Professional Development and Maintains High Visibility, with a mean of 4.48 and 4.21 out of a possible rating of 5.

Table 2

*Mean Response Rate and Standard Deviations per Subcategory of the PIMRS Questionnaire*

| Subcategories                           | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| 1. Frames School's Goals                | 4.68     | .30       |
| 2. Communicates the School's Goals      | 4.03     | .53       |
| 3. Coordinates the Curriculum           | 4.12     | .66       |
| 4. Supervises and Evaluates Instruction | 4.01     | .56       |
| 5. Monitors Students' Progress          | 4.02     | .45       |
| 6. Protects Instructional Time          | 3.93     | .41       |
| 7. Provides Incentives for Teachers     | 3.64     | .72       |
| 8. Provides Incentives for Learning     | 3.38     | .48       |
| 9. Promotes Professional Development    | 4.48     | .48       |
| 10. Maintains High Visibility           | 4.21     | .49       |

The 10 PIMRS subcategories above reflect a comprehensive overview of the behaviors associated with Instructional Leadership. The descriptive statistics relative to the three main

categories addressed by the PIMRS questionnaire are presented in Table 3. Recalling the PIMRS works on a 5-point scale with a score of 1 representing *Almost Never* and a score of 5 representing *Almost Always*; Defining School Mission displays the highest mean with a score of 4.36, whereas Promoting a positive school learning climate displayed the lowest score out of the three with a mean of 3.93. Finally, Managing the Instructional Program falls in between, with a mean score close to 4 points (4.05). All three subcategories present a similar variability with standard deviations that range from .36 to .46.

Table 3

*Mean Response Rate and Standard Deviations per Main category of the PIMRS Questionnaire*

| Categories                                   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--|----------|-----------|
| Defining School Mission                      | 4.36     | .36       |
| Managing the Instructional Program           | 4.05     | .46       |
| Promoting a positive school learning climate | 3.93     | .39       |

The 3 main categories shown above are the foundational components of the PIMRS framework. Since there are no tools readily accessible to help measure the levels of Instructional Leadership competencies addressed in the LQS, a decision was made to use the PIMRS questionnaire to measure the leadership perception of principals in this study. To adequately respond to the research question, as to how principals perceive themselves within the Instructional Leadership competencies of the LQS, Table 4 shows a cross comparison between domains of the PIMRS and their possible related domains from the LQS.

Table 4

*Cross Comparison Between LQS Instructional Leadership Indicators and PIMRS Subcategories*

| <b>LQS Instructional Leadership Indicators</b>   | <b>PIMRS Subcategories</b>   |
|--|--|
| (a) Building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students   | Supervise and evaluate instruction<br>Monitor student progress<br>Promote professional development |
| (b) Implementing professional growth, supervision and evaluation processes to ensure that all teachers meet the <i>Teaching Quality Standard</i> | Promote professional development<br>Supervise and evaluate instruction                             |
| (c) Ensuring that student instruction addresses learning outcomes outlined in programs of study  | Supervise and evaluate instruction<br>Coordinate the curriculum                                    |
| (d) Facilitating mentorship and induction supports for teachers and principals   | No link between LQS and PIMRS  |
| (e) Demonstrating a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and curriculum  | Coordinate the curriculum<br>Supervise and evaluate instruction                                    |
| (f) Facilitating the use of a variety of technologies to support learning for all students   | No link between LQS and PIMRS  |
| (g) Ensuring that student assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate, and evidence-informed                                       | Supervise and evaluate instruction<br>Monitor student progress                                     |
| (h) Interpreting a wide range of data to inform school practice and enable success for all students  | Frame school goals<br>Monitor student progress   |
| (i) Facilitating access to resources, agencies, and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development  | Promote professional development   |

The crosswalk result shown in Table 4 was used in the subsequent analysis to display levels of principals' self-perception in their leadership abilities according to the LQS indicators. It is important to notice that some subcategories from PIMRS could not be matched to LQS indicators: these were Maintain High Visibility and Provide Incentives for Learning. Similarly, there was no link between two LQS indicators and the PIMRS subcategories: Facilitating mentorship and induction supports for teachers and principals and Facilitating the use of a variety of technologies to support learning for all students.

Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviations of the LQS indicators, which were obtained by grouping the answers of the PIMRS questionnaires that were aligned with each domain.

Table 5

*Mean and Standard Deviations of the LQS Instructional Leadership Indicators*

| <b>LQS Instructional<br/>Leadership Indicators</b>  | <b><i>M</i></b> | <b><i>SD</i></b> |
|---|-----------------|------------------|
| (a) Building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students  | 4.17            | 0.53             |
| (b) Implementing professional growth, supervision, and evaluation processes to ensure that all teachers meet the <i>Teaching Quality Standard</i> | 4.25            | 0.56             |
| (c) Ensuring that student instruction addresses learning outcomes outlined in programs of study   | 4.06            | 0.60             |
| (e) Demonstrating a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and curriculum   | 4.06            | 0.60             |
| (g) Ensuring that student assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate, and evidence-informed  | 4.02            | 0.49             |
| (h) Interpreting a wide range of data to inform school practice and enable success for all students   | 4.35            | 0.50             |
| (i) Facilitating access to resources, agencies, and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development   | 4.48            | 0.46             |

There were two PIMRS subcategories that did not crosswalk with the LQS Instructional Leadership indicators. For that reason, indicators (*d*) and (*f*) are not included in this table.

**Question 2. What effect, if any, do years of experience and gender, have on new principals' perceptions of their ability to meet the competencies of the Leadership Quality Standard related to Instructional Leadership?**

Since the sample size was too small to perform inferential statistics that allow for group comparison, the data were grouped according to gender and years of experience, and descriptive statistics were calculated with this new data organization.

**Gender**

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics of each of the subcategories in the PIMRS questionnaire. Results show that overall females scored higher in most of the subcategories with only two exceptions: Maintains High Visibility (males = 4.37, females = 4.14) and Provides Incentives for Learning (males = 3.93, females = 3.12).

Table 6

*Group Differences in Gender for Leadership Self-Perception According to the PIMRS Subcategories Included in the PIMRS Questionnaire*

| PIMRS Subcategory                    | Males ( <i>n</i> = 6) |           | Females ( <i>n</i> = 13) |           |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|
|                                      | <i>M</i>              | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                 | <i>SD</i> |
| Communicates the School's Goals      | 3.93                  | .47       | 4.08                     | .56       |
| Coordinates the Curriculum           | 3.90                  | .56       | 4.22                     | .70       |
| Frames School's Goals                | 4.60                  | .31       | 4.72                     | .30       |
| Maintains High Visibility            | 4.37                  | .39       | 4.14                     | .53       |
| Monitors Students' Progress          | 4.00                  | .40       | 4.03                     | .49       |
| Promotes Professional Development    | 4.17                  | .37       | 4.63                     | .46       |
| Provides Incentives for Learning     | 3.93                  | .74       | 3.12                     | .75       |
| Provides Incentives for Teachers     | 3.50                  | .55       | 3.71                     | .80       |
| Protects Instructional Time          | 3.70                  | .45       | 4.03                     | .36       |
| Supervises and Evaluates Instruction | 3.80                  | .63       | 4.11                     | .52       |

The differences in overall scores were generally small with regards to the scores provided by each of the two genders. With respect to the three main categories of the PIMRS questionnaire, Table 7 shows the corresponding mean and standard deviations. Once again results show that overall, females score higher in most of the categories, with the only exception being Promoting Positive Climate, in which mean scores from both genders are fairly similar.



Table 7

*Group Differences in Gender for Leadership Self-Perception According to the Main PIMRS Categories Included in the PIMRS Questionnaire*

| <b>PIMRS Subcategory</b>       | <b>Males (n = 6)</b> |           | <b>Females (n = 13)</b> |           |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|
|                                | <i>M</i>             | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                | <i>SD</i> |
| Define the School Mission      | 4.27                 | .35       | 4.40                    | .36       |
| Managing Instructional Program | 3.90                 | .49       | 4.11                    | .45       |
| Promoting Positive Climate     | 3.93                 | .34       | 3.92                    | .42       |

The highest mean scores for both male and females was in the subcategory Defining School Mission. Finally, to show how gender may impact principals' perceptions of their Leadership competencies according to the LQS, descriptive statistics for each LQS indicator are presented in Table 8 with a subdivision of means and standard deviations according to gender of the participant.

Table 8

*Means and Standard Scores for Each LQS Instructional Leadership Indicator According to Gender*

| <b>LQS Indicator</b>  | <b>Females (n=13)</b> |           | <b>Males (n=6)</b> |           |
|---|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|
|   | <i>M</i>              | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>           | <i>SD</i> |
| (a) Building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students  | 4.26                  | 0.47      | 3.99               | 0.49      |
| (b) Implementing professional growth, supervision, and evaluation processes to ensure that all teachers meet the <i>Teaching Quality Standard</i> | 4.37                  | 0.51      | 3.98               | 0.50      |
| (c) Ensuring that student instruction addresses learning outcomes outlined in programs of study   | 4.16                  | 0.48      | 3.85               | 0.49      |
| (e) Demonstrating a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and curriculum   | 4.16                  | 0.48      | 3.85               | 0.49      |
| (g) Ensuring that student assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate, and evidence-informed  | 4.07                  | 0.50      | 3.90               | 0.51      |
| (h) Interpreting a wide range of data to inform school practice and enable success for all students   | 4.38                  | 0.43      | 4.30               | 0.48      |
| (i) Facilitating access to resources, agencies, and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development   | 4.63                  | 0.47      | 4.17               | 0.50      |

LQS Instructional Leadership indicator (i) rated the highest for females while indicator (h) rated the highest for males.

### **Years of Experience**

In a similar fashion, it was of interest to analyze possible differences in the perception of leadership competencies according to the years of experience of being a principal. To explore how years of experience can impact leadership skills, the data were sub-grouped. Since the sample size was small, two groups were created for this analysis. The first group combined

principals with one and two years of experience, and the second group comprised principals with three years of experience. Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics of the ten subcategories of the PIMRS questionnaire grouped by the two aforementioned groups.

Table 9

*Group Differences in Gender for Leadership Self-Perception According to the Ten Subcategories Included in the PIMRS Questionnaire*

| PIMRS Subcategory                    | Year 1 & 2 ( <i>n</i> = 10) |           | Year 3 ( <i>n</i> = 9) |           |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|
|                                      | <i>M</i>                    | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>               | <i>SD</i> |
| Communicates the School's Goals      | 3.94                        | .57       | 4.13                   | .48       |
| Coordinates the Curriculum           | 4.08                        | .69       | 4.16                   | .65       |
| Frames School's Goals                | 4.60                        | .30       | 4.78                   | .29       |
| Maintains High Visibility            | 4.04                        | .37       | 4.40                   | .56       |
| Monitors Students' Progress          | 4.00                        | .41       | 4.04                   | .52       |
| Promotes Professional Development    | 4.50                        | .48       | 4.47                   | .50       |
| Provides Incentives for Learning     | 3.36                        | .67       | 3.40                   | 1.00      |
| Provides Incentives for Teachers     | 3.40                        | .62       | 3.92                   | .76       |
| Protects Instructional Time          | 3.92                        | .37       | 3.93                   | .48       |
| Supervises and Evaluates Instruction | 4.12                        | .53       | 3.89                   | .60       |

The subcategory of Frames school's goals rated the highest for first- and second-year principals as a combined group. As was the same for the third-year principals with a slightly lower score. Table 10 shows the mean and standard deviations related to the differences between the first- and second-year principals compared to the third-year principals. The comparisons are made against the PIMRS' three main categories.

Table 10

*Group Differences in Years of Experience for Leadership Self-Perception According to the Main Categories Included in the PIMRS Questionnaire*

| <b>PIMRS Subcategory</b>       | <b>Year 1 &amp; 2 (n = 10)</b> |           | <b>Year 3 (n = 9)</b> |           |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|
|                                | <i>M</i>                       | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>              | <i>SD</i> |
| Define the School Mission      | 4.27                           | .40       | 4.46                  | .29       |
| Managing Instructional Program | 4.07                           | .43       | 4.03                  | .52       |
| Promoting Positive Climate     | 3.84                           | .25       | 4.02                  | .50       |

The highest rating for the first- and second-year principals was in the main category of Defining School Mission. Finally, the Alberta LQS indicators' mean scores and standard deviations were divided by years of experience and presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Alberta LQS Instructional Leadership indicators' mean scores and standard deviations divided by years of experience

| LQS Indicator   | Year 1&2 ( <i>n</i> = 10) |           | Year 3 ( <i>n</i> = 9) |           |
|---|---------------------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|
|   | <i>M</i>                  | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>               | <i>SD</i> |
| (a) Building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students  | 4.21                      | 0.50      | 4.13                   | 0.57      |
| (b) Implementing professional growth, supervision, and evaluation processes to ensure that all teachers meet the <i>Teaching Quality Standard</i> | 4.31                      | 0.52      | 4.18                   | 0.60      |
| (c) Ensuring that student instruction addresses learning outcomes outlined in programs of study   | 4.10                      | 0.58      | 4.02                   | 0.61      |
| (e) Demonstrating a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and curriculum   | 4.10                      | 0.58      | 4.02                   | 0.61      |
| (g) Ensuring that student assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate, and evidence-informed  | 4.06                      | 0.45      | 3.97                   | 0.53      |
| (h) Interpreting a wide range of data to inform school practice and enable success for all students   | 4.30                      | 0.45      | 4.41                   | 0.54      |
| (i) Facilitating access to resources, agencies, and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development   | 4.50                      | 0.46      | 4.47                   | 0.57      |

The LQS Instructional Leadership indicator that had the highest score for the first- and second-year principals was, indicator (*i*) as was the same for the third-year principals, although with a slightly lower score.

### Summary

This chapter has presented descriptive statistics of the responses given by 19 principals to the PIMRS questionnaire, where they evaluated their self-perception in the area of Instructional Leadership. Results were divided into the 10 subcategories and three major categories of the

survey. In addition, a crosswalk with the LQS Alberta Leadership Standards was made as an attempt to show how principals perceive their competencies according to these indicators. To explain factors associated with gender and years of experience, the data were subdivided by these two demographics and shown in a similar fashion (i.e., mean and standard deviation for each subdivision).

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

Chapter 5 discusses the results and implications of how school districts and principals may use the key learnings gathered from the analysis of the data to assist and support their current professional development frameworks and initiatives for principals. Within the discussion, there will be evidence as to how the findings in the research reflect the literature on the key components of this study. The discussion also includes suggestions for further areas of study along with some limitations uncovered in the study.

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which new principals perceive themselves as prepared to implement the expectations of Instructional Leadership within the competencies of the new Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) for the province of Alberta. Their perceptions were measured using Instructional Leadership indicators of the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). This instrument aligns with the Instructional Leadership competencies from the LQS; a benchmark for school leadership practice in the province of Alberta. The relevance of this study stems from the fact that the evaluative criteria to judge and guide principal performance, in the province of Alberta, has gone through a revision. Alberta has moved from the Principal Quality Performance Standard to the new Leadership Quality Standard. This revision to the previous standard, which was legislated and in force across Alberta on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, brought about an opportunity to engage principals new to their role, in identifying how competent they see themselves relative to Alberta's Leadership Quality Standard. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) suggest there are systemic problems of weak curriculum knowledge on the part of the principal and unclear expectations provided by the school district in the area of Instructional Leadership, a competency

of the LQS that has served as the focus of this study. These systemic problems stem from principals having a weak knowledge base in curriculum, unclear district expectations, and a broad scope of principal responsibilities that make working with staff a significant challenge.

With this in mind, two questions were explored to guide this study:

1. To what extent do novice principals perceive themselves as prepared to meet the competencies of the LQS related to Instructional Leadership?
2. What effect, if any, do years of experience, gender, and school demographics have on new principals' perceptions of their ability to meet the competencies of the Leadership Quality Standard related to Instructional Leadership?

Due to this study being exploratory in nature, a particular group of new principals from one school district in central Alberta was chosen. Participants were in their first, second or third year of their principalship.

Chapter 1 addresses the barriers that are known to keep principals from performing their roles to the full extent of their capabilities. This is accompanied with new complexities brought about through the change in the role of the principal over the past 30 years. The chapter reveals the expectations and criteria that accompany the change in the role of the principal. The chapter identified areas of concern in relation to the gap in knowledge that principals are facing.

Reference is made specifically to their weak knowledge base in the curriculum, unclear district expectations, and the broad scope of responsibilities they must manage. The two theories addressed in the chapter, Role and Motivation Theory, are used to discuss the interplay between the individual who leads and those who are impacted by the leader. The instruments relevant to this study, the PIMRS and the LQS, are introduced to show how new principals perceive themselves as Instructional Leaders.



A review of the research literature in the area of school leadership shows that there are specific characteristics and behaviors exhibited by school principals that lead to positively impacting an entire school community. Although there are terms and specific behaviors that refer to strong leadership, it is important to note the interplay a leader has with the technical side of his or her work, along with the emotional variables that come with working with people.

Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) proposed that leadership is an intrinsically emotional process in which leaders display certain emotions and attempt to evoke and control other emotions in their followers. Leadership is a concept practiced within an emotional sphere. Therefore, a strong sense of who a leader is, what they value, and how they attend to the needs of others takes precedence. Gülcan (2012) suggests that Instructional Leadership be broken into two specific components. One focuses on the desired results and goals within a concerted plan. The other reflects how a school leader creates the conditions for learning through the relationships and support provided for their teachers. The results and goals speak to the technical side, while creating the conditions reflects the relational side of the principal's role.

## **Discussion of Results**

Answers from the PIMRS questionnaire were evaluated in this study by using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 25, for a number of statistical techniques and procedures that include frequencies and descriptive statistics. Analysis of individual response scores from the PIMRS relative to the 10 subcategories showed that overall, the participants in the study rated themselves as fairly competent Instructional Leaders.

### **Principal Perceptions Relative to the PIMRS**

The first research question in this study considered how the perceptions of new principals showed how prepared they felt in attending to the indicators found in the LQS, specific to the

area of Instructional Leadership. The two subcategories that principals showed the most strength in were in the areas; Promotes Professional Development and Maintains High Visibility. The literature cited by Raja and Palanichamy (2011) suggests, principals viewed communication between themselves and staff as more significant than any one quality possessed by the principal. The lowest rating given by the principals in Raja and Palanichamy's study was related to their overall ability to perform their role. The principals in their study felt their special skills (intuitive abilities to respond to people) could be used to overcome any deficit in their actual abilities. This study supports Goleman (2000) and Bandura's (1977) general claims about the importance of relational connections within the work setting. Although they were not speaking directly to the role of the principal, this may address why attention needs to be given to the role the principal plays in how they support their staff who for example, may have unique professional development needs. In doing so, the principal is seen enacting responsive behaviors to support teachers while at the same time maintaining high visibility. This serves as an opportunity to create chances for connections throughout the school day between a principal and staff. Raja and Palanichamy's study revealed that the relationship principals have with their staff positions them to overcome areas of deficiency related to their skill set as principals. Conversely, the areas that show up as a challenge for principals as indicated in the analysis of the PIMRS subcategories are; Protects instructional time, Provides incentives for teachers, and Provides incentives for learning. The research uncovered by Amabile (1985), related to Motivation Theory, acknowledges the importance of motivation coming from within. Intrinsic motivation, as a tool to inspire and promote creativity, must come from the need and want of individuals. Perhaps, this is why the principals in this study rated lower in this area. There is recognition on their part as to how far their influence can go in the areas of Providing incentives for teachers and Providing

incentives for learning.

The category of Frames School's Goals rated high, with a mean score of 4.68. This high score could be due to this being a fundamental requirement of the school leader. The principal must have a vision and a purpose that frames the work in the school. Principals develop a sense of credibility by seeing what is needed based on results and the school community they serve. Hallinger (2011) defines Frames School's Goals, as how the principal determines where the focus of resources will be for the school year. This includes a mission and goals related to student achievement. Sinnema, Ludlow, and Robinson's (2015) research supports goal setting, monitoring data, and having high standards as areas where principals felt competent in relation to their effectiveness as leaders. Being able to formulate a vision and determine goals is something principals can have direct control over. This was supported in how the principals in this study demonstrated more confidence in this particular area over other areas. These goals incorporate past data as well as in the moment analysis of what to focus on in their schools. Input to support the direction of these goals is collected from parents, staff, and students. These goals should be measurable and should include teacher professional development strategies. It would be logical to assume that a new principal would be engaged in all the aforementioned activities, as they would be relying on others to help them understand the people and school context they are welcomed into. This line of reasoning would be consistent with the findings of Senge (1990), who claimed leaders were the designers of organizational behaviors. This is done through listening to people and designing goals based on these key learnings, particularly important to a principal early in their career.

**The LQS Instructional Leadership and PIMRS Crosswalk.** To further explore the connection between the participants in this study and the LQS, a crosswalk between the PIMRS

survey questions and the LQS Instructional Leadership indicators was completed using descriptive analysis. The area rated highest after the LQS indicators and the PIMRS categories were aligned, was indicator (i) from the LQS: Facilitating access to resources, agencies, and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development. Due to the complex nature of the principalship, one way principals can survive in their role is to access all available resources. This notion is supported by referencing the Mediated-Effects Model. Hallinger and Heck's (1998) Mediated-Effects Model surmises how the principal's influence is eclipsed by factors such as other people, events, and teacher attitude. Therefore, a principal who invests in making connections with their staff and school community position themselves to have more success as a leader. It appears the new principals in this study are aware of this and are using this practice to their advantage.

When examining the data from the crosswalk, the LQS indicator principals rated lowest with a mean score of 4.02 was (i) Ensuring that student assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate, and evidence informed. When looking at the cause of the lower rating from the participants in this study, Hargreaves and Fink (2006), contend teacher time for inquiry around their practice is sacrificed at the expense of implementing unnecessary school-based initiatives. The whole process of how teachers are trained and coached becomes rushed, thus decreasing the intended positive results on student achievement. Simply put, the competing interests in a school may take away from a focus on high leverage assessment practices practiced across the staff, including the principal. Another possible reason for a lower score in this area may resonate with Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008), claim that the importance of the school principal is in developing teacher capacities through motivation and supportive working conditions. The principal takes care of the big picture and finds trust in their teachers to take care of assessment

practices, which are predominantly a classroom practice.

**Impact of gender.** This section will examine the data relative to the study's second research question; What effect, if any, do gender and years of experience have on new principals' perceptions of their ability to meet the competencies of the Leadership Quality Standard related to Instructional Leadership? When looking at the reporting of each gender, results show that overall females score higher in most of the 10 subcategories with only two exceptions: Maintains High Visibility (males = 4.37, females = 4.14) and Provides Incentives for Learning (males = 3.93, females = 3.12). While these results could be due to chance, it may also be due to female principals having the perception they have worked harder to attain their leadership position, and therefore rate themselves, in general, higher than their male counterparts. This is substantiated by Eagly and Carli (2007) who reference the pipeline, a term used to describe the narrow perspective of advancing (funneling) males into leadership positions. This idea asserts, females are not being moved through to high level positions because these positions are being held more so for their male counterparts. Individuals assigning these leadership positions may feel certain attributes of a male leader is better equipped to handle the position. Aligned with this assertion is Perez's (2012) belief of women being underrepresented in positions of leadership potentially because they are viewed differently than men by potential followers (p. 217). Based on these factors, female principals may tend to view the LQS and PIMRS (evaluation instruments) in a manner different than male principals. They may use these instruments as a way to substantiate their work more than their male counterparts. Interestingly, Eagly et al. (2003) found that women in positions of power perceived themselves to be more productive and effective in their roles as leaders over their male counterparts. They stated, although small in differences, females were actually more transformational in their leadership

efforts while the males were more transactional in nature. There certainly could be a correlation with this particular conclusion and the strong results of the female participants in this study.

When looking at the data relative to the three main PIMRS categories (defining school mission, promoting a positive school learning climate, and managing the instructional program), the results show that overall, females demonstrated a higher level of self-efficacy in most categories, with the exception being promoting a positive school learning climate, in which mean scores from both genders are fairly similar. Promoting a positive school culture is rooted in the relationships the principal has with their school community. The more visible and present the principal is with those he or she serves, the more the possibility of creating this positive environment within their school. In two separate studies that tracked how the principal used their time, two differing sets of results were captured. In Horng, Klasik & Loeb's (2010) study, it was found that principals spend only 15% of their time related to their in-school relationships. These would be primarily those relationships involving students and teachers. In a similar study conducted five years later, Tomàs-Folch and Ion (2015) determined that principals spent twice as much time on people, than on the other principal roles, such as setting objectives, organization and instruction. These differing results may be a small look into the challenge in pinning down what causes the variance in how effective a principal is in creating a positive school environment.

**Impact of years of experience.** As stated earlier, it was of interest to analyze possible differences in the perception of leadership competencies according to the years of experience of being a principal. To explore how years of experience can impact leadership skills, the data were disaggregated. Due to the total sample size being relatively small, there were two distinct groups created for this analysis. The first group combined the principals with one and two years of

experience (10 participants) while the second group contained only principals with three years of experience (9 participants). The advantage of forming these two particular subgroups was that it created an opportunity to compare the low end of the three-year experience with the high end of the three-year experience in this study. This provided the opportunity to see if more time in the position brought about more confidence in performing the role. Of the three main PIMRS categories the first- and second-year participants grouped together, scored a higher mean score of 4.07 on only one of the three categories. This was in the area of managing the instructional programming. In the two other main categories, defining school mission and promoting a positive school learning climate, the third-year principals fared higher in their mean scores. The subcategories under the main category of managing instructional programming includes; coordinates the curriculum, supervision and evaluation of staff and monitoring student progress. It could be considered a surprising finding that those principals in their first and second years scored higher in performing tasks related to these areas of Instructional Leadership.

It could be thought that newer principals would need more time to develop more confidence in these fairly complex PIMRS subcategories. In general, the more experience a principal has seems to align with higher scores on how they rate themselves. This does suggest that the more experience a principal has may serve to their advantage as an Instructional Leaders. This claim is supported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2017) who found that through their research, experienced principals spent a higher percentage of their time working with teachers as well as on administrative duties than new principals. Conversely, their research noted that experienced principals spent a smaller percentage of their time on school management, discipline and attendance, and monitoring school areas than new principals. Furthermore, Azaiez and Slate (2017) assert that the way principals spend their time prioritizing their duties

can affect academic performance and thus, they can influence the success or failure in improving student achievement (p. 20). However, as stated by Azaiez and Slate (2017) and the National Center for Education Statistics (2014) it is the experience the principal gains through their practice that provides them the insight as to how to plan and manage their time and activities successfully. As a principal's years of experience increase combined with the amount of time they stay situated within a particular school community, there develops a sense of understanding of where to best shift their time and focus to make the biggest difference for their staff and school community.

### **Limitations**

A possible limitation in this study is directly related to the survey itself. The PIMRS is designed to provide feedback to the principal which includes separate surveys that are to be given simultaneously to key stakeholders who work along-side the principal. The principal then compares their perceptions with those they work with to evaluate the accuracy in their perceptions. The complete 360-degree feedback loop would include perceptions from a direct supervisor and teachers who work with the principal. Without this subset of data, the survey does not yield all the information it is intended to uncover. Due to the fact that this study is focused on the personal reflections of new principals; as well as an opportunity for the study to yield some generalizable notions of the perceptions of these principals, the PIMRS is a satisfactory tool to be used for the purpose of this particular research. Another limitation may be the low number of respondents involved as participants. As such, the response rate for the participation of the total new principal population was very high at 83%. Regardless, due to the aforementioned opportunity to collect generalizable data within the context of exploratory research and the high response rate, the limited number of participants did not deter from the



study. The research also focuses on one particular school district making the generalizing of the findings a possible challenge. In terms of another limiting factor of the survey was the lack of definitions provided for the key terminology used in the survey. It is possible principals taking the survey could see the questions from different perspectives unless key terms were highlighted to create a common understanding. It is, however, a situation whereby providing too much information could take away from the integrity of the survey. Most individuals practicing school leadership, should be very familiar with the terms found in the survey.

An additional ethical limitation could have been the optics of involving executive members of the school district in assisting with the promotion and collection of the participant survey. This support from the central office was necessary to ensure a greater participation rate of all new principals eligible to take the survey. This potential issue was dealt with by ensuring any messaging to principals only spoke to central office's support for the research and at the same time communicated that participation was anonymous and voluntary. Additionally, it was made clear that any principal could opt out of the study with no repercussions.

### **Future Research**

A recommended follow-up to this study would be to conduct a similar study where principals from two different school districts could be compared. This would allow the research to see if there are statistically significant similarities and differences across school district in how principals view themselves as Instructional Leaders. In the future, it would be helpful if a survey created specific to the LQS Instructional Leadership competency could be developed that checks principal perceptions against itself. Although the PIMRS was helpful in gathering some important findings relative to the LQS, having a survey specific to the LQS dimensions would be helpful and perhaps present a more accurate depiction of principal perceptions in Alberta.

Another recommendation in a follow-up study would be to expand the participants to those in the first to fifth years of their principalship. This would increase the number of participants in the study and capture a larger range of those practicing as new principals. Within this study, there were two areas that were not supported by the crosswalk between the LQS Instructional Leadership competency and the PIMRS. The LQS Instructional Leadership competency did not have any indicators relative to the PIMRS categories of, facilitating mentorship and induction supports for teachers and principals or facilitating mentorship and induction supports for teachers and principals. There may be a need to explore if these two areas of Instructional Leadership can be addressed in the LQS Instructional Leadership competency for a more encompassing look at the role of the principal.

Based on the findings of this work there appears to be cause for future research in the area of how male and female principals engage in the process of self-reflection. A qualitative analysis designed to understand the thinking of both genders as they self-reflect on their abilities as a principal, may reveal insights into feelings of efficacy in general and factors as yet unstudied that impact efficacy for instructional leadership. The same suggestion could be applied to understanding more deeply those principals serving in different years of their principalship and how their efficacy for being instructional leaders is affected by internal and external forces acting upon the principalship.

### **Implications**

This section, of the study will address the tangible actions that may be addressed by school districts and principals as they plan their professional development and support strategies for new principals. The area of motivating and inspiring staff and students seems to be an area that needs further attention. Principals in the study struggled more with the idea motivating

students and teachers than any of the other subcategory in the PIMRS. Whereas principals may know this is part of their work as Instructional Leaders, they seem to struggle with when and how to motivate others. Perhaps the issue around motivation stems from the fact that it is so unique to those who are in the position to motivate and those who need to be motivated.

Relational understanding on that part of the principal is essential. Knowing how to connect with and be in sync with the students and people on staff is a critical feature of Instructional Leadership. This concept brings back the theoretical frameworks related to both Role and Motivation theory. A construct associated with Role Theory suggested by Hunter (2001) claims, that how a person acts within their role is greatly impacted by the experience and knowledge they have through firsthand experiences. This can also be applied to the work of the principal. A principal wishing to carry out their role as a motivator, must have had concrete examples of this behavior from their past experiences to be able to make sense of how to do this in their present context. If not, there would be some tension or at the very least questions as to how to perform this part of their role. In terms of the connection to Motivation theory on this same idea, Deckers (2014), contends that unless people have some exposure (from their past) as to what their goals may even look like, it would be hard for the person to visualize tangible outcomes for their future aspirations. The two theories and their conceptual ideologies carry great weight in supporting principals to understand not only their behaviors but the behaviors of those they serve. This level of understanding would position new principals in a better place to respond appropriately to the needs to their school community. The skills associated with motivating and providing incentives to students and teachers could be explored further at the district level with conversations with teams of principals and central district members. For example, a brainstorming session could be held as to the strategies that may be used to motivate and

incentivize those they influence. These discussions could include when incentives and motivating others is appropriate, and when it may not be even be necessary.

Although in general, the results (mean scores) in this study yielded high scores, it may be of note that principal judgments related to their own practice are relative. Principals see their work as school leaders from the lens of their individual school context. Perhaps an opportunity for on-going mentorship and mandatory school visitations with other principal colleagues, would provide more opportunities for principals to expand the scope as to how they see themselves in their role.

The females who participated in this study, overall scored themselves higher than their male colleagues. It may be of interest to further explore the perceptions female principals have when self-reporting on their successes. According to Perez (2012) the research involving male and female leaders show there is evidence that they are indeed viewed differently, however neither one has an advantage regarding the expectations of how they are required to perform their roles. There may be other reasons outside the scope of this study as to why female principals rated themselves with more confidence in the area of Instructional Leadership. For example, could factors such as female principals having more classroom teaching experience prior to becoming a principal or more vice or assistant principal experience influence their perceptions of their work once in the role of principal?

### **Summary**

As Instructional Leaders, the principal is asked to attend to a variety of different tasks requiring a specialized set of skills. This study began from a desire to ensure that principals new to their positions had an opportunity to reflect deeper on the area of Instructional Leadership. Ultimately, the goal of this study was to allow an entry point that could lead to further

exploration of behaviors relative to the LQS Instructional Leadership competency. The more clarity principals have as to the behaviors required to actualize success in their roles, the better our students will be in preparing for their future. Fullan (2001) references how chaotic the conditions currently are for school principals. At the same time, he recognizes, no matter how complex or uncertain the times are, school principals must still perform their duties. Creating a sense of certainty in how new principals see their role, how they can access support relative to the questions they may have, creates further opportunities for school districts to learn the unique needs of their principals. These unique supports may be dependent on gender, years of experiences or other factors beyond the scope of this study. An evaluative tool, such as the PIMRS or the LQS, can not work in isolation. Conversation and follow-up with principals and their supervisors must be part of the success plan. The question can be asked, why the focus on Instructional Leadership? Cattonar (2007) suggests that behaviors that constitute Instructional Leadership, are less frequently considered important in the work of principals; however, 85% of principals in Canada place great value on this part of their work. If principals see this part of their work as important, then school districts would benefit from providing the attention this area of leadership deserves. The tension between the competing interests of principals is made clear by the Alberta Teacher's Association (2009) and Canadian Council of School Principals study that reports that, "faced with a time crunch, [principals] find themselves giving more attention to the managerial aspects of their job than to the educational ones, a situation that they regret but consider inevitable" (p. 4). It is imperative school districts be very intentional in how they constantly shed light on this area of leadership. Clearly, the research indicates that Instructional Leadership is both required and is wanted. These are two important criteria in determining if something is worth investing in, particularly in the field of Education. Shirley (2014) recognizes

that the diversity brought on by the needs of key school community members such as, parents, staff and students, often require supplementary materials and cross-cultural skills that expand the nature of the principal's responsibilities. When principals lack those materials and the professional development required to make the most of diversity, the nature of their workload intensifies (CAP & ATA, 2014, p.81). This conveys the urgency and attention that should be given to support new principals moving into their roles as school leaders.

Although this study was applicable to a low numbered and targeted population of principals residing in a geographical area in Alberta, the findings in this study are important in supporting other school districts who are inquiring as to the needs of new principals. There are transferable ideas that could have strong implications on the support and awareness school districts have as to the needs and wants of their principals.

Thankfully, the school district that took part in this study have a number of practices in place to facilitate the support and on-going development of their new principals. These take place in the form of: monthly meetings as a principal group, visits from supervisors focused on problem solving and goal setting, be it personal or school based and invitations to engage in professional development that serves the principal's individual school communities. It is my hope that the participants who gave their time to participate in this study, continue with the reflections and questions in a manner in which they can build their leadership capacity, with success, joy, and fulfillment.

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