Holding the reins of the professional learning community: Principals' perceptions of the

normative imperative to develop schools as professional learning communities

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to describe the perceptions of twelve school principals in Manitoba concerning the relationship between their duty to evaluate teachers and the normative imperative to develop schools as professional learning communities. This study used Toole and Louis's (2002) definition of a school as professional learning community.

Toole and Louis contend that the term professional learning community is composed of three interdependent concepts: a school culture that emphasizes professionalism which is client oriented and knowledge-based; one that emphasizes learning, placing high value on teachers' inquiry and reflection; and one that is communitarian, emphasizing personal connections. Furthermore, this definition is built on the notion that there are preconditions, structural supports, and human and social resources, necessary for professional learning communities.

Grounded theory served as both the theoretical structure and research design to gain an understanding of principals' thinking (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Principals participated in this study in two focus groups (six principals in each focus group), and twelve interviews. Each focus group and interview was transcribed, and content analysis was employed to identify commonalities and differences in the data (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Using open, axial, and selective coding eight themes were identified based on the responses to the research questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

This study revealed some consistency between the information cited in the literature, with specific focus on Toole and Louis' (2002) definition, and principals'

perceptions of their schools as professional learning communities. The participants perceived a professional learning community as being comprised of the three interdependent domains theorized by Toole and Louis and as requiring necessary structural supports and human and social resources as preconditions. They identified time, teacher empowerment, interconnected teacher roles, school plans and institutional identity as structural supports. They also viewed trust and respect, and supportive principal leadership as human and social resource preconditions for schools striving to become professional learning communities.

The study also revealed some conflict between the beliefs of the principals and conceptions of professional learning communities as theoretically constructed in the literature. The participants perceived that while a professional learning community is multidimensional, its effectiveness is not necessarily tied to measures of student achievement. There appeared to be few differences among the participants' perceptions when separated by gender, school type (public or private) and school size (small, medium or large). The participants appeared to have limited notions of a professional learning community and as a result it is hard to make a case that professional learning communities exist in these schools. Additionally, they saw the duty to evaluate teachers as fostering the development of a professional learning community. Finally, while professional learning communities may hold the best promise for sustaining school improvement efforts (Hord, 2004), the efforts associated with nurturing one will lack results if principals do not possess the clarity of what is required for a school to become a professional learning community.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Study

In many countries, including Canada, the last twenty five years have been characterized by large-scale reforms of public education systems (Fullan, 2001a; Louis, Toole & Hargreaves, 1999; Young & Levin, 1999). While the educational reforms have not been identical in each country, or uniform across jurisdictions, it appears that powerful political, social, and economic shifts in the environment in which schools are nested, in the ways we understand learning, organize and manage school organizations, and relate to students and parents, favour the exploration of new conceptualizations for the profession of educational leadership (Murphy, 2002).

Arguably four key forces are shaping the context of contemporary educational leadership (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). The forces are: demographic trends, hybrid forms of governance, pressures for accountability, and teacher professionalism. Educational leaders are cautioned not to ignore or resist these forces, as they are too strong and too profound (Goldring & Greenfield). Aspects of the terrain of two of these forces, pressures for accountability and professionalism, are the focus of this study.

1.2 Background to the Study

Research evidence suggests that the state can influence large scale, sustainable school reform efforts by using strategies which include accountability and capacity building (Fullan, 2005). In fact, school improvement efforts targeted at boosting student achievement have a greater likelihood of success and sustainability when school changes are linked to district and state policies that support them, an approach Fullan terms the "tri-level solution". In part, this is because the state is an important actor in shaping

professional development policies for schools and as a result authoritative policy and decisions have significant potential to affect school capacity (Youngs, 1999). Knapp (1997) suggests professional development activities can be influenced by state policies which, as purposeful courses of action, can guide, direct, or support improved teaching practice.

Canadian legislation provides the provinces and territories with constitutional control over primary and secondary education (Webber & Townsend, 1998). Provincial or territorial legislation regarding teacher supervision and evaluation provides policy meant to ensure public confidence not only in the education system as a whole, but also in teachers and their teaching (Bredeson, 2001). Traditional approaches to professional development in most school districts typically include annual teacher supervision and evaluation by school principals (Youngs, 1999). A goal of these professional development policies is to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of individual teachers by supporting their growth in competence in instruction and evaluation (Reitzug, 2002). However, professional development policy should also address elements of school capacity including the ability of staff to improve student outcomes school-wide rather than focusing solely on individual teachers in isolation (Newmann et al., 2001). Further, the principal should be an involved, proactive change agent to initiate and support school-wide improvement of the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers that can result in improved student learning (Reitzug, 2002).

Legislatures and ministries or departments of education have historically attempted to hold educators professionally accountable; however, over the last twenty

five years there have been increasing calls for educational reform through specific

accountability measures (Dagley & Veir, 2002; Goldring & Greenfield, 2002; Moe,

2002). A recurring theme in many recent reform efforts sweeping across North America

is a concern about the manner in which school personnel, especially classroom teachers,

are evaluated (Dagley & Veir, 2002; Elmore, 2000). Colby, Bradshaw and Joyner (2002)

suggest any effective teacher evaluation system gives thought to both issues of

accountability and professional development. While some contend that it may be

impossible in practice to serve both the purposes of professional development and

professional accountability through a single system of teacher evaluation (for example,

Duke, 1990), others (for example, Dagley & Veir, 2002; Veir & Dagley, 2002) argue that

a central policy intent of state legislation regarding teacher evaluation should be that it

address both purposes.

     Major educational reform surges also generated a renewed interest in fostering

professional learning community as a means to counter teacher isolation, build a

common vision for schooling, foster collective action around reform, and improve

practice and student learning (Achinstein, 2002). Professional learning communities are

purported to provide the organizational conditions to facilitate significant and lasting

school changes (Louis et al., 1999). It is suggested that, "[t]he PLC is specifically

designed to develop the collective capacity of a staff to work together to achieve the

fundamental purpose of the school: high levels of learning for all students" (DuFour,

Eaker & DuFour, 2005, p. 18).

     A critical element in both of these school reform themes – increased professional

accountability through teacher evaluation, and developing schools as professional

learning communities – is found in the role that a principal plays in each. While it is possible that school reform might occur without the principal, if that change is to be sustained, then the principal's active support and involvement are essential (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Principals serve as the primary link between the outside world and the school. Principals must respond to government demands while working inside schools by maintaining contact with teachers and responding to their professional problems (Martinez, 2003). Because of the increasing demands on principals to provide the voice of knowledge and experience, especially when it comes to improved instruction, while simultaneously meeting the expectation to build the professional community of the school by developing and working with others (Hargreaves et al, 2002), one wonders if the formal duty to evaluate teachers affects how principals conceive of schools as professional learning communities.

A search for empirical studies which examined or explored principals' conceptions of schools as professional learning communities resulted in no studies being found that directly related to the topic of this research. There is a need to uncover principals' perspectives on educational matters as these provide a more complete understanding of principal leadership (Beatty, 2002). Conceptions of a professional learning community that do not take into account the conditions and circumstances in which teachers and principals are situated provide limited insight and understanding of what occurs inside and across schools (Sirotnik, 2004). This study attempts to situate principals' conceptualizations of schools as professional learning communities within the context of their statutory duty to evaluate teachers.

1.3 Problem Statement

Principals are asked to build and nurture the collegial and collaborative relationships required in professional learning communities (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin & Bernstein, 1984), while simultaneously evaluating teachers to improve student achievement (Elmore, 2000; Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Principals are challenged to respond to the tensions created by moving from the metaphor of school as an organization to one of school as professional learning community (Senge, 1990). In addition, principals are asked to create and sustain school communities, ones that secure the ties and connectedness of a caring and stable collectivity while supporting the "constructive controversy" of a learning community (Achinstein, 2002), and simultaneously, fulfill their duty of teacher evaluation.

It is likely, therefore, that the conceptualization of a professional learning community on the part of school administrators will exist within and amongst the various responsibilities and pressures, notably teacher evaluation, that school administrators must address. One of the reasons why educational reform so often fails is because the reform does not appear to take into account that what must be changed is an interconnected, complex and socio-political system which affects, and constrains the work of teaching and efforts to improve it (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Fullan, 2005). In part, this study is an exploratory probe of the dynamics of this complex system through a focus on the exercise by school administrators of a basic responsibility - teacher evaluation – in the context of the imperative to develop schools as professional learning communities. Toole and Louis (2002) argue that an "area ripe for additional research" involves listening to school leaders' "voices from the field" on the shape and values of professional learning communities (p. 274).

This study explores: a) how principals conceptualize schools as professional learning communities, and b) whether principals' formal duty to evaluate teachers has an effect on principals' conceptualizations of professional learning community. Specifically this study addresses the following questions:

1. Do principals conceptualize schools as professional learning communities?

2. What are the characteristics identified by principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

   a. What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by public school principals and private school principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

   b. What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics that male principals and female principals identify in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

   c. What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by principals of small, medium, and large-sized schools in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

3. Do principals perceive their duty to evaluate teachers as having an effect on their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

   a. How do they perceive that this effect is evident?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Given legislative changes to the professional relationships between principals and teachers in Ontario (Judson & Tranquilli, 1999; Roher, 2001), and a court decision in Saskatchewan regarding the need for principals to be unfettered in the performance of their statutory duties to evaluate teachers (Doctor, 2004) and given the claim that professional learning communities may well embody the necessary conditions to support and sustain school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005; Hord, 1997a, 1997b, 2004; Lezotte, 2005), it is appropriate to explore principals' perceptions of professional learning community. Hord (2004) argues that, "[t]here is much work still to be done in order to fully understand and successfully implement professional learning communities in schools" (p. 4). Exploring principals' thinking is important because: "In the real world of schools, we are forced to move from a more naïve to a more complex portrait of what is required to build professional learning communities" (Toole and Louis, 2002, p. 257). This research study proposed to explore principals' thinking, and provide researchers, policymakers, and practitioners with a more developed understanding of principals' notions of schools as professional learning communities.

1.4.1 Significance for Theory

"School communities do not exist in isolation from their surrounding communities. What and how they learn needs to be in dialogue with their surroundings" (Starratt, 2003, p. 233). Roher (2001) contends that when the Ontario government in 1997 introduced a comprehensive reform package, through Bill 160, it intended to alter the education system. Bill 160 effectively removed Ontario's principals and vice-

principals from the various teachers' professional associations/unions, and as a result

principals and vice-principals became outsiders to the collegial environment of their old

bargaining units (Roher). School administrators clearly became management and were no

longer teacher colleagues in the Ontario teachers' professional associations (Roher). This

loss of formal association with the teaching profession, even though principals may still

teach, creates tensions and dilemmas between a principal and the teaching staff as both

adjust to the new relationship (Judson & Tranquilli, 1999).

This research situates principals' conceptions of a professional learning

community in the context of their statutory duty to evaluate teachers. Much of what is

known of leadership in educational administration, observes English (1995), has been

assembled through research methods where the context in which the leadership is

exercised has been ignored. What is needed in research on educational administration is a

better understanding of the critical role that context (i.e., the sum of the situational,

historical, institutional, and socio-cultural circumstances that constrain leadership and

give it meaning) plays in the construction of an individual's leadership (Brandon, 2002).

Principals maintain that the most important qualification for their jobs is the ability to use

concepts "in context", and while theories are no substitute for thought, they can be guides

for administrative decision making and problem solving (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). This

study attempts an in-context understanding of selected principals' conceptions of

professional learning communities.

1.4.2 Significance for Practice

Daniel (1996) cautions it can be somewhat precarious to extrapolate from what

appears to be effective in one educational situation to another. Something that works

within the context of a particular school setting or as part of a research investigation is

not necessarily going to be effective when transferred to a different school, system or a

practical situation (Daniel). Haller and Kleine (2001) contend that research in educational

administration cannot be applied to practical problems in a straightforward manner.

Initially conceptualized in educational research as an "overconcern with practicality"

(Kerlinger, 1959, p. 282) and later designated as the "pragmatic-practical misconception"

(Kerlinger, 1977), the "practicality myth" is characterized by a preoccupation with

immediate usefulness when designing, conducting, or evaluating research (Daniel, 1996).

Researchers motivated by this myth erroneously view the identification and solution of

practical problems in education as the general purpose of educational research (Daniel).

The expectation that research can contribute to the improvement of practice

remains in the minds of educators and researchers though not all practical problems are

solved by research per se and there is a recognition by some that the domain of practice

itself contains anomalies. For example, on November 28, 2003 the Saskatchewan Court

of Queen's Bench determined that school principals cannot be fettered in the performance

of their mandated duties of teacher supervision and evaluation, including reporting, under

Saskatchewan's Education Act, 1995, without fear of being disciplined pursuant to the

teachers' Professional Code of Ethics of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (Doctor,

2004). This research explores a significant practical connection for principals namely that

although principals are necessarily teachers, they cannot be considered on the same

footing as their staff as they have been assigned additional legislated responsibilities by

the state including that of teacher evaluation (Doctor).

Simultaneously, principals are being challenged to establish the kind of collegial relationships that put aside notions of rank in order to develop and sustain professional learning communities so that teachers can continually improve their students' chances of succeeding in a high stakes world (Marshall, 2005). In the face of this practical dilemma, this study examined how principals conceived of schools as professional learning communities, including an examination of whether or not specific contextual factors affected those conceptions, and asked whether the duty of teacher evaluation in particular affected principals' conceptions of their schools as professional learning communities.

1.5 Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to investigate principals' perceptions of schools as professional learning communities. In this research study, grounded theory served as both the research methodology and research design (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data collection, analysis and theory development followed Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory approach. Two focus groups, each with six participants, followed by twelve individual interviews with principals served as the data collection method. Of the twelve participants, nine of whom were women and three of whom were men, five were employed in public schools and seven were employed in private schools. Using Ertl and Plante's (2004) definition of school size, the schools were categorized as being a small, medium or large-sized school based on student enrolment as reported by the study's participants at the time of their individual interview. Two of the participants were principals of small schools, six were from medium-sized schools and the remaining four were principals of large schools.

Data analysis was based on grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in which theories are grounded in data from particular contexts, that is, people are viewed as engaged in interaction and social processes while struggling to come to a greater understanding of a phenomena (Behrens & Smith, 1996). Following transcription of the focus groups and individual interviews, I subjected the data to three coding procedures: open, axial and selective coding (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In open coding, the data were read through multiple times, labeled, classified and named and, words, phrases and sentences were identified as substantive comments (Strauss & Corbin). Through the axial coding of substantive comments, I was able to arrange the data in new ways through the exploration of elements of context and interrelationship (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Selective coding, the final analytical process used in this study, resulted in the identification of eight themes which are the subject of Chapter 5, "Discussion of Findings and Suggestions for Future Research," of this thesis (Johnson & Christensen).

1.6 Delimitations

In Canada, provincial and territorial governments enact legislation in various forms, through acts and regulations to, among other concerns, safeguard public confidence in primary and secondary education and promote student learning (Webber & Townsend, 1998). Arguably, statutes pertaining to teacher supervision and evaluation indicate governments' commitment to these through the delivery of education as a public good (Webber & Townsend). This legislation is generally specific enough to delineate a principal's duty without being so rigid that it does not allow for local implementation through local school division or district policy. It is left to local school boards and

superintendents to develop in personnel and/or collective agreements policies that dictate, often with room for discretion, how teacher evaluation and supervision are to be implemented (Bezeau, 2002).

This study was not an analysis of local school division or district policies or systems of teacher evaluation and supervision.   It was focused on the principal's duty to evaluate teachers as set out in Manitoba's legislation, the *Education Administration Act, and the Miscellaneous Provisions Regulation* (Man. Reg. 468/88R).

While there is disagreement on the goals and effects of teacher supervision and evaluation systems, for the purposes of this study the relevant Manitoba legislation was regarded as the provincial government's commitment to be involved in safeguarding the instruction of children in schools through the supervision and/or evaluation of teaching. For this study teacher supervision and/or evaluation was located within the practice of a legislated requirement for evaluation.

In addition this study was based on the perceptions of nine female and three male principals from five public and seven private schools of varying school size, that is two principals from small-sized, six from medium-sized, and four from large-sized schools. Therefore, study is not intended to reflect completely the perceptions of the more than eight hundred principals employed in Manitoba schools.

Finally, this study recognized that the concept of a professional learning community is complex (Little, 2003). When applied to schools, the metaphor of a "learning community" may extend beyond teachers and a principal to include students, parents, community members and others (Shields, 2003). For the purpose of this study, Toole and Louis' (2002) definition was chosen as the basis of an examination of the

professional relationships between the adults who work in schools, specifically because it focuses on the kinds of relationships that exist between teachers, and between teachers and principal that can support individual and collective change in classrooms school-wide (Spillane and Louis, 2002).

1.7 Limitations of the Study

In qualitative research, while the personal perspectives of the research participants adds dimension to the study, "it does not offer the measured and perhaps less biased point of view of the outsider" (Haller & Kleine, 2001, p. 94). Additionally, because this study examined principals' perceptions holistically it does not offer "an opportunity to analyze the component parts in great detail" (p. 94). The relatively small number of participants and small data set obtained places limits on the certainty with which the research questions may be answered. Another limitation to this study may be found in the possibility that qualitative inquiry, especially, depends on the skills, training, insights, and capabilities of the researcher. As with all interpretative research, the human dynamic is the greatest strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis (Patton, 1990).

Initially, the design of this study proposed that the twelve participants be six female and six male principals employed in six public and six private schools that varied in student enrolment so that four were principals of small-sized schools, four were principals of medium-sized schools, and four were principals of large-sized schools. Due to unanticipated participant withdrawals the week prior to the focus groups, the actual participants in the study were nine female and three male principals employed in five public and seven private schools that varied in student enrolment such that two were from

small-sized schools, six were from medium-sized schools and, four were from large-sized

schools.

For the purpose of this study, in keeping with Toole and Louis' (2002) definition,

the preconditions for schools to develop as professional learning communities were

divided into two broad areas, namely structural supports and human and social resources.

Toole and Louis, citing the work of Kruse, Louis and Bryk (1995), list time and places to

meet, interdependent teacher roles, communication structures, teacher empowerment, and

school autonomy as structural supports of professional learning communities. As human

and social resource preconditions, they list openness to improvement, trust and respect,

access to expertise, supportive leadership, and socialization. I acknowledge that there

may be other structural supports and human and social resource preconditions that are not

included in the definition by Toole and Louis. Additionally, concepts used in this study

such as empowerment, teamwork, autonomy, and accountability are not only difficult to

define but arguably may have contested meanings (Haller & Kleine, 2001). Terms such

as these are not value neutral and may be viewed as ideological constructs (Collins,

1995). Collins, in fact, suggests that when one definition of a "contested concept" is

privileged above all others, the definition becomes a mechanism of ideological control. In

keeping with the grounded theory approach of this research (Glaser, 1998), this study

does not attempt to absolutely define these terms and uses them only in the specific

context of this study.

The interpretations of the data in this study are presented as provisional and

preliminary. Given the study format, I cannot generalize its findings for all principals in

all contexts. The findings reflect the perceptions of the twelve Manitoba principals who

participated; however, concepts discussed by the research participants may have

transferability to certain other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings will

hopefully provoke further research of principals' conceptions of schools as professional

learning communities in different settings and contexts. Finally, it should be noted that

the findings contained in this thesis represent only one interpretation of the data, and this

interpretation was undoubtedly influenced by the background, values, viewpoint, and

interests of the researcher.

2.6   Definition of Key Terms

The following list of key terms contains words and phrases that are particular to

this thesis; where appropriate the meaning of each key term is expanded upon in the

thesis. The listed definitions below are helpful for clarifying how these key terms were

used in this study.

Accountability: The exercise of sufficient hierarchical control to enable principals

to report information on the teaching and learning in a school to a community, district, or

state agency (Timperley & Robinson, 1998).

Legislated duty: Responsibility assigned by a provincial or territorial legislature

through various acts, and/or regulations pertaining to primary and secondary education in

Canada.

Professional development: Any formally planned activity, including teacher

evaluation, intended to advance individual or collective staff knowledge, skills or expectations in order to improve student achievement (Newmann et al., 2001).

Professional learning community: A term composed of three interdependent concepts: a school culture that emphasizes professionalism which is client oriented and knowledge based; one that emphasizes learning, placing high value on teachers' inquiry and reflection; and one that is communitarian, emphasizing personal connections (Toole & Louis, 2002).

School human and social resource preconditions for professional learning communities: Trust and respect, supportive leadership, openness to improvement, access to expertise and socialization (Kruse, Louis & Bryk, 1995 as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002).

School structural support preconditions for professional learning communities: Times and places to meet and talk, school autonomy, teacher empowerment, Interconnected teacher roles and communication strategies (Kruse, Louis & Bryk, 1995 as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002).

Teacher evaluation: Various activities, including teacher supervision, whose primary goals are: 1) improving educational instruction, 2) enhancing educational delivery through professional development, and 3) justifying the disciplining of substandard teachers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Confederation of the provinces of Canada occurred in 1867. The *British North America Act – BNA, 1867*, referred to now as the *Constitution Act, 1867*, left the provinces largely, as opposed to the federal government, with the constitutional responsibility for primary and secondary education. The terms of Sections 91 and 92 of the *Constitution Act* provides for the division of federal and provincial legislative responsibilities, whereas Section 93 elaborates some of the specifics of the provinces' jurisdiction. Section 93 of the *Constitution Act* recognizes the provinces' constitutional authority over primary and secondary education (Thomason, 1995). The result of Sections 91, 92, and 93 of the *Constitution Act* together with specific acts of provinces/territories created the legislative framework for the now ten provincial and three territorial autonomous education systems in Canada each with legislation that in some form specifies the duties or responsibilities of principals.

Each province/territory has a constitutional obligation to provide for the education of its children and youth. The provincial/territorial systems have been organized as state agencies and social instruments (Rallis, Schibles, & Swanson, 2002). Public schools and systems of education serve the interests of the larger society and not just those of the parent – or the learner (Rallis et al.). Educational leaders conduct a provincial/territorial function and protect a province's/territory's interests by promoting education (Thomas & Davis, 2000). According to Thomas & Davis, in effect a principal acts as a provincial or territorial agent of the state in fulfilling her or his legislated duties.

In Manitoba, the Province grants general authority, subject to the *Public Schools Act*, to school principals to supervise and evaluate teachers. Specifically among the duties listed in Manitoba's *Education Administration Act, Miscellaneous Provisions Regulations* (Man. Reg. 468/88R) are:

> Principals' general authority
>
> 28(1)   Subject to *The Public Schools Act* and the instructions of the school board, the principal is in charge of the school in respect of all matters of organization, management, discipline.
>
> 28(2)   The principal is responsible for the supervision of staff, pupils, buildings, and grounds during school hours.…
>
> Hiring, assignment and evaluation of teachers
>
> 30   A principal is to participate in the hiring, assignment and evaluation of teachers and may have regard to parental and community views when making recommendations about those matters to the school board.

Downey et al. (2004) contend that teacher evaluation is shaped by and in turn reinforces not only the legalistic and bureaucratic social environment of a school, but also the content and form of all professional discourse and relationships that occur.

As professional learning communities exist within systems of beliefs and power, social structures and legal frameworks, it is important to be mindful of how various forces affect understandings of school reforms that call for a change of the principal-teacher relationship from one of hierarchical authority, where a hierarchy is defined as, "a social arrangement characterized by stratification in which, like the angels, there are

orders of power and glory and society is classified in successively subordinate grades"
(Clark, 1989, p. 2), to one that is more egalitarian, where the organization is flatter and
relationships are professionalized permitting the legitimate valuation of multiple skills,
types of knowledge and of working styles without privileging, by role or status, one over
the other (Crumley 1987, 1995).

In the current context of professional work in education, conflict over jurisdiction
seems commonplace due in part to the fact that modern work increasingly takes place in
corporate organizations that feature a division of labor between front-line workers and
those who manage them (Sykes, 1999). A significant tension emanates from
conceptualizations of professional learning communities in schools: if peer review, a
cornerstone of the push to professionalize teaching in the name of "new unionism", is to
replace or augment traditional models of teacher evaluation, then what is the new role for
principals who have traditionally performed this duty (Sykes)?

This review of literature is divided as follows: first it begins by examining the
concept of a school as a professional learning community, including the characteristics
and preconditions which give it vitality; second it analyzes the existing empirical research
on principals' conceptions of professional learning community; third it connects
conceptions of schools as professional learning communities with the duty for teacher
evaluation; and finally it suggests that the reason for schools to become professional
learning communities is chiefly to build school capacity for improved learning and
achievement.

2.2 Schools as Professional Learning Communities

There is growing call (Crow, Hausman & Scribner, 2002; Hord, 1997a; Toole & Louis, 2002) for educational leaders and policy makers to examine the idea of a "professional learning community" as a means to improve school functioning. DuFour and Eaker (1998, xi) claim that, "The most promising strategy for sustained, substantial school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities." Principals are viewed (Barth, 1990; Blase & Blase, 2004; Shields, 2003) as playing a significant role in the establishment and nurturing of a professional learning community.

Research studies appear to demonstrate that schools with strong professional learning communities produce important outcomes for students and school professionals (Crow et al., 2002). Toole and Louis (2002) suggest that cross-cultural research findings that examine international perspectives indicate that professional learning communities generally lead to improved school functioning in most settings. The professional learning community, as an organizational arrangement for schools, is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement (Hord, 1997b).

In a school that is a community of learners, the principal occupies a central place (Barth, 1990). More than ever before, school reform efforts require that principals and teachers at the school level work collaboratively to solve educational problems through the development of the school as a powerful community of learners willing to take responsibility for successes and capable of achieving it (Blase & Blase, 2003). Shields

(2003) suggests that among many other professional responsibilities, principals are expected to develop learning communities and build the professional capacity of teachers.

A problem facing research on professional learning communities has been a conceptual one, and within a robust conceptualization of a professional learning community lie tensions (Toole & Louis, 2002). While there are claims (Morrissey, 2000) that the term professional learning community defines itself, oversimplifications offer very little to a meaningful conceptual understanding. Although perhaps obvious to some, the concept of a professional learning community has proven difficult to capture. As a reminder of this oversimplification, Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth (2000) note that the mere gathering of a professional staff is far from a community. Hord (1997a) notes that there is no universal definition of a professional learning community. DuFour (2004) comments that people use the term professional learning community to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education, while Plank (1997) suggests that there are as many definitions as there are authors who write about it.

2.2.1 *What is a Professional Learning Community?*

Even without a precise definition of a professional learning community an understanding of the human relations that might possibly exist in schools is significant (Spillane & Louis, 2002). Professional community, however defined, is nothing more or less than a shorthand term for the kinds of adult relationships in schools that can support individual change in classrooms (Spillane & Louis). Hord (1997b) conceptualizes the interaction in a professional learning community as a place where the teachers in a school along with its principal continuously seek and share meaning and act on their learning. A school as professional learning community can be viewed as a group of people across a

school who are engaged in common work; share to a certain degree a set of values,

norms, and orientations towards teaching, students, and schooling; and operate

collaboratively with structures that foster interdependence (Achinstein, 2002; Carpenter

& Matters, 2003). Some suggest, for example Hord (1997a, 1997b) and Stoll et al.

(2006a), that a professional learning community can be measured across a

multidimensional continuum to determine if it is less like, or more like an ideal type of

professional learning community.

Crow et al. (2002), in reviewing the literature on schools as professional

communities, conclude that this body of literature on professional learning communities

may be illustrated in terms of three concentric circles as shown in Figure 2.1, "Three

concentric circles of schools as professional learning communities".

Figure 2.1 Three concentric circles of school as a professional learning community (based on ideas by Crow et al., 2002).

Relationships that exists between teachers and children

Relationships amongst the professional staff within a school

Relationships between school personnel and the community-at-large
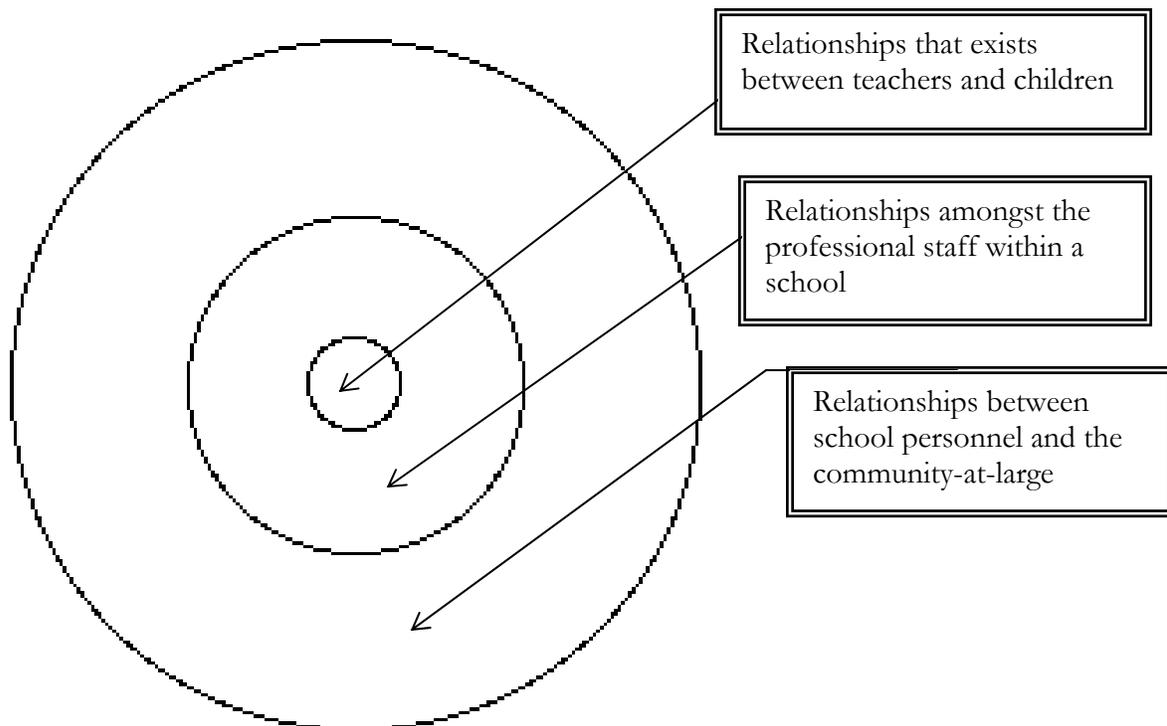
In their synthesis of the literature, Crow et al. argue that within the concept of a professional learning community there is an innermost circle which is the community that exists between teachers and children. The outermost ring represents the relationships between school personnel and the community at large. Mediating between these two rings, the middle ring represents relations among the professional staff within a school, including faculty and their principal (Crow et al.). It is this middle ring which mediates between the outside world and the inner workings of the classroom that provides an entry into an exploration of principals' understandings of the relationship between teachers and themselves.

Do professional learning communities matter? In response to this question Toole and Louis (2002) say that professional learning communities can be viewed as a school culture that provides a critical context for school improvement initiatives. Toole and Louis claim that the idea of a professional learning community integrates three mutually influencing concepts: a school culture that emphasizes professionalism which is client oriented and knowledge-based; one that emphasizes learning places high value on teacher inquiry and reflection; and, one that is communitarian, emphasizing personal connections. In expanding what they term "the rings of influence" surrounding the innermost circle of teacher-student interaction, Toole and Louis contend:

> Like the Russian dolls that fit inside each other, the teacher's instructional program exists within … rings of influence by parents, principals and headmasters, unions, school cultures, national culture, organizational structures, micro-politics, professional networks, community educational values, and district, regional and national policies (p. 250).

Toole and Louis's conceptualization, one which identifies the interface of the human relationships, including those between teachers and the principal, provides a more developed understanding of interactions and influences within a professional learning community. When a professional learning community is viewed from this understanding, a specific series of interactions is central to this study, namely a principal's perception of a school as a professional learning community vis-à-vis a provincially legislated duty to evaluate teachers in her/his school.

Sparks (2005) contends that principals play pivotal roles in establishing and nurturing professional learning communities. Others hold that effective school principals help the school become a professional learning community to support the performance of all key workers, including teachers and students (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Bryk, Camburn, and Louis (1999) suggest that principals play a key role in creating a normative order or culture that reinforce the practices of professional learning communities. Hord (1997b) argues that transforming a school organization into a professional learning community can only be done with the sanction of the principal and the active nurturing of the entire staff's development as community. As Sparks (2005) states, "Leaders matter in the creation and long-term maintenance of professional learning communities. The quality of teaching, learning, and relationships in professional learning communities depend on the quality of leadership provided by principals and teachers" (pp. 156-157).

In cultivating a professional learning community committed to professional inquiry, data-based decision making, and best practice, as well as helping teachers learn to adapt to new standards of accountability, principals can either help or hinder their schools in achieving higher levels of productivity and success (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

It appears that the principal's role in nurturing a professional learning community will be complex, challenging and problematic because in viewing teachers as members of a professional community it will focus attention on norms of collegiality and on the ethics of professional practice (Clark & Astuto, 1994; Pajak & Evans, 2000). This shift has significant implications for the work of principals because the functions of the principal as school leader, and others considered to be leaders, will require a clarification (Pajak & Evans). Sources of control will be built into the processes of professional work and collaboration, not just into the hierarchical authority of the principal. Principals' actions that focus on stability, goal setting, regularity, accountability, intervention, control, and efficiency may be redundant, destructive of cooperation and a sense of community, or both. Alternative actions that support the professional learning community, and the stakeholder community, will require more complex, professional expertise on the part of principals (Clark & Astuto, 1994). Creating a professional learning community is a difficult venture because of the fragmented and complex ways in which schools are organized, and teachers and principals are socialized (Zepeda, 2000).

Kleine-Kracht (1993) proposes that the traditional patterns of schooling, in which teachers teach, students learn and administrators manage, must be completely altered in a professional learning community as there is no longer a hierarchy of who knows more than someone else, but rather a need for everyone to contribute what she or he knows. While Murphy (2002) agrees that to nurture a professional learning community, a principal needs to adapt strategies and styles that are in harmony with the central tenets of "heterarchical" school organizations, he suggests that in a professional learning

community the basis of a principal's influence must be professional expertise and moral imperative rather than simply line authority.

Toole and Louis (2002) contend that many writers have struggled to make sense of the concept of professional learning community. Professional learning community remains conceptually ambiguous in education and open to critique, partly because it is a composite of three loosely defined, or contested notions: professional, learning, and community (Furman & Starratt, 2002). The word "profession", for example, is used in multiple ways in the education literature (Sykes, 1999), and the application of the term professional is ideologically contested (Taylor & Runté, 1995). There is significant variation too in how organizational learning is conceived and the purposes it is presumed to serve. For example, some views of organizational learning tend to emphasize stability and the status quo of organizational life while others inherently favour continuous inquiry and fundamental change as necessary aspects of organizational renewal (Achinstein, 2002). In addition, community is conceptualized in multiple ways with significantly different meanings and different applications (Shields, 2003).

2.2.2 Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community

Given these conceptual issues, attention will be given in this study to examine, following Toole and Louis (2002), the three "domains" of a professional learning community as separate yet interrelated, namely profession, learning and community. The focus will also be on how each domain interacts with the others. Any attempt to conceptually deconstruct the term professional learning community and reconstruct it is subject to interpretation and potential bias. Ultimately, it may be incomplete; however, what follows in this literature review is an attempt to refine the idea by focusing on each

domain as it interacts with the others and derives meaning and context through its interconnectedness. Each domain is viewed as being a mutually influencing and embedded element in the construct "professional learning community" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). Gaining some understanding of the complexity of each element of a professional learning community as it interacts with the other two may provide insight into exploring the implications for how principals, who are required to evaluate teachers, are challenged to build a professional learning community in their schools.

2.2.2.1 Profession

Glickman (2003) argues that by definition a profession is the work of persons who possess a body of knowledge, skills, and practice that must be regularly tested and upgraded with colleagues. The occupational claim to the term "profession" arguably rests on several central tenets: that practitioners of the profession possess specialized, codified, expert knowledge, acquired through years of training, guided practice, and induction; in addition, that they place the welfare of those they serve above other considerations; and finally that the occupation assumes collective responsibility for the definition, transmittal, and enforcement of standards of practice and norms of conduct (Sykes, 1999).

Considerable autonomy and independence is granted to experts in occupations such as medicine, law and others based on a social contract between the profession and the public (Sullivan, 2000). Sullivan argues that professionalism is the moral understanding among professionals that gives concrete reality to this social contract. Professionalism is thus based on mutual trust. In exchange for a grant of authority to control key aspects of their market and working conditions through licensing and credentialing, professionals are expected and promise to maintain high standards of

competence and moral responsibility. The work of what are termed the traditional learned professions has long been understood to require a significant domain of discretion in individual practice (Sullivan). Professionalism stands as one among the core values that informs the educational enterprise in schools and in our society (Sykes, 1999).

It should be noted at this point that there are those (Larson, 1977; Taylor & Runté, 1995) who claim that the ideology of a profession, in general, no longer applies today. Taylor & Runté (1995) claim there is no longer such a thing as a profession, while Larson (1977) points out that the conditions of professional work have changed so much that the predominant pattern which anchored the concept of a professional as a free practitioner in a market of services has changed to a salaried specialist in a large organization. While it is worth noting the post-modern climate of skepticism surrounding professional claims (Sykes, 1999), a full examination of critiques such as these and others, is beyond the scope of this study. Teaching as a profession will be understood to be a contested term that is left for others to resolve. Attempting to find a precise definition of professionalism for any occupation can be a frustrating experience. Almost anyone who wants to be called a professional, and almost every occupation striving for professional status, can find some argument and basis for doing so (Phillips, 1981).

In Canada's public service there are numerous salaried employees governed by not only their job descriptions and obligations to their governmental employer, but also by the standards of their respective professional governing body (Phillips). According to Phillips the presumed incompatibility that is sometimes claimed to exist between professionalism, unionism and collective bargaining, has largely been resolved in practice. Hence, the term a "union of professionals" is not viewed as a contradiction in

terms (Sullivan, 1988). Instead, the collective bargaining techniques used by professional associations are now viewed as "professional", while occupational membership in traditional unions is considered "unprofessional" (Phillips, 1981).

Ungerleider (1996) suggests that despite the fact that they are public employees in bureaucratic institutions, Canadian teachers have achieved a measure of professional autonomy and influence. In Canada, teachers are viewed as salaried professionals who perform their work in the context of a formal employment relationship with an employer. Generally, a teacher's professional status is conferred by a provincial or territorial government, or agency such as the Ontario or British Columbia College of Teachers through certification (Canadian Teachers' Federation, n.d.), while their teacher behaviour is proscribed by both a ministry/department of education and a professional association which may also function as a union (Thomason, 1995). The ability to regulate the ethical behaviour of the members of a professional group is considered to be an important factor in determining professional status (Ungerleider, 1996).

There are significant distinctions between the context and history of Canadian teachers' associations and the two predominant American teachers' unions (Rodrigue, 2004). Rodrigue suggests that one significant distinction is that unlike the National Educational Association and the American Federation of Teachers in the United States, Canadian teachers' unions have willingly assumed the mantle of professionalism since their conception. This point is contested by those, such as Thomason (1995), who claim that in Canada since World War I, "teacher federations have been transformed from professional associations, which occasionally engaged in collective bargaining, to labour unions, with a strong interest in professional issues" (p. 272). Professionalism, according

to Rodrigue (2004), is an essential element in the public discourses of teacher unions in Canada. The term professional has social and cultural value for teachers' organizations both internally and externally (Rodrigue).

As this study focuses on the perceptions of twelve Manitoba principals, five of whom are members of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, it is worthwhile to situate Canadian teachers' associations in a brief history of the teacher unionism movement in Canada. Thought not comprehensive, the following background information will provide a basic understanding of the nature of Canadian teachers' professional associations. Education in most of Canada's provinces and territories is financed through a combination of local and provincial taxes, although the discretion between these sources varies widely across jurisdictions (Thomason, 1995). Against this diverse national backdrop, provincial and territorial governments have each developed different systems of shared responsibility for education with their own municipalities and jurisdictions (Thomason & Zwerling, 1994). Primary and secondary schools within a province or territory are typically organized into geographical or denominational units called districts, divisions, or counties administered by school boards, headed by elected school trustees (Thomason, 1995).

Generally, local school boards assume responsibility for the day-to-day operations of schools, the employment of teachers and staff, and the maintenance of school buildings, while the provincial and territorial governments' departments of education mandate and supervise curricula as well as the certification of teachers (Giles & Proudfoot, 1990). School trustees are responsible for the policy development within the district. The school superintendent, director-general, or director of education is employed

by the school board to administer the day-to-day operations of the schools within a

district. The Canadian design for primary and secondary education is a strong centralized

authority located at the provincial or territorial government level, supplemented by

elected and sometimes appointed school boards with limited authority, and usually in

parent or advisory councils associated with the local school (Giles & Proudfoot).

In response to the fact that education jurisdictionally rests in the hands of

provincial and territorial governments, teachers' organizations have accordingly

developed on a provincial and territorial basis. Teachers' associations, the forerunners of

teachers' unions in Canada, have historically been vehicles for professional organization

in Canada since the middle of the nineteenth century (Lawton, Bedard, MacLellan & Li,

1999; Thomason & Zwerling, 1994) At that time these professional associations were, for

the most part, organized and sponsored by officials within the provincial departments of

education to serve three main purposes: provide general in-service training, create

opportunities for people with an interest in education to meet annually, and provide a

forum for departments of education to make public pronouncements (Smaller, 1988).

Lawton et al. (1999) suggest that shortly after Confederation steps were taken to

formalize and standardize the certification of teachers throughout the provinces.

As an outcome of the development of teacher professional associations in Canada

at the beginning of the 1900s and the evolution of the union movement during the 1930s

and through the 1970s, a myriad of contexts in which teachers' unions exist has emerged

(Thomason, 1995). The majority of Canadian teachers are employed and are subject to

negotiated collective agreements. Provincial law provides them with due process

procedures related to employment status (Bezeau, 2002). The provisions for collective

bargaining vary considerably from one province to another. Alberta and British Columbia permit collective bargaining by teachers under the same legislation that governs private sector employees. In New Brunswick, teachers negotiate under special legislation governing collective bargaining in the provincial public service. All other provinces have collective bargaining provisions that are specific to teachers (Bezeau). Thomason (1995) claims that typically, teacher associations are recognized by statute as the collective bargaining agents for instructional personnel within each province, and membership is usually mandatory (e.g., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec) or automatic (e.g., Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland).

Thomason (1995) argues there has been a trend in provincial teacher associations to remove school administrators – principals and sometimes vice-principals – from bargaining units through legislation or to place limitations on their participation in collective bargaining or labour disputes. In Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia principals are classified as management and excluded from the bargaining unit, whereas in Alberta, the exclusion of principals is subject to bargaining at the local level, and in Manitoba public school principals and teachers must belong to the Manitoba Teachers' Society (Bezeau, 2002). In each case, the inclusion or exclusion of school administrators in the unit does little to lessen the difficult fusion of roles, contexts and leadership challenges that face both school and district administrators (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002).

Data from the 1960s through the early 1990s reflect a change in teacher union tactics in collective bargaining that accompanied the gradual transformation of teacher organizations from professional associations into labour unions (Thomason, 1995).

Unionists are arguing that new forms of cooperation between labour and management are necessary and that teachers' unions should engage more pro-actively in efforts to reform and improve education, not as a subsidiary to the main business of economic improvement and job protection, but a central goal of the organization that is intertwined with traditional interest in wages, job security, and due process (Sykes, 1999, Urban, 2000). Many teachers' organizations currently publicly support and generate educational policy (Bascia, 1994). Lawton et al. (1999) contend that the political leadership of Canadian teachers' unions appears committed not simply to negotiating collective agreements for their members, but they also appear to want to change the character of the Canadian state and bring about a social-democratic renaissance. Unions can be potentially powerful collaborators because they negotiate the allocation of time in school and define a teacher's official duty day and psychological work role relationship (Lawton et al., 1999; Kerchner, Koppich, & Weeres, 1997). Some suggest, for example Bredeson (2001) and Urban (2000), that the "new unionism" articulated by union leaders represents to a significant extent the values espoused by the old professional associations of the pre-unionization era.

All of this may be part of the reason why authors (Crow et al., 2002) who write about school leadership for the twenty-first century are calling for principals to reshape their role to foster professional community within both the complex internal and ambiguous external school environment. Much of the recent literature on effective school leadership and professional learning communities (Louis et al., 1999; Sykes, 1999; Spillane and Louis, 2002; Crow et al., 2002) focuses on collegial principal and teacher relationships without noting any potential conflict between the legislated hierarchical

authority in schools and the place teachers and principals occupy, or do not occupy in the

profession of teaching vis-à-vis their inclusion or exclusion from teachers' professional

associations/unions.

2.2.2.2 *Learning*

There is a distinction in the literature between "organizational learning" and the

related but different concept of "the learning organization" (Fenwick, 1997). The former

concept has been in circulation for over thirty years (Marks, Louis & Printy, 2000 as

cited in Silins & Mulford, 2002). Levitt and March, (1998, p. 319, as cited in Fenwick,

1997) suggest that organizational learning has been viewed conservatively as a process to

"encode, store and retrieve the lessons of history despite the turnover of personnel and

the passage of time." The concept of the learning organization came along later in the

1980s and Senge's book, *The Fifth Discipline: the Art of Practice of the Learning*

Organization, is viewed as the breakthrough in moving the concept from academic theory

into the boardrooms of corporate America (Hord, 1997b).

DuFour and Eaker (1998) claim that a paradigm change occurred in education at

the very end of the twentieth century, one that moved away from Taylor's industrial

model theory of schools as organizations towards Senge's (1990) metaphor of a learning

organization. Senge (1990, p. 3) proposes a description of a learning organization as one,

"where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire,

where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is

set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together".

Hord (1997b) posits that Senge's description caught the attention of educators

struggling to plan and implement educational reform. As Senge's paradigm shift was

explored by educators and shared in educational journals the label shifted, took on

contextual meaning and moved to one of learning communities (Hord). This shift in

terminology away from organization and towards community was significant because as

Hargreaves et al., (2001) suggest schools that are more like communities rather than

organizations may be better able to drive educational reform agendas. Similarly Newman

(1991) suggests that education systems could benefit from efforts to transform

impersonal, fragmented, bureaucratic schools into communities where participants share

goals and pursue a common agenda of activities through collaborative work that involves

stable, personalized contact over a long period.

   Palmer (1997) suggests that if teachers want to grow in their practice they have

two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes, and to

the community of their fellow teachers from whom they can learn more about themselves

and their craft. In this description of teachers' learning, the professional learning appears

to be inclusive of teacher, and exclusive of principals. Palmer's comment indicates that

what is needed to improve teaching are a combination of deeply personal and collective

processes exclusively amongst teacher colleagues.

   In an alternate view, Ingvarson (2003) argues that of all the options available to

policy makers seeking to improve student learning outcomes, the most effective are those

that invest in teacher knowledge and skill, and that the content of professional learning

matters as much if not more than the process. A dilemma faced by policy makers who

want to promote professional learning is the challenge to determine whether the process,

one of an inclusive teacher community which might exclude the principal, takes

precedence over the content of the professional learning which may have to be

determined by the principal. Divisions such as these begin to open up the complexity of professional learning.

The predominant metaphor of the learning community in education assumes that schools are expected to facilitate the learning of all individuals, and also that educators are ideally positioned to address fundamental issues and concerns in relation to learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). It is suggested (Mitchell & Sackney) that over the last ten years or more, educational researchers have moved the concept from thinking about schools as a learning organization, where the concern is about organizational productivity, to thinking about schools as a learning community, where the concern is about human experience. When the concept of a learning community is applied to schools, the ends of importance are the growth and development of all the people in the school (Mitchell & Sackney). A school which operates as a learning community consists of a group of people, without restriction, who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting approach toward both the mysteries and problems of teaching and learning (Mitchell & Sackney).

While teachers are being pressed, invited and cajoled into ventures in collaboration, traditional patterns of teacher interaction, the patterns that support mutual assistance or routine sharing, allow for the conditions of individualism, and conservatism to persist (Little, 1990). A conservative bias for professional learning is introduced when the most powerful warrant for action is personalized and localized classroom history (Little). It is generally presumed that by involving teachers more closely with one another, as knowledgeable professionals, learning communities will prosper; yet, problems arise due to the immediacy and intensity of classroom practice and because of

the isolated work of teaching (Little). Little notes that the classroom often overwhelms other sources of information, and individual preferences and prerogatives take precedence over theory, or systematic and dispassionate comparisons of practice and their consequences that reaches beyond the classroom. "Disequilibrium" is necessary if professional learning is to take place at a fundamental level (Ingvarson, 2003).

Genuine professional learning results in changes in the teaching, knowledge, skills, and approaches to instruction that form practicing teachers' or principals' repertoire (Knapp, 2003). Fostering a culture of collaboration within a teacher professional community may spark conflict. Some (for example, Achinstein, 2003) claim that such conflict allows for professional learning in a community and that conflict is one of the critical dimensions that influences the nature of professional learning in schools (Carpenter & Matters, 2003).

Sachs (1999) contends that individualism develops in response to teachers' working conditions characterized by isolation and privacy. While perhaps a controversial proposition, Hargreaves (1992) argues that individualism is primarily a shortcoming, not a strength, not a possibility; rather it is something to be removed in teaching rather than something to be respected. "Network theory" is helpful in a basic understanding of professional learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). Mitchell and Sackney imply that when network theory is applied to schools, a teacher's thoughts and behaviours are at least partly dependent on the ties that they establish with others in their social or professional community. In analyzing the effects of teachers' "joint-work", the shared responsibility for the work of teaching that leads to learning, Little (1990, p. 12) poses the question:

"Bluntly put, do we have in teachers' collaborative work the creative development of well-informed choices, or the mutual reinforcement of poorly informed habit?"

As a response, Elmore (2000) claims that the educational literature is full of injunctions to respect the autonomy of teaching and the mystery of its fundamental practices, and hence the inviolability of individual teacher's choices about what to teach and how. The result is that volunteerism becomes the only way to improve practice in an organization in which the instructional leaders do not purport to manage the core – teaching and learning (Elmore). Existing institutional structures of public education systems do one thing very well; they create normative environments that value idiosyncratic, isolated and individualistic learning at the expense of collective learning (Elmore).

The current organizational settings of schools rarely foster professional or teacher learning (Louis, et al., 1999). Teachers and principals are not able and willing to examine their own practice publicly in organizational cultures that are too competitive or too filled with uncertainty (Louis, et al.). Adult learning requires what Freire (1970) terms "praxis", the ability to combine reflection and action. Matthews and Crow (2003) contend that praxis, the ability to consider the underlying values and assumptions which lead to actions and the ability to evaluate these same values and assumptions, is critical for building a learning community in a school in which teachers and principals can reflect on their individual and collective practice in ways to improve it.

It appears that the path to change in the classroom core lies within and through the professional learning that occurs within teachers' professional communities (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993) but, the path has obstacles that might only be overcome by large scale

programs and policies (Fullan, 2004; 2005). Principals are challenged to find subtle ways to deprivatize practice as it appears to be the key to nurturing and strengthening a professional learning community (Ingvarson, 2003).

The professional learning community concept is built on the foundation that the "core" mission of formal education is to ensure that students are taught and learn (DuFour, 2005). Principals who are building professional learning communities recognize that they must, along with teachers, work to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all (DuFour, 2004). The kind of professional community established within the walls of a school has a significant effect on whether a school can become a learning community (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). A significant issue facing any examination of a professional learning community is a conceptual one (Toole & Louis, 2002). Toole and Louis suggest that researchers have used a variety of terms, sometimes interchangeably, to describe how to organize schools for teacher learning. While Toole and Louis suggest that terms such as collegiality, collaboration, professional community, discourse communities, teacher networks, schools that learn, democratic communities, and professional learning community are at times used synonymously with little conceptual clarity, Stoll et al. (2006b) contend that the "heart" of the professional learning community concept is clearly the notion of community.

2.2.2.3 *Community*

In further exploring the concept of community that supports professional learning, Mitchell and Sackney (2001) add that professional learning communities move closer to "communities of practice" when professional learning is not linked exclusively to problem solving and is not pushed solely by institutional expectations. Communities of

practice are born from democratic discourses that require sustained engagement while

simultaneously demanding the development and negotiation of shared meanings (Sachs,

1999). While this evolving view of democratic discourse and negotiated meanings not

solely linked to institutional expectations is complex, it does suggest that the professional

learning community is not just made up of teachers as professionals inside the building,

but it leaves space to include others in the educational enterprise whose duty is broader

than just to the school.

Even without a clear definition Murphy and Louis (1999) contend that central to

the role of principals is the need to create within a school a genuine sense of community.

Pursuing a spirit of community within and among schools is both a practical necessity

and a moral imperative to the educational leader. The cultivation of a sense of community

helps to create conditions in which the instrumental goals of schooling can be achieved

(Beck & Foster, 1999). The term professional learning community signifies an interest

not only in discrete acts of teacher sharing, but in the establishment of a school-wide

culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, continuous, and focused on

critically examining practice to improve student achievement (Toole & Louis, 2002).

Many conceptualizations of schools as community narrowly focus on the "like

us" assumption of theory which, provide a romanticized image of a homogeneous

community of like-minded individuals (Furman & Starratt, 2002). Thinking of schools as

communities such as this foregrounds notions of belonging, connectedness, and caring

relationships, as an idealized view of what a community should be like, and it may be

problematic for learning (Achinstein, 2002). The notion of "community" when viewed as

conservative in relation to professional learning, may not provide the conditions required

of the complex human interrelations which should arise out of critical analysis of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Furman and Starratt (2002) argue that conventional conceptualizations of school communities as consisting of "atomized" individuals does not completely capture the reality of what schools are today. Community as it is envisioned for schools in contemporary society needs to be redefined. This new understanding of community must be based on the acceptance and celebration of difference rather than a futile and nostalgic striving for sameness and homogeneity. The key concepts on which to build this new concept of community are interdependence and the common good (Furman & Starratt).

In schools, the professional learning community is demonstrated by people from multiple constituencies, at all levels, collaboratively and continually working together (Hord, 1997b). Collaborative work grounded in reflective dialogue, in which teachers and principals conduct conversations about students and teaching and learning identifying related issues and problems is what Griffin (1983) refers to as inquiry. As principals and teachers inquire together they create community. Inquiry helps principals and teachers create ties that bind them together as a special group and that bind them to a shared set of ideas. Inquiry, in other words, helps principals and teachers become a professional community of learners (Griffin).

Communities define who is in and who is out (Achinstein, 2002; Noddings, 1992; Putnam, 2000). Movements to define a sense of professional community construct walls and borders that define insider and outsider status (Achinstein, 2002). From a micro-political perspective, the idea of "border politics" negotiates which ideas belong to the community thereby identifying a boundary of its inclusiveness (Achinstein).

Communities may simultaneously define the status of insider and outsider distinguishing principals from teachers; as communities reinforce shared identities they distinguish member from nonmembers (Achinstein). A community may even define its membership by locating the opposition (Nias, 1987). People tend to draw circles around groups to which they belong, and at times define those outside their circles in disturbing ways (Noddings, 1992). Putnam (2000) points out that networks of community engagement foster sturdy norms of reciprocity which may be stated in terms such as: "I'll do this for you now, in the expectation that you will return the favour later." Putnam cautions that networks and the associated norms of reciprocity are generally good for those inside the network, but the external effects are by no means always positive.

In conceptualizations of the school as a professional learning community there appears to be a need to explore whether, how, and where the duties and values of principals fit inside or outside emerging conceptions of professional learning community (DuFour, 2004, 2005; DuFour et al., 2005; Lezotte, 2005)?

Blase and Blase (2004) suggest the radical work involved in creating and sustaining a professional learning community requires principals who are "special people". An illustration of what is required of these special people indicates that she/he might be better described as a "developmentalist", someone who knows where he or she stands on the issues and who has a well-developed theory of teaching and learning based on the best current work in education. This person recognizes the need that others have to construct understanding on their own. She or he is comfortable with the give and take of spirited discussion. This individual understands the importance of striking a balance between support and challenge, between honoring each individual's contribution to the

group while at the same time moving the group toward more powerful, disciplinary-based ways of viewing educational phenomena (Prawat, 1993).

In addition to the above exhaustive list of capabilities, Beck and Foster (1999) suggest that while crafting a viable and vital understanding of community – one that draws upon the strengths of various perspectives and, as much as possible, avoids dangers embedded in the extremes of liberalism and communitarianism – is not the greatest challenge. The greatest challenge for a principal lies in the actual work of administering community, which is determining the scope and focus of community building (Beck & Foster). As Schmoker (2001) posits,

> …what leaders do has a pronounced effect of how an organization fares – on its focus, its aspirations. The administrator – the leader – has to concretely orchestrate urgency, direction, and vision. The leader has to demonstrate the need and opportunity for improvement. It rarely emerges spontaneously. Creating such a sense of direction and impetus is the leader's job. (p. 10)

2.2.3 *Preconditions of a Professional Learning Community*

The capacity of schools to enable and support the profound kind of faculty inquiry necessary in professional learning communities requires what Kruse et al. (1995, as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002) refer to as preconditions. While Toole and Louis note that researchers vary on the exact list and number of preconditions, they contend that how a school is structured and how it utilizes key human and social resources affects both teachers' attitudes and practices in a school striving to become a professional learning community. Kruse et al. (1995, as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002) divide the preconditions into two broad areas, namely structural supports and human and social resources.

2.2.3.1 *Structural supports*

For the purpose of this study, structural supports were generally viewed as mechanisms for arranging and monitoring the way teachers interact with each other in time and space (Hargreaves et al., 2001). Structural supports can shape teachers actions and relationships by opening up opportunities for collaboration to develop, and by imposing constraints on them (Hargreaves et al.). Simply put, schools are affected by the structural supports which shape their capacity to create and sustain professional learning communities (Leithwood & Louis, 1999). While a precise listing of all of structural supports may vary (Haller & Kleine, 2001), for the purpose of this study structural support preconditions for professional learning communities were understood to be time and places to meet and talk, school autonomy, teacher empowerment, interconnected teacher roles, and communication strategies (Kruse et al., 1995, as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002).

2.2.3.2 *Human and social resources*

Stoll et al. (2006b) state that, "Creating, developing and sustaining PLCs [professional learning communities] is a human enterprise and the literature suggests that making effective use of human and social resources is a key dimension" (p. 238). According to Spillane and Louis (2002), social and human resources support the kind of settings in which teachers can engage in the systematic, collaborative work to improve their teaching, and the development of more thoughtful and perhaps even research-based forms of instructional improvement that can affect student learning. Kruse et al. (1995, as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002) list the human and social resource preconditions for

professional learning communities as trust and respect, supportive leadership, openness to improvement, access to expertise, and socialization.

2.2.4 *Summary: The Reason for Choosing Toole and Louis' Definition*

Toole and Louis (2002) contend that the term professional learning community is composed of three interdependent concepts: a school culture that emphasizes professionalism which is client oriented and knowledge-based; one that emphasizes learning, placing high value on teachers' inquiry and reflection; and one that is communitarian, emphasizing personal connections.

Toole and Louis' definition of a professional learning community was chosen for this study because it signifies an interest "not only in discrete acts of teacher sharing, but in the establishment of a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing, and focused on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes" (p. 247). This definition provides for recognition of the significance of the type and quality of relationships between teachers, and between the teachers and the principal (Barth, 2006). Toole and Louis' (2002) definition illustrates the key role a principal plays in making the relationships amongst the school's faculty discussable because typically staff "demonstrate all too well a capacity to either enrich or diminish one another's lives," and thereby enrich or diminish a school's ability to develop as a professional learning community (Barth, 2006).

According to Achinstein (2002) there is an emerging body of work which criticizes the over-harmonious picture of a professional learning community. A fundamental dilemma in the literature of school as a professional learning community, one that is at the heart of community, is left under-explored and under-examined. This

dilemma is: how do members really manage conflict amid unity (Achinstein, 2002)? Conflict, an antecedent to professional learning (Achinstein; Carpenter & Matters, 2003), can be a challenge for a professional community. Conflicts are often described as painful for teachers who perceive themselves as a tightly knit group of friends (Achinstein, 2003). In some teacher communities, conflict is suppressed, relegated to the private domain while in others the conflict among teachers is transferred to the principal for "outside" arbitration (Achinstein). Suppressing, relegating or transferring conflict in order to maintain a sense of community amongst a faculty of teachers undermines the process required for professional learning. Viewing the principal as an outside arbitrator, while providing a solution, denotes the principal's status as being outside of the immediate circle of professional community. Under-explored and under-examined are claims that communities build unity without destroying individuality by developing basic agreements in principle about values, norms of behavior and bases of reciprocal obligation (Hill & Guthrie, 1999). This claim of reciprocity in a professional learning community when applied to a principal's duty to evaluate teachers, might provide insight into Peterson's (2000) claim that a flawed system of teacher evaluation continues because teacher evaluation has been reduced to a most innocuous "bottom-level" activity that bothers participants the least. Because it is difficult to argue that no teacher evaluation should be done, the corrupting contract between teachers and the principal is to do the least disruptive activity and call it adequate claims Peterson.

    2.3 Empirical Research on Principals' Conceptions of Professional Learning

Communities

A search for empirical studies pertaining to principals' conceptions of professional learning communities was conducted during the summer of 2005 using the following electronic databases: EBSCOhost full text, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) of the United States Department of Education, and Social Science Fulltext. The initial search used "professional and learning and communities" as the descriptor and resulted in 3956 document matches in EBSCOhost, 3299 matches in ERIC, and 24 matches in Social Sciences Fulltext. Due to the volume of matches it was determined that the initial search descriptor needed to be refined.

A second document search was conducted using the descriptor "principals and professional and learning and communities". This secondary search resulted in 19 documents matches in EBSCOhost, 160 matches in ERIC, and 0 matches in Social Science Fulltext. The abstracts of the matches from EBSCOhost and the article descriptions from the ERIC matches were examined. It was determined that these studies or reviews described professional learning communities in general terms but did not examine principals' understandings of them.

Lastly, a document search was conducted using the descriptor "principals' and "conceptions and professional and learning and community". This final search resulted in 3 documents matches in EBSCOhost, 3 matches in ERIC, and 0 matches in Social Science Fulltext. None of these documents dealt with the focus of this inquiry as they concerned such topics as: a practitioner's guide to learning communities, the role of the principal of improving the quality of teaching in Japanese schools, and the influence of context, community and culture in learning to teach.

Although no empirical studies were found which dealt directly with principals'
conceptions of professional learning communities, the results of three related studies are
worth noting. Huffman and Jacobson (2003) reported the results of a research study they
conducted involving educators enrolled in Master's level education classes which
indicated that the research participants perceived their schools as reflecting what the
authors termed the "core processes" of a professional learning community. The core
processes identified were providing a safe environment for diverse ideas and being a
democratic organization guided by positive principles, ethics, and values. Huffman and
Jacobson suggested the research participants believed principals' collaborative leadership
style influenced the presence or absence of the core processes of a professional learning
community.

In another study, Grodsky and Gamoran (2003) hypothesized that school-based
professional development contributed to school-wide professional community. Using the
"Schools and Staffing Survey" of 1993-94, which included a sample of 50 000 teachers
from over 10 000 American schools, the authors concluded that analysis, using
hierarchical linear modeling, suggested positive effects of school sponsored professional
development on professional community.

Finally, a study by Sebring and Bryk (2000) reported that eight years of empirical
research on the 1990s Chicago School Reforms indicated that principals of improving
Chicago elementary schools skillfully used a combination of support and pressure to
promote the efforts of the staffs who worked directly with students. The authors indicated
that the principals of these schools had a long term focus on the instructional core which
required profound changes in teachers' work. The principals of these schools

concentrated on strengthening the quality of the teaching staff by recruiting new teachers, arranging for targeted staff development for all teachers, and making organizational changes to promote best practices. Critical to the success of these schools was the commitment of each principal to develop teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions through professional development strategies which included evaluation. The report attributed some of the school improvement effects to the abilities of the principals to gain adequate local authority and resources to intervene and work with teachers to improve instruction (Sebring & Bryk).   Sebring and Bryk claim that the quality of the principal's leadership is a critical factor in determining whether a school moves forward to improve learning opportunities for students. In their analysis, Sebring and Bryk found that one of the three common elements among principals of productive schools was a specific instructional focus on student learning. This specific focus occurred because principals of productive schools set high standards for teaching, understood how children learn, and encouraged teachers to take risks and try new methods of teaching. They contend that the instructional focus was supported by a principal who visited classrooms regularly, demonstrating her conviction and taking the institutional pulse of the school.

These empirical studies contain three conclusions that are most important for this study namely: (1) principals can influence the core processes of a professional learning community (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003), (2) school sponsored professional development activities can contribute to the development of a school's professional community (Grodsky & Gamoran, 2003); and (3) a principal's evaluation of teachers can have a positive effect on school-wide improvement (Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

2.4 Professional Learning Communities and Teacher Evaluation

Teacher evaluation by principals is seen as a quality control and accountability measure of teaching because whenever a problem occurs in a school, including problems about the quality of instruction, heads automatically turn toward the office (Lashway, 1999). Lashway (2000) argues that while the leading models of the school principalship emphasize facilitation and shared decision making, the principal's hierarchical accountability remains. The "new accountability" of many current reform and school improvement efforts assumes a systematic assessment of school performance, including teaching on the basis of clearly identified standards (Lashway, 1999). When it's time for an accounting system at the school level, the system still turns to one person - the school principal (Lashway, 2000). Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, and Bernstein (1984) conclude that the most serious problem in evaluation practices is that principals are in a significant role conflict position. While the principal is in a collegial relationship with a teacher, the principal is also the evaluator of the teacher. Teachers roundly criticize formal evaluation practices in part because teachers are well aware of the role conflict for principals who must make summary judgments and also have the responsibility for giving sustained professional support (Johnson, 1996). Peterson (2000) argues the majority of teacher evaluation practices ignore the powerful effects of expectations, roles, rewards, sanctions, and relationships in the workplace. Over thirty years ago House (1973, cover leaf) wrote about evaluation in schools: "Education is political. It is used to allocate resources, cover up mistakes, build reputations and make money. It is also used to correct mistakes, improve programs, reward merit, and tell parents what is happening to their children". Much of what was written three decades ago seem to bear significance on

teacher evaluation practices of today. Teacher evaluation is linked to societal and political forces (Good, 1996).

Several authors agree that teacher quality is the single most important in-school factor determining student achievement (Collinson, 1999; Goodwin, 1999; Kaplan & Owings, 2001; Reichardt, 2001; Schalock, Schalock & Myton, 1998; Wenglinsky, 2000). Leithwood and Riehl (2005, p. 15) claim that "student characteristics persistently emerge as having the strongest effects on student achievement. School-related factors explain a much smaller but still important portion of the variance in achievement." Among the school-related influences which affect student achievement, Leithwood and Riehl suggest that teacher quality and classroom practices matter a great deal.

As Kaplan and Owings (2001) note,

> Teaching quality refers to what teachers do to promote student learning inside the classroom. Teaching quality includes creating a positive learning climate, selecting appropriate instructional goals and assessments, using the curriculum effectively, and employing varied instructional behaviors that help all students learn at higher levels. (p. 64)

It is suggested (Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 1994; Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003) that a principal can affect teaching quality in her or his school through teacher evaluation. Ingvarson & Chadbourne (1994) claim that,

> The most important purpose of a school is to provide children with equal and enhanced opportunities for learning; the most important resource a school has for achieving that purpose is the knowledge and skills of its teachers; and the most important strategy for maintaining and improving

that resource is a career development process of teacher evaluation and

professional development. (pp. 11-12)

Based on the significant impact teacher evaluation can have on student achievement, a

further exploration of the literature on teacher evaluation is warranted.

Teacher supervision and evaluation are frequently used synonymously in practice

(Matthews & Crow, 2003). Despite what supervision is intended to be, a great many

teachers' only experience with supervision is formal teacher evaluation (Ponticell &

Zepeda, 2004). Discussions of teacher evaluation and supervision are marked by

considerable confusion. Often key terms are defined in different ways by different

authorities, and frequently their meanings overlap and are interchangable (Duke, 1987).

In reality it is often impossible to determine where supervision stops and evaluation

begins (Duke). Duke argues that teacher supervision includes evaluation. Acheson and

Gall (1987) contend that the two processes of teacher supervision and evaluation are

often combined.

Supervision, when applied to school settings, can take on a variety of meanings

(Duke, 1987). Supervision has been defined as "the process of helping the teacher reduce

the discrepancy between *actual* teaching behaviour and *ideal* teaching behaviour"

(Acheson & Gall, 1987, p. 27, [italics in original]). Others (Zepeda, Wood & O'Hair,

1996) take a broader view that supervision is a way to assist and facilitate the

professional activities of teachers and principals working collaboratively to achieve

school improvement efforts through shared decision making. Newer conceptions of

supervision present it as a sustained, integrated process of professional development

involving all educators (Matthews & Crow, 2003). The most common purposes of

teacher supervision and evaluation are quality control to monitor teacher effectiveness, remediation of weak teachers, validation of teacher strengths, empowerment to develop teacher autonomy, and professional development to encourage teacher growth (Beerens, 2000; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998; Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998). After an analysis of various approaches to teacher supervision, Blase and Blase (2004) conclude that substantial disagreement about the essential nature of supervision has existed for more than 140 years, and that disagreement is likely to continue.

Typically, evaluation is the process of collecting data to make a decision (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Danielson and McGreal (2000) contend that the principal purposes of teacher evaluation are quality assurance and professional development. Duke (1987) argues that evaluation when used in the context of school personnel decisions has come to mean a formal process by which judgments, usually by the principal, are made about the extent to which desired teaching outcomes have been achieved. Teacher evaluation often means rating, grading, and classifying teachers using some locally standardized instrument as a yardstick (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998). Some (Duke, 1987) have attempted to separate teacher supervision and evaluation by claiming that supervision represents all efforts to monitor teacher performance, while evaluation is the process by which the acceptability of teacher performance is judged. Yet, Ponticell and Zepeda (2004) contend such a separation may not be possible in practice. In Ponticell and Zepeda's study of over 100 teachers and their administrators in two southwestern states to examine what supervision meant, all the teachers and the majority of principals concluded that supervision was quite simply evaluation.

The reality is that most supervisors of teachers must also evaluate them. The two

processes of supervision and evaluation are intertwined, and are not separable in practice

(Matthews & Crow, 2003). Talbert and McLaughlin (1993) argue that if evaluation is to

be valid, it must take into account the context of teaching or, at least what Kupermintz

(2003) describes as a reasonable approximation of the context. A single process of

classroom observation and supervision has long been a strategy of the evaluation process,

and it appears it will always play an important role in the evaluation of teachers

(Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Hazi (1994) suggests that state regulations and courts

contribute to the confusion by rarely distinguishing between supervision and evaluation

in legislation, regulations, and court decisions.

Peterson (2000) suggests that decades of empirical research on teacher evaluation

shows that traditional practices do not improve teaching performance, nor accurately

describe what happens in classrooms. Principals' reports do not increase good teacher's

confidence or reassure the public about teacher quality and, as currently practiced,

teacher evaluation does not identify innovative teaching so that it can be adopted by other

teachers or used in teacher education programs (Peterson).

Yet, legislatures have traditionally viewed teacher evaluation as a significant

means of improving the delivery of education (Dagley & Veir, 2002). Furthermore,

teacher evaluation is regarded as a significant tool in controlling what is going on in

schools, while it is simultaneously viewed as promoting the self-development of teachers

and the quality of their instruction (Chrysos, 2000). Research on the daily work of

principals indicates that principals view evaluation as a part of their instructional

leadership activities, and as important to their working reality (Doud & Keller, 1998; Macmillan & Meyer, 2002).

The tension of the contradictory positions for and against the significance of teacher evaluation may be summarized in Danielson and McGreal's (2000) claim that research over the past 35 years has consistently supported two important findings: teachers and administrators have always recognized the importance and necessity for evaluation; and, they have had serious misgivings about how it was done and the lack of effect it had on teachers, their classrooms, and their students.

Nevertheless, supervision and evaluation are seen as the critical means of improving teaching (Ponticell & Zepeda, 2004; Kleinhenz, Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 2002; Jonasson, 1993). Generally researchers of teacher evaluation agree that the overarching purpose of evaluation is to ensure that children are taught well (Kleinhenz et al., 2002), while supervision has as its prime objective the improvement of practice (Tunison, 1998). Jonasson (1993) proposes that if we wish to promote student learning in schools we must invest time, money, and energies into the training and development of teachers by instituting a supervision program in which teachers and principals work together for mutual professional development. Ponticell and Zepeda (2004) contend supervision and evaluation are complementary processes because supervision is supposed to improve classroom teaching by enhancing teacher thinking, reflection, and understanding teaching, while evaluation is supposed to increase effective teaching behaviours and enhance teacher professionalism.

Ingvarson (2002) claims there are two purposes of teacher evaluation. One is to safeguard the educational interests and welfare of students and ensure that their teachers

are able to fulfill their contractual duties. This purpose is based on the assumption that teaching and teachers ought to be held publicly accountable. The second purpose emphasizes the complementary need to ensure that teachers continually review their practices and develop professionally in light of contemporary research standards. Kleinhenz, Ingvarson, and Chadbourne (2001) propose there a need to seriously and effectively evaluate the work of teachers for the twin purposes of public accountability and improvement. Teacher evaluation is seen as being a critical means of improving education.

Even with claims that teacher supervision is beneficial, Acheson and Gall (1987) conclude that most teachers do not like being supervised even though it is a required part of their professional work. Teachers often react defensively to supervision, and they do not find it helpful (Acheson & Gall). Blumberg (1974) claimed thirty years ago that teacher supervision is an organizational ritual of education that is no longer relevant. More recently, Garman (1982, 1990) criticized the "ritualistic" nature of the instructional conference of supervision. Glanz (1995) proposes that supervision is nothing more than a bureaucratic legacy of fault finding and inspectorial supervision, while Blase and Blase (2004) conclude that despite the fact that many approaches to supervision are collaborative in nature, the practice of supervision remains one of inspection, oversight, and judgment. Blase (1995) claims supervision smacks of something from the Dark Ages, and that it is like a barbaric act of policing those who are only lately being acknowledged as professionals.

While finding value in supervision, Glickman (1990, 2003) believes that evaluation is useless in improving practice. Teacher supervision is seen as enhancing

teacher belief in a cause beyond self, promoting teachers' sense of self-efficacy, making teachers aware of how they complement each other in striving for common goals, stimulating teachers to plan common and actions, and challenging teachers to think abstractly about their work (Glickman, 1990). Yet, it is suggested that there is both little research that establishes a clear link between the attainment of school-wide priorities and the amount and type of teacher evaluation, and that the teacher evaluation boondoggle has been perhaps the greatest robbery of educational resources in our time (Glickman, 2003).

Traditional teacher evaluation systems have been criticized because many teacher evaluation practices do not adequately reflect the complexities of teaching as a professional occupation and do not sufficiently address what is termed the "technical-core" – teaching and learning, of teachers' work (Kleinhenz et al., 2001). Efforts to improve the technical quality of teacher evaluation have not resulted in better evidence of teacher quality or student achievement (Blase, 1995).

Historically evaluation has been something done to teachers by people like principals (Kleinhenz et al., 2002), and Peterson (2000) argues that seventy years of research on principal ratings of teachers shows that traditional evaluation procedures do not work well. Still there are those interested in preserving the practice of principal as teacher evaluator (Elmore, 2000). Modern and postmodern views of teacher evaluation underlie some of the debate on the form and functionality of the practices and policies.

Postmodernists criticize modern conceptions of evaluation as bureaucratic, hierarchical, and oppressive (Glanz, 2000). Citing the work of a variety of researchers, Glanz contends that a postmodern supervisor would advocate for a process that is

collegial, non-evaluative, and non-directive. Advocates of teachers and principals as collaborative inquirers of practice argue that traditional models based on modernism value principal expert knowledge and essentially marginalize teacher knowledge (Reitzug, 1997). Traditional modern paradigms of evaluation focus instructional relationships at the school level on a hierarchical principal-teacher dyad, thus isolating teachers from fellow practitioners and restricting opportunities for educative discourse (Reitzug). Postmodern views of evaluation, as found in conceptualizations of professional learning community, advocate partnerships, communication, and practice that are humane, equitable, and inclusive as leadership on a school becomes a process for which all are responsible instead of a trait projected onto a single individual as found in the principal (Glanz, 2000; Pajak & Evans, 2000).

Glanz (2000) asks: is the postmodern desire to eschew expert supervision, evaluation, and intelligent and judicious use of direct teacher supervision by principals misguided and limited? Collegial relationships that are non-directive and non-evaluative may not be sufficient as principals are not only expected, but legislated, to ensure that every teacher's best efforts at teaching are good enough to secure the students' right to meaningful learning (Harris, 1997).

According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), in the current era of accountability and school reform, efforts to improve schools increasingly look to the principal to spearhead changes efforts at the local school level. Good principals are regarded as the cornerstones of effective schools (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis). Without a principal's leadership efforts to improve student achievement, a school will not achieve its academic mission of improving student outcomes. While Leithwood and Riehl (2005,

p. 13) contend that "leadership is difficult to define conceptually," they suggest that when applied to schools, leadership becomes about "the work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals" (p. 14). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis suggest the principal is viewed as a key agent at the school level, initiating change by raising the level of expectations for both teachers and students. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) posit that principals "are increasingly being held accountable for the actual performance of those under their charge" (p. 2).

While there is disagreement about the effectiveness of various methods of teacher evaluation, one result of the widespread debate about the role of schools in many parts of the world has been an increase in the public demands for accountability, accompanied by mandated cycles of teacher evaluation (Webber & Townsend, 1998). Over the last twenty years, public attention focused on school accountability and teacher evaluation has been considerable (Berliner, 1986). The theme of accountability in education through the evaluation of school personnel has not diminished despite claims of its traditional ineffectiveness (Veir & Dagley, 2002; Peterson, 2000).

The accountability movement's focus on teacher quality has changed the role of the school principal to one that focuses on instructional leadership (Checkley, 2000; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Smith and Andrews (1989) state that as instructional leader, the principal is regarded as,

> (1) Providing the necessary resources so that the school's academic goals can be achieved; (2) possessing knowledge and skill in curriculum and instructional matters so that teachers perceive that their interaction with the principal leads to improved instructional practice; (3) being a skilled

communicator in one-on-one, small group, and large group settings; and

(4) being a visionary who is out and around creating a visible presence for

staff, students, and parents at both the physical and philosophical levels

concerning what the school is all about. (p. 23)

Several authors (Buffie, 2000; Duke, 1987; Hallinger, 1990; Matthews & Crow,

2003; Peterson, 2000; Sheppard, 1996) document the significance of the instructional

leadership capacity of the principal. Duke (1987) argues for the need to create an

integrated vision of instructional leaders to support school improvement efforts. Hallinger

(1990) argues that instructional and curricular leadership must be at the forefront of

school principals' leadership skills. Sheppard (1996) claims there is a strong positive

relationship between effective instructional leadership behaviours exhibited by principals

and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and innovativeness. Buffie (2000)

maintains that instructional leadership is the key to the quality of the instructional

program in the school, while Peterson (2000) claims that one of the characteristics of a

"successful school" is strong instructional leadership.

Instructional leadership is both difficult to define and to conceptualize.

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Walhstrom (2004) are skeptical of conceptions of

"leadership by adjectives." Buffie (2000) argues there is no one way, not even a best way,

to conceptualize instructional leadership. Leithwood and Duke (1999) agree that a lack of

an explicit definition of instructional leadership makes it difficult to assess if it means the

same thing to all those who write about it. While difficult to define and conceptualize it

appears the principal plays a critical role in conceptualizations of school leadership,

including instructional leadership (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore & Manning, 2001). If a

school is to be an effective one, Findley and Findley (1992) claim it will be because of

the instructional leadership of the principal. Most conceptions of instructional leadership

allocate authority and influence to formal administrative roles, usually the principal,

assuming as well considerable influence through expert knowledge on the part of the

principal (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

Many school principals view themselves as instructional leaders. School

principals believe that instructional leadership, often conceived of as a blend of

supervision, staff development, and curriculum development facilitates school

improvement (Blase & Blase, 2004). So although Glickman (1991) proposes that the

principal of a successful school is not the sole instructional leader but the coordinator of

teachers as instructional leaders, and Barth (1990) recommends that principals be leaders

of learning, Crow, Hausman, and Scribner (2002) conclude that while it is clear that the

principal's role has evolved beyond seeing the principal alone in the center of

instructional leadership, the principal remains the focal point. Duke (1987) comments

that although other individuals may fulfill the responsibility of instructional leader, in

reality the principal is the most obvious candidate for instructional leadership.

One function associated with the broad category of instructional leadership is the

supervision of teaching (Acheson & Gall, 1987; Duke, 1987; Hanny, 1987; Elmore,

2000; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Supervision is one significant

aspect of the principal's role as instructional leader (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The skills

and knowledge that matter in instructional leadership are those that can be connected to,

or lead directly to, the improvement of instruction and student performance (Elmore,

2000). Evaluation is one of the two most important activities to the instructional leader in

dealing with teachers, the other being supervision (Acheson & Gall, 1987). One of the most critical situations that the instructional leader must deal with is the development of teachers (Duke, 1987). Effective principals are expected to be effective instructional leaders, and the principal must be knowledgeable about curriculum development, teacher and instructional effectiveness, clinical supervision, staff development and teacher evaluation (Hanny, 1987).

While there have been arguments put forward that the principal cannot both supervise and evaluate teachers because the two processes are contradictory, it is suggested that it is important for the principal do both because to limit the principal's role solely to evaluation and exclude supervision removes the principal from a substantive instructional leadership role (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Supervision gives principals access to the context of teaching for evaluation (Acheson & Gall, 1987). It is beyond the scope of this study to clearly separate the processes of teacher supervision and evaluation. For the purposes of this study, teacher supervision and evaluation are regarded as integrated elements of a single concept - teacher evaluation. Therefore, teacher evaluation is as those various activities, including teacher supervision, whose primary goals are 1) improving educational instruction, 2) enhancing student achievement through the professional development of teachers, and 3) justifying the disciplining of substandard teachers. Given the above definition, at this point the literature review will explore the effects of teacher evaluation on teaching practice.

Fullan (2001b) in citing the cover article of the January 12, 2000 issue of *Education Week* suggests that education policymakers have recently turned on the spotlight of school accountability in order to focus on all the people charged with making

the system work. At the beginning of the new millennium, the call for greater levels of accountability is stronger than ever before, but the focus of accountability has shifted, and now encompasses teacher accountability (Veir & Dagley, 2002). This shift to teacher accountability is heavily embedded in teacher evaluation systems (Veir & Dagley). In education the scope of an accountability system refers to who is held accountable by whom, for what, and with what practical consequences (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Hoffer, 2000). Principals are held accountable by the public for the quality of instruction in a school through the continuing evaluation of classroom teachers, that is principals are presumed to have an effect on student achievement through teacher evaluation. In fact principals do make a difference in student achievement and school outcomes (Weaver Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Sherman, 2000; Crow et al., 2002; Smylie & Weaver Hart, 1999). Analyses of research suggest that principals are essential in the enormously complex workings, both physical and human, of a school (Sherman, 2000). School principals have an effect on the workings of schools. There is evidence of the importance of the principal in contributing to the learning community of schools (Crow et al., 2002). Principals have substantial influence on the development, nature, and function of teacher social relations, teacher learning, and change (Smylie & Weaver Hart, 1999). Ryan (2002) not only contends that the principal's role in a school is important, but he also proposes that the principal generally has more influence in the school than most other individuals. The principal is the pivotal person in a position of power and leadership who can act to influence others in the school community and, as such has the potential to have a major effect on the set of human relationships we call school (Derkatz, 1996).

The dominant metaphor for school administration changes every decade or so (Beck & Murphy, 1993). Since the 1920s the school leader metaphor has changed from: value broker to scientific manager, to democratic leader, to theory-guided administrator, to bureaucratic executive, to humanistic facilitator, and to instructional leader. As the metaphor of the school leader changed so did the roles and responsibilities (Beck & Murphy). Fundamentally, principals should look at classrooms full of students and themselves: What is happening behind the classroom doors? What are the students learning? How are the teachers teaching? (Glickman, 2002).

Over the past several decades, the term accountability has been used in Canada, and elsewhere, with increasing frequency in education and government (Kupchanski, 1998). Yet, there is very little clarity on what accountability means. In practical and theoretical terms, the area of educational accountability is a mess, and the concept is in urgent need of rehabilitation (Macpherson, 1995; 1996). With this acknowledgement of a lack of complete clarity, it is still possible to examine accountability as it applies to education conceptually as an "idea" (Kupchanski, 1998).

One possible way to explore implications of the new educational accountability for principals may be found in Kogan's (1986) definition of accountability, which is: "a condition in which individual role holders are liable to review" (p. 25). Responsibility is a fundamental construct in accountability theory (Adams & Kirst, 1999). Responsibility as accountability in education means being answerable to someone else and having to account for one's action or inaction and their consequences (Adams & Kirst). Schools as collective entities should be accountable to the higher levels of the educational system, the district and the state (O'Day, 2002). When the idea of accountability is applied to the

individual school situation the definition becomes inclusive of accountability to peers,

school leaders and managers, and to nonprofessional interests such as the local

community and government agencies (Timperley & Robinson, 1998). In this idea of

school accountability, Timperley and Robinson argue that school principals must exercise

sufficient hierarchical control to enable them to report relevant information on the quality

of teaching and learning in a school to a community, district and state agencies.

Burger et al. (2001) note that in Alberta the theme of "new accountability" was at

the forefront of an unprecedented wave of top-down, seemingly ideological driven,

package of education reforms that swept over the educational landscape in that province

during the mid-1990s. The cornerstone of the new accountability sweeping over Alberta

during that time was evaluation policies for students and cyclical evaluation of teachers.

A principal must establish accountability among the other processes within the

school for the progress of teachers and instructional practices through continuous

assessment (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Teacher evaluation is part of school

accountability systems because a central purpose of evaluation is accountability. Teacher

evaluation provides assurances to the public that professional incompetence and

malpractice will be detected and corrected (Duke, 1987). Peterson (2000) states, "A key

role for principal leadership is that of teacher evaluation. Although it is only one

administrative duty and only one part of the whole picture of school operation, teacher

evaluation is a central educational function" (p. 339).

Parents and the public at large expect principals to exercise authority as children

are entrusted to school personnel for education and personal development in what are

expected to be safe and nurturing environments (Thomas & Davis, 2000). Principals are

expected to demonstrate responsibility for students and their education in the principals'

actions (Thomas & Davis). Regardless of the accountability measures that exist, the

principal must facilitate the accountability processes (Matthews & Crow, 2003). The

principal remains the central figure, the key individual, who is held accountable at the

school for the primary business, which is teaching and learning (Crow et al., 2002).

In education, professional accountability is rooted in the assumption that teaching

is too complex an endeavour to be governed by bureaucratically set routines and rules

(O'Day, 2002). As with other professions, effective practice is situated in the

professionals who have acquired specialized knowledge, skills and dispositions, and who

are able to apply these to the specific context in which they work (O'Day). Reliance on

professional accountability alone cannot assure that students' needs are addressed. What

is required is a combination of professional and administrative/bureaucratic

accountability to create an environment that fosters long-term school improvement

(O'Day). Cohen and Ball (1998) argue that instruction is a function of what teachers

know and can do with particular students around specific material, both physical and

intellectual. Instruction is constituted in the interaction of teacher, students, and material,

the three elements of what Cohen and Ball term "the instructional unit". Instructional

capacity, the capacity to produce worthwhile and substantial learning, is a function of the

interaction among the various elements of the instructional unit, not the sole province of

any single element (Cohen & Ball).

A significant role of a principal is to "cause" greater instructional capacity in a

school in order to get better results, which should be arguably student achievement

(Fullan, 2001b). The principal's role is to support, or cause, improved instructional

capacity school-wide (Fullan). The job of a principal is to enhance the attitudes, skills and knowledge of people in the school, create a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, hold various pieces of the school together in a productive relationship with each other, and hold individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result (Elmore, 2000).

In summary, "While principals may inspire and transform others' thinking and behaviour, their work occurs in large parts through a social interactive context" (Smylie & Weaver Hart, 1999, p. 430). New relationships, as found in professional learning communities and an understanding of these new relationships by principals are crucial for school improvement efforts if staffs are to work at the hard task of establishing greater program coherence and determining the requisite resources to support improved student outcomes (Fullan, 2001b; Knapp, 2003).

Little (2003) writes:

> Researchers posit that conditions for improving teaching and learning are strengthened when teachers collectively question ineffective teaching routines, examine new conceptions of teaching and learning, find generative means to acknowledge and respond to difference and conflict, and engage in activity in supporting one another's professional growth (Achinstein, 2002; Grossman, Wineberg, & Woolworth, 2001; Gutierrez, 1996; King & Newmann, 1999; Little, 1990, 1999; Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Stokes, 2001; Talbert, 1995; Westheimer, 1998; Witziers, Sleegers, & Imants, 1999)…Yet relatively little research examines the specific interactions by which professional community

constitutes a resource for teacher learning and innovations in teaching

practice (Wilson & Berne, 1999). (pp. 913 – 914)

The creation and nurturing of a professional learning community is not an easy

endeavour because it entails fundamentally different ways of thinking, and of teaching

and learning, and fundamentally different ways of being teachers and principals (Mitchell

& Sackney, 2001). Hargreaves (2004, p.5) observes that "A PLC [sic] is the ethos that

infuses every single aspect of a school's operation. When a school becomes a PLC,

everything in the school looks different that it did before." If a professional learning

community operates to enable and create student and teacher learning, it ought to be

evident not only in the continuous encounters that teachers have with one another, but

also in the continuous encounters teachers have with principals (Little, 2003). A

challenge posed through moving from the metaphor of a school as organization towards a

school as professional learning community is how to conceptualize a community that

maintains the ties and connectedness of a caring and stable community while sustaining

the constructive controversy of a learning community that includes teachers and

principals (Achinstein, 2002).

According to Mitchell and Sackney (2001), strong professional ties are likely to

be forged when colleagues spend considerable time together, when they participate in

emotional or deeply engaging activities, when they share common knowledge, and when

they receive mutual rewards. Yet, it is weak ties which emerge from the opposite

conditions of heterogeneous networks of colleagues that provide a rich source of new

ideas and possibilities, and a foundation for experiments in practice. (Mitchell &

Sackney). While strong ties are necessary for emotional support, weak ties hold the

greatest potential for profound improvement and learning (Mitchell & Sackney).

Complacency, whether collective or individual, rarely provides sufficient impetus for

change (Bascia, 2002). There is a need for struggle in learning, and perhaps the

principal's duty to evaluate is an element of a struggle to improve the professional

practice of teachers (Bascia). Exploring the notion of the ties that educators establish with

other individuals in their learning community may provide insight into the struggle.

A professional learning community asks all members to build the capacity to

work well with one another (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). Interpersonal capacity is as

much about how the people employed in a school relate to one another as it is about the

dominant normative culture in the school (Mitchell & Sackney). It has been suggested

(Elmore, 2000) that one way schools and school systems which are improving directly

and explicitly confront the issues of isolation and individualism is through principals who

routinely engage in direct observation of practice in schools and classrooms. These

principals who can be catalysts to initiate and support professional learning communities

have mastered ways about talking about practice that allows for non-threatening support,

criticism, and judgment (Elmore, 2000).

Administration in education has come to mean not the management of instruction,

but the management of the processes around instruction (Elmore, 2000). Using the

backdrop of "loose-coupling" theory, Elmore proposes that since the 1960s the technical

core of education, teaching and learning, has come to be viewed as residing in individual

classrooms, and not in the organizations in which classrooms are embedded. The basis of

the loose coupling argument as it relates to education and schools is that because the

technical core of education systems is weak, disordered, and uncertain largely because of

doubts about the status of teachers' professional knowledge, the surrounding administrative arrangements prefer to ignore teaching and learning, thereby acting mainly to shield the fragile core from external scrutiny and criticism (Kleinhenz, Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 2001).

When applied to schools, the loose coupling model describes the role of the principal as the buffer of the technical core of education from external pressures (Elmore, 2000). In this theory of schools, principals are hired and retained based on largely on their capacity to shield teachers from outside interference of parents, school trustees and politicians, and their capacity to support the prevailing logic of confidence between a school system and its constituencies (Elmore). The result of Elmore's and Kleinhenz et al.'s (2001) loose coupling argument when applied to traditional interpretations of teacher evaluation, where the principal conducts the processes of evaluation using models based on relatively behavioristic forms of psychology (Leithwood & Duke, 1999), allows Peterson (2000) to suggest that teacher evaluation in the majority of school jurisdictions in North America consists of wrong thinking and doing.

This wrong thinking and doing means that principals occasionally visit classrooms, less often meet with teachers to talk about their work, and fill out annual report forms. Typically, teachers for their part put up with the activity and continue to teach as they always have. Principals and teachers tell each other, and the public, that the purpose of evaluation is to improve teaching. Few seem to notice, or admit, that evaluation does not improve practice, and both teachers and principals continue in their ways in spite of the rhetoric of feedback for change (Peterson, 2000).

If learning is to occur in a school's community of professionals, existing assumptions underlying practice have to be challenged, "disequilibrium" is necessary for professional development to take place a fundamental level (Ingvarson, 2003). Yet, often what are referred to as teachers' communities are collections of educators who do not feel free to critique each other's ideas or practice, or to challenge each other's understanding of subject matter because strong norms of politeness and privacy mitigate against such activities (Grossman et al., 2000)

Proponents of teacher evaluation systems by principals (Danielson & McGreal, 2003; Elmore, 2000; Goldrick, 2002; Schmidt, 2003), and proponents of schools moving closer to the reality of a professional learning community (DuFour, 2004, 2005; DuFour et al., 2005; Lezotte, 2005; Hord, 1997a, 1997b) make claims that their reform effort ensures not only that students are taught well, but also that they learn. A great deal of emphasis has been placed on developing and understanding conceptualizations of a professional learning community from, and for, a teacher's perspective (Achinstein, 2002; Little, 2003). While not the only legislated duty of principals in Canada, teacher evaluation, as a part of educational accountability measures, is substantive work for principals both in terms of time and complexity (Macmillian & Meyer, 2002; Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, 2004; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2001).

Accountability systems that focus on student achievement without taking into account the actions of teachers and leaders are useless, Reeves (2005) contends since the framework of a professional learning community is inextricably linked to the integration of standards, assessment, and accountability; if school improvement efforts are to succeed, conceptions of professional learning communities must include indicators of

such things as teaching practices which influence student achievement. Exploring

principals' conceptions of professional learning communities taking into account the

conditions and circumstances that principals are surrounded by, may provide greater

insight into what occurs amongst principals struggling to understand the implications that

conceptions of professional learning communities may have for their work in schools

(Sirotnik, 2004).

A scheme of the factors and processes that affect school capacity can be found in

the work of Newmann et al. (2001), which provides an avenue to explore the effect a

principal's duty to evaluate teachers as state professional development policy has, or does

not have, on conceptualizations of a professional learning community. Such an

exploration may open up what Little (2003, p. 915) refers to as the "black box" of

professional learning community – "a set of plausible but unexplored and specified

relationships" - ; and, it may show how teacher evaluation affects, or does not affect, a

principal's conception of a professional learning community which both creates and

sustains an effective school (DuFour, 2004, 2005; DuFour et al., 2005; Lezotte, 2005;

Hord, 1997a, 1997b).

2.5 The Reason for a Professional Learning Community: Building School Capacity

Educational researchers, policymakers and practitioners are beginning to form a

consensus that professional development, including teacher evaluation, is vital to

successful reform efforts (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999; Bredeson, 2001). Even

with this emerging agreement, in only a fraction of classrooms and schools have teachers

and principals been able to develop, incorporate and extend new ideas about teaching and

learning to improve student achievement (Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 2001b).

Fullan (2001b) suggests there is a growing "sense of urgency" in society that schools must do a better job of teaching. To this end, policy makers and citizens are demanding large-scale reform efforts involving all schools within and across school jurisdictions (Fullan). If large-scale reform is to be sustainable there must be a focus on support beyond individual teachers in individual classrooms (Fullan). Barber and Fullan (2005) claim if the goal is sustainable school-wide improvement there need to be policy initiatives that deliberatively set-out to cause improvement at multiple levels, namely the school and community, the school district and the state level, and those areas which overlap.

According to Fullan (2005) research evidence suggests the state can make a difference in large-scale sustainable school reform by using strategies which include accountability and capacity building. As part of an approach that links changes at the school to the district and state, what he terms the "tri-level solution", Fullan contends school improvement efforts targeted at improving student achievement have a greater likelihood of success and sustainability than those that do not involve the school, district and state. When supported by accountability and capacity building policies (Fullan), teachers are viewed as ideally positioned to affect the fundamental issue and concern of the educational enterprise, which is teaching and learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001).

Student achievement, while a term that does not have a single precise operational definition (Hoy & Miskel, 2001), and is beyond the scope of this dissertation to review, is regarded as being influenced most directly by a single school factor, which is the quality of instruction (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ingvarson, 2003; Sanders, 1998; Schmoker, 2002) though, it is worth noting that Leithwood and Riehl

(2005) claim that student characteristics or out-of-school variables have the strongest effect on student achievement. Even if one were to accept Leithwood and Riehl's claim, it should also be noted that "school-related factors" while constituting a smaller portion of the variance in student achievement are still considered to be very important (Leithwood and Riehl).

Student achievement may be generally viewed from the perspective of school effects, that is, primarily a function of two factors - which are - what teachers teach and how teachers teach (Schmoker, 2002). What teachers know and can do with specific students around particular material has been referred to as instructional quality (Cohen & Ball, 1998). Instructional quality can be regarded as the interaction and mutual influence of curriculum, assessment and instruction (Newmann et al., 2001).

In what Fullan (2001b) has described as one of the best up-to-date analyses of the influences that contribute to student achievement school-wide, Newmann et al. (2001) identify particular factors which influence instruction by influencing school capacity. In Newmann et al.'s model, school capacity is a combination of five interactive and mutually influencing factors, which are: 1) teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions, 2) professional community, 3) program coherence, 4) technical resources, and 5) principal leadership.

Teacher competence is a foundational element of improved classroom practice; but, in order to improve achievement of all students in a school from one academic year to the next, teachers must exercise their individual knowledge, skills, and dispositions in an integrated way to advance the collective work of the school under a set of unique conditions (Newmann et al.). The collective power of the full staff, teachers and principal

working together, to improve student achievement school-wide can be characterized as

school capacity (Newmann et al.). The knowledge, skills and dispositions of teachers can

be enhanced through carefully orchestrated professional development programs and

policies (Fullan, 2001b; Newmann et al., 2001). Fullan (2001b) notes the limitation of an

approach designed to build individual capability - it is an individualistic strategy which

only applies one classroom at a time. Many authors contend that both individual and

collective professional development are fundamental goals of effective policies and

systems of teacher evaluation (Acheson & Gall, 1987; Chrysos, 2000; Duke, 1987;

Glickman; 1990; Ingvarson; Kleinhenz, Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 2001; Jonasson, 1993;

McColskey & Egelson, 1993).

Evaluations of large-scale reform efforts of the 1990s indicate unsatisfactory

results in many cases (Sleegers, Geisel & van den Berg, 2002). Educational scholars have

come to the conclusion that the almost exclusive focus on changing classroom instruction

may explain the failure of past innovation efforts to achieve long-term effects on

classroom practices and outcomes (Sleegers et al.). They claim there was a misplaced

assumption that individual professionalism among teachers would produce excellent

results (Louis et al., 1999). Professional development at the teacher level should be

accompanied by the development of the school as a whole, and professional development

at the whole school level should be accompanied by development of the individual

teacher (Sleegers et al., 2002). Louis et al. (1999) suggest that research indicates that

while the school is a critical focus for school reform efforts, the changes will not endure

without stable policy environments and resources outside of the school. Provincial and

school district policy actions can have an effect on "downstream" activities that affect

student achievement (Knapp, 2003). Professional development can be understood

productively as a "channel" or "pathway" connecting teachers' and principals'

engagement in professional learning processes and outcomes with state policy (Knapp).

Policy actors at levels removed from the school, including governments, can have an

effect on professional learning communities through professional development legislation

and government mandates that stimulate teachers and principals to improve their

collective practice (Knapp, 2003).

 With the broad conceptualization of school capacity offered by Newmann et al.

(2001) and using a grounded theory research approach, this study attempts to lay the

foundation for an analysis of principals' perceptions of schools as professional learning

communities. Sharing a generally construed constructivist epistemology (Howe, 2001),

this study is premised on the assumption that people construct their knowledge bases,

interpret new information and, create understanding in light of their prior knowledge,

experiences, and values (Mabry, 2004; Zepeda, 2000). It should be noted that

constructivist research is not limited to a single approach (Heck & Hallinger, 1999).

 Generally viewed, constructivism suggests that knowledge grows through the

interactions of internal (cognitive), and external (environmental and social) forces (Hoy

& Miskel, 2001). A constructivist research orientation allows for an examination of how

principals create understandings about their roles and participation in schools (Heck &

Hallinger, 1999). Socially constructed ways of knowing, and ways of coming to know,

are conveyed by understandings made by a principal to others in the environment

(Zepeda, 2000). Constructivism allows for an exploration of schools as constructed

realities as opposed to systems or structures that operate independently of the people in them (Heck & Hallinger, 1999).

In this study, principals' perceptions are viewed as reflecting the outside world as filtered through and influenced by language, culture, beliefs and human interaction (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). Using Toole and Louis's (2002) definition of the school as a professional learning community, one that seeks to identify the human interaction and relationships in the putative community, this research explores principals' understandings of such communities. Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) contend that there is import in considering power relationships when discussing the social entities that structure relationships in schools.

Research in the field of educational administration should help practitioners make better decisions about some of the problems they face (Haller & Kleine, 2001). Strategies of inquiry that enable the uncovering of school principals' perspectives can carry the field of educational administration far as they allow for better understanding of the complexity of school leadership (Beatty, 2002). Typically, the literature of management and organizations is much better at describing "theory-espoused", what ought to happen, than a "theory-in-use", what actually happens, within schools (Argyris, 2000, p. viii). An intent of this dissertation is to provide a view of "theory-in-use": to examine and explore principals' conceptions of schools as professional learning communities.

According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), the first objective of educational research is exploration, or an attempt to generate ideas about phenomena. This line of research into what principals' think attempts to address a criticism of educational research, namely that much educational research is non-cumulative insofar as it does not

build on earlier research: by confirming or falsifying it, by extending or replacing it, by

replacing it with better evidence of theory (Hammersley, 2002). This study attempts to

build on and extend earlier theoretical work on the concept of the school as a professional

learning community by focusing on principals' conceptualizations, and attempting to see

how these conceptions are affected by one important feature of state policy – the duty to

evaluate teachers.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of the research is to explore principals' conceptions of professional learning community, and the effect that their statutory duty to evaluate teachers has on their conceptions of schools as professional learning community. The specific research questions which this study answers are:

1. Do principals conceptualize schools as professional learning communities?

2. What are the characteristics identified by principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

   a. What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by public school principals and private school principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

   b. What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics that male principals and female principals identify in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

   c. What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by principals of small, medium and, large-sized schools in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

3. Do principals perceive their duty to evaluate teachers as having an effect on their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

a.   How do they perceive that this effect is evident?

This chapter describes and justifies the research methodology and research methods used to answer the above noted research questions.

3.2 Research Methodology

Research methodology is a generic term that refers to the general logic and theoretical perspective of the research project (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Methodology is used to describe the theory of how the research should proceed, and involves an analysis of the principles and procedures for the particular field of research (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Erickson (1986) notes that interpretive methods and designs are used when the research takes place in natural settings as opposed to laboratories, and when researchers strive to know more about meaning-making and the points of view of specific individuals in particular settings. In interpretive research, a concrete particular case is studied in detail with the aim of developing as full a model of understanding as possible of the phenomenon within its context (Erickson). Interpretive frameworks allow researchers to examine how research participants construct their social lives (Heck & Hallinger, 1999). In an interpretive framework the goal of the research is to develop an understanding of social life and discover how people construct meaning in their natural settings (Neuman, 2003). Interpretive researchers study social action in which intentionality is critical and accept that social life is based on social interaction and socially constructed meanings (Neuman). An interpretive, or sense-making, research orientation in this study allows for an examination of how principals create understandings about their roles and responsibilities in schools (Heck & Hallinger, 1999).

Interpretive researchers share a generally construed constructivist epistemology (Howe, 2001). Against classical empiricist and positivist approaches, researchers using an interpretive framework view knowledge as being actively constructed – as culturally and historically grounded – reflecting moral and political values, and serving certain interests and purposes (Howe). Simply stated, the interpretive approach of this study is anchored in how human beings understand their circumstances, that is, how do principals perceive the social reality of their school? How do they interpret it? And, how do aspects of their work life – in this case, their duty to evaluate teachers – affect their perceptions and interpretations?

This study utilized grounded theory as the research methodology. Grounded theory is a methodology in which theory develops inductively from data (Charmaz, 2000). Creswell (2002) argues that grounded theory is a "systematic, qualitative process used to generate a theory that explains, as a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic" (p.439). The grounded theory approach uses a "systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.24). According to Strauss and Corbin, a theory is a set of relationships that presupposes a plausible explanation of the phenomenon under study. This explanation is extended by Morse (1994) who suggests a theory offers "the best comprehensive, coherent and simplest model for linking diverse and unrelated facts in a useful and pragmatic way" (p.25).

The process of generating grounded theory begins with uncovering an unnoticed area to study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Typically researchers apply a grounded theory approach when the topic of interest has been given superficial attention or has been

relatively overlooked (Strauss & Corbin). The researcher's mission is to build her or his

own theory from the data or ground (Strauss & Corbin). However, it should be noted that

researchers using grounded theory usually have a disciplinary background which

provides a perspective from which to investigate a problem (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As

Strauss & Corbin (1998) suggest, the literature review outlined earlier in this thesis

provided a foundation of disciplinary knowledge and offered the researchers a certain

theoretical sensitivity, perhaps even a limited viewpoint since it was based on current

thinking and inquiry about schools as professional learning communities.

3.3 Research Methods

Method is a term that generally refers to the specific tools and techniques used in

research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Methods should be consistent with the logic

embodied in the research methodology (Bogdan & Biklen). Methods are specific research

tools used by researchers to gain fuller understanding of the phenomenon under

investigation (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Miles and Huberman (1990, p. 349) off this

caution to qualitative researchers; "Unless we can develop more of a tradition of making

our methods explicit…it will keep on being hard to trust the results of qualitative

inquiry."

This study utilized focus groups and individual interviews (Bogdan & Biklen,

2003; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). The combination of different

methods of data collection was an attempt to develop knowledge claims that respect a

wider set of interests and perspectives (Greene, 2001), and to incorporate the caution of

Putnam (2000) who concludes that no single source of data is flawless; as a result, the

more diverse the sources the less likely that they will all be influenced by the same flaw.

Creswell and Miller (2000) identify eight verification procedures to address common criticisms of qualitative research. These procedures are: a) prolonged and persistent observation, b) triangulation, c) peer review or debriefing, d) negative case analysis, e) clarifying research bias, f) member checks, g) thick description and, h) external audits. Creswell (1998) recommends that qualitative researchers use at least two of these eight verification procedures in any given study. This research study utilized four of these procedures, namely: 1) triangulation, 2) negative case analysis, 3) clarifying researcher bias, and 4) member checks.

Data collection began with two focus groups and was followed by face-to-face interviews with each participant. Johnson and Christensen (2004, p. 186) note that, "Focus groups are especially useful as a complement to other methods of data collection." Gall et al. (2003) claim researchers using focus groups "are finding that the interactions among the participants stimulate them to state feelings, perceptions, and beliefs that they would not express if interviewed individually." The basic principles of focus group methods have been informed by and refined by authors such as Patton (1990), Morgan (1988; 1993), Kitzinger (1996), and Stewart and Shamdasani (1990). Focus groups involve in-depth, open-ended group interviews of individuals who have been assembled for specific purposes (Gall et al., 2003). A focus group is not a discussion, a problem solving session, or a decision making activity (Robinson, 1999). It is a group interview. Kruger and Casey (2000) identify the main characteristics of a focus group:

> [It is] a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a
> defined area of interest in a permissible, nonthreatening environment. It is

conducted with approximately seven to ten people by a skilled

interviewer. The discussion is relaxed, comfortable, and often enjoyable

for the participants as they share ideas and perceptions. Group members

influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the

discussion (p. 18).

Group interaction is a significant component of the method with people encouraged to

talk to one another, asking each other questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting

on others' experiences and views (Kitzinger, 1994). A focus group can be used to probe

underlying assumptions that give rise to particular views and opinions (Robinson, 1999).

Not only are individual's experiences and knowledge explored, but also what individuals

think, how they think, and why they think a particular way can be examined (Kitzinger,

1996). Not designed to reach a generalized statement of opinion, a focus group method

accepts that perceptions are open to influence by others in an interactive setting and are

socially construed (Robinson, 1999).

The focus group data collection was followed by individual qualitative research

interviews with each of the study's participants, which sought to further describe and

understand the meanings of the responses made by the participants in the focus groups

(Kvale, 1996) and to probe their individual answers to specific questions. Kvale contends

the main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say.

A qualitative research interview seeks to uncover facts, meanings, and interpretations

(Kvale). McNamara (1999) suggests interviews are particularly useful for getting the

story behind a participant's experiences. Interviews can be useful as a follow-up to focus

group participants to further investigate their thoughts on the matter under study (McNamara).

<p style="text-align:center">3.4 The Researcher's Experience</p>

This following section briefly explores and exposes my own experience of the concept of a school as professional learning community because, as Douglass and Moustakas (1984) argue, the first phase in any qualitative study involves the researcher exploring and exposing her or his biases, and preconceived notions of what might be discovered through the data analysis before the study begins. Van Manen (1990, p. 57) suggests that, "To be aware of the structure of one's own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all of the other stages of phenomenological research."

I spent eight years as a high school principal from 1995 to 2003 in two high schools in two provinces – Saskatchewan where I and my teaching staff belonged to the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, and Manitoba where none of the staff belonged to a professional association/union. The schools differed considerably in size, one being a smaller school of 80 students and the second a larger school of close to 600 students. In the first school there was a teaching staff of nine and a support staff of five, while the second had a teaching staff of thirty seven and a support staff of six. One was located in a very sparsely populated rural area, while the other was suburban in a city of over six hundred thousand. I spent four years as principal in each school without ever having been a member of the teaching staff of either one. During my tenure in both, beyond regular staff supervision, I formally observed dozens of classes and completed at least twenty written evaluations of different teaching and non-teaching staff. My training in teacher

supervision and evaluation involved nine-credit hours of graduate level coursework as well as workshops on supervision and evaluation.

I came into teaching in 1992 believing the profession needed to develop many of the characteristics described in the emerging literature on organizational learning. I supported notions associated with the continued professionalization of teaching, the need for continuous inquiry and learning to improve practice, and the centrality of the notion of staff as one form of community. Throughout my administrative tenure I continued to place a belief not only in the value of nurturing these characteristics, but in the fact that the necessary conditions existed in schools to develop as professional learning communities. During my first principalship, I slowly began to question whether our staff was becoming or could become a professional learning community. There were times when I wondered if I was out of touch with the realities of my teaching staff, even though I taught one-third of a full teaching load, since I became frustrated as I tried to lead the staff through critical reflections on creating and nurturing a school as a professional learning community.

In my fifth year as principal, my first year in my second school, I was struck by a conversation I had with a new colleague. The entire staff, teaching and non-teaching, took part in a two-day retreat designed to build community and set school priorities for the next five years. As a group of four of us, myself and three teachers, sat down to eat lunch on the first day of the retreat, one teacher who had been at the school for over ten years volunteered what he thought I should keep in mind about the school's professional community. He told me about a previous administrator at the school who had only lasted one year, and who had left because he was incapable of adjusting to the staff culture. The

teacher calmly said the staff's sense of community could be summed up very simply as the "FIFO" principle – "fit in, or f#$! off." From my understanding of my colleague's comments, no pedagogical or curricular innovation which involved the staff, no matter how well intentioned or planned, could be successfully implemented if the "FIFO" principle was violated.

During my tenures as principal my duty to supervise and evaluate staff put me in conflict with my staff at times, and it affected my developing conception of a school as a professional learning community. My duty for teacher evaluation coloured how I understood teachers as professionals, shaped my thoughts about professional learning, and shaded my understanding of professional community. In fulfilling my duty to evaluate teachers, I was left wondering how principals viewed themselves, and are viewed by others, in the community of the school. My experiences left me questioning the viability of my frame of reference - the concept of a school as professional learning community - not only from a principal's perspective generally, but from one that specifically took into account the principal's statutory duty to evaluate teachers. I believe I developed over that time a belief that the concept of a school as a professional learning community may be an elusive and perhaps unattainable ideal.

<div align="center">3.5 Research Participants</div>

The specific participants were purposely selected to address not only the general research problem, but also the specific research questions and sub-questions (Robinson, 1999). The principals were selected from either, a list of names of public school principals employed in school divisions either in, or surrounding, the city of Winnipeg taken from the 2004-05 Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (MEC&Y) listing of

"Schools in Manitoba"; or a list of names of private school principals within the city of Winnipeg taken from the 2004-05 annual directory of the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools (MFIS). According to Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2005) there were 703 public schools, 65 funded independent schools and 43 non-funded independent schools in the 2004-05 school-year. Accordingly, it is estimated that there were approximately 811 principals in Manitoba of whom 703 were employed in public schools, while 65 were employed in funded-independent schools and 43 employed in non-funded independent schools. Initially, using a stratified random sample, 10 names of public schools' principals were taken from the MEC&Y directory divided equally by gender (5 male and 5 female), and divided unequally based on school size (3 from smaller schools, 4 from medium size schools, and 3 from larger schools). The names of the 10 public schools' principals were written out individually on pieces of paper along with the size of school, placed into a box, blindly drawn by me and then the names were recorded in draw order from 1 to 10. From the list of 10 ordered names, with attention to representation of small, medium and large schools, three male names and the three female names were selected and these principals were contacted either by telephone or email to ascertain their willingness to participate in this research study. In the initial research design in the case that any principal declined, the next name from the list of the same gender was contacted making accommodation for representation of principals from smaller, medium and larger schools. The same process was followed using the 10 names of private schools' principals taken from the MFIS directory.

In the week leading up to the scheduled dates of the two focus group sessions, five principals who had initially agreed to participate withdrew from the study and could

not be replaced on short notice by the principals whose names remained on the list. The

primary reason for withdrawal given was the fact that they were too busy. As a result, I

contacted three doctoral students from the Faculty of Education at the University of

Manitoba and requested each supply a list of names of principals who might be interested

in participating in this study. Individuals from these lists were contacted either by

telephone or via email to ascertain their willingness to participate. In choosing the

participants, attention was again given to the degree that it was possible to allow for a

diverse representation of participants in the study based on, gender, school size as

determined by student enrolment and grade levels offered and school type.

In the focus groups the twelve principals were divided so that first consisted of

five principals employed in public schools and one from a private school, while the

second focus group consisted of six principals employed in private schools, also referred

to as independent schools. The choice of the research participants allowed for a

comparison of conceptions between principals' from private and public schools. The

research participants were also chosen so that male and female principals were involved,

as well as principals from smaller schools, from medium sized schools and from larger

schools, so that comparisons could be made amongst the principals' perceptions

considering also gender and school size.

Table 3.1, "Research participants," describes the principals who participated in

this study, showing the gender, school type, school size, and pseudonym assigned to each

principal. The research participants consisted of nine females and three males, employed

in seven private schools and five public schools of varying student enrolment, that is two

principals came from small schools, six from medium-sized schools, and four from large-

sized school. The participants do not proportionally represent the distribution of female

and male principals employed in Manitoba's over eight hundred small, medium or large-

sized public and private schools.

Table 3.1 Research participants

Participant's name	Gender (female or male)	School type (public or private)	School size (small, medium, or large)
Principal Crystalwhite	Female	Public	Small
Principal Sienna	Female	Private	Medium
Principal Dodgerblue	Female	Private	Medium
Principal Khaki	Female	Private	Medium
Principal Mustardseed	Female	Private	Large
Principal Sandstone	Female	Public	Medium
Principal Olivegreen	Female	Public	Large
Principal Kellygreen	Female	Private	Small
Principal Teal	Female	Public	Medium
Principal Cyan	Male	Private	Medium
Principal Coral	Male	Private	Large
Principal Bluemist	Male	Public	Large
Summary	9 Female 3 Male	7 Private 5 Public	2 Small 6 Medium 4 Large

The study protocol was reviewed by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics

Board (ENREB) of the University of Manitoba under the title "Holding the Reins of the

Professional Learning Community: A Study of Twelve Manitoba School Principals

Concerning the Relationship between the Duty to Evaluate Teachers and the Normative Imperative to Develop Schools as Professional Learning Communities". ENREB approval was received on January 1, 2006 under Protocol number: E2005:120 (see Appendix A for a copy of the "Approval Certificate").

Appendix B, "Permission Forms", contains three letters: first, a letter requesting permission from the superintendent in the case of a public school for a principal to participate; second, a letter to a member of the board of directors of an independent school requesting permission for a principal to participate; and third, a letter requesting a principal's participation. Finally, Appendix C, "Consent Forms", contains three letters: a letter requesting consent from the superintendent in the case of a public school for a principal to participate; secondly, a letter to a member of the board of directors of an independent school requesting consent for a principal to participate; and thirdly, a letter which is the informed consent declaration of the principals who agreed to participate in the study.

3.5.1 Differences between Public and Private Schools

Looking for differences between private schools' and public schools' principals may illuminate the effects that the type of school, private versus public, has on principals' conceptions of schools as professional learning communities. According to Statistics Canada, a school is classified as either public or private according to whether a public agency or a private entity has the ultimate decision-making power regarding school affairs. For example, a private school is controlled and managed by a non-governmental organization (e.g., a church, a trade union or a business enterprise) or is governed by a

board consisting mostly of members not selected by a public agency (Ertl & Plante, 2004).

In Manitoba, public and private schools differ in legislative status, organizational structure and institutional ethos or culture. While the majority of Manitoba's private schools are religiously based, not all are. It is a significant feature of public policy that public schools are subject to the entire provincial *Public Schools Act* whereas provincially-funded private schools are subject only to Section 60(5) of the *Act* in order to receive limited operating grants from Manitoba Education as outlined in the *Private Schools Grants Regulation 267/97* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth, 2005). From a cultural perspective a reason for exploring differences in principals' conceptions of schools as professional learning communities may be found in the different types of formal inter-school associations that teachers and principals in public and private schools belong to. As a result of Manitoba's legislative regimes, specifically the *Public Schools Act* and *Manitoba Teachers' Society Act*, teachers and principals employed in private schools are not permitted to be active members in the Manitoba Teachers' Society, which is effectively the province's teacher union/association for all public school teachers and principals. While two of the province's private schools have teacher unions (Gray Academy of Jewish Education and Holy Cross School – Roman Catholic), the approximately 100 other funded and non-funded independent schools in Manitoba do not. The two unionized independent schools' staffs do not share an inter-organizational professional association/union.

While professional identity does not solely emanate from membership in a professional association, it is argued (Bascia, 1994) that formal association/unionization

plays a significant role in delineating the boundaries of a teacher's professional community. Putnam (2000, p.80) asserts that sociologically unions and professional associations are "an important locus of social solidarity, a mechanism for mutual assistance and shared expertise". Organizations develop their own distinctive culture and as members interact shared values, norms, beliefs and ways of thinking emerge (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) suggest that private schools possess a form of community in which students enjoy a distinctive "social capital" that enriches the resources of information and oversight available to the students. Driscoll and Kerchner, while specifically referencing the findings of studies of private Catholic schools in the United States (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982), suggest that research demonstrates most public schools, especially those in urban settings, do not have the tightly knit communities indicative of the social cohesion found in both small town communities of the early twentieth century and contemporary private schools. Consistent with the conclusions of the Coleman studies, there is agreement that the communities in and around private schools are different from those in public schools, and that the type and form of community in a private school is an important factor in the success of the institution and its students (Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999).

3.5.2 Differences between Female and Male Principals

Many researchers have described the professional roles and orientations of female principals (Shakeshaft, 1989; Growe & Montgomery, 2001; Stanley, 2002; Adler, Laney & Packer, 1993; Hurty, 1997; Weiss & Cambone, 2000), and have described female principals in relation to their male counterparts as being more child-centered and achievement-centered, more focused on teaching and learning, motivated by building and

maintaining relationships, and more visible in schools. According to Rusch and Marshall (1995, p. 12), "The unexamined assumptions of leadership theory as gender neutral works to sustain a professional culture that avoids the puzzles and dilemmas of gendered leader behavior."

Shakeshaft (1989, p. 325) points out that one of the problems associated with research in educational administration is its androcentric bias, that is, "the practice of seeing the world and shaping reality through a male lens." Shakeshaft argues for a transformation of the way theory and practice in educational administration are carried out in order that they might take into account the female perspective, "because we now know that gender and race differences in behaviour and perspective do exist, it becomes important to examine theory and research for androcentrism and to expand theory and research to include the perspectives of nondominant groups" (p. 325). Shakeshaft contends that gender influences both behaviour and perception, and deems that "Gender and gender expectations may partially determine how supervisors interact with those they supervise" (p. 329). She also believes that gender is a significant factor in determining what is communicated and how it is interpreted; apparently, males and females listen for different things – women for feelings, men for facts, and when discussing an instructional issue, women and men might see the same issue from an entirely different perspective.

3.5.3 Differences between Small, Medium and Large-Sized Schools

According to Ancess (2003, p. 3), "Community denotes a cohesive, self-governing, and independent social unit where the constituents share values and a common experience and have a sense of belonging, natural concern and support, ownership, and habits of cooperation." There has been continuing debate on the subject

of organizational scale in education, specifically about the effects of school size on student achievement (Monk & Plecki, 1999). If principals from smaller schools conceive of schools as professional learning communities differently from those who work in larger ones we may gain some insight into whether organizational size affects their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities (Monk & Plecki).

Determining precisely what is meant by the term "small school" is, as Harber (1996) points out, an impossible task. Harber states that in Great Britain the definition of "small" school has varied over time from enrolments of 70 students and under in the primary level, and 400 and fewer students at the secondary level. Francis (1992) lists different research studies of primary schools as defining "smallness" as: 100, 125, 132, 441 and 475 students.

Following the general definitions established by Statistics Canada (Ertl & Plante, 2004), this study took school size into account in relation to the school's instructional level. Ertl and Plante classified as elementary a school that offers grade 6 and under or a majority of elementary grades; secondary, if the school offers grade 7 and over or a majority of secondary grades; and finally, schools offering a complete elementary and secondary grades are referred to as mixed schools. Thus, size of the school – small, medium or large (Ertl & Plante) was based on the participants' responses (see Appendix E, "Interview Guide"), and was determined by the number of students enrolled by instructional level as shown below in Table 3.2, "School size".

Table 3.2 School size

		Instructional size		
		Elementary school	Secondary school	Mixed school
School size	Small	Less than 200 students	Less than 300 students	Less than 60 students
	Medium	200 to 350 students	300 to 700 students	60 to 200 students
	Large	More than 350 students	More than 700 students	More than 200 students

3.6 Data Collection

Two interview protocols were created: 1) focus group questions derived from the

literature review, and 2) follow-up individual interview questions derived from the

literature and from the focus groups transcripts. While the interview questions for the

focus groups and individual interviews were constructed to help answer each research

question, interviews in qualitative research are usually more open ended and less

structured and flow like conversations (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). "The largest part of

the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the

exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time," notes Merriam

(1998, p. 74). Practice interviews were conducted with two principals who were not

involved in the study and three doctoral students in educational administration to ensure

the appropriateness of the questions. Questions were modified when necessary so as to be

clear to the study's participants. Additional probing questions were devised to gain

deeper responses.

The first phase of the data collection involved focus groups to collect information

about research participants' beliefs (Gall et al., 2003). Bogdan and Biklen (2003, p. 101)

posit that focus groups are "particularly useful when the topic to be explored is general,

and the purpose is either to stimulate talk from multiple perspectives from the group

participants so that that the researcher can learn what the range of views are."

Prior to the actual focus group interviews I considered Simon's (1999)

suggestions for planning focus groups:

> Start planning at least four weeks ahead of the focus group session date.
> Six to eight weeks is probably more realistic. It takes time to identify your
> participants, develop and test the questions, locate a site, invite and follow
> up with participants, and gather materials for the sessions. You must have
> all the pieces in place if you are going to have a successful focus group.
> (p. 40)

The questions for the focus group sessions were chosen to stimulate useful

discussion, provide responses to the research questions, and take into account the

sequencing of the questions (Perry, 2002). Simon (1999) cautions that, "The questions

posed in a focus group are critical" and, "the sequence and tone of the questions are as

significant as the questions themselves" (p. 41). The focus group questions were open-

ended and moved from the general to the more specific (Simon). Six questions were

asked in each focus group session and time was provided for responses and discussion

amongst the focus group participants (see Appendix D, "Focus group guide", for the

protocol and questions). Data were recorded from the focus groups in two ways: audio

tapes, and written notes I made during the sessions (Kruger & Casey, 2000). Kruger and

Casey suggest that written notes are essential and should be as complete as possible not

only in case the tape recorder breaks, but also to identify non-verbal cues that appear to

be significant.

During the second phase I conducted face-to-face interviews with each principal (see Appendix E, "Interview guide", for the protocol and questions). The individual interviews, which Gall et al. (2003) refer to as "key informant interviews", were conducted with the same principals who had participated in the focus groups so as to explore, individually, their own perspectives. These interviews were intended to have each research participant construct, by her or his testimony, as complete as possible an understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). The research study attempted to examine both the emic perspective, the insider's point of view of principals who viewed themselves as part of the school's professional learning community, and the etic perspective, the outsider's point of view of principals who do not perceive themselves as part of the professional learning community (Gall et al., 2003). Face-to-face interviews provided me an opportunity to probe deeper with individuals than the focus groups allowed, to clarify participant responses by asking additional questions, and to pay attention to non-verbal cues (Jaeger, 1997). Putnam (1973) suggests that talking and listening to those in leadership positions is an excellent way to check reality against theory.

Gall et al. (2003) suggest eight steps for preparing and conducting research interviews. The steps are: 1) define the purpose of the study, 2) select a sample, 3) design the interview format, 4) develop questions, 5) select and train interviewers, 6) conduct a pilot test of the interview procedures, 7) conduct the interviews, and 8) analyze the data. Seven of the steps outlined by Gall et al. were used: step five, "select and train the interviewers," was omitted because I was the sole interviewer. In a manner similar to that used with the focus groups, data were recorded from the individual interviews in two

ways: audio tapes and written notes that I made during the sessions as Kruger and Casey

(2000), for example, advise.

Ultimately, the focus groups consisted of unequal numbers of males and females,

unequal numbers of principals from private and public schools, and unequal numbers

from small and large schools. Two focus groups were conducted ($n = 6$ in each case) and

the composition of each focus group is shown in Table 3.3, "Focus Group Participants".

Table 3.3 Focus Group Participants

Focus group 1 ($n = 6$)		Focus group 2 ($n = 6$)	
School size			
Small	1	Small	1
Medium	2	Medium	4
Large	3	Large	1
Participant's gender			
Female	4	Female	5
Male	2	Male	1
School type			
Private	1	Private	6
Public	5	Public	0

After the focus groups and individual interviews were held, the audio taped

recordings were transcribed. The transcripts became the data sources for analysis

(Merriam, 1998). After the transcription of the audiotapes of each individual interview,

both a focus groups' transcript and an individual interview transcript were emailed as

attachments to the appropriate participant to ensure accuracy. Participants were asked

through an electronic mail cover letter to review the transcripts for precision and clarity

and they were instructed to submit any amendments, deletions or, clarifications they

deemed appropriate for their portion of the focus group interview or their individual

interview transcripts. The email cover letter asked them to respond within two weeks of receipt of the original email by either return email or regular mail. Five participants made slight changes in wording to their comments in their focus group transcript and, three individuals made minor changes clarifying inaudible comments in their individual interviews transcripts.

<div align="center">3.7 Data Analysis</div>

This research study was designed to explore principals' perceptions of schools as professional learning communities. Johnson and Christensen (2004) contend that the key to exploratory studies in education is the use of the inductive method. An inductive method allows theory to be developed from data, that is, theory is inductively derived from the phenomenon it represents; it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2000). Specifically, the study utilized a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. Researchers do not begin with a formal theory and then prove it. Instead researchers begin with an area of study and what is relevant to the research is allowed to emerge: in this study, how principals perceive schools as professional learning communities (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Research situated in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) requires qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis.

In the data analysis of a research study using grounded theory, a researcher should try to collect as extensive data as feasible because during the study the researcher will interact with the data, collect additional data as questions arise and need answering, and

may begin data analysis while data collection is still underway (Gall et al., 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Confidence in these data came from careful attention to the accuracy of the data collected, from triangulating the data collected (Creswell, 2002; Patton, 1990), and from what Strauss and Corbin (1990) call theoretical sensitivity.

> Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data… [It] refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't (Strauss & Corbin, p. 42).

Strauss and Corbin propose that theoretical sensitivity comes from a number of sources, including professional literature, professional experiences, and personal experiences. The credibility of a qualitative research report relies heavily on the confidence readers have in the researcher's ability to be sensitive to the data and to make appropriate decisions in the field (Eisner, 1991; Patton, 1990).

Methodological triangulation was used along with member checks to establish internal validity (Merriam, 1998). Methodological triangulation was achieved by having each participant review the transcripts from the focus group and individual interview for accuracy, and by comparing the data generated from the two focus groups, comparing the data from the focus groups to the data from the twelve individual interviews, and by comparing the data from the individual interviews. Data triangulation was achieved by collecting data from multiple respondents as well as examining the consistency of several statements by a single individual (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Internal validity was also supported by observation, participant involvement, and identification and

clarification of the researcher's experience and possible bias. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that reliability in the traditional sense is better expressed as 'dependability' or 'consistency' in qualitative research. According to Merriam (1998), such dependability is established by the researcher's statement of position, triangulation, and an audit trail, all of which were used in this study.

External validity or the ability to generalize has been established as a problem in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). I considered the findings of this research as a set of working possibilities or tentative generalizations rather than firm conclusions. More data and thick, rich descriptions add could strengthen the possible transferability of the findings to other settings (Merriam, 1998).

Researchers utilizing focus groups and interviews should ensure that the data collected are needed to answer the proposed research questions and should limit the interview questions to variables of primary interest (Creswell, 1998). Each item or question was linked explicitly or implicitly to a particular research question (Creswell). In analyzing the data from this study attempts were made to follow the lead of Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) who suggest that qualitative researchers should offer sufficient description and details about research design and analysis to allow for independent judgments about fit between research questions, data collection procedures and data analysis techniques. As such, I offer information about my data analysis procedures in the remainder of this chapter.

In keeping with the recommendations of Goulding (1998), grounded theory analysis involved a succession of stages which started with the development of *in vivo* codes (open coding) from the transcripts, through to the development of more abstract or

second-level coding of categorical codes (axial coding) which allowed for the coded

segments to be examined juxtaposed against each other, and finally involved the last

stage of developing conceptual and theoretical codes (selective coding) which are the

building block of themes as presented in Chapter 5.

A linking document (see Table 3.4, "Research questions in relation to the focus

group and interview questions") was created to demonstrate that the data collected in the

focus groups and individual interviews were needed to answer the research questions

(Jaeger, 1997). Table 3.4 presents the three major research questions and four sub-

questions that served as the foundation on which the subsequent focus groups and

individual interviews were designed (Anfara et al., 2002; also see Appendices D & E).

Table 3.4 Research questions in relation to focus group and interview questions

Research question	Focus group question	Interview question
1. Do principals conceptualize schools as professional learning communities?	FG1, FG1.A, FG2, FG3 FG4.	I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8
2. What are the characteristics identified by principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?	FG1, FG1.A, FG2, FG3, FG4.	I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8
2. a. What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by public school principals and private school principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?	FG1, FG1.A, FG2, FG3, FG4.	I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8
2. b. What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics that male principals and female principals identify in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?	FG1, FG1.A, FG2, FG3, FG4.	I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8
2. c. What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by principals of small schools and principals of large schools in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?	FG1, FG1.A, FG2, FG3, FG4.	I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8
3. Do principals perceive their duty to evaluate teachers as having an effect on their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?	FG5, FG6.A, FG6.B, FG6.C.	I2, I9
3. a. How do they perceive that this effect is evident?	FG6.A, FG6.B, FG6.C.	I2, I9

To the right of each research question are codes (i.e., FG1, I6, etc.) matching each

research question to specific questions used in the focus groups and individual

interviews. FG1 for example, indicates the first question from the focus group sessions

reflects the first research question. In a similar fashion, I6 indicates that the sixth question

from the individual interview protocol also relates to the first research question. The

process of constantly revisiting the central questions that I hoped to answer in this study

was helpful in establishing a base of reference for the focus groups and individual

interviews (Anfara et al.)

In total, 320 double-spaced pages of transcript were obtained from the two focus

groups sessions (51 pages), and the twelve individual interviews with the principals (269

pages) who participated in this study. The transcripts were read and coded on four

separate occasions over a six month period by the researcher.

In examining the transcripts of the focus groups and individual interviews, the

analytical goal was to identify common or contradictory themes in how principals'

conceive of professional learning community and what influence the duty for teacher

evaluation is reported to have on those conceptions. Each focus group and individual

interview was analyzed after it was conducted: "The right way to analyze data in a

qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (Merriam, 1998, p. 162).

This process enabled the researcher to pose clarifying questions when needed and helped

recognize patterns in the data. In this respect Creswell (2002) notes:

> Unquestionably there is not one single way to analyze qualitative data – it
>
> is an eclectic process in which you try to make sense of the information.
>
> Thus the approaches to data analysis espoused by qualitative writers will
>
> vary considerably (p. 258).

Content analysis was employed to review and categorize the data according to their

research questions. Content analysis enables large amounts of data to be reduced into

smaller chunks to discern meaning (Weber, 1990). Merriam (1998) notes that "Devising

categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the

study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves" (p. 179).

After each of the focus sessions and individual interviews was concluded, I listened to the audiotape recording, and matched my written notes from the session to the recording (Kruger & Casey, 2000). The audiotapes were then transcribed using a word processor and printed with line numbers leaving a large margin on the left side of each page. Each transcript was then analyzed against my written notes from the session, and any non-verbal cues recorded in my notes were identified and marked in the left margin of the transcript (Kruger & Casey). This data analysis followed what Catterall and Maclaran (1997) refer to as the annotating-the-scripts approach which involves listening to the audiotapes, reading the transcripts, and writing interpretations of the data in the margins. Catterall and Maclaran suggest that the benefit of this approach is that, "each transcript is considered as whole rather than as a set of discrete responses," while annotating-the-scripts "allows the analyst to re-experience the group, body language and tone of the discussion" (p. 3).

In this thesis, a total of 214 segments of text were coded as comments. The first 164 of these comments are included in Sections 4.2 to 4.5 of the next chapter to illustrate principal's conceptions of schools as professional learning communities. Comments 165 to 201 appear in Section 4.5 to describe the effect that principals perceive the duty for teacher evaluation has on their conceptions of professional learning communities. Finally, comments 202 to 214 describe the effects that principals perceive teacher evaluation has on their understandings of professional learning communities. These latter comments are discussed in Sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.2, and summarized in Table 4.16.

Unique identifiers (for example, P1-FG1 is Participant #1, Focus Group #1) were assigned to each participant in each focus group. The unique identifier allowed me to identify who said what and when without revealing the participant's identity. Following transcription of both focus group interviews and a first reading of each, the unique identifier of each participant was replaced with an individual pseudonym devised from a colour palette. The analysis of the data generated from the focus groups centered on the interaction of the participants: the shared language on the topic, what seemed to be taken for granted, and what was being asked for by means of questions of clarification by the participants of each other or the researcher (Catterall & Maclaran).

The data were examined for common patterns and irregularities and coded based on those patterns since "typically, qualitative research findings are in the forms of themes, categories, typologies, and concepts" (Merriam, 1998, pp. 7-8). For the purposes of the study segmenting was understood to be dividing data into meaningful units and coding was viewed as marking segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The purpose of this type of data analysis was to bring meaning, structure, and order to the data (Anfara et al, 2002). The data analysis also consisted of familiarizing myself with the data by moderating the focus groups, listening to the audiotapes, transcribing the audiotapes, reading the transcripts, reviewing the written notes from the sessions, and analyzing the focus group data (Robinson, 1999; Gall et al., 2003). Catterall & Maclaran (1997) suggest that researchers utilizing focus groups examine data not only as meaningful segments, but also stay attentive to the data as generated from a whole group process and not view it as a series of simultaneously occurring individual interviews.

In focus groups, the group interaction and discussion are part of the data and data analysis should reflect this (Catterall & Maclaran). Schindler (1992) and Kitzinger (1994) argue that while focus groups can provide insight into the experiences of individual participants, greater value can be found by analyzing the interaction between participants. Too often communication that occurs in focus groups is ignored in the data analysis (Albrecht, Johnson & Walther, 1993). Albrecht et al. contend that perceptions are "generally determined not by individual information gathering and deliberation but through communication with others" (p. 54).

The data were originally coded as they related to specific research questions, but new categories emerged from the data upon further examination (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Merriam, 1998). Initial categories were determined by the researcher after a review of the transcripts. Microsoft Word software was also used to find keywords in the transcripts based on the research questions. The search command was also used to determine the frequency of words in order to help develop categories.

Content analysis (Weber, 1990) was conducted at various levels including phrases, sentences, and paragraphs although not all data were analyzed at these three levels. Instead codes were assigned to a phrase, sentence, or paragraph as a coherent idea became evident in the data. These phrases, sentences, or paragraphs, which were viewed as representing a coherent idea relevant to the research questions contained in this study, were identified as a participant comment.

I used code categories either drawn from the review of the literature or assigned "in vivo" codes, words which were used by the interviewees, to code the material identified as comments (Glaser; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example the following

quote was coded as a comment indicating that the respondent conceived of a school as a professional learning community as a stage-like transformative process:

> As a professional learning community, I think we have a way to go. Individually there are people that are way ahead of others in terms of wanting that [to be a professional learning community] and then there's others who are not sure what it's all about, and not sure how they would fit in (Principal Coral: Comment 18).

In the comment, the principal referred to a process that is necessary for a school to become a professional learning community. The comment was viewed as illustrating the participant's perception that a process must likely occur to transform a school from a bureaucratic organizational model into a professional learning community. Each comment was considered in a similar manner and the data were examined to determine if they fit into theoretical codes as derived from the literature review or required "in vivo" codes to be generated. This process of coding data is considered to be preliminary for the actual analysis in which the analyst tries to make sense of the data by looking for patterns and/or structures in the data (Jorgenson, 1989).

The data analysis of the individual interviews followed an approach called the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Haller and Kleine (2001), this data analysis approach calls for the coding of data from focus groups and interviews under headings that appear to capture the theoretical properties of a category. The initial stage of the interview analysis involved open coding (Johnson & Christensen, 2004), where the transcribed audiotape of each interview was read multiple times and substantive phrases, sentences or paragraphs in the transcripts were identified (Johnson &

Christensen). Gillham (2000) identifies substantive statements as phrases, sentences of paragraphs that "really say something".

Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the initial open coding of the focus groups and individual interview transcripts and literature review resulted in segments of the data being labeled with code names assigned according to the content of each comment (see Table 3.5, "Initial coding categories"). Table 3.5 presents the larger, consolidated picture that emerged from the "process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150 as cited in Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31-32).

Table 3.5 Initial coding categories

Data sources	Initial coding categories
FOCUS GROUPS	1. Schools as professional learning communities
	2. Process
	3. Journey
	4. Time
	5. Teacher empowerment
	6. Teacher interconnectedness
	7. School plans
	8. Institutional identity
	9. Trust and respect amongst staff
&	10. Principals' connectedness to staff
	11. Staffs' trust of principal
	12. Principal as engaging staff in reflective conversations
	13. Ties amongst teachers
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS	14. Collaboration in community
	15. Learning as fostering improvements in instructional practices
	16. Professional as collective commitment versus individual attributes
	17. Client-oriented professionals
	18. Collective knowledge-based professionals
	19. Duty for evaluation
&	20. Teacher evaluation as building public confidence
	21. Teacher evaluation shapes principals' conceptions of professional learning communities
LITERATURE REVIEW	22. Teacher evaluation effect on new staff
	23. Teacher evaluation effect on principal & teacher relationships

Axial coding of the data followed the initial analysis and during this second stage I manipulated, modified and merged the substantive statements into categories (Haller & Kleine, 2001; Johnson & Christensen, 2004), looking for possible relationships between and among the categories (Johnson & Christensen).

To add credibility to the analysis, negative case analysis was used as the data were combed through to look for examples of statements or words that contradicted a category under construction (Haller & Kleine, 2001). Negative case analysis is a method to handle error variance in qualitative studies (Kidder, 1981 as cited in Haller & Kleine). As an example of how negative case analysis was used in this study, the following comment illustrates one participant's initial view that teacher evaluation had no affect on her perception of a school's professional learning community,

> When you think of the evaluative process it really can be quite superficial. It just has negative parameters associated with it. Generally speaking I don't think it really helps the professional community. Does the evaluative process really help with that? I'm not so sure. It's a process that we have to go through legally to cover everybody's bases (Principal Sandstone: Comment 183).

At a later point in the same interview, the same principal remarked that teacher evaluation does have an affect on how she perceives of a school as a professional learning community. She noted, "If I've got to take a teacher and maybe put that person on intensive supervision that's going to be a very difficult thing for the whole professional community" (Principal Sandstone: Comment 185).

Negative case analysis required that I look for disconfirming data in the transcribed comments of each participant because "a single negative case is enough to require the investigator to revise a hypothesis" (Kidder, 1981, p. 241 as cited in Haller & Kleine, 2001, p. 202). Each negative case required me to re-examine, re-evaluate and revise categories and themes until the negative case was accommodated in the current interpretations or generated new interpretations (Kidder). Finally, categories were analyzed using selective coding (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) to identify themes and to develop propositions (Taylor & Bogdan, 2004). A theme is defined as a statement of meaning that: 1) runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or 2) one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact (Ely et al., 1997).

Throughout the analysis, a grounded theory perspective was used to allow the "story line" to emerge from the open, axial and selective coding (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) as illustrated in Chapter 5, "Discussion of findings and suggestions for future research". Data analysis in a grounded theory approach allowed for a constant interplay between the focus group transcripts, individual interview transcripts and the pertinent literature because as Strauss and Corbin note (1998) note, the literature review can be viewed as a foundation for a researcher's theoretical knowledge base. Certainly, the literature review in this thesis revealed current thinking in the area being investigated (Strauss & Corbin).

As the data were brought into manageable chunks (see Table 3.5), insight and meaning were brought to the words of the research participants through axial coding by interweaving the data sources to allow for linkages to be forged between and amongst the

initial codes as an important element of a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

During selective coding, data reduction allowed me to look for underlying uniformity in the initial set of coding categories so that the codes could be manipulated, modified, merged and reformed as eight themes (Glaser, 1998; Haller & Kleine, 2001). Chapter 4, "Response to the research questions," illustrates how the reflective analysis and selective coding (Gall et al., 2003) of the data led to the development of the themes described in Chapter 5, "Discussion of findings and suggestions for future research".

CHAPTER 4: RESPONSES TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to describe the perceptions of twelve school

principals in Manitoba concerning the relationship between their duty to evaluate

teachers and the normative imperative to develop schools as professional learning

communities. This study used Toole and Louis's (2002) definition of a school as

professional learning community.

Toole and Louis (2002) assert that conceptually a school as professional learning

community is one in which there is "a school-wide culture that makes collaboration

expected, inclusive, genuine, continuous, and focused on critically examining practice to

improve student outcomes" (p. 247). When applied to schools the professional learning

community concept rests on a set of assumptions:

> That teaching is inherently a non-routine and complex activity (i.e.,
>
> teachers will need to continue learning throughout their career); that there
>
> is a great deal of knowledge already existing in schools; that challenges
>
> teachers face are partly localized and will need to be addressed "on the
>
> ground," and that teachers improve by engaging with their peers in
>
> analysis, evaluation, and experimentation. (Toole & Louis, p. 248)

Newmann et al. (2001) assert that provincial policies on professional development, one

component of which is teacher evaluation, can influence all aspects of school capacity.

Newmann et al. suggest that school capacity is the collective power of the entire staff of a

school to improve student achievement school-wide. Newmann et al. note that principals

have the legal authority to affect each aspect of school capacity, for better or worse,

including a school's professional learning community through the duty to evaluate teachers.

The study compared the findings from the literature review in the areas of schools as professional learning communities with principals' beliefs and their perception of the reality of administrative practice. The study focused on the ways that principals conceive of schools as professional learning communities. Specifically this study addressed the following questions:

1. Do principals conceptualize schools as professional learning communities?

2. What are the characteristics identified by principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

    a.   What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by public school principals and private school principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

    b.   What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics that male principals and female principals identified in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

    c.   What differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by principals of small, medium and, large-sized schools in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

3. Do principals perceive their duty to evaluate teachers as having an affect on their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities?

    a.   How do they perceive that this effect is evident?

What follows in this chapter is an examination of each of the three research questions and four sub-questions utilizing a grounded theory approach. In this grounded theory approach, meaningful patterns and themes were derived from the data as I constantly compared the literature, focus groups and individual interview transcripts looking for common or unique categories and examining for underlying theoretical structures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin suggest that by interweaving the pertinent literature throughout the analysis process, a researcher can add another voice to the theoretical reconstruction of data. In this manner, the literature review supplemented the focus group and interview data and was used also as analytical tool to develop themes regarding the phenomenon being studied (Strauss & Corbin). Through the constant comparison, coding and analysis of the data obtained from focus groups, individual interviews and literature, themes grounded in the data sources were generated. Using such an approach, this research sought to approximate principals' perceptions of schools as professional learning communities, thereby conveying a conceptual understanding of issues that make up an aspect of the administrative world of principals (Van Maanen, 1979).

In the examination of each research question or subquestion, I connect the perceptions of the principals involved in this study with discoveries from the related literature to demonstrate similarities and/or differences between principals' perceptions

and Toole and Louis's (2002) definition of a school as a professional learning community. Common themes are identified for each research question based on the responses of the principals. Participant comments are included as appropriate.

4.2   Research Question 1

Research Question One was: Do principals conceptualize schools as professional learning communities? The specific questions posed to the participants in the focus groups and individual interviews to obtain data to answer this research question were aligned to the research question as described in Chapter 3, Section 3.7 (see also Table 3.4).

4.2.1   Striving to be a Professional Learning Community

According to Toole and Louis (2002), evidence exists to indicate that the principal is key to the existence of a professional learning community. So the interviews began by asking if principals conceive of schools as professional learning communities. This question is a critical departure point because as DuFour (2004) suggests, the concept of a school as professional learning community is being used "so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning" (p. 6). In order to choose between the competing prescriptions for creating professional learning communities, because most of the mistakes in thinking are not mistakes of logic but mistakes of perception (DeBono, 1998), a principal needs to be guided by a conception, even if only tentatively, that indicates what changes need to be made, or what needs to be supported, and how these changes can be operationalized to develop schools as professional learning communities (Lipman, 2003).

When asked if they conceive of schools as professional learning communities, the participants in this study expressed the view that schools, even if they are not fully developed as professional learning communities, can be striving to become more like one (Hord, 1997a, 1997b, 2004). As Principal Sienna noted, "Yes, we are trying to become a professional learning community" (Comment 1). Another participant, Principal Sandstone commented, "We're not there yet, but we are working at it" (Comment 2). In addition Principal Cyan stated, "I'd say we're working at building community, we're working at being learners, and we're working at being professionals" (Comment 3). This view of striving to be as a professional learning community was reported by other participants, such as,

> Principal Dodgerblue: I think the teachers are definitely a community of supportive professionals (Comment 4).
>
> Principal Khaki: I would describe us as trying to be like a professional community (Comment 5).
>
> Principal Olivegreen: [This school] seems to be a school that has been well known for its professional community (Comment 6).

The principals perceived the concept of a school as a professional learning community as being multi-dimensional and as such they felt it was possible for schools to be operating, as Hord (1997a, 1997b, 2004) suggests, along some of the dimensions more effectively than others yet still be developing overall as professional learning communities. Principal Mustardseed said, "We are striving to be a professional community, a learning community. I don't think we are there yet. I'm not satisfied anyway. I think we have a ways to go" (Comment 7). Principal Kellygreen remarked, "In some sense yes they are a

community, a professional learning community. In some instances I'd say we're not" (Comment 8). Another, Principal Bluemist commented, "I'd say we're probably well along that continuum [of becoming a professional learning community]. Do we practice it regularly, and is it high-end, professional conversations and whatnot? I think there's a limitation. You know, I think we're on that journey" (Comment 9).

4.2.2   *Professional Learning Community as a Transformative Process*

Louis and Kruse (1995) observe that a professional learning community is founded on a "process of communicating ideas, ideals, shared concerns, and interests" (p. 216). Similarly, DuFour (2005) and Stoll et al. (2006b) contend that the deep collaboration which characterizes professional learning communities is a process. The principals in this study noted that creating schools as professional learning communities is a process that requires work and a continuous commitment. As Principal Teal stated during a focus group, "This [a professional learning community] is not some label that you can put on a group that comes together to have a meeting about a certain topic. It isn't something that happens because they say they are. It's a process" (Comment 10). Principal Crystalwhite agreed by stating, "I would agree with Principal Teal in that sense. I think schools strive to become professional learning communities. It's not a state that you happen to be in by miracle. It's something you have to work at" (Comment 11). In addition, Principal Cyan noted, "Whether we get there or whether we don't get there, all that process is building professional learning community" (Comment 12).

Comment 12 suggests that a school can be measured as more or less a professional learning community (Hord, 1997a, 1997b, 2004; Stoll et al., 2006). In this regard, Principal Cyan noted that schools may exist along a continuum as a professional

learning community. Essentially, the participants viewed being as a professional learning community as a transformative process that exists along a continuum where schools move from being less to being more a professional learning community. In identifying a professional learning community as a transformative process Principal Sandstone observed, "I believe that the meaning of community or the real lessons of community comes from a transformation process" (Comment 13). Principal Bluemist explained his belief of a professional learning community as an ideal when he stated, "I think it's not static. It's maybe an ideal, like so much of the work that we do. We never really arrive [at being a professional learning community]. That's why we are still at it and it [what a professional learning community is] changes. We're on that journey" (Comment 14). The belief of a professional learning community as a process, journey or continuum was supported by five others who commented:

Principal Cyan:

I think we're on that journey to becoming a professional learning community (Comment 15).

Principal Sandstone:

I like the idea that it's a process and it's not something that you actually arrive at (Comment 16).

Principal Crystalwhite:

I think a school becomes a professional learning community when it creates its own processes to make it work instead of the principal saying well this is how we are going to do it (Comment 17).

Principal Coral:

As a professional learning community, I think we have a way to go. Individually there are people that are way ahead of others in terms of wanting that [to be a professional learning community] and then there's others who are not sure what it's all about, and not sure how they would fit in (Comment 18).

Principal Teal:

I think if things are in place and a process has taken place you do end up with a group of people who feel that they can function at a high level together. When I think of being a professional learning community I think there is a continuum (Comment 19).

These principals viewed becoming a professional learning community as "a journey" in which a school develops to become more like one (Stoll et al., 2006b). "Schools never arrive as a PLC – they simply drive the concept deeper and deeper into their culture…this is an ongoing process rather than a new program to be adopted or a project to complete" (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005, p. 233). Table 4.1, "Principals' perceptions of professional learning communities," summarizes the comments made by the participants which indicated that principals conceive of schools as professional learning communities. All of the comments found in Table 4.1 are found in pages 117-120 of this thesis.

Table 4.1 Principals' perceptions of professional learning communities

Participant's name	Striving to be as professional learning community	Professional learning community as a transformative process
Principal Crystalwhite		Comments 11 & 17
Principal Sienna	Comment 1	
Principal Dodgerblue	Comment 4	
Principal Khaki	Comment 5	
Principal Mustardseed	Comment 7	
Principal Sandstone	Comment 2	Comments 13 & 16
Principal Olivegreen	Comment 6	
Principal Kellygreen	Comment 8	
Principal Teal		Comments 10 & 19
Principal Cyan	Comment 3	Comments 12 & 15
Principal Coral		Comment 18
Principal Bluemist	Comment 9	Comment 14
Summary	Total 9 comments	Total 10 comments
	Total 9 participants	Total 6 participants

4.2.3   Summary and Connections to Related Literature

Based on the data reviewed for this research question, the presentation was organized into the following categories through data analysis, as delineated by questions posed to the participants of the focus groups and individual interviews: striving to be as professional learning community, and professional learning communities as emerging in or from a transformative process. The participants in this study reported that they conceived of a school as professional learning community, and also believed the concept existed as a multidimensional continuum whereby a school can be more or less like an ideal type. While the participants did not express what specific dimensions are included in their conceptions of professional learning communities, this conceptual understanding

is supported by authors such as Hord (1997a, 1997b, 2004) whose model involves five

dimensions, DuFour and Eaker (1998) who list six characteristics, DuFour (2005) who

outlines that professional learning communities are anchored in three "big ideas", and

Stoll et al. (2006b) who offer seven characteristics and five processes of professional

learning communities.

The principals in this study also reported that they believed that to become more

like a professional learning community a school must undergo a transformative process.

Toole and Louis (2002), and DuFour, Eaker and DuFour (2005) support the notion of a

process of transformation to become a professional learning community or to become like

one. DuFour et al. assert that the kind of substantive and lasting change embedded in the

professional learning community concept will "ultimately require a transformation of

culture – the beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and habits that constitute the norm for

the people throughout the organization" (p. 11). While collaboration that characterizes

professional learning communities is a process, DuFour (2005) notes that, "Professional

learning communities judge their effectiveness on the basis of results" (p. 39).

Specifically, the process of a professional learning community is one in which teachers

work together to critically analyze and improve their professional practice (DuFour).

"Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep

team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement" (p.

36).

The participants in this study did not comment on either a measurable product of a

school as professional learning community such as improved student achievement, or an

"in-process" measure that helps the professional learning community understand what is

going right and what is going wrong on the journey to be more like one (DuFour et al., 2005). Toole and Louis (2002) comment that there is very little systematic data about how the tensions or processes are handled within schools striving to be professional learning communities.

Stiggins (2005) suggests that accurate formative and summative assessment of student achievement results and of classroom practices should occupy prominent places in the plans and actions of any professional learning community. Apart from being a systematic process, a professional learning community is also a state in the sense that a school can be measured more or less "as a professional learning community" (Hord, 1997a, 1997b). Researchers, for example Hord (1997a, 1997b, 2004) and Stoll et al. (2006a), who have developed instruments to assess a school as professional learning community, support the notion that in-process measurement of schools striving to be as professional learning communities is important. DuFour et al. (2005, p. 20) suggest principals in conceiving of professional learning communities need to ask the question, "What evidence do we have that this initiative or this practice is helping us to become more effective in assisting all students to achieve at high levels?" DuFour et al. contend that a principal needs to be equally focused on measurable outputs and in-process features of a professional learning community as she or he is on the inputs of one. The principals in this study regarded the development of a school as a professional learning community as a process and as a multidimensional concept, but not necessarily one that is focused on student achievement.

4.3   Research Question 2

Research Question Two asked: What are the characteristics identified by

principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities? The

specific questions posed to the participants in the focus groups and individual interviews

to acquire data to answer this research question were aligned to the research question as

described in Chapter 3, Section 3.7 (also see Table 3.4).

4.3.1   *Preconditions for a Professional Learning Community*

The existence of a social design to school organizations helps shape both

teachers' attitudes and practice, and a school's social architecture can enable or facilitate

the development of a professional learning community (Toole & Louis, 2002). Kruse,

Louis and Bryk (1995, as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002) designate a set of what they term

"preconditions" that support or nurture the development of a school as a professional

learning community. They divide these preconditions into two broad areas: 1) structural

supports, and 2) human and social resources.

According to Haller and Kleine (2001, p.25), "formal organizations such as

schools have structures composed of bureaucratic expectation and roles, a hierarchy of

offices and positions, rules and regulations, and specialization." Haller and Kleine also

claim that school structures can vary widely and be either tightly or loosely-coupled. For

the purpose of this study, as it principally compared the participants' perceptions against

Toole and Louis' (2002) definition of a professional learning community, school

structural supports as preconditions for professional learning communities were viewed

as: time and places to meet and talk, school autonomy, teacher empowerment,

interconnected teacher roles, and communication (Kruse, Louis & Bryk, 1995 as cited in

Toole & Louis, 2002). Human and social resources as preconditions for professional

learning communities were viewed as: trust and respect, supportive leadership, openness

to improvement, access to expertise and socialization (Kruse, Louis & Bryk, 1995 as

cited in Toole & Louis, 2002)

4.3.1.1 Structural Supports

In the area of structural supports as preconditions of schools striving to become

professional learning communities, Kruse et al. list time and places to meet and talk,

school autonomy, teacher empowerment, interconnected teacher roles and

communication strategies. The principals who participated in this study identified the

following structural supports in their conceptions of schools as professional learning

communities: 1) time, 2) teacher empowerment, 3) interconnected teacher roles, 4) school

plans, and 5) institutional identity.

4.3.1.1.1 Time.

According to Hoy and Miskel (2001, p. 293), "A neglected factor in the study of

organizations and the assessment of their effectiveness is time". Spillane and Louis

(2002) state: "One factor that appears in all studies that look at professional community is

time to meet and talk" (p. 99, [italics in original]). It is generally understood that teacher

learning takes time and takes place over time rather than in periodic isolated moments

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). When asked about the forces or conditions which affect,

that is promote or inhibit, the functioning of a school as a professional learning

community, the participants identified time as a factor. Principal Sandstone and Principal

Teal identified the impact time has as a structural support for professional learning

communities when they simply stated, "Time. That's the biggest thing" (Comment 20)

,and "I think it's [time] a huge thing" (Comment 21). Time is considered to be of import

in professional learning communities because, as these three participants noted, time was

seen as a finite resource in schools. Principal Kellygreen noted, "Time. We don't have

enough time to work on the community building piece as much as we'd like to"

(Comment 22).

> Principal Sienna:
>
>> I think time is a huge factor. I think you have to allow for time collectively
>>
>> as a whole staff to work on projects together. You need to provide time
>>
>> within their day. It can't be added on. It has to be programmed within the
>>
>> schedule (Comment 23).
>
> Principal Green:
>
>> The one that you hear and we always hear is the time one. Time is
>>
>> obviously a force that makes meeting together difficult. I think lack of
>>
>> time is a bit of an age old problem and we struggle with that (Comment
>>
>> 24).

These principals expressed the view that to nurture and develop professional learning

communities, time is required for staff to meet and have conversations about teaching and

learning. The principals contended that if schools are to operate as professional learning

communities, there needs to be time for collaboration that is built into the school day and

school year (DuFour, 1999). Principal Olivegreen said, "If we could somehow give

people time to really explore things and to go into some depth I think the learning for

children would be improved" (Comment 25).

In addition the participants noted it takes time, long periods of time with sustained commitment by principals for schools to become professional learning communities. According to Hargreaves (2003, p. 186), "Professional learning communities exert their effects slowly, yet substantially over time." Principal Dodgerblue reported, "What helps me to develop community is knowing the staff really well and having the same staff. If we constantly had new staff members, I would have to spend more time devoted to them particularly. I wouldn't have as much time to spend in all the classrooms. So that [length of time of teachers' and principal's tenure] certainly helps" (Comment 26).

In addressing the significance that longevity plays in principal and teacher relationships in the creation of a professional learning community, Principal Crystalwhite noted, "It takes years to get them used to you and understanding and knowing you so that you can build trust with the community" (Comment 27). Five other participants reported similar points of view. Principal Khaki stated, "I think [the lack of] time and coming together for those types of things [such as collaboration] are a little bit of an obstacle" (Comment 28).

Principal Mustardseed noted, "The one thing that inhibits me is time. I feel guilty that I don't have enough time to spend developing this professional community the way I'd like" (Comment 29).

Principal Coral:

> What helps is the professional development time that we have spent together as a staff. What has helped us become connected is time together as a whole staff as opposed to a number of fragmented units within the school (Comment 30).

Principal Cyan:

> Because this job is so all-encompassing it can take over our lives. In order
>
> to move this idea [a professional learning community] continually
>
> forward, it not only takes the six hours that you are at school and the two
>
> hours outside of that for planning then another hour on top of that
>
> (Comment 31).

Principal Bluemist noted that due to of a shortage of people willing to become

principals and the practice of school divisions rotating principals from one school to

another, a principal's ability to build a professional learning community was limited:

> As we have administrator shortages it's harder to deal with [building
>
> professional learning communities]. We need to leave them [principals] in
>
> the building because it comes back to community, relationships, rapport
>
> and trust (Comment 32).

The participants comments confirms the literature which indicates the

significance of time as a structural precondition for schools to become professional

learning communities

4.3.1.1.2 Teacher Empowerment.

The principals commented that among the supportive conditions that allow

professional learning communities to function productively is teacher empowerment

(Louis & Kruse, 1995). Teacher empowerment is viewed as a form of shared and

collegial leadership in schools, where staff grow professionally and learn to view

themselves as, "playing on the same team and working toward the same goal: a better

school" (Hoerr, 1996, p. 381). Principal Crystalwhite noted, "What I see in professional

learning communities is empowering all the people that are part of it. What you want is shared leadership" (Comment 33). This belief was supported by Principal Sandstone who stated, "A huge part of that [building professional learning communities] is to try and empower teachers as much as possible. Somebody once said the purpose of leadership is to make heroes out of the people that you work with" (Comment 34). Principal Mustardseed added, "Have teachers solve problems of practice themselves. Empower them and say you can take a look at this problem" (Comment 35).

These principals believed that teacher empowerment provided a stronger teacher voice and lead to a level of shared leadership throughout the school. Empowerment they hoped would foster the creative forces and tap into the intellectual power of teachers to improve learning conditions and classrooms (Spillane & Louis, 2002; Crow et al., 2002). The following observations by five participants note the significance teacher empowerment played in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities. Principal Bluemist noted, "There are a number of really good ideas that come from the staff and not just the administrator's agenda. They've happened [the good ideas] and they're there, and they're really visible" (Comment 36). Principal Kellygreen remarked, "When you actually give it [power] to them to make a decision, they are taken aback. They don't know how to make decisions. They haven't been empowered that way before" (Comment 37). Additionally, Principal Coral observed:

> It goes back to the fact that it's your responsibility to ensure that the
>
> school grows in curriculum and in the area of meeting the needs of the
>
> community. It's the ideas and thoughts of one person as opposed to the
>
> ideas and thoughts of many. In the case of a bad idea that you came up

with alone, I guess the fallout would come back to you. There would be a

lack of support because you really didn't develop a team approach to deal

with issues (Comment 38).

Principal Mustardseed:

To add to what Principal Coral said, I think leadership is about

empowering all the leaders in our schools. There are many people who are

very good at what they do. This is a way to get them to buy into a shared

vision of the school and that is what professional learning community is

about (Comment 39).

Referring to a specific example Principal Olivegreen stated:

A year and a half ago we went to a model where teachers took on one of

the goal areas [from the school plan] and that was kind of their area to

concentrate on. That really worked well in that it made them feel like they

were taking ownership for a certain area and planning for it and making it

seem real from a day-to-day perspective in the school (Comment 40).

The principals' perceptions of the role that teacher empowerment plays in the

development of a professional learning community confirms what Toole and Louis

(2002) suggest is a important structural support of a school's professional learning

community.

4.3.1.1.3 Interconnected teacher roles

The principals noted that if schools are to be professional learning communities

there is a need to encourage and establish interdependent teacher roles through strategies

such as teaming, co-teaching or peer coaching (Spillane & Louis, 2002). Principal Sienna

said, "I think you need to provide time for small groups, the grade groups or, the teams; however you configure it, whether it's departments or teams or whatever" (Comment 41). Principal Olivegreen noted, "Well collectively we do have the grade level partners and they do planning together. We do have the early years' and middle years' teams. So those kinds of joint planning things happen" (Comment 42).

These principals indicated that as an organizing strategy for instruction, interconnected teacher roles enables teachers to collaborate and share their knowledge and to create stronger relationships amongst themselves and in some cases their students (Jackson & Davis, 2000). In a professional learning community, typically these strategies work by focusing "on immediate teaching decisions and responsibilities that encourage reflection and collaboration" (p. 99). Principal Sandstone noted, "We have an early years' and a middle years' team. They voluntarily meet on times chosen by the staff. That's initiated by teachers" (Comment 43). Principal Crystalwhite stated,

> Because we're small – it happens sometimes that they team up because of
> issues. We might not have those big discussions at a staff meeting but on
> the other hand the teachers work well across grades as teams. I think it's
> more through working together and discussing how they are going to get
> the grade eights and ones working together in the lab and that kind of
> thing in which you bring the change and the learning as professionals
> (Comment 44).

Additional related comments about interconnected teacher roles included: Principal Bluemist who noted, "The more I know about one person or another, the more I can put them together in a teaming situation" (Comment 45). Principal Coral who observed,

"The grade 7/8 math teacher and the two grade 6 teachers are working on the best way to transfer information about students and working on how to collectively address some skill areas that appear to be an area of weakness as students transition form one grade level to the next (Comment 46).

4.3.1.1.4 School Plans

Eaker, DuFour & Brunette (1998) contend that if schools are to become professional learning communities a key element will be found in the processes and production of a school plan. In Manitoba, individual school plans are viewed as a means of increasing school effectiveness in promoting student success and while the exact content of a school plan is not prescribed, there is an expectation by Manitoba Education that a school's priorities will be linked to the divisional priorities and also linked to the six priorities for all Manitoba schools (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2002). As Principal Teal commented, "I can't live without a school plan, a great school plan. For me the school plan is what we're about. It is about where we are going and how we plan to get somewhere" (Comment 47). A school improvement plan focuses on a few specific priorities that can have a significant impact on learning (Earl & Lee, 1998).

Principal Sienna stated,

> I do feel it's a matter of focus which happens if you have a group of people who have common goals, who have worked on those goals together via strategic planning. If everyone buys into those goals then everyone is working towards them and that's when you see improvement in your school (Comment 48).

Principal Bluemist added, "A school plan is the end piece of paper and it's really handy to focus your efforts in that year that you start on those plans" (Comment 49)"

Principal Olivegreen noted,

> I would say the school plan tends to force that [collaboration] a little bit for people because I think without one teachers tend to focus more on what is happening in their classroom than they do what is happening in the whole school (Comment 50).

The participants indicated that their school or strategic plan focused school-wide improvement efforts and helped with the development of the school's professional learning community. For example, Principal Teal viewed the school plan as means of providing evidence of the effects of the school's professional learning community. She commented,

> That's where a school plan comes into place because if you are not using data then you can be professional learning community all you want to be. But, if you aren't using data as evidence to whether or not you are making an impact on students learning, then you sit around going "good-job, good-job" and there is no evidence that anything has changed (Comment 51).

Principal Mustardseed regarded her school plan as a means of developing shared ownership for the school's priorities. She said,

> I've told the staff that they would become an integral part of school improvement and school planning, because those two are connected. I have to admit that the school plan has been written for many years by one

or two people, and because our staff here has not been involved in the

school plan when I first said everyone would be involved there was a little

bit of, "Well why do we have to do that, that's your job isn't it?" I said,

"No, it's not. This is our job and we're going to do this together"

(Comment 52).

School planning by a school staff operating as a professional learning community

builds a sense of common purpose among staff as they engage in processes intended to

change school practices to improve student outcomes (Eaker et al, 1998). These two

participants believed their school plans brought some cohesiveness to staff efforts:

Principal Dodgerblue stated, "With our school plan I think that that's where we try to get

collective endeavours" (Comment 53). Principal Khaki remarked. "There are the

priorities of the school plan which is the focus of what we're working on at the time.

With a plan you just get one thing done with one priority and then you move on to

another" (Comment 54).

4.3.1.1.5 Institutional identity

Among the most important aspects of a professional learning community are

shared values and vision of staff which creates a sense of identity (DuFour & Eaker,

1998; Hord, 1997a, 1997b). Hoy and Miskel state (2001), "All institutions are

frameworks of programs and rules establishing identities and activity schemes for such

identities" (p. 270). Using Hutch and Schultz's (1997) general description of

organizational identity, institutional identity is understood to be the teachers' and

principal's collective, commonly-shared understandings of a school's distinctive values

and characteristics. Principal Khaki said, "If you are a community that has an identity

then your identity helps form who you are as a community. Everything else is going to flow from that identity" (Comment 55).

The principals who participated in this study identified institutional identity as one factor in establishing a professional learning community. As Principal Mustardseed articulated, "When I think of this phrase 'professional learning community' and I guess because I come from an independent Catholic school, it goes back to who are we? It goes back to our identity and why are we here" (Comment 56)? Principal Olivegreen added, "Part of who we are is that we are a French Immersion school" (Comment 57). In addition Principal Sienna commented on the role institutional identity plays by stating,

> The International Baccalaureate program has a focus of creating essential agreements that pretty well everyone decides that they need to have as a part of their program. So there isn't choice. There may be choice in how you do it but you must agree to do this. I think that leads to a very cohesive group (Comment 58).

By emphasizing the institutional identity of the school as being a force that assists the school's development as a professional learning community, these principals noted that their staffs' active participation in social communities, including work, not only shapes what they do but who they are and how they interpret what they do (Wenger, 1998). As Wenger notes, "Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the societal and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of other" (p. 145). Additionally, the following participants reported that institutional identity

is part of the architecture of their conceptions of their schools as professional learning communities:

Principal Coral:

I think it provides an identity. We are a Catholic school staff. There are a lot of things that are implied by that. We have similar beliefs in our spiritual lives. We're allowed to celebrate those openly, which I think is something that probably enhances our sense of community (Comment 59).

Principal Cyan:

I think the identity of this school as a Catholic school is important. We are trying to be a progressive school in terms of where we're going academically and also be a school that tries to live a social contract with the students. This is very much around the idea of building good relationships, problem solving, and strengthening students as learners and as individuals (Comment 60).

Principal Dodgerblue:

In a Catholic school, I know our Christian and spiritual growth needs to be there as part of who we are (Comment 61).

Table 4.2, "Principals' perceptions of structural supports as precondition of professional learning communities," summarizes the comments made by the participants which indicated that principals perceive structural supports of professional learning communities to be important to their creation and viability. By and large, the principals who participated in this study agree that some structure is needed to facilitate the development of a professional learning community and that the structures include these

five elements: time, teacher empowerment, interconnected teacher roles, school plans,

and institutional identity. Of the structural supports that Toole and Louis (2002) suggest

are preconditions for professional learning communities, the study's participants did not

comment on school autonomy or communication structures as necessary preconditions.

All of the comments found in Table 4.2 are found in pages 125 to 137 of this thesis.

Table 4.2 Principals' perceptions of structural supports of professional learning

communities

Participant's name	Time	Teacher Empowerment	Inter-connected teacher roles	School plans	Institutional identity
Principal Crystalwhite	Comment 27	Comment 33	Comment 44		
Principal Sienna	Comment 23		Comment 41	Comment 48	Comment 58
Principal Dodgerblue	Comment 26			Comment 53	Comment 61
Principal Khaki	Comment 28			Comment 54	Comment 55
Principal Mustardseed	Comment 29	Comments 35 & 39		Comment 52	Comment 56
Principal Sandstone	Comment 20	Comment 34	Comment 43		
Principal Olivegreen	Comments 24 & 25	Comment 40	Comment 42	Comment 50	Comment 57
Principal Kellygreen	Comment 22	Comment 37			
Principal Teal	Comment 21			Comments 47 & 51	
Principal Cyan	Comment 31				Comment 60
Principal Coral	Comment 30	Comment 38	Comment 45		Comment 59
Principal Bluemist	Comment 32	Comment 36	Comment 46	Comment 49	
Summary	13 Comments	8 Comments	6 Comments	8 Comments	7 Comments
	12 Participants	7 Participants	6 Participants	7 Participants	7 Participants

4.3.1.2 Human and Social Resources

In the second broad area of preconditions for the development of a school's as a

professional learning community, human and social resources, Kruse et al. (1995, as cited

by Toole & Louis, 2002) list 1) trust and respect, 2) supportive leadership, 3) openness to

improvement, 4) access to expertise, and 5) socialization. The principals who participated

in this study identified only: trust and respect, and supportive principal leadership as human and social resource preconditions for schools striving to become professional learning communities.

4.3.1.2.1 Trust and Respect amongst Staff

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) assert that faculty trust may well be the foundation of school effectiveness. This statement reflects the sentiment that the adult relationships which occur in schools are the basis of school improvement (Barth, 1990). As Tschannen-Moran (2004) states,

> Professional learning communities are based on trust that teachers and principals will act with the best interests of students in mind by researching best practices and pursuing data to bolster decision making (Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996; Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Louis et al., 1996) (p. 107-108).

The principals referred to the impact that trust and respect amongst the staff has on developing a school's professional learning community. Principal Bluemist commented, "It comes back to community, relationships, rapport and trust, all that kind of interaction" (Comment 62). In addition Principal Teal stated,

> I think it was years ago when I first started learning about professional learning communities. I wanted to have this as a functioning group within any school that I was in. The amount of work that it took was enormous to get us to the place where our norms were established and the trust was built and that we could actually have conversations that were extremely important. We began to have conversations about changing our practice, and improving student learning (Comment 63).

These principals believed that trust and respect amongst faculty acts a foundation on which collaboration, reflective dialogue, collective efficacy, and deprivatization can occur (Spillane & Louis, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Principal Crystalwhite reported,

> I don't think that we can get people to change unless they feel that there is trust and that it's safe to change. That's why you have to have this community feeling that we're all in it together. If you have this culture of trust that encourages change, then you will see progress (Comment 64).

In addition Principal Cyan commented on the effort required to establish trust with and amongst staff:

> It takes that enormous amount of energy to kind of extend yourself for this group to say who they are and what does learning mean to us and how are you going to become a group of people who can move forward together with any kind of trust (Comment 65).

Principal Kellygreen viewed trust as the foundation for professionalism found in professional learning communities when she noted,

> You know there's professionalism and there's a professional learning community. Going back to what I said earlier that's why trust came out for me. Teachers need to feel comfortable so that other teachers can come into their room and perhaps help them to grow and to develop. It is in my experience for many, very threatening. It's not something that they're used to or they feel comfortable with (Comment 66).

For Principal Khaki the key to developing community was to be found in trust. She commented,

> I think in a professional learning community, the word community is paramount. We're stronger together and the teaching is better if trust is there. With trust I am going to grow along with others and then marvelous things can happen (Comment 67).

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) write, "Trust allows individuals to focus on the task at hand, and therefore, to work and learn more effectively. Productive relationships build effective schools." (p. 341) These principals noted nurturing the kinds of relationships between teachers that leads to the types of teacher behaviours and dispositions required to develop schools as professional learning communities is difficult. The significance of trust as a supporting condition for school improvement is supported by Principal Sienna who observed,

> School initiatives can be implemented collectively and individually within your school when they become a focus. It becomes, "How you are stepping out of your comfort zone? How do you want to move forward?" It's often through professional development and the buying-in of your staff to an idea, which goes back to the trust (Comment 68).

Similarly, Principal Coral commented during one of the focus group sessions,

> Going back to the point of Principal Kellygreen and others have made about trust, it got me thinking about professional learning communities and the experience that I have gone through. There are other skills that need to go in to a professional learning community and one is caring. I

think that trust is the foundation… I think that we can't jump into

professional development until people have had the opportunity to develop

the trust and caring for each other as human beings. Then I think

collaboration will come about because there is no longer that sort of

wondering, "Well what's this person all about?" (Comment 69).

Principal Dodgerblue noted that trust is the foundation for the kind of teacher

collaboration required to be as a professional learning community,

I think that's where you would have to go to the next step. This would be

collaboration and talking together as a staff and people having enough

trust and willingness to speak in a group about their own personal growth

and where they see that there's room for improvement and where others

can maybe work together if someone is strong in a particular area, and

how can they then work together in the future (Comment 71).

Finally, Principal Mustardseed described why a lack of trust can be a limiting

factor for a school trying to become a professional learning community when she

suggested,

There's a fear of putting things on the table. So to say to our professional

community, "This is our school and we need to work together but we need

to also build trust," is a huge step, because I don't think that language has

been used. I think the lack of trust is the inhibitor to a professional

learning community, but I think gaining trust is like gaining wings.

(Comment 70)

4.3.1.2.2 Supportive Principal Leadership.

Toole and Louis (2002) contend that numerous studies have demonstrated that educational leaders occupy a central position in focusing professional learning communities on the "what matters" of schooling. Sergiovanni (1994) asserts the leader plants the seeds of community, nurtures fledgling community, and protects the community once it emerges. "They lead by following. They lead by serving. They lead by inviting others to share in the burdens of leadership" (Sergiovanni, p. xix).

The study's participants commented that principals help schools become professional learning communities by supporting the performance of teachers (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). As DuFour and Eaker (1998) argue, "Strong principals are crucial to the creation of learning communities" (p. 183). Yet, not all of the principals were consistent in how they perceived their leadership was supportive of their schools' professional learning communities. In the context of a school as a professional learning community, "the image of how a strong principal operates needs to be reconsidered" (DuFour & Eaker, p.183).

4.3.1.2.3 Supportive Principal Leadership: Connectedness to Staff

The principals in this study noted that they occupy essential places in communities of professional learners (Barth, 1990). This view was expressed by Principal Cyan, who offered,

> I think that is what we do as educators or as principals. The fundamental element of our job is to create professional learning communities. It becomes our job from the time we begin at the position until the time we leave it. Hopefully we can move it [the idea of a professional learning community] to a level where we can have that kind of set of norms or

sense of what we're about and then decide that now we really want to try

and move ahead and bring that into fruition (Comment 72).

Crow et al. (2002) suggest the principal's role as facilitator of a professional

learning community is clear. The quality of teaching, learning, and relationships in a

professional learning community depend in large measure on the quality of leadership

provided by the principal (Sparks, 2005). Principal Mustardseed reported that it was

important for a principal to be connected to staff, "My community includes me. I want to

be included in that as an administrator but that's hard to do sometimes. It's a fine dance"

(Comment 73). While some viewed themselves as being central in their schools'

emerging professional learning community, other participants saw themselves as

belonging to a circle that forms the schools' professional learning community.

Principal Cyan noted,

> I think that I would be probably, without sounding egocentric, at the
>
> centre. I'm at the centre of the school's professional learning community.
>
> Some people might prefer that I wasn't. It's my desire as an educator to
>
> be at the centre. Not that I'm the centre of attention but I am the centre
>
> and the driving force (Comment 74).

Principal Sienna offered a different view,

> I wouldn't want to say I'm in the centre. I don't see that. I see myself sort
>
> of within the group but also at times away from the group. I think you
>
> have to be able to do that. I think there are certain times and certain
>
> initiatives where you do need to get in there, in the thick of things and
>
> work with people and be really very much a part of them. But, then there

are other times where unfortunately you have to make more difficult

decisions and you need to step away from the group (Comment 75).

Similarly, Principal Sandstone noted,

> Well I know ideally I shouldn't be at the centre. I think you have to put
>
> yourself within each of those boundary lines. I think of the focus of what
>
> we're about, which is the kids then I have to be on that line. I've got my
>
> staff and I've got to be on that line. I've got the parents and I've got to be
>
> seen walking with them. You can't be the centre point around which all
>
> that revolves. I don't think that's appropriate. You have to be revolving
>
> throughout with people (Comment 76).

Principal Bluemist believed that his role in the community needed to be flexible

and dynamic. He said,

> My first mental image as you were describing [my position in the school's
>
> professional learning community] that came to me is a fish in an aquarium
>
> in a doctor's office. At various levels and at various times and it's moving
>
> left to right and right to left, so there's really no consistency. I don't really
>
> see a consistent place in there for me (Comment 77).

While still being connected, Principal Crystalwhite viewed herself as being

positioned toward the periphery of the school's professional learning community. She

reported,

> I am on the edge. I don't think I'm in the middle of the school's
>
> professional learning community because we're not centralized. Though
>
> if you ask my staff I'm pretty sure they would say that I'm the boss

[laugh]. I'm on the line because I push and I influence and I discuss but, I'd like to think that I'm in the middle. Ideally I'd like it to be more like a spider-web with all the webs attached to make sure everybody's connected (Comment 78).

Regardless of the precise position where the participants viewed themselves within the school's professional learning community, they remarked that principals need to stay connected with the faculty, interact, and exchange information because when a principal and staff are connected the staff feels empowered and is more likely to commit to school-wide goal attainment (Green, 2005). Principal Khaki noted that staff looks for the principal to maintain organizational stability. She commented that staff look to her as principal to offer, "Cohesion, they're looking for us to bring some stability and build some cohesion and calmness. Whatever is needed in that day. We do have perspective as we do our rounds and I think staff is looking for that" (Comment 79). Principal Coral added,

I guess to some extent I bring the glue that connects and helps to keep the connections within the staff. Those connections can quickly deteriorate quickly because staff is busy and they have little time. It's our responsibility [as principals] to keep those connections healthy (Comment 80).

Principal Sandstone commented that a central role of the principal in a professional learning community is to provide connections amongst staff, "In my work here I spend a lot of time working with people and building bridges" (Comment 81).

Principal Kellygreen regarded her role as being connected to staff and connected to the

school's broader vision,

> [My role as principal in a professional learning community is to have] an
>
> awareness of how we are collectively and individually moving towards
>
> our goals. If we're not, then to check out why we're not getting to where
>
> we need to go. I am looking at whether it's individual or if it's larger than
>
> that, and how I can get us to move there. Asking how can I help staff with
>
> being professional and also to be student-focused (Comment 82)?

Finally, participants mentioned that principals play a key role in developing and

nurturing the normative cultures that reinforce the practices of professional learning

communities (Bryk et al., 1999). As Principal Bluemist said, "Norms get set in lots of

way. Principals have a massive influence on that, whether they like it or. A nod from

them can wreck a conversation or improve it. We try to avoid it but it happens"

(Comment 83).

As Principal Olivegreen added,

> I think the one advantage we have as school leaders is that we see the big
>
> picture for the school and maybe a little bit more, like what is happening
>
> divisionally and provincially. We can bring that to the teachers who are
>
> expected to be much more focused. I think that is the role we have to play.
>
> (Comment 84)

4.3.1.2.4 Supportive Principal Leadership: Staff Trust.

When asked about the factors that favour or limit their involvement in developing

their schools as professional learning communities, the principals expressed their beliefs

that trust relationships between themselves and their respective staffs had an impact on their ability to nurture their schools as professional learning communities. Principal Cyan remarked, "You've got to have that trust first" (Comment 85). Principal Crystalwhite supported this and stated "You need to build their trust" (Comment 86). Principal Sandstone added, "It's taken a little bit of time to create a climate of trust" (Comment 87).

According to Tschannen-Moran (2004) principals need to nurture trust relationships with teachers "because although governance structures such as collaborative decision making and site based management can bring the insights of more people to solving the complex problems of schooling, they depend on trust (Hoy & Tarter, 2003; Smylie & Hart, 1999)" (p. 173). Principal Sienna noted, "Within a workplace you have to build trust" (Comment 88).

Participants expressed the belief that trust between the staff and principal is a critical factor in schools developing as professional learning communities. Principal Mustardseed commented,

> I'm going to tell you what inhibits us because I've been living it for four
> years. It's lack of trust. It's a huge word. They wonder, "Why is
> administration doing this?" To me that is a roadblock. It continues to be a
> barrier because I really believe a lack of trust creates walls and not bridges
> (Comment 89).

The principals noted that in a culture of trust, staff looks to the principal to see if she or he is consistent in words, actions, and deeds (Ciancutti & Stedding, 2001). Principal Bluemist explained how fragile trust can be, when he suggested,

Although we learn management and leadership you soon realize that you

can blow all that in a heartbeat and on a very small thing. I'm more

experienced now than when I was first an administrator, so I'm coming to

have some comfort level by building capital, social capital and trust capital

with staff. As you build it then you can cash it in every now and then. It

allows you to jump into a more difficult or uncomfortable conversation

and feel that you've got a little bit of leeway there. (Comment 90)

In addition Principal Bluemist commented,

I guess it's whatever it takes to keep that trust thing going. They even will

ask for me to show my cards and I use a framework for them and they're

liking that. Things are negotiable or not negotiable and the sooner we're

clear on that and we know that the better. I tell them, "Look, I'll be up

front. Keep talking about it with me, but don't waste too much time

because it really is in my non-negotiable pile, so you see how much time

you want to spend with me on it. But we're probably not going to change

that, and this is why". I do it in a facetious way, but at least it clears the

air and we don't waste any time on it or argue over it or they don't get set

up. That's again all about the trust piece (Comment 91).

Trust and respect are developed with staff when they perceive there are no gaps

between what the principals says and does (Ciancutti & Stedding, 2001). Principal

Mustardseed articulated that trust is based on authenticity when she noted she finds

herself telling staff,

"What you see here is what you get. There's nothing suspicious or underhanded or conniving. We are in this together. This is our school". I mean I use that language all the time. It's an inclusive language. "This is our school. I need you. We need each other – that interdependence to move forward and I need you to trust me because I trust you" (Comment 92).

Principal Olivegreen commented that trust between the staff and principals is built incrementally as she observed,

I think trust is built on a daily interaction. Every day you have to be a consistent person. You have got to be there for them. You have got to respond in a very consistent way, meaning that you are not volatile in your emotional responses. I think that is how you build trust. It is a hands-on every day meeting with people kind of experience and that build trust (Comment 93).

Principal Olivegreen stated on a separate occasion,

Trust is a very interesting thing. Trust is extremely important and I think with time and being in a place, people begin to trust you more as a colleague and as an administrator. We all know that trust can be lost very easily as well though. It is one of those things where trust is built with experiences where the person does things that make you feel like you can have confidence in them (Comment 94).

It is essential that school leaders develop the trust necessary for teachers to follow and support their efforts. Principal Bluemist claimed,

I've earned their trust in some ways. I feel I have a pretty good trust with

them. I tested it not too long ago and had a difficult situation that turned

out to be a right thinking idea on my part, thank goodness. I scored points

in the end, but I was not the popular guy for a while. They trusted me,

they hung in there with me and it worked out all right (Comment 95).

Principal Sienna observed that in developing trusting relationships between

teachers and a principal there is a requirement for vigilance over relational boundaries,

You have to be able to step back from the relationships that you have

individually with people in order to make good decisions that impact the

entire staff or a group of staff. It is hard at times (Comment 96).

In addition Principal Kellygreen reported that with trust there is an openness with

teachers. She reported, "Trust and communication are necessary because if staff feels

there is a hidden agenda well then you have problems. There needs to be an openness of

communication" (Comment 97). Building and sustaining one-to-one relationships with

teachers via communicative and supportive behaviors is the overarching trust-promoting

behavior of the principal (Gimbel, 2003).

4.3.1.2.5 Supportive Principal Leadership: Engaging Staff in Reflective

Conversations.

The principals in this study believed that a condition for nurturing their schools as

professional learning communities was their ability to engage staff in reflective

conversations about teaching and learning. Principal Teal stated,

I don't care what the past looks like, I mean I do. I know I have to but I

am not looking to blame. I'm not looking for anything other than, "Okay

so we know this is where they are, how do we get to the next place"? Just

like pack our baggage, pack our defenses, stop worrying about what was

happening and let's start moving forward (Comment 98).

Principal Bluemist commented,

In our role as principal, we get to walk around the building all day and we

can connect the conversations that teacher A had with you and connect it

to teacher B when you are talking to them the next day and say, "Oh well

Jane's really interested in this." You get to make those kinds of

connections because the poor teachers don't have the meeting time or

conversation time that we get. You get to connect those conversations and

maybe foster them in the rest of the staff. You can have a lot of influence

on how it all goes (Comment 99).

Principal Olivegreen remarked, "I think there is a comfortable relationship where

they feel that they can come and talk with me about issues that are important and that I

will hear them and reflect on their concerns and get back to them" (Comment 100).

Principal Mustardseed noted, "I think I'm a good listener. It's hard to listen sometimes

but you've got to listen with an open heart. I listen for intent. I'm a careful listener"

(Comment 101). In addition Principal Kellygreen commented,

What keeps it at a good level is that the office door is always open.

There's listening, a lot of talking, a lot of communication and a lot of

individual reassurances that, "Yes you are on the right track" (Comment

102).

These principals believed that among their professional responsibilities is the expectation that they will nurture and develop learning communities that build the professional capacity of all teachers (Shields, 2003). Sheppard (1996) contends there is a positive relationship between principals' instructional leadership behaviours and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and innovation. "If schools are to be effective ones, it will be because of the instructional leadership of the principal" (Findley & Findley, 1992, p. 102).

These participants felt the principal is a central figure in descriptions of instructional leadership because the principal is described as possessing knowledge and skill in curriculum and instructional matters so that teachers perceive that their interaction with the principal will lead to improved practice (Crow et al., 2002; Smith & Andrews, 1989).   According to Young and Levin (2002), "Under the instructional leadership approach, principals spend much more time in classrooms, learning about what teachers are doing, and discussing educational issues with them" (p. 201). Principal Crystalwhite believed that a principal's ability to engage in reflective dialogue is based on the premise of her ability to provide assistance and guidance to teachers. Principal Crystalwhite reported,

> It's a dialogue between two professionals and because I have twenty years
>
> experience and perhaps the teacher has one and sees me as a leader, then I
>
> can offer suggestions and they are usually happy to receive them. I don't
>
> force my ideas on them. I just make them reflect and I say, "Well, from
>
> your comments, what is it that you want to work on from now until June

and how can I help you?" I help them prioritize and so they can put a plan

in place to succeed (Comment 103).

As these principals noted, this kind of connection that provides for collaboration

between a principal and teachers is grounded in reflective conversations. It is these

conversations that create the ties that bond them together to a shared set of ideas and

creates a community (Griffin, 1983).   As Principal Cyan stated,

I think that a professional learning community comes about because of

who the principal is. That's not to say that I'm central on every level. I

could use various words; if I'm not driving it, cultivating it or encouraging

it, it's not going to happen because there's too much demand on the

individual teacher in a classroom. It may happen in pockets. People will

connect as they naturally do, as there are natural connections in this

school. But as a group it's only going to happen if someone has that vision

and is saying, "We need to do this. How are we going to do this? What

can you contribute?" In general I would say that I certainly spend a lot of

time in dialogue with staff. (Comment 104)

Table 4.3, "Principals' perceptions of human and social resources of professional

learning communities," summarizes the comments made by the participants which

indicated principals' conceptions of the human and social resource preconditions of

schools' professional learning communities. All of the comments found in Table 4.3 are

found in pages 139 to 154 of this thesis.

The principals who participated in this study agreed that some human and social

resources are needed as preconditions to nurture a school to become a professional

learning community and indicated that the human and social resources included these

four elements: trust and respect amongst staff, principal's connectedness to staff, staff's

trust of principal, and principals as engaging staff in reflective conversations.

Table 4.3 Principals' perceptions of human and social resources of professional learning

communities

Participant's name	Trust and respect amongst staff	Supportive principal leadership		
		Connectedness to staff	Staff trust	Engaging staff in reflective conversations
Principal Crystalwhite	Comment 64	Comment 78	Comment 86	Comment 104
Principal Sienna	Comment 68	Comment 75	Comment 96	
Principal Dodgerblue	Comment 71		Comment 88	
Principal Khaki	Comment 67	Comment 79		
Principal Mustardseed	Comment 70	Comments 73 & 74	Comments 89 & 92	Comment 101
Principal Sandstone		Comments 76 & 81	Comments 87	
Principal Olivegreen		Comment 84	Comment 93 & 94	Comment 100
Principal Kellygreen	Comment 66	Comment 82	Comment 97	Comment 102
Principal Teal	Comment 63			Comment 98
Principal Cyan	Comment 65	Comment 72	Comments 85	Comment 103
Principal Coral	Comment 69	Comment 80		
Principal Bluemist	Comment 62	Comments 77 & 83	Comments 90, 91 & 95	Comment 99
Summary	10 Comments	13 Comments	13 Comments	7 Comments
	10 Participants	10 Participants	9 Participants	7 Participants

4.3.2   *Characteristics of Schools as Professional Learning Communities*

Even without a precise definition of a professional learning community, an understanding of the human relations that might exist in schools is significant to any understanding of the types of behaviours that must occur if a school is to become a professional learning community (Spillane & Louis, 2002). The term professional learning community signifies an interest not only in discrete acts of teacher sharing, but in the establishment of a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, continuous, and focused on critically examining practice to improve student achievement (Spillane & Louis, 2002). Toole and Louis (2002) claim a school as professional learning community is composed of three interdependent elements: a school culture that emphasizes professionalism that is client oriented and knowledge-based; one that emphasizes learning, placing high value on teacher and principal inquiry and reflection; and one that is communitarian, emphasizing personal connections.

The participants in this study noted the relevance of each of the three elements in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities, and commented on the tensions they felt existed between their thinking about each of the interdependent elements - professional, learning and community – and the reality of what each is in practice.

4.3.2.1 Ties amongst Teachers

The participants commented on the significance that personal connections between staff play in schools operating as professional learning communities. Whereas trust and respect amongst staff have been described as organizational properties whose fundamental elements are socially defined in the mutual exchanges among the

participants of a school community, ties amongst teachers is a more general notion that is anchored in the simple social interactions that occur between teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). A few of the principals noted that the connections between teachers, while somewhat personal and social, tended to be more work oriented. Principal Cyan reported,

> I think that overall there's a fairly healthy dynamic amongst the staff. People generally like to be here and like to work together and that we're in the process of trying to understand what it means to be in this together happily (Comment 105).

Principal Bluemist talked about the nature of the social connections between staff, "Socially – lots of them seem to be making good social contact on their own. They're friends and some of the spend weekend time informally" (Comment 106). In some regard the principals reflected an understanding of community that is somewhat pragmatic and transitory where what is shared amongst staff tends to be of narrow interest (Furman & Starratt, 2002).

Principal Kellygreen noted,

> In some sense they are a community. They will pull together for each other. If a certain event is happening in the school they may bitch and complain but they do help each other out. We all work together towards certain outcomes. In some instances I'd say we are not being a community in the sense because they are very individualistic when they step into their classrooms (Comment 107).

The participants in the study indicated that the kind of disagreement and disequilibrium that Toole and Louis (2002) contend are positive qualities of strong professional learning communities are not regarded necessarily as constructive features in their conceptions of community. This is reflected in Principal Green's statement,

> Every school usually has a couple of people who are not necessarily good community members and that does exist here. With those people you have to maybe work a little bit differently. You know that there are some people that relate better with each other. I mean that exists within any staff. I think what's not evident here is a clique sort of situation where some people are together and others are left out. There is a sense of "We all work together". That said, there are some people who get along better than others (Comment 108).

Also Principal Mustardseed commented,

> Of course teachers are very territorial. I think they become very territorial and want to promote their program within the school. It's not always pretty but sometimes things have to be said and after that we move on. Are we a community? I think we're a community, well sort of a community of professionals (Comment 109).

In their conceptions of community, ones that resemble what Little (1990) labels as "weak ties", the participants remarked that to a degree teachers share some ideas about teaching, learning and students but this is done without holding up those ideas to be collective critical examination. Principal Teal noted that the application of the metaphor

of community to a school can also be problematic in terms of a school being a closed

community that seeks to protect what might be questionable practices. She said,

> What connects them is that they believe they're really great teachers. They
>
> say they've been told they are great teachers. This group has been told
>
> they're great. The students have been told they're great. the teachers
>
> believe their practice is "a-okay". I have never encountered a school in
>
> which this kind of belief system exists and where there is absolutely no
>
> reason or desire to improve (Comment 110).

Some principals believed that the connections amongst the staffs in their schools

resemble the kinds of bonds that occur in families. Sergiovanni (1992, p. 47) observes

that, "the idea of a school learning community suggests a kind of connectedness among

members that resembles what is found in family, a neighborhood, or some other closely

knit group, where bonds tend to be familial or even sacred". Principal Khaki reported, "A

lot of people have been here a long time and we consider each other like family. There's

a close bond" (Comment 111). Additionally, Principal Crystalwhite said, "We're like

family. Because we're small, it's very much like family. There are no cliques. There are

no subgroups" (Comment 112). Principal Sienna noted, "We have very much a family

atmosphere within our school and the teachers are a very big part of that" (Comment

113). Finally, Principal Dodgerblue commented that in conceptions of community that

resemble family there can be tensions,

> Sometimes rather than a community it's almost like a family. I think
>
> about that because in a family not everybody gets along at the same time.
>
> But, like family you'll do anything for those people. I think we've got a

strong community, but there are still things to work on because of the

family closeness (Comment 114).

4.3.2.2 Collaboration in Community

In presenting a description of how a professional learning community develops in

schools, McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) argue they develop through joint work on

instruction. Additionally, the environment of a professional learning community is

collaborative (DuFour, 2005). Collaboration becomes both a means and an end of schools

operating as professional learning communities (Hord, 1997a; 1997b; 2004). DuFour,

Eaker and DuFour (2005) add that a major idea embedded in the professional learning

community concept is that, "educators cannot help all students learn at high levels unless

they work together collaboratively" (p. 16).

When asked if collaboration amongst staff was easy or difficult and then asked to

provide examples of staff collaboration or staff commitment to collective endeavours, a

number of principals commented that collaboration was easy and then provided examples

of collaboration that might best be described as non-instructional. Some sample responses

are listed below of principals' highlighting what they felt were examples of collaboration:

Principal Sienna:

> Preventing bullying is a big initiative in our school this year and teachers
>
> are collectively trying to implement anti-bullying initiatives into their
>
> classrooms. It may not be as effective or as much as we want as those
>
> initiatives take time. I think collectively they do try, not always though.
>
> Sometimes it is only lip-service but sometimes it's more a school-wide
>
> commitment (Comment 115).

Principal Mustardseed:

> We wanted to do a radical change in our timetable. We went from an 8-
> period, 40-minutes per cycle day and we wanted to see what would best fit
> for all stakeholders. That process took a long time. I know in my mind
> what my idea was and what I thought would work but, I needed to have
> the input of everybody. It took a lot of professional development sessions,
> professional development days, in-service days, and time at our staff
> meetings. At the end of all that process the result was that the timetable
> was theirs and staff-driven (Comment 116).

Principal Khaki:

> During Catholic schools' week we did a retreat and a few on staff came
> forward and said they wanted to take it on. I said, "Okay". Then I thought,
> "Well gee I better get something out to the staff because I really like
> people's input." I knew I was only going to get back comments from
> those five or six on staff who had volunteered. That's how we collaborate
> and it's never really much of a problem (Comment 117).

Principal Crystalwhite:

> [Collaboration is] Very easy. That's how they do business. I mean beside
> me there are many other leaders in the school. For example, we have an
> incredible Remembrance Day service. I don't have to do anything for the
> Remembrance Day service except show up (Comment 118).

Principal Green:

> I think collaboration in this building is quite easy from my other
>
> experiences. There are teams that happen around co- and extracurricular
>
> types of activities where people are planning something like a camp or that
>
> kind of thing (Comment 119).

Citing technology enhancements in the school as an example of staff

collaboration, Principal Cyan remarked,

> For the most part I would say collaboration is easy, at least in this group.
>
> There's a couple of key players, well maybe there's a number of key
>
> players, and another group of people who would sort of go along for the
>
> ride. Then there are pockets of minor resistance. It's a matter of keeping
>
> that momentum amongst staff to collaborate on things. Generally
>
> collaboration is easy when we're starting a project. Take for example
>
> technology. (Comment 120)

But, DuFour (2005) asserts, "The powerful collaboration that characterizes

professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work

together to analyze and improve classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in

an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning" (p. 36). The principals

remarked that more difficult kind of collaboration amongst staff are activities that involve

matters of practice or could best be described as of an instructional nature. When asked

about how easy collaboration was, Principal Kellygreen said,

> It depends on the task. In English Language Arts for the scope and
>
> sequence, collaboration was difficult. If they're putting together
>
> something non-academic like our Day of Giving, there's huge

collaboration between the staff in terms of the planning and all of that.

But when you're talking curriculum and what falls into which grade level

something, well that is more difficult (Comment 121).

Principal Coral offered,

The more difficult collaboration is things that impact one group of

teachers differently than the other. There are problems if there's the

appearance that one group is more favoured by a decision than the other.

It rears the ugly head of "We're not treated as equal" or, "We're not as

important". It depends on the issue. For example, in the implementation

of a new curriculum there's a lot of collaboration where people are more

willing to work together to implement it in the school. But, with what's

the best way to deliver knowledge, well those are the touchy things

because people are more engrained and more comfortable with their way

to do it. There's a lot more difficulty in that area (Comment 122).

Principal Mustardseed stated,

Collaboration is more difficult when you're dealing with maybe some

history and staff problems, like morale problems, or how people perceive

that they've been treated. When history is put on the table and there's no

fear of repercussion and trust is built, there can be a lot of hurt that

surfaces. It makes people feel very uncomfortable to be in a room with

forty people and everyone's putting their ideas on the table of how they've

been mistreated or, made to feel inadequate. (Comment 123)

Principal Teal reported,

Today at the staff meeting the grade 7 to 9 teachers said, "We do not

collaborate", which is very interesting because that's new. It was

interesting because they talked about, "Well we have this, we have that,

we've got time to do this but we don't collaborate." then they said, "This

is not a place for collaboration" (Comment 124).

4.3.2.3 Learning as Fostering Improvements in Instructional Practices

Teacher learning is the "sine qua non" of every school change effort (Cochran-

Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 249). According to Darling-Hammond (1998) teacher learning

occurs most productively when "questions arise in the context of real students and work

in progress, and where research and disciplined inquiry are also at hand" (p. 6). The

principals in this study thought that teacher learning is an important characteristic of

schools that are professional learning communities. In describing the types of behaviours

exhibited by a professional learning community that illustrate learning, Principal

Olivegreen said,

The image that comes to my mind is a group of people sitting around a

table talking about teaching and learning. That's an important image for

me. As well, people who are willing to examine what they've done, to

reflect on that and to say how they could do things differently (Comment

125).

Additionally Principal Bluemist noted,

One of the assumptions I've always had with the professional learning

community concept is that it means that there are some pretty effective

conversations going on amongst the staff in the building for some purpose

which should be about student learning as it is our main purpose. [In a
professional learning community] There should be a lot more professional
and appropriately focused conversations going on than might otherwise
have not occurred (Comment 126).

Principal Teal remarked,

> You want people to be at a place where really important conversations can
> take place and the focus is the kids and not everyone's ego. That's where
> the change starts to happen and people can hone their skills. It's not just a
> conversation about it. The conversation leads to a level of perfecting or
> honing skills so that you're striving for being great at your craft (Comment
> 127).

Principal Mustardseed noted teacher learning must be continuous, "It's life long
learning instead of just compartmentalized into that moment" (Comment 128). Similarly,
Principal Crystalwhite articulated the view that learning in the context of a professional
learning community is continuous when she said,

> It [a professional learning community] reminds people that they are
> lifelong learners and though they might decide to be lifelong learners in
> some areas outside of school, they still have a responsibility to continue to
> develop their skills and their knowledge in teaching and learning
> (Comment 129).

The principals noted that they view learning as a process of continual, reflective
inquiry and an exchange of ideas with other teaching professionals and non-teaching staff
which, collectively leads to the development of a shared technical language and shared

knowledge base through continuous conversations (Little, 1993). Principal Bluemist stated,

> In a learning community we are life long learners and we are learning at
> and outside the workplace. It's us accepting the fact that what we know
> today might be different from and inform what we know tomorrow. It's
> accepting that we are going to continue to learn as a group of people
> (Comment 130).

Many of the principals in this study articulated that they struggle to balance their beliefs about the significance of what teacher learning should be in a professional learning community versus what they see in teachers' practices. Principal Teal noted,

> In a professional learning community I really think that there are some
> really basic things that need to have happened with the people in order to
> have meaningful discussions. I think group norms create, if they are done
> well by the collective, the opportunity for true collegial conversations to
> be take place rather than just congenial ones (Comment 131).

Principal Crystalwhite commented, "They could do better in learning collectively. They are not good at sharing professional books, but they do share some things" (Comment 132). Principal Bluemist observed,

> I'm rather frustrated by the lack of collective learning. We are supposedly
> professionals right? We went to university for a minimum of five years,
> some on staff have Master's degrees and we give them tons of autonomy.
> But, they close the door and then it's go solo. You'll see them get to the
> union mentality, which can be kind of petty and unprofessional in its

worse light. Sometimes they need to be carried through difficult things and want you to solve their problems (Comment 133).

The principals recognized that a school as a learning community is characterized by an understanding that individual and collective learning are key (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). As Wheatley (1992, cited in Spillane and Louis, 2002) writes,

Organizational learning theories assume that until members move beyond preoccupation with power, and toward issues of shared vision and inquiry, collectively held models, and increased (professional) mastery of work, they will consistently arrive at the wrong solutions to the wrong problems. (p. 95).

The principals admitted there is a conflict between the type of teacher learning that should occur and the type that actually does occur. While Shulman (1997, p.101) contends that "The potential of teacher learning is dependent upon the processes of activity, reflection, emotion and collaboration [which] are supported, legitimated, and nurtured in a community or culture that values such experiences and creates many opportunities for them to occur and to be accomplished with success and pleasure," the principals in this study were not able to cite examples of teachers engaging in collaboratively reflective learning activities. Principal Teal noted,

It's just incredible because when I look at the practices it is clear they couldn't have ever had a conversation about practice because they wouldn't still be doing what they're doing. I mean even the smallest conversation brings about change. That's what I discovered with these

teachers, for the most part, they aren't interested in learning from each

other (Comment 134).

Principal Olivegreen reported,

> One of the disadvantages of teaching is most conversations are superficial
>
> because they have no time to have in-depth conversations. We have some
>
> conversations, probably a little bit more on the practical side like how we
>
> struggle in a French Immersion school to get the kids to speak French.
>
> That is something where is it very obvious, it is concrete and we can
>
> discuss what can we do to encourage children to speak French more
>
> (Comment 135).

Principal Coral observed,

> People are beginning to feel that they can be a little bit more public with
>
> who they are in some of their ideas and beliefs. That it's okay to share
>
> your opinions. It's more difficult for some. Faces pop into my head as
>
> we're talking.   But, we're nowhere near there yet in terms of talking
>
> about, "How do I best instruct certain topics" (Comment 136).

Principal Khaki remarked, "I think there's always room for improvement along

those lines [of teacher learning]. Everybody gets so darn busy. I think time and the

ability to come together for those conversations is an obstacle" (Comment 137).

Finally Principal Cyan commented,

> I don't know how comfortable teachers are in terms of offering a
>
> professional critique of each other. I think they might encourage each
>
> other. I think there's an atmosphere of encouragement. There's an

atmosphere of shared resources, like, "This is what I'm doing", and then

they share that. But I would say that people don't have the comfort level

in this school at this point anyway to offer each other a critique of their

teaching (Comment 138).

These principals noted that a tension exists in their conceptions of professional

learning communities because teachers are challenged to continually recognize

opportunities for learning within the context of their work and take advantage of them.

Yet, there were very few concrete examples of this type of behaviour or attitude to which

principals could refer (Randi, 2004).

4.3.2.4 Professional as Collective Commitment versus Individual Attributes

The most pervasive aspect of the culture of teaching is an ethos of individual

responsibility and accountability (Ingersoll, 2003). The principals in this study described

a professional teacher as someone who is personally dedicated to children and who is

committed to the needs of individual students (Ingersoll) As Ingersoll comments, what is

revealing about this description is that within the proper role of teacher the emphasis is

on individual, rather than organizational responsibilities. These principals identified

individual knowledge about curriculum and instruction, appropriate dress and respectful

speech as the marks of teacher professionalism. These principals believed that identity as

a professional is to a large degree a set of individual attributes that are essential for those

in the teaching profession (Sachs, 1999). Principal Kellygreen commented,

First of all it's about professional dress. Also, do they remember that they

are the adults in the situation? They have to know their content. They

have to know how to deliver their content, to meet student needs and to

handle themselves in the appropriate manner as a code of conduct. They

have to be always aware of their role as a teacher and their responsibility

as a teacher to be professional (Comment 139).

Principal Coral noted, "I guess communication style such as, how to communicate

with students and parents and public. It's also the dedication that they put towards

delivery of their programs. Those are the two that I would focus on" (Comment 140).

Principal Olivegreen remarked,

I guess if it is professional it is something that is well thought out, well

prepared. I think part of professionalism within our practice as teachers is

very much the idea of self-reflection and asking, "How did that work?"

"How could I have done it differently?" Professionalism is also about

how we treat the children as well (Comment 141).

Principal Cyan added,

I guess everything from their appearance and demeanor, interactions of

parents and students to their ability to teach effectively, and having an

outcomes-driven program that includes effective assessment. We don't

have a dress code but we expect them to dress comfortably and

professionally. The expectation around how we interact with children is

very much a part of the professional culture here (Comment 142).

Principal Mustardseed noted,

I would expect teachers on staff to definitely be current as to what the

outcomes of the curriculum are and how to assess and evaluate in a very

current manner that is mixed with our traditional values. I believe that the

professionals in our building exhibit a moral driven behaviour (Comment

143).

Principal Khaki reported,

I expect teachers on staff to definitely know the curriculum and how to

deliver it. As professionals they have to be ethically focused on the

children's needs (Comment 144).

Principal Bluemist commented on his frustration with one teacher's

professionalism,

We have a teacher who will show up in shorts and t-shirt that I think he

got from the locals in Jamaica. I'd like to take a run at that guy personally

and set him straight under the guides of professionalism. (Comment 145)

From this perspective professionalism is viewed as an exclusive rather than

inclusive ideal and is conservative rather than radical in its intent (Sachs). The principals

had difficulty in finding examples for teacher professionalism as a collective commitment

by staff. In the professional learning community concept, teachers as collectively

professional is better exemplified in what DuFour (2005) describes as the kind of

powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities, "a

systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their

classroom practice" (p. 36). These principals indicated that it was difficult to broaden

their concept of teacher as professional as provided in DuFour's description. None were

able to offer examples beyond individual attributes or dispositions. Principal Teal noted

what she thought a professional teacher should be,

If I saw it, what would it look like? People talking about kids and

learning, and not about themselves. I know that sounds pretty harsh, but I

think that our staff talks about themselves, about protecting themselves

and about not overworking themselves. The focus should be on kids and

learning. They'd be talking about the assessment they did and what

happened with it, and asking "Can you help me figure this out?" "Do you

have an idea why this is happening?" I'd see people wanting to learn and

searching for information from each other, from within the school, from

the professional development that they have come back to share. They

would be dying to share with somebody else or, asking for time to meet

with each other. I'd see them planning together. In reality it's all the stuff

I don't see happening (Comment 146).

Principal Bluemist noted,

They close the doors and just focus on themselves. Like I said, it's strange.

All that professional training and then it's just about me and my class and

who cares about anyone else? Somehow it seems to be just plain wrong

(Comment 147).

Principal Dodgerblue observed,

I struggle with it, trying to find out what can I do, how I can get to a point

that we're all getting along together as staff and we're all doing what

we're supposed to be doing. I want them to do it not because of rules and

not because I'm there watching them or telling them what to do, it's

because everyone knows the right thing to do to get better and they do it

together (Comment 148).

4.3.2.5 Client-Oriented Professionals

The participants in this study remarked that in schools that are operating as

professional learning communities there should be a culture that emphasizes

professionalism as being client-oriented. The participants observed that having a client

orientation played a role in their conceptions of being professional (Murphy, 2002).

Principal Cyan remarked,

Parents are very supportive of the school but they can also be demanding.

They pay money and they think, "This is what I want", and at times they

can be interfering. There can be a sense among the teachers that "They're

interfering in my work, and do they have the right to do that?" I've tried to

cultivate that we're kind of like sales people here and they are our

clientele, and we have to provide them with a great product or else they're

not going to send their children here. It's about our survival (Comment

149).

Principal Sienna commented, "I think in an independent school you almost have

to have a client-centered approach. It's just part of the culture here. It's part a business

and part a school" (Comment 150). Additionally, Principal Coral noted, "We are client-

centered for sure. Teachers care about the kids they are dealing with.   They're not just a

name on their register" (Comment 151). Principal Mustardseed noted,

We're finding out more and more as time goes on that we have to

compete. As a school we can no longer just sit on the laurels of past

success. We have to compete in the market for our students. Are we

client-based? I would say yes (Comment 152).

Principal Dodgerblue observed,

I think that's probably a completely different mindset for a lot of people to

have to think that, "Yes, we do have to please the students and their

parents." Perhaps this is especially true in our community where we have

so many of the parents willing to let us do what we want and not

questioning that. We tend to get comfortable thinking that we're the ones

that need to be pleased. (Comment 153)

Principal Crystalwhite noted,

I think just about everything we do is student-centered in our decisions. If

we ever forget, we'll bring it right back. We ask, "What's best for the

child?" "How good are we at that?" (Comment 154).

Finally, Principal Sandstone reported, "I'd say we're pretty highly client-focused

just because of the demands of the kids and we have to be that way in order to make it all

work at this school" (Comment 155).

4.3.2.6 Collective Knowledge-Based Professionals

The principals in this study recognized that to improve classroom learning in a

lasting way "the teaching profession needs a knowledge base that grows and improves"

(Hiebert, Gallimore & Stigler, 2002). They remarked that teachers must have solid

understandings of pedagogical practices that help make content vivid and memorable as

well as practices that will pique the students' interest, relate to their background

experiences and motivate them to learn (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Shulman, 1986).

Principal Dodgerblue reported,

> I think that our staff is pretty good as far as knowing about differentiating
>
> instructions, like the *Success for All Learners'* documents put out by
>
> Manitoba Education. We've really gotten into those strategies. A few
>
> years back at one point there were five of us taking our post-Baccalaureate
>
> Certificate in Education at the University of Manitoba and increasing our
>
> knowledge from those courses (Comment 156).

Principal Coral commented, "Are we knowledge based? Yes. The vast majority
of staff want to be the best teacher they possibly can. I would equate that with, "What's
my knowledge level in this area?"" (Comment 157) Participants commented that
generally teachers are committed to their own professional growth.

Principal Olivegreen reported,

> [Our teachers are] people who are interested in learning and inquiry and
>
> are very interested in participating in professional development
>
> opportunities (Comment 158).

Principal Cyan noted,

> I think our staff want to be knowledgeable of their craft. They see value in
>
> that. They look for professional development opportunities, and they want
>
> to move in that direction. There's a sense that learning is important to
>
> them. People are taking steps in their learning and there are a lot of very
>
> knowledgeable teachers in the school (Comment 159).

Principal Crystalwhite observed,

Are they knowledge based? I think I have a very competent staff and

they're doing the best they can do in the situation we're in. What I see is

that they're interested in doing better, at least most of them, and learning

more. It's still an area that we need to focus on (Comment 160).

Principal Mustardseed remarked,

I think because we are a senior high school, we have experts in this

building. For example, we have experts in art, drama and in math. Each

person has a defined knowledge base and it's because they studied that

area (Comment 161).

Conversely, in understanding teachers as collective knowledge based

professionals with shared expertise, the principals identified that "teachers rarely draw

from a shared knowledge base to improve their practice" (Hiebert et al., 2002, p.3).

Principal Teal remarked,

They don't talk about their practice. They don't talk about concerns. They

don't talk about craft of teaching. They don't talk about assessments. They

just support each other no matter what and anytime someone brings

something up, like me or if the division has a workshop or an issue arises

in discussion by the staff, and if it's going to be anything that makes

anybody the slightest bit uncomfortable or makes them do something

extra, like extra work, it's immediately shut down. I mean, they want to

believe, "All is great." (Comment 162).

Principal Khaki spoke of the pressure one staff member felt of being too

knowledgeable,

I once had a teacher say to me she's had a little bit of pressure put on her

by her colleagues. It was kind of like you would see in a factory, "You

better not be doing that too well because you're going to raise the

expectations for all of us". I was quite shocked to hear her say that about

her colleagues (Comment 163).

Principal Bluemist commented,

I have some frustration over the academic preparation piece of teachers

because every time we seem to move into discussion about academic

content, that's when the professionalism piece gets really tricky because

according to them there's my style and my interpretation of what is

rigorous grade ten English and then there is yours. That's a tough

conversation, so we just do not have them collectively (Comment 164).

Collaboration amongst teachers becomes essential for the development of a

professional knowledge base, not because collaboration provides teachers with social

support groups but because teacher collaborations force their participants to make their

knowledge public and understood by colleagues (Hiebert et al.) Schools as a professional

learning community should operate in a manner that allows teachers to treat ideas for

teaching as objects that can be shared and examined publicly, that can be stored and

accumulated and passed on the next generation of teachers (Hiebert et al.)

Table 4.4, "Principals' perceptions of the characteristics of professional learning

communities," summarizes of the comments made by the participants which indicated

principals' conceptions of the characteristics of schools' professional learning

communities. All of the comments in Table 4.4 are found in pages 157 to 177 of this
thesis.

Table 4.4 Principals' perceptions of the characteristics of professional learning
communities

Participant's name	Community		Learning	Professional		
	Ties amongst teachers	Collaboration in community	Learning as fostering improvements in instructional practices	Professional as collective commitment versus individual attribute	Client-oriented professionals	Collective knowledge based professionals
Principal Crystalwhite	Comment 112	Comment 118	Comment 129 & 132		Comment 154	Comment 160
Principal Sienna	Comment 113	Comment 115			Comment 150	
Principal Dodgerblue	Comment 114			Comment 148	Comment 153	Comment 156
Principal Khaki	Comment 111	Comment 117	Comment 137	Comment 144		Comment 163
Principal Mustardseed	Comment 109	Comments 116 & 123	Comment 128	Comment 143	Comment 152	Comment 161
Principal Sandstone					Comment 155	
Principal Olivegreen	Comment 108	Comment 119	Comment 125 & 135	Comment 141		Comment 158
Principal Kellygreen	Comment 107	Comment 121		Comment 139		
Principal Teal	Comment 110	Comment 124	Comment 127, 131 & 134	Comment 146		Comment 162
Principal Cyan	Comment 105	Comment 120	Comment 138	Comment 142	Comment 149	Comment 159
Principal Coral		Comment 122	Comment 136	Comment 140	Comment 151	Comment 157
Principal Bluemist	Comment 106		Comment 126, 130 & 133	Comment 145 & 147		Comment 164
Summary	10 Comments	10 Comments	14 Comments	10 Comments	7 Comments	9 Comments
	10 Participants	9 Participants	8 Participants	9 Participants	7 Participants	9 Participants

4.3.3   *Summary and Connections to Related Literature*

Based on the data from the focus groups and interviews reviewed for this research

question, the presentation was organized into the following two broad areas through data

analysis, preconditions for schools to be professional learning communities, and characteristics of schools as professional learning communities. The preconditions were divided into structural supports, which are time, teacher empowerment, interconnected teacher roles, school plans, and institutional identity; as well as human and social resources, which are trust and respect amongst staff, and principal leadership. Principal leadership was further separated into staff's trust of principal, principal's connectedness to staff, and principal as engaging staff in reflective conversations. The characteristics of professional learning communities were divided categorized as ties amongst teachers, collaboration in community, learning as fostering improvements in instructional practices, professional as collective commitment versus an individual attributes, client-oriented professionals, and collective knowledge-based professionals.

Little (2002, as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002) contends that while there is no simple checklist that will adequately guide the construction of a professional learning community, a central tenet of the concept is the existence of a "social architecture" to schools that helps shape teachers attitudes and practice. The participants in this study considered time, teacher empowerment, interconnected teacher roles, institutional identity, and school plans as necessary structural preconditions for schools to operate as professional learning communities. While time, teacher empowerment, and interconnected teacher roles were consistent with Kruse et al.'s (1995, as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002) list of structural supports, two other items which were included by the participants as necessary preconditions to establish schools as professional learning communities do not appear on Kruse et al.'s list. These were institutional identity and

school plans. Additionally, two items from Kruse et al.'s list were not commented on by

participants. These were school autonomy and communication strategies.

While Spillane and Louis (2002) contend that research evidence suggest structural

supports are significant for establishing professional learning communities, Toole and

Louis (2002) argue that while important, structural supports alone do not necessarily lead

to professional learning communities. It is only in the interaction between the structural

components with each other and other features of effective schools that allows a school to

operate as a professional learning community (Toole & Louis).

This point is illustrated when the participants in this study commented that

increased meeting time for teachers was a critical feature of professional learning

communities which would leads to increased collaboration. Yet "time by itself does not

lead to more collegiality among teachers" (Toole & Louis, p. 250). More time, even when

scheduled jointly for teachers only provides time to teachers to work individually, albeit

simultaneously on their own individual practice (Toole & Louis). In terms of the

participants' beliefs that time as longevity of a principal's tenure is connected to a

sustained commitment to nurture schools as professional learning communities, Toole

and Louis agree that the current context of principal turnover has a detrimental effect of

"disrupting the ability of schools to build or maintain professional learning communities"

(p. 273). Similarly while the participants noted the importance of empowerment, teacher

empowerment improves instruction only as it works through school-wide organizational

attributes such as professional learning communities (Sykes, 1999, p. 238).

Finally, despite the fact that research (Annenberg Institute for School Reform,

2004) supports the principals' beliefs that interconnected teacher roles in the form of

teacher teams enable staff to engage in conversations about how and what they are learning and doing, and how this "teaming" can be extended to inform each others' practice and to improve learning conditions and achievement levels school-wide, DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggest that the basic structure of a professional learning community is not independent teacher teams but a series of interconnected collaborative teams that share a common purpose. Costa and Kallick (2000) identify the benefits of interconnected teacher roles,

> Working in groups requires the ability to justify ideas and test the feasibility of solution strategies on others. It also requires developing a willingness and openness to accept feedback from a critical friend. Through this interaction, the group and the individual continue to grow (p. 37).

Although the participants in the study noted the role teacher teams play in establishing professional learning communities, they did not articulate a view that in schools that operate as professional learning communities teacher teams do not simply function as entities unto themselves, but instead members of teams and the teams exist as structurally and philosophically interconnected and overlapping groups within the school (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004).

One of the structural factors reported by the principals, school plans, may be associated with Kruse et al.'s (1995) two preconditions: autonomy and communication structures. In Manitoba each school is mandated by the Province's department of education to develop and submit an annual school plan (Manitoba Education, Citizenship, & Youth, 2002). Part of the annual school planning procedure involves developing

individual school priorities through a collaborative process, as well as creating

procedures for reporting the school plan to the school's community internally and

externally (Manitoba Education, Citizenship, & Youth). To the extent that school plans

and the procedures for developing them address issues of autonomy allowing schools to

choose priorities and strategies for improvement (Louis & Miles, 1990), as well as enable

schools to work closely communicating those priorities with the school's community

(Crow et al., 2002), school plans as identified by the participants may address issues of

school autonomy and communication strategies as outlined by Kruse et al.

The final structural support noted by the participants was institutional identity.

Institutional identity is regarded as a means of building a personal and professional

understanding of who teachers are and what they value. To some extent this may

establish an institutionally approved set of shared values and a vision for teachers and

create a sense of identity and unity which both DuFour and Eaker (1998), and Hord

(1997a, 1997b, 2004) suggest are important features of a school operating as a

professional learning community. Institutional identity may also assist in providing a

framework for staff to develop shared norms and customs that influences the culture of

the school, which is seen as an important part of an professional learning community

(Toole & Louis, 2002).

Principals did not comment that organizational space, in the form of physical

space, was a structural precondition for schools to be professional learning communities.

The principals consistently commented on the importance of time for extensive

interaction and experimentation in the form of collaborative teacher relationships, but did

not note that there was a need for there to be designated organizational space within

schools for this kind of collaboration to occur. Yet, Shields and Sayani (2005) suggest "The burgeoning literature on space clearly suggests the importance of creating spaces in which individuals and groups within a school may encounter and come to understand one another" (p. 386). Shields and Sayani contend that principals "must create spaces of respect, spaces in which each person is treated with "absolute regard" (Starratt, 1991) and in which each not only is encouraged to share his or her personal stories and lived experiences but also perceives the environment to be safe enough to do so" (p. 386).

The principals in this study believed that trust and respect amongst staff, and supportive principal leadership were essential human and social resources for nurturing schools as professional learning communities. Specifically within the concept of supportive leadership they commented on the need for a principal to establish and nurture trust with staff, the principal's connectedness to staff and the principal as engaging the staff in reflective dialogue The study's participants did not claim that an openness to improvement, access to expertise or, socialization were necessary preconditions for the creation of a professional learning community (Kruse et al., 1995).

Trust amongst staff was noted by the participants as being a significant element of their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities. Trust is regarded as an essential factor as it leads to improved professional practice by enabling teachers to push one another's thinking about instruction and schooling (Kochanek, 2005). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) contend that empirical evidence, "demonstrates that trust is related to a climate of openness, collegiality, professionalism, and authenticity" (p. 350). All of these are arguably significant features of a professional learning community. The participants also noted that the level of trust amongst staff is typically thin and somewhat

fragile based on social similarity and a social contract of like-minded professionals
(Kochanek, 2005). The principals also reported that to the extent that trust amongst staff
is not developed and nurtured through repeated positive social exchanges, it can diminish
(Kochanek).

The participants in the study believed that a principal plays a significant role in
developing a school as a professional learning community. This view is supported by
Toole and Louis (2002) and others (Crow et al., 2002; DuFour 2005; DuFour & Eaker,
1998; Hord, 1997a, 1997b, 2004). Principals need to foster social relations amongst
teachers that promote the type of requisite interaction required for schools to develop as
professional learning communities (Crow et al., 2002). The principals in this study
remarked that teachers look to them not only for a vision for the school, but also to
negotiate the web of social relationships that exist in schools. This view is consistent with
the kind of supportive leadership described by Smylie and Hart (2000, as cited in Crow et
al.) as "the interactional principal" who constantly works within the social network of the
school "to broker information and promote relations among disconnected groups in ways
that are mutually beneficial" (p. 429).

The social network of relationships within a school can exert formal and informal
control that encourages colleagues to act in ways that are considered to be trustworthy
(Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). The participants regarded the staff's trust of the
principal as another powerful condition to develop as a professional learning community.
This is a view supported by Bryk and Schneider (2003) who contend that a principal
needs staff support to maintain a cohesive sense amongst staff and that a principal's
actions play a key role in developing the kind of relational trust required to make

improvement efforts diffuse broadly across a school. As Bryk and Schneider claim, "Relational trust is grounded in the social respect that comes from the kinds of social discourse that takes place across a school community" (p. 41). The participants in this study regarded supportive principal leaderships, built on connectedness and relational trust as providing them opportunities to engage staff in the kinds of reflective conversations that lead to improved practice. This view is consistent with the notion that professional learning community, however defined, is established on the kinds of adult relationships in schools that can support individual change in classrooms (Spillane & Louis, 2002). As Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) state, "To engage in reflective practice requires and environment of support. It requires an organizational climate that encourages open communication, crucial dialogue, risk taking, and collaboration" (p. 20-21).

The principals articulated that the professional learning community concept is built on a framework of three constituent interdependent domains, which are: community, learning and professional. In noting the characteristics of a professional learning community, the participants highlighted: ties amongst teachers, collaboration in community, learning as fostering improvements in instructional practices, professional as collective commitment, client oriented professionals, and collective knowledge based professionals.

Toole and Louis (2002) argue community when understood within the concept of a professional learning community is one that "emphasizes personal connection" (p. 247). The principals in this study acknowledged the importance that teacher connectedness plays in nurturing a conception of school as community. The relationships amongst staff were generally regarded as being professional with some intra-staff groupings being

described as more closely resembling relationships that are regarded as being more personal in nature. This understanding of the relationships which exist in a school's community may best be represented by Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) definition of communities of practice: "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (2002, p. 7). In the instances where participants viewed staff connectedness as being more familial in nature it appears that this conception of community is more similar to Sergiovanni's (1992) description of community in which the ties that bind create a very tightly knit group.

A tension which arises from either of these conceptions of school as community can be found in a critique of the concept of community by McLaughlin and Talbert (2001, as cited in Toole & Louis, 2002) where they suggest that strong communities reinforce common beliefs amongst staff – for better or for worse. This critique suggests that any conception of community as applied to schools needs to examine the foundation of the ties that bind. Furman and Starratt (2002) suggest that any conception of school as community should contain two critical features, interdependence and the common good. This critique leads to the question: to what extent does the operation of the schools as community, protect or reinforce poor practice? Furman and Starratt posit that thoughts of school as community need to be deepened and broadened beyond the connotations of community of sameness and community as isolated from the larger societal context that are typically applied when thinking about school as community. School as community should be seen as being integrated into the societal ideal of education as a public good (Furman & Starratt).

The kind of collaboration illustrated by the participants as "easy" is best characterized as non-academic. While collective commitment and collaboration on issues such as school bullying, student timetables and school retreats is arguably important to quality of life at school, they do not fully represent the powerful kinds of collaboration advocated by Little (1993) who suggests in a school that is a professional community, what happens in any one individual classroom is a concern for all teachers as school-wide student success is only possible through collective, interdependent efforts. The principals noted in reality it was difficult to cite examples of this kind of collaboration on issues of practice amongst teachers.

The participants in this study identified teacher learning as an important characteristic in a conception of school as a professional learning community. In describing what they believed teacher learning should be, they articulated a notion of learning which is commensurate with Toole and Louis (2002) who advocate that "learning places a high value on teachers' inquiry and reflection" (p. 247). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that teachers learn when they "generate local knowledge of practice by working within the contexts of inquiry communities to theorize and construct their own work and to connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues" (p. 250). In describing the reality of what teacher learning is in action, the principals commented that a gap exists between the ideal and the real of teacher learning. The illustrations of teacher learning provided by the participants resembled what Wenger (1998) criticizes as endemic of current modern institutions which largely bases professional learning on the assumption that "learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching" (p.

3). The principals expressed frustration with the fact that teacher learning as a collective endeavour and practice is very difficult to promote and it is very hard to find examples of it by the teaching staff.

Toole and Louis (2002) contend that "a school culture that emphasizes professionalism is client oriented and knowledge based" (p. 247). When asked to describe what marks teachers as professional, the participants in this study provided a description of teacher as professional that reflects the individual attributes of teachers. The descriptions offered focused on personal qualities and habits such as: dress and grooming, language use and tone of voice as examples. These types of descriptions are criticized by Ingersoll (2003) as being simply inadequate to denote teaching as professional work. Ingersoll contends that teachers as professionals presumes a collective commitment by all teachers to work together and share to address issues of student success not only within a school but also across schools in a system.

While the participants commented on the importance that a client orientation played in their conceptions of teachers as professionals, they had difficulty in articulating illustrations of either how a client-orientation influences teachers as professionals or, the existence of a collective knowledge base for teaching. Teaching as professional work should be viewed as a collective endeavour rather than the private practice of individual teachers (Glazer, 1999). Hiebert et al. (2002) argue that in order for teachers to be professionals there needs to be a collective commitment which supports teachers' as collective knowledge based professionals with shared expertise and who draw from a shared knowledge base to improve their practice.

In summary, Toole and Louis (2002) posit that the concept of a professional learning community when applied to schools is built on the foundation that there are preconditions - structural and human and social resources - and characteristics that need to exist to support and develop schools as they become professional learning communities. Yet, the participants in this study only identified some of what Toole and Louis identify as the necessary preconditions and characteristics, and appeared to include other features as preconditions and characteristics in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities. Table 4.5, "Participants' perceptions compared to Toole and Louis' (2002) definition of the preconditions and characteristics of professional learning communities," summarizes the research participants' perceptions as compared to Toole and Louis' definition of the preconditions and characteristics of schools' professional learning communities.

Table 4.5 Participants' perceptions compared to Toole and Louis' (2002) definition of the

preconditions and characteristics of schools' professional learning communities

		Participants' perceptions	Toole and Louis' definition
Preconditions of schools as professional learning communities	Structural supports	Time	Time and places to meet
		Teacher empowerment	Teacher empowerment
		Interconnected teacher roles	Interconnected teacher roles
		School plans	School autonomy
		Institutional identity	Communication strategies
	Human and social resources	Trust & respect amongst staff	Trust and respect
		Principal's connectedness to staff	Supportive leadership
		Staff's trust of principal	Openness to improvement
		Principal as engaging staff in reflective conversations	Access to expertise
			Socialization
Characteristics of schools as professional learning communities	Professional	A collective commitment versus individual attributes	A school culture that is client-oriented and knowledge-based
		Client-oriented	
		Knowledge-based	
	Learning	Fostering improvements in instructional practice	Teacher and principal inquiry and reflection
	Community	Ties among teachers	An emphasis on personal connections
		Collaboration in community	

4.4 Research Questions 2a, 2b, and 2c

The three sub-questions of Research Question Two were: a) what differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by public school principals and private school principals in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities, b) what differences, if any, exist in the characteristics that male principals and female principals identify in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities, and c) what differences, if any, exist in the characteristics identified by principals of small, medium, and large-sized schools in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities? The data collected from the focus groups and individual interview questions posed to the participants and described in the preceding two sections of this thesis (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3) were re-analyzed to answer these three research sub-questions.

This section of the thesis describes the similarities and differences of the perceptions of the study's participants separated as a) public and private school principals, b) female and male principals, and c) small, medium and large-sized schools' principals. In keeping with the qualitative nature of this research study, one that is situated in grounded theory, the following data analysis focuses on a search for meaning and understanding to generate theory and not build universal laws (Goulding, 1998). Theorizing is viewed as the process of constructing explanations until a "best fit" that explains the data most simply is obtained (Morse, 1994). As Morse posits, theorizing "involves asking questions of the data that will create links to established theory" (p.26). The perceptual differences and similarities illustrated in this section of the thesis between public and private school principals, between female and male principals, and between

small, medium and large-sized school principals are not anchored in statistical analysis

but are instead identified through constant comparative analysis methods (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967). The small number of participants in the study and relatively small data set

places limits on the certainty with which conclusions may be drawn (Fowler, 2002).

Instead, the analysis that follows attempts to discern the significance, if any, of some

specific relationships hypothesized as relevant to the phenomenon under study:

principals' perceptions of the normative imperative to develop schools as professional

learning communities (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

4.4.1 Differences and Similarities between Public and Private School Principals'

Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities

Using Ertl and Plante's (2004) definition of public and private schools, which is

outlined in Chapter 3, Section 3.5 of this thesis, five of the twelve principals who

participated in this study were employed in public schools, which is 5/12 or

approximately 42 %, and seven were employed in private schools, which is 7/12 or

approximately 58% of the study's participants. Accordingly, comments made by each of

the study's participants were categorized as being made by either public or private school

principals.

Table 4.6, "Public and private school principals' perceptions of the structural

supports of professional learning communities," summarizes the participants' comments

as separated by the participants' school type, that is either public or private, and coded as

reflecting the structural preconditions of schools' professional learning communities. All

of the comments found in Table 4.6 are found in pages 125 to 137 of this thesis.

Table 4.6 Public and private school principals' perceptions of the structural supports of professional learning communities

Structural preconditions	Participant's school type	
	Public (n = 5)	Private (n = 7)
Time	Comment 20 Comment 21 Comment 24 & 25 Comment 27 Comment 32	Comment 22 Comment 23 Comment 26 Comment 28 Comment 29 Comment 30 Comment 31
School plans	Comments 47 & 51 Comment 49 Comment 50	Comment 48 Comment 52 Comment 53 Comment 54
Teacher empowerment	Comment 33 Comment 34 Comment 36 Comment 40	Comments 35 & 39 Comment 37 Comment 38
Interconnected teacher roles	Comment 42 Comment 43 Comment 44 Comment 46	Comment 41 Comment 45
Institutional identity	Comment 57	Comment 55 Comment 56 Comment 59 Comment 58 Comment 60 Comment 61

Based on an analysis of the comments made by the study's participants, it appeared that public school principals did not regard institutional identity as an important structural precondition of a school's professional learning community. Of the five public school principals who participated in this study, only Principal Olivegreen, the principal of a French Immersion public school, commented on the school's institutional identity as playing a role in the development of the school's professional learning community.

Table 4.7, "Public and private school principals' perceptions of the human and social resources of professional learning communities," summarizes the participants' comments as separated by the participants' school type, that is, either public or private, and coded as reflecting human and social resource preconditions of schools' professional learning communities. All of the comments in Table 4.7 are found in pages 139 to 154 of this thesis.

Table 4.7 Public and private school principals' perceptions of the human and social resources of professional learning communities

Human and social resource preconditions	Participant's school type	
	Public (n = 5)	Private (n = 7)
Trust amongst staff	Comment 64 Comment 63 Comment 62	Comment 65 Comment 69 Comment 66 Comment 68 Comment 71 Comment 67 Comment 70
Staff trust of principal	Comment 86 Comment 87 Comments 89 & 92 Comment 93 & 94 Comments 90, 91 & 95	Comment 85 Comment 88 Comment 97 Comment 96
Principal connectedness to staff	Comment 78 Comments 77 & 83 Comments 76 & 81 Comment 84	Comment 75 Comment 72 Comment 80 Comment 82 Comment 79 Comments 73 & 74
Principal engaging staff in reflective dialogue	Comment 104 Comment 99 Comment 98 Comment 100	Comment 101 Comment 103 Comment 102

Based on an analysis of the comments made by the study's participants, it appeared that public and private schools principals generally agree on the human and social resource preconditions of schools' professional learning communities.

Table 4.8 below, "Public and private schools principals' perceptions of the characteristics of professional learning communities," summarizes the participants' comments as separated by school type, that is either public or private, and coded as reflecting the characteristics of schools' professional learning communities. All of the comments in Table 4.8 are found in pages 157 to 177 of this thesis.

Table 4.8 Public and private schools principals' perceptions of the characteristics of
professional learning communities

Characteristics of schools as professional learning communities	Participant's school type	
	Public (n = 5)	Private (n = 7)
Ties amongst teachers	Comment 106 Comment 108 Comment 110 Comment 112	Comment 105 Comment 107 Comment 113 Comment 114 Comment 111 Comment 109
Collaboration in community	Comment 124 Comment 119 Comment 118	Comment 120 Comment 122 Comment 117 Comments 116 & 123 Comment 121 Comment 115
Learning as fostering improvements in instructional practices	Comments 126,130 & 133 Comments 125 & 135 Comments 127, 131 & 134 Comment 129 & 132	Comment 137 Comment 138 Comment 136 Comment 128
Professional as collective commitment versus individual attributes	Comment 145 & 147 Comment 146 Comment 141	Comment 142 Comment 140 Comment 139 Comment 148 Comment 144 Comment 143 Comment 149
Client-oriented professionals	Comment155 Comment 154	Comment 150 Comment 153 Comment 152 Comment 151
Collective knowledge-based professionals	Comment 160 Comment 158 Comment 164 Comment 162	Comment 156 Comment 163 Comment 161 Comment 159 Comment 157

Based on an analysis of the comments made by the study's participants, it appeared that
public and private school principals generally agree on the characteristics of schools'
professional learning communities.

4.4.2 Differences and Similarities between Female and Male Principals' Perceptions of

Professional Learning Communities

Nine of the twelve principals who participated in this study were female, which is 9/12 or approximately 75%, and three were male, which is 3/12 or approximately 25%. Comments made by each of the study's participants were categorized as being made by either female or male principals.

Table 4.9 below, "Female and male principals' perceptions of the structural supports of professional learning communities," summarizes the participants' comments as separated by the participants' gender, that is either female or male, and coded as reflecting structural preconditions of schools' professional learning communities. All of the comments in Table 4.9 are found in pages 125 to 137 of this thesis.

Table 4.9 Female and male principals' perceptions of the structural supports of

professional learning communities

Structural preconditions	Participant's gender	
	Female (n = 9)	Male (n = 3)
Time	Comment 20 Comment 21 Comment 22 Comment 23 Comment 24 & 25 Comment 26 Comment 27 Comment 28 Comment 29	Comment 30 Comment 31 Comment 32
School plans	Comment 47 Comment 48 Comment 50 Comment 51 Comment 52 Comment 53 Comment 54	Comment 49
Teacher empowerment	Comment 33 Comment 34 Comments 35 & 39 Comment 37 Comment 40	Comment 36 Comment 38
Interconnected teacher roles	Comment 41 Comment 42 Comment 43 Comment 44	Comment 45 Comment 46
Institutional identity	Comment 55 Comment 56 Comment 57 Comment 58 Comment 60 Comment 61	Comment 59

Based on an analysis of the comments made by the study's participants, it appeared that

the male principals did not regard school plans and institutional identity as important

structural preconditions for schools' professional learning communities. Of the three

male principals who participated in this study, only Principal Bluemist noted school plans

as playing a role in the development of a professional learning community and only

Principal Coral commented on the importance of a school's institutional identity in the

establishment of a professional learning community.

Table 4.10 below, "Female and male principals' perceptions of the human and

social resources of professional learning communities," summarizes the comments as

separated by the participants' gender, that is either female or male, and coded as

reflecting human and social resource preconditions of schools' professional learning

communities. All of the comments found in Table 4.10 are found in pages 139 to 154 of

this thesis.

Table 4.10 Female and male principals' perceptions of the human and social resources of professional learning communities

Human and social resource preconditions	Participants' gender	
	Female (n = 9)	Male (n = 3)
Trust amongst staff	Comment 63 Comment 64 Comment 66 Comment 67 Comment 68 Comment 70 Comment 71	Comment 62 Comment 65 Comment 69
Staff trust of principal	Comment 86 Comment 87 Comment 88 Comments 89 & 92 Comment 97 Comment 93 & 94 Comment 96	Comment 85 Comments 90, 91 & 95
Principal connectedness to staff	Comments 73, 74 Comment 75 Comments 76 & 81 Comment 78 Comment 79 Comment 82 Comment 84	Comment 72 Comments 77 & 83 Comment 80
Principal engaging staff in reflective dialogue	Comment 98 Comment 100 Comment 101 Comment 102 Comment 104	Comment 99 Comment 103

Based on an analysis of the comments made by the study's participants, it appeared that female and male principals generally agree on the human and social resource preconditions of schools' professional learning communities.

Table 4.11 below, "Female and male principals' perceptions of the characteristics of professional learning communities," summarizes the participants' comments as

separated by the participants' gender, that is either female or male, and coded as

reflecting the characteristics of schools' professional learning communities. All of the

comments found in Table 4.11 are found pages 157 to 177 of this thesis.

Table 4.11 Female and male principals' perceptions of the characteristics of professional

learning communities

Characteristics of schools as professional learning communities	Participant's gender	
	Female (n = 9)	Male (n = 3)
Ties amongst teachers	Comment 107 Comment 108 Comment 109 Comment 110 Comment 111 Comment 112 Comment 113 Comment 114	Comment 105 Comment 106
Collaboration in community	Comment 115 Comments 116 & 123 Comment 117 Comment 118 Comment 119 Comment 124	Comment 120 Comment 121 Comment 122
Learning as fostering improvements in instructional practices	Comments 125 & 135 Comments 127, 131 & 134 Comment 128 Comment 129 & 132 Comment 137	Comments 126, 130 & 133 Comment 136 Comment 138
Professional as collective commitment versus individual attribute	Comment 139 Comment 141 Comment 143 Comment 144 Comment 146 Comment 148	Comment 140 Comment 142 Comment 145 & 147
Client-oriented professionals	Comment 150 Comment 152 Comment 153 Comment 154 Comment 155	Comment 149 Comment 151
Collective knowledge-based Professionals	Comment 156 Comment 158 Comment 160 Comment 161 Comment 162 Comment 163	Comment 157 Comment 159 Comment 164

Based on an analysis of the comments as made by the study's participants, it appeared that female and male principals generally agree on the characteristics of schools' professional learning communities.

4.4.3 Differences and Similarities between Principals of Small, Medium, and Large Schools' Perceptions Professional Learning Communities

Using Ertl and Plante's (2004) definition, which is outlined in Chapter 3, Section 3.5, Table 3.2, of small, medium and large-sized schools, two of the twelve principals who participated in this study were employed in small-sized schools, which is 2/12 or approximately 17%, six were employed in medium-sized schools, which is 6/12 or 50%, and four were employed in large-sized schools, which is 4/12 or approximately 33%.

Using the guidelines outlined in the preceding sections, comments made by each of the participants were categorized as being made by a principal of a small, medium or, large-sized school. Table 4.12 below, "Small, medium and, large-sized school principals' perceptions of the structural supports of professional learning communities," summarizes the participants' comments as separated by the participants' school size that is, small, medium or large-sized, and coded as reflecting the structural preconditions of schools' professional learning communities. All of the comments referred to in Table 4.12 are found in pages 125 to 137 of this thesis.

Table 4.12 Small, medium and, large-sized school principals' perceptions of the

structural supports of professional learning communities

Structural preconditions	Participant's school size		
	Small (n = 2)	Medium (n = 6)	Large (n = 4)
Time	Comment 22 Comment 27	Comment 20 Comment 21 Comment 26 Comment 28 Comment 29 Comment 31	Comment 23 Comment 24 & 25 Comment 30 Comment 32
School plans		Comments 47 & 51 Comment 52 Comment 53 Comment 54	Comment 48 Comment 49 Comment 50
Teacher empowerment	Comment 33 Comment 37	Comment 34 Comments 35 & 39	Comment 36 Comment 38 Comment 40
Interconnected teacher roles	Comment 44	Comment 43	Comment 41 Comment 42 Comment 45 Comment 46
Institutional identity		Comment 55 Comment 56 Comment 60 Comment 61	Comment 57 Comment 58 Comment 59

Based on an analysis of the comments made by the participants, it appeared the principals

of small-sized schools did not regard two structural preconditions, school plans and

institutional identity as preconditions of schools' professional learning communities.

Neither of the two principals of small-sized schools commented on school plans or

institutional identity as necessary preconditions for schools to become professional

learning communities. Additionally, it appeared generally that the principals of medium-

sized schools did not regard interconnected teacher roles as a necessary structural

precondition of schools' professional learning communities. Only one principal, Principal

Sandstone, noted interconnected teacher roles as playing a role in her understanding of a school's professional learning community.

Table 4.13 below, "Small, medium and, large-sized school principals' perceptions of the human and social resources of professional learning communities," summarizes the participants' comments, as separated by school size, that is small, medium or, large-sized schools, and coded as reflecting the human and social resource preconditions of schools' professional learning communities. All of the comments referred to in Table 4.13 are found in pages 139 to 154 of this thesis.

Table 4.13 Small, medium and, large-sized school principals' perceptions of the human and social resources of professional learning communities

Human and social resource preconditions	Participant's school size		
	Small (n = 2)	Medium (n = 6)	Large (n = 4)
Trust amongst staff	Comment 64 Comment 66	Comment 63 Comment 65 Comment 67 Comment 70 Comment 71	Comment 62 Comment 68 Comment 69
Staff trust of principal	Comment 86 Comment 97	Comment 85 Comments 87 Comment 88 Comments 89 & 92	Comment 96 Comments 93 & 94 Comments 90, 91 & 95
Principal connectedness to staff	Comment 78 Comment 82	Comment 72 Comment 73 & 74 Comment 76 & 81 Comment 79	Comment 75 Comment 77, 83 Comments 80 Comment 84
Principal engaging staff in reflective dialogue	Comment 102 Comment 104	Comment 98 Comment 101 Comment 103	Comment 99 Comment 100

Based on an analysis of the comments made by the study's participants, it appeared that principals of small, medium or, large-sized schools generally agree on the human and social resource preconditions of schools' professional learning communities.

Table 4.14 below, "Small, medium and, large-sized school principals' perceptions of the characteristics of professional learning communities," summarizes the participants' comments as separated by the participants' school type, that is, principals of small, medium or large-sized schools, and coded as reflecting characteristics of schools as professional learning communities. All of the comments referred to in Table 4.14 are found in pages 157 to 177 of this thesis.

Table 4.14 Small, medium and, large-sized school principals' perceptions of the

characteristics of professional learning communities

Characteristics of schools as professional learning communities	Participant's school size		
	Small (n = 2)	Medium (n = 6)	Large (n = 4)
Ties amongst teachers	Comment 107 Comment 112	Comment 105 Comment 109 Comment 110 Comment 111 Comment 114	Comment 106 Comment 108 Comment 113
Collaboration in community	Comment 118 Comment 121	Comments 116 & 123 Comment 117 Comment 120 Comment 124	Comment 115 Comment 119 Comment 122
Learning as fostering improvements in instructional practices	Comments 129 & 132	Comments 127, 131 & 134 Comment 128 Comment 137 Comment 138	Comments 125 & 135 Comments 126, 130 & 133 Comment 136
Professional as collective commitment versus individual attribute	Comment 139	Comment 142 Comment 143 Comment 144 Comment 146 Comment 148	Comment 140 Comment 141 Comment 145 & 147
Client-oriented professionals	Comment 154	Comment 149 Comment152 Comment153 Comment155	Comment 150 Comment151
Collective knowledge-based professionals	Comment 160	Comment 156 Comment 159 Comment 161 Comment 162	Comment 157 Comment 158 Comment 163 Comment 164

Based on an analysis of the comments made the study's participants it did appeared that

principals of small, medium or, large-sized schools generally agreed on the

characteristics of schools' professional learning communities.

4.4.4   Summary and Connections to Related Literature

Based on the from the focus groups and the interviews data reviewed for these three research sub-questions, the presentation was organized into the following three broad areas through data analysis: a) public and private school principals' perceptions of professional learning communities, b) female and male principals' perceptions of professional learning communities, and c) small, medium and large-sized schools' principals' perceptions of professional learning communities.

4.4.4.1 Public and Private School Principals' Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities

As was outlined earlier in this section, only one public school principal commented on institutional identity as a structural precondition of a school's professional learning community. DuFour and Eaker (1998) and Hord (1997a; 1997b) suggest that among the features of a professional learning community are shared values and vision of staff that creates a sense of identity. The fact that only one public school principal remarked that institutional identity was a structural precondition in her conception of a professional learning community may support the notion that private schools possess a different kind of community cohesion than do public schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982, as cited in Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999).

The one public school principal who noted institutional identity as a precondition of a school's professional learning community was Principal Olivegreen who stated that, "Part of who we are is that we are a French Immersion school." Perhaps this comment reflects the nature of the sociological cohesion of a French immersion school and its culture (Safty, 1992). According to Safty, the teachers and principal of a French

immersion school are in privileged and envied positions in the social environment of a
publicly funded immersion school because the school may be regarded as a "school of
choice" which was specifically chosen by parents.

Finally, the data analyzed for this research sub-question of the study appeared to
indicate that public or private school principals generally agreed on the human and social
resource preconditions, and characteristics of schools' professional learning communities.
Hausman (2000) posits that school choice does little to alter the role principals play as
leaders in schools. While Hausman's research findings specifically focus on "magnet
schools", that is a school with a thematic curriculum or unique method of instruction,
admission criteria to facilitate voluntary desegregation, choice of school by family, and
access to students beyond neighbourhood attendance zone, his findings may be
tentatively applied to private schools. It may be suggested that principals in private
schools do not possess a different formal leadership role from their public school
counterparts.

4.4.4.2 Female and Male Principals' Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities

The analysis of the comments made by female and male principals indicated that
only one male principal noted school plans and one other male principal commented on
institutional identity as structural preconditions of schools' professional learning
community. It is argued (Gilligan, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989) that gender influences
perception and in this case it is speculated that perhaps gender influenced the male
principals' conceptions of the preconditions of schools professional learning communities
insofar as the male principals did not note school plans or institutional identity as
prominently as did female principals. While only conjecture, perhaps school plans and

institutional identity reflect what Eagly and Johnson (1990) suggest is a more democratic style of school leadership possessed by female principals.

Finally, the data analyzed in this research sub-question of study appeared to indicate that female and male principals generally agreed on the human and social resource preconditions, and characteristics of schools' professional learning communities.

4.4.4.3 Small, Medium and Large-Sized Schools' Principals' Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities

The analysis of the comments made by the principals of small, medium school, and large-sized schools appeared to indicate that principals of small schools did not regard school plans or institutional identity as necessary structural preconditions of schools' professional learning communities. Neither of the two small-sized school principals who participated in this study commented on either of these two structural preconditions.

Berlin and Cienkus (1989) and Rutter (1988) suggest one might have expected that principals from small schools would comment on the role that both the school plan and institutional identity play in their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities as they argue that staff, including the principal, generally has a stronger sense of personal efficacy in smaller schools. As such, it might have been expected that the small school principals would have noted both school plans and institutional identity as a precondition of a school's professional learning community as it might be argued that each has the capacity to build staff's collective efficacy.

Only one of the six principals from a medium-sized school remarked that interconnected teacher roles play a role in his perception of a school's professional

learning community. Yet, three of the four participants from large-sized schools noted that institutional identity played a role in their understanding of a school as a professional learning community. It has been suggested that typically larger schools are more challenged to coalesce around features such as school identity to nurture amongst staff a shared commitment to the kind of collaborative activities that enhance the capacity of a school to become a professional learning community (Marks & Louis, 1999). Without regard to school size, Louis et al. (1999) suggest that the concept of schools as professional learning communities has grown out of the need to create environments and structures where teachers can learn together. The lack of commentary on interconnected teacher roles might allow one to speculate that for principals of medium-sized schools organizational size has an impact on their perceptions insofar as they did not regard interconnected teacher roles as a precondition of schools' professional learning communities.

Finally, the data analyzed in this research sub-question of study appeared to indicate that principals of small, medium and large-sized schools generally agreed on the human and social resource preconditions, and characteristics of schools' professional learning communities.

4.5 Research Question 3

The third research question was: Do principals perceive their duty to evaluate teachers as having an effect on their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities? Again, the specific questions from the focus groups and individual interviews provided the data to answer this research question and were aligned to the research question as described in Chapter 3, Section 3.7, see Table 3.4.

4.5.1   Duty for Teacher Evaluation

Among the most important decisions made concerning school effectiveness are those related to the selection and retention of staff (Haller & Kleine, 2001), and teacher evaluation by the principal plays a role in those important decisions. "A key role for principal leadership is that of teacher evaluation. Although it is only one administrator duty and only one part of the whole picture of school operation, teacher evaluation is a central educational function" (Peterson, 2000, p. 339). The most common purposes of teacher evaluation are quality control to monitor teacher effectiveness, professional development to support teacher growth, remediation of weak teachers, validation of teacher strengths, and empowerment to develop teacher autonomy (Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998; Beerens, 2000). While the participants in this study evaluate teachers in a variety of ways according to local policies, all commented that they had a duty for teacher evaluation which they believed resided in statutory legislation, or in school/school division policy, or existed as a professional obligation.

In Manitoba, the Province grants general authority, subject to the *Public Schools Act*, to school principals to supervise and evaluate teachers. Among the legal duties of Manitoba principals, as set out specifically in the *Miscellaneous Provisions Regulation*

(Man. Reg. 468/88R) as promulgated by the Minister under the authority of the

Education Administration Act, is the responsibility of principals for the supervision of

staff during school hours, and a responsibility to participate in the evaluation of teachers.

Accordingly, Principal Crystalwhite commented about her duty to evaluate teachers, "I

know teacher evaluation is in the *Education Administration Act*. Principals are agents of

the board and one of those [duties] is to evaluate staff" (Comment 165). Principal

Dodgerblue admitted that her knowledge of a duty for teacher evaluation arose, "From

reading through Manitoba's *Public Schools Act*" (Comment 166). Principal Coral added,

"I'm responsible for evaluating the teachers under the Manitoba *Education*

Administration Act" (Comment 167).

 Principals also noted that their responsibility for teacher evaluation arose from

school or school division policy. Principal Sandstone said, "In Central Lakes School

Division we have a teacher evaluation policy and we adhere to that policy" (Comment

168). Principal Crystalwhite noted that she became aware of the duty when she became

principal, "When I took on the job it was part of the job description that I am fully and

totally responsible for the teaching practices here in the school. It was laid out by my

superior and I take that very seriously" (Comment 169). Both Principal Sienna and

Kellygreen remarked that the duty was simply part of the job of being principal. Principal

Sienna noted, "Well it's always been a part of the position. It was a part of the job

description" (Comment 170); while Principal Kellygreen observed, "I was told I did

[teacher evaluation] by the head of my school and I believe that if you look in my job

description, teachers' performance appraisal is in there" (Comment 171).

Principal Khaki who works in a private school commented, "We have a teacher evaluation or a teacher appraisal evaluation policy" (Comment 172). Principal Bluemist noted that the duty existed in divisional policy and was guided by the teachers' collective agreement as he remarked, "In our policy teachers need to be evaluated as part of the decision to retain them as per the teachers' collective agreement. Therefore, term-teachers are looking for it [to be evaluated] and therefore we must provide it" (Comment 173). In addition Principal Teal reported, "We have a policy that tells me I have to evaluate new teachers.   Also, if they are on a term contract for more than four months, I have to evaluate them. The policy tells me I have to" (Comment 174).

Smith and Andrews (1989) note that as part of instructional leadership, the principal is regarded as professionally possessing knowledge and skill in curriculum and instructional matters so that teachers through their professional interaction with the principal can improve their practice. Participants indicated that teacher evaluation was a professional responsibility owed to teachers and students. Principal Cyan commented on her view of evaluation as a professional responsibility when she stated:

I think that evaluation is an important part of learning, but essentially self-evaluation is the most critical. Teacher self evaluation often only comes about, at least in the initial stages of professional growth, by external forces. I think teachers as professionals need to be driven a little bit to grow and that is my job. It's my job to hire them and it's my job to continue to work with them, support them and give them some guidance and feedback. Then I have them go through some evaluation process driven by me that allows me to say, "Here are your strengths and here are

some areas for growth." All that time I am inviting teachers to be in

dialogue with me and I am looking for ways to promote self-reflection and

growth model. Eventually my goal would is, "You need to take this

process over" (Comment 175).

In addition Principal Olivegreen noted,

I guess it is our duty as administrators to ensure there is quality in

classrooms and if there isn't quality in classrooms we need to be working

with those individuals to bring them along. I need to ensure that in the

interest of children that there is quality teaching happening (Comment

176).

Some of the participants in this study noted that one of the purposes for teacher

evaluation is to increase their awareness of what is going on in classrooms. Principal

Coral observed, "I guess evaluation is to ensure that the teaching methodologies are

appropriate for students that we have. It's an opportunity to ensure that curriculum

outcomes are being taught" (Comment 177). Principal Bluemist stated that teacher

evaluation gave him confidence that teacher practices were appropriate. He stated,

"Originally it was just sort of selfish. I need information to know if I can go to sleep at

night and knowing that things are going okay. I need to know that something meaningful

is going on in the class" (Comment 178). Finally, Principal Bluemist commented,

I need to be informed and it's one of the ways for me to be informed as to

what's going on. I do that by walking into classrooms either on a repeated

basis informally or, more formally if I'm looking for something. In those

visits I can get pretty good insight (Comment 179).

While teacher evaluation provides visible principal leadership in the school (Peterson & Peterson, 2006), the participants viewed teacher evaluation as a means to get into classrooms to ensure that teachers are teaching effectively because as Kaplan and Owings (2004) observe, "Improving teacher effectiveness has become the center of educational reform. Increasingly, research confirms that teacher and teaching quality are the most powerful predictors of student success" (p.1).

4.5.2   Teacher Evaluation as Building Public Confidence

A few participants commented that teacher evaluation builds public confidence in not only the quality of teaching but also in the school. Principals although not always directly involved in teaching, are responsible for making sure that teachers are held responsible for student learning (Holland, 2004). Principal Olivegreen stated, "I would say that there is a collective good that happens throughout your school community because evaluation builds confidence amongst parents with regard to the quality of teaching that's happening within your building" (Comment 180). Principal Coral noted that teacher evaluation affected his conception of a professional learning community because evaluation allowed him to say the school was, "Collectively a top-notch school where parents want to continue to send their children" (Comment 181). Finally, Principal Cyan commented that teacher evaluation is significant because,

> I have to answer to the parent community and the board, and the Department of Education to say, "Yes, the teachers are qualified and this is how I know they are, because I'm in the classroom and observing and seeing that they're doing their job" (Comment 182).

4.5.3   Teacher Evaluation Shapes Principals' Conceptions of Professional Learning

Communities

A number of participants in this study identified that some of the naïve thinking

and doing of teacher evaluation typically means that evaluation does not improve practice

(Glickman, 1990; 2003; Peterson, 2000). Even though it is suggested (Blase & Blase,

2004) that many approaches to evaluation remain ones of inspection, oversight, and

judgment, initially two principals believed that teacher evaluation had no positive effect

on their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities. Principal

Sandstone stated,

> When I think of the evaluative process it really can be quite superficial. It
>
> just has negative parameters associated with it. Generally speaking I don't
>
> think it really helps the professional community. Does the evaluative
>
> process really help with that? I'm not so sure. It's a process that we have
>
> to go through legally to cover everybody's bases (Comment 183).

In additional Principal Teal noted, "Collectively the evaluative track can have no impact

on a group of educators in a building unless something red-flags those people or

somebody new comes into the building" (Comment 184).

Given the significance that teacher evaluation can play in terms of school

effectiveness (Haller & Strike, 1997), these same two principals later identified that

teacher evaluation that might lead to dismissal or termination through progressive

discipline procedures would have a deleterious affect on a school's professional learning

community. Principal Sandstone noted, "If I've got to take a teacher and maybe put that

person on intensive supervision that's going to be a very difficult thing for the whole

professional community" (Comment 185). Principal Teal commented "I think my job as

an evaluator affects the way other people feel they can participate in the school culture if

they're at risk. If they're not at risk I don't think that's the case at all" (Comment 186.

Principal Coral added,

> When you have to release a staff member who has developed connections
>
> to staff, it can be difficult for the others because there's this friendship. It's
>
> difficult for the others to understand that there's reasons why this person
>
> was let go. In terms of evaluation, when you evaluate someone who is not
>
> doing a good job and you have to, in the worse case scenario, release
>
> them, it can be detrimental to staff in terms of culture and communication
>
> and trust level between administrator and teachers (Comment 187).

The principals noted that because evaluation leading to potential dismissal is a

difficult and blunt instrument, it can cause a profound negative impact on a staff's sense

of community (Young & Levin, 2002). The participants reported that teacher evaluation

shapes their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities as they believed

that evaluation could reduce the teacher isolation and individualism so prevalent in

schools (Elmore, 2000). These principals felt that evaluation created a didactic

relationship in which a principal could work one-on-one with a teacher. The principals

felt evaluation created an instructional focus on student learning by encouraging teachers

to be risk takers and by encouraging them to try better methods of teaching (Sebring &

Bryk, 2000). Principal Sienna articulated the importance of evaluation for her when she

stated,

> I think teacher evaluation is really important. When I do the teacher
>
> evaluations I get to go in and see the teacher as someone who plans, who

has teaching strategies and who is assessing. I'm looking at those kinds of

things when I evaluate (Comment 188).

Principal Khaki remarked,

The reason I think that it [teacher evaluation] affects the school's

professional learning community positively is that none of us has the full

edge or owns the craft, no matter how long you've taught. But, there's

some really good teaching happening that you can connect others to

because you've actually examined it with that person. I have to say that in

evaluation I'm looking for the good (Comment 189).

Principal Crystalwhite added that evaluation has broad objectives for her,

Teacher evaluation is so teachers become better at what they do. The

purpose is for them is to become better teachers. To do that you need to

identify the outcomes as a goal. Otherwise, we are human and the

tendency for some people might be to just cruise. Evaluation creates this

process and reminds people that they are lifelong learners and that they

have a responsibility to continue developing their skills and their

knowledge in teaching and learning (Comment 190).

The participants believed this instructional focus, a fundamental component of

professional learning communities, is supported by principals who visit classrooms

regularly, demonstrate their conviction to teaching and learning and take the institutional

pulse of the school through teacher evaluation (Sebring & Bryk, 2000).   Principal Cyan

explained,

My role is to be an outside version of the voice inside the teacher's head that says, "I want to be the best professional I can be. I have a commitment to do that and I have a desire to do that. So how is my performance? What do I need to do differently to make it better? What's happening out there that I need to integrate?" If I'm doing my job well, I'm just that voice outside their head (Comment 191).

Three other participants commented as follows:

Principal Mustardseed:

The objective [of teacher evaluation] is to create a professional learning community. It's important to have a structure, a process to encourage that. Without that piece of the assessment and the professional growth, the professional learning community would lack something. The more that individuals are encouraged to grow, to keep current, to take courses that might help them, to learn from each other and to read research, then teaching gets better the teaching and there is an improved knowledge base (Comment 192).

Principal Kellygreen:

It's important that evaluation helps us to stop and reflect on our practice and on what is working or not working in the classroom. It's a learning process for each staff member to continue to grow as an educator. What I would hope to see is staff further develop her or his potential, have the ability to be able to grow and to be able to feel that she or he can attempt

to grow. This growth would enhance their ability to teach and in the end

the result is greater success in student learning (Comment 193).

Principal Sienna:

We've got a lot of initiatives that we have been developing within our

staff. Evaluation allows me to see evidence of that in the classroom. I

think evaluation is really important. Evaluation lets me see what comes

from our discussions and what the evidence there is in the classroom of

those conversations. Evaluation is a pretty important connecting factor

from the professional development that we provide each year and how that

plays out, and is implemented into the classroom (Comment 194).

The principals remarked that the professional learning community concept is built

on an assumption that the fundamental mission of schools is to ensure students are taught

and learn, and that teacher evaluation affects how they conceive of a school as a

professional learning community (DuFour, 2005). They believed that teacher evaluation

allowed them to try to fulfill their responsibility to achieve the collective school-wide

purpose of ensuring students were being taught and learning, which is a underlying goal

of the concept of a professional learning community (DuFour, 2004). As Principal Coral

noted,

In terms of teachers collectively, evaluation helps us see through our areas

of weaknesses so that we can focus on them as a staff as opposed to

individuals. It's one way of identifying the needs of the school or needs of

teachers collectively within the school (Comment 195).

Principal Cyan stated,

Through evaluation I can get a feel for what is happening across the

grades and then begin to talk with staff about what I see. Then I can begin

to set some collective goals which are driven by my observation and

driven to some degree by my vision for the school but, in connection with

the staff of course (Comment 196).

Principal Sienna remarked that evaluation provided insight into relationships

amongst staff,

I'm looking at their role within their partnership, within their team, within

the whole school staff and then I look at how they fit into the whole school

community. Do they offer their services on initiatives or committees that

benefit the whole school? It's not just their role within the classroom

which is important and also student learning that happens in their

classroom, but also how do they fit into the picture as a whole staff and a

whole community (Comment 197)?

Principal Coral added,

It [evaluation] does help us. First of all from the evaluation you do get a

sense of where the strengths and weaknesses of the staff are. It allows me

to set some school goals for professional development. Yes, it does help

because it does give you a focus (Comment 198).

According to Sebring and Bryk (2000), productive principals are strong managers

as well as instructional leaders, characterized by "an inclusive, facilitative orientation; an

institutional focus on student learning; efficient management; and a reliance on a

combination of pressure and support to motivate others" (p. 441). These principals

regarded teacher evaluation as an approach to foster purposeful interaction and problem solving with teachers (Fullan, 2001). Principal Olivegreen noted,

> I think often times staff don't necessarily tell us how they feel about their colleagues. But, they know if somebody is not pulling their part or doing the things that should be done. Usually, there is an appreciation on the part of staff when somebody does take that leadership and asks that teacher to make some changes (Comment 199).

From a collective point of view Principal Coral suggested evaluation,

> Help to see through our collective areas of weakness so that we can focus on them as a staff as opposed to simply as individuals. It's a way of identifying the needs of the school or needs of all of teachers within the school (Comment 200).

Principal Crystalwhite reported that teacher evaluation allowed for issues of the "common good" to surface in teachers' practices,

> There is definitely a connection [between teacher evaluation and the school's professional learning community] because I'm not the one who decides alone what the professional development should be for our school. It's a staff decision and it's done usually after we've had the chance to have a dialogue about their collective need for professional growth. The way I see it is that there are two different streams. There is the individual teacher and his/her own room and then there is the common good, the common needs for the school related to the school goals (Comment 201).

Table 4.15, "Principals' perceptions of the effects teacher evaluation has on conceptions of professional learning communities," summarizes the comments made by the participants which indicate principals' perceptions of schools as professional learning communities are shaped by the duty of teacher evaluation. All of the comments referred to in Table 4.15 are found in pages 213 to 223 of this thesis.

Table 4.15 Principals' perceptions of the effects teacher evaluation has on conceptions of professional learning communities

Participant's name	Duty for teacher evaluation	Teacher evaluation as building public confidence	Teacher evaluation as shaping conceptions of professional learning community
Principal Crystalwhite	Comments 165 & 169		Comments 190 & 201
Principal Sienna	Comment 170		Comments 188, 194 & 197
Principal Dodgerblue	Comment 166		
Principal Khaki	Comment 172		Comment 189
Principal Mustardseed			Comment 192
Principal Sandstone	Comment 168		Comments 183 & 185
Principal Olivegreen	Comment 176	Comment 180	Comments 199
Principal Kellygreen	Comment 171		Comment 193
Principal Teal	Comment 174		Comments 184 & 186
Principal Cyan	Comment 175	Comment 182	Comments 191 & 196
Principal Coral	Comments 167 & 177	Comment 181	Comments 187, 195, 198 & 200
Principal Bluemist	Comments 173, 178 & 179		
Summary	15 Comments	3 Comments	19 Comments
	11 Participants	3 Participants	10 Participants

4.5.4   Summary and Connections to Related Literature

Based on the data analyzed for this research question, the presentation was organized into three broad areas through data analysis: duty for teacher evaluation,

teacher evaluation as building public confidence, and teacher evaluation as shaping

conceptions of professional learning community. While the duty for teacher evaluation

arose from three sources - legislated responsibility, school/school division policy, and

professional responsibility - the participants in this study acknowledged that staff

evaluation is an essential responsibility of principals. Copper, Ehrensal and Bromme

(2005) assert the evaluation of teacher performance is a major responsibility of

principals. They state, "Called instructional leadership, staff review, and performance

evaluation, these efforts are deemed critical to teaching and learning and to the quality of

school productivity" (p. 112).

The participants also commented that two important outcomes, but not the only

ones, of evaluation fit into what are described as the historic roles of teacher evaluation,

which are inspection and control (Gordon, 1997). In addition, participants viewed

evaluation as a means of building public confidence in both the quality of the teachers

and the quality of the school. This view reflects the findings of Darling-Hammond, Wise

and Pease (1983) who suggest that over the last two decades teacher evaluation has

assumed increasing importance as the public demand for accountability in education has

shifted to concerns about the quality of classroom teaching and teachers.

While a few principals initially reported that their duty for teacher evaluation did

not affect their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities, these same

participants plus one other specifically noted that evaluation procedures leading to

teacher dismissal did influence how they conceived of a school as a professional learning

community. These views represent what is referred to as the micropolitical perspective of

schools (Achinstein, 2002; Cooper et al., 2005). Blase (1991, as cited in Achinstein, 2002) writes,

> Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups coupled with their motivation to use power to influence and/or protect (p. 11).

Cooper et al. (2005) argue that the teacher and principal relationship should be understood as micropolitical, involving layers of authority and control. The participants noted evaluation potentially leading to teacher dismissal negatively affects conceptions of professional learning community because thinking of schools as community foregrounds what Achinstein (2002) suggests are notions of belonging, connectedness, and caring relationships.

The participants in the study regarded teacher evaluation as influencing their thinking about professional learning communities by allowing them to focus on their instructional leadership and the instructional practices of the teacher being evaluated. Narrowly defined, instructional leadership "focuses on leadership functions directly related to teaching and learning" (Marks & Printy, 2003). This narrow understanding of instructional leadership appears to be the model of supportive leadership for a professional learning community which the study's participants regarded as emanating from the duty for teacher evaluation. These principals perceived teacher evaluation as supporting notions of professional learning community by providing principals with insight into individual classroom practices.

From a collective school-wide focus, the principals commented that evaluation provided a broad perspective for them of what is going on in many individual classrooms. Evaluation was viewed by the participants as a formally planned activity, one teacher at a time, intended to advance individual teacher knowledge, skills and/or dispositions in order to improve student learning. The collective influence of evaluation on a school's professional learning community is viewed by the participants as providing a composite picture of teachers practice by evaluating a number of individual teachers. This view falls short of what Newmann et al. (2001) suggest is the potential impact of teacher evaluation across a school, which is that it can be used to advance the knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions to improve student learning across a school by the staff collectively. Newmann et al. contend that evaluation can be used to address aspects of school capacity by focusing on teachers' instruction that then boosts student achievement school-wide.

The participants' perspective did not reflect what Toole and Louis (2002) suggest is a potential positive effect of teacher evaluation on a school's professional learning community, which is that principals should use systemic means such as evaluation to build deep and broad notions of collegiality amongst staff – i.e., what it means to be a good colleague and how a good colleague should act. Principals, they contend may be able to use evaluation "to promote collective intellectual stimulation, reflection, participation, and a continuous focus on improved practice" amongst staff (p. 272). The participants in this study regarded teacher evaluation as affecting their characterization of a professional learning community, but their concepts fell short of what the literature recommends it could be.

4.6 Research Question 3a

The fourth and final research question asked: How do principals perceive that this effect is evident? As previously, questions posed to the participants in the focus groups and interviews provided the data to answer this research question concerning the impact that their involvement in teacher evaluation had on principals' conceptions of a professional learning community.

4.6.1 Teacher Evaluation Effects on New Staff

While there are variations in the policies between public schools and between private schools, typically in Manitoba it takes either one or two years for new teachers to obtain a continuous contract from their employing authority. The participants regarded the successful completion of the evaluation process by new teachers as the standard required to be able to join a school's professional learning community.

Principal Coral noted,

> I think for a first year teacher the purpose of the evaluation, and my responsibility to the board is to decide whether this teacher has the ability and skills to both teach and deliver the program. This is a very different outcome of evaluation than it is for a teacher who has been here for a number of years where my responsibility is not necessarily to the school board but to that teacher (Comment 202).

Principal Coral commented,

> In the first couple of years evaluation does not really have a purpose other than to get a teacher a permanent contract, because to get that contract you have to pass the evaluation process. For the teacher, they want to pass the

evaluation so that they can become a permanent staff member. I think

that's where the focus is. I think that they want to become better teachers

only after they know they have a contract (Comment 203).

Among the core induction tasks of new teachers by principals is that of providing leadership for instructional and professional development through formative and summative evaluation (Carver, 2003). Besides communicating their expectations to new teachers about professional practice, principals may use evaluation procedures to match novices with skilled colleagues who can assist the new teachers in developing not only their instructional practice but also help in extending their understanding of what the notion of school entails (Carver). Principal Teal commented, "I'll talk candidly about the fact that the evaluative process for new teachers is to determine whether or not they are people that we should be keeping in our division and who will be working with us" (Comment 204).

Principal Bluemist illustrated the effect of evaluation on his conception of professional learning community when he stated,

Evaluation is important because you have new teachers coming into the

school and it is important that they get some training. The existing norms

are known by the majority of the people in so far as they can say, "That's

kind of how we do it here." New people can just come in and watch other

teachers who are well trained and get caught up in whatever norms there

are like, "This is how we do talk professionally," "This is how we get

through sticky issues" and "This is how we keep kids at the center of our

conversations and those sorts of things" (Comment 205).

Finally, Principal Crystalwhite remarked,

> There's another responsibility [in teacher evaluation] which is that we do
> get new teachers coming into the profession and our job as principal is to
> support them, make sure they have mentors and the resources that they
> need so that they can grow. It's also to make sure that as a division we
> know we are committing ourselves to keeping them forever. That's a big
> responsibility (Comment 206).

4.6.2 Teacher Evaluation as Fostering Principal and Teacher Relationships

Administration in education, it is argued (Elmore, 2000), should be focused on the

management of instruction and not only on the management of the processes around

instruction. Teacher evaluation may be a catalyst to challenge extant assumptions which

underlie teachers' practices (Ingvarson, 2003). Reeves (2005) contends the framework of

a school as a professional learning community is closely connected to standards,

assessment and accountability of teaching practices which influence student achievement.

Given that much of the information needed to make quality decisions about teaching and

learning comes from teachers, participants in this study commented that the relationships

between teachers and principals are crucial (Green, 2005). Principal Khaki noted,

"Sometimes it [teacher evaluation] opens up the opportunity for us to dialogue as

professionals in the building" (Comment 207). Similarly Principal Coral said, "The

evaluation process has forced me to be in the classroom and having conversations"

(Comment 208).

These principals suggested that no adult-to-adult relationship in a school has a

greater effect on the quality of life in that school than the relationships between teachers

and principal (Barth, 1990). These principals believed their duty to evaluate teachers

provides one avenue for gaining an understanding of the types and quality of the

interactions that exist which a school's professional learning community. This

understanding can constitute a resource for teacher learning and improved teaching

practices (Little, 2003). A number of principals commented on this fact.

Principal Mustardseed:

> I think teacher evaluation and assessment plays a very important part
>
> because it gives me a chance to know where our teachers are at in the
>
> classroom. Evaluation is a very important piece of that puzzle because it
>
> allows me to go into the classroom and see what is being taught, how is it
>
> being taught and see if it is meeting our students' needs. That's my direct
>
> involvement in partnership with a teacher to make sure that happens
>
> (Comment 209).

Principal Sandstone:

> I see evaluation not as something we do to people but, something that we
>
> do with people. It becomes a time where we get to know each other. I get
>
> to see in a formal way how teachers interact with students. As I get to
>
> know my staff, it gives me an opportunity to position people with each
>
> other. I start to see their strengths and I make, in some ways, a subjective
>
> judgment about those individuals. What I try to do is get people positioned
>
> with each other because maybe they have similar interests or, similar gifts
>
> and if I see a strength in one area and maybe a challenge in another area

with another teacher what I can do is connect people to help support each

other (Comment 210).

Principal Crystalwhite:

As the principal what I do is create situations so they have opportunities to

work with a colleague on what their goals are for the year. I am there to

remind them to discuss it midway and there's that evaluation package at

the end. But what I do, and I know a lot of principals do, is I create a

situation where they can have dialogue with me (Comment 211).

Principal Cyan:

I'm not in the classroom as much as I would like to be, but I do get in a

fair bit. I think people feel fairly comfortable sharing their teaching

successes and challenges with me. Through that interaction there are

connections being made (Comment 212).

Principal Crystalwhite:

I need to see them working together to challenge themselves in

pedagogical or curriculum related areas. They're not quite there. As

leaders we need to be involved with teachers so that there is continuous

learning which leads to a learning community (Comment 213).

Principal Bluemist:

What am I looking to evaluate? I think I'm looking at relationship

building in the broad sense. The more I know about one person or another,

the more I can put them together in a teaming situation. It helps me to

know what their struggles are, where their strengths are, what kind of

student they might work best with, whether they're having a really rough

time. Those kinds of conversations go on. I ask teachers all the time,

"What's working in your class? How did such and such project go?" Then

I try to carry that conversation on a little bit further (Comment 214).

The effect of the duty for teacher evaluation was viewed as an opportunity for

principals to nurture relationships with teachers and use the intellectual capacity of

faculty as a source and disseminator of knowledge in the school's professional learning

community (Crow et al., 2002). Table 4.16, "Principals' perceptions of the effects that

teacher evaluation has on conceptions of professional learning communities,"

summarizes comments made by the participants which indicated principals' perceptions

of the effects that teacher evaluation had on their conceptions of schools as professional

learning communities. All of the comments referred to in Table 4.16 are found in pages

229 to 234 of this thesis.

Table 4.16 Principals' perceptions of the effects that teacher evaluation has on

conceptions of professional learning communities

Participant's name	Teacher evaluation effects on new staff	Teacher evaluation as fostering principal and teacher relationships
Principal Crystalwhite	Comment 206	Comments 211 & 213
Principal Sienna		
Principal Dodgerblue		
Principal Khaki		Comment 207
Principal Mustardseed		Comment 209
Principal Sandstone		Comment 210
Principal Olivegreen		
Principal Kellygreen		
Principal Teal	Comment 204	
Principal Cyan		Comment 212
Principal Coral	Comments 202 & 203	Comment 208
Principal Bluemist	Comment 205	Comment 214
Summary	5 Comments 4 Participants	3 Comments 3 Participants

4.6.3   Summary and Connections to Related Literature

Based on the data analysis for this research question, the presentation was organized into two broad areas: teacher evaluation effects on new staff, and teacher evaluation as fostering principal and teacher relationships. Some of the participants commented that one effect of teacher evaluation on their conceptions of professional learning communities is that evaluation provided them with a demarcation within the school's community between newly hired and veteran teachers. While the purpose of evaluation for veteran staff was regarded generally by the participants as providing continuous professional development, for new teachers the effect of evaluation was regarded as a process that not only allows new teachers to access continuous employment

but also as a process which secures membership for a new teacher in a school's professional learning community.

This latter effect of evaluation may cement in the minds of new teachers the existence of an organizational superior-subordinate relationship between principal and teacher (Cooper et al., 2005). The principal has the authority to secure a teacher's employment and in effect permit a teacher to become a member of a school's professional learning community. Another effect of evaluation is that it may permanently legitimize in the minds of new teachers the primacy of the principal's opinion in organizational matters and limit notions of shared decision-making, which is needed if schools are to be as professional learning communities (Cooper et al.). Evaluation in terms of securing permanent employment for teachers may crystallize the belief that the opinion that mattered most, set from the very beginning of their careers, was that of the principal.

Many of the participants noted that a second effect of teacher evaluation is that it fosters the development of principal and teacher relationships within the school's professional learning community. This point is consistent with Murphy's (2002) assertion that a central tenet of the professional learning concept is that principals "must learn to lead not from the apex of the organizational pyramid but from a web of interpersonal relationships – with people rather than through them" (p. 77). This effect of evaluation appears to be consistent with the idea that in conceptions of schools as professional learning communities principals need to take on greater responsibility in maintaining the vibrancy and health of the web of social relationships which exists amongst teachers, and between the teachers and the principal (Crow et al., 2002). In conceptions of professional

learning community, "the interactional principal" (Crow et al.) uses teacher evaluation to continually access teaching practices and assess the nature of teacher work, and bring teachers together to have conversations they would not otherwise have.

Marks and Printy (2003) suggest that principals should employ integrated leadership, a combination of instructional and transformational leadership practices, in their evaluation of teachers. This integrated form of principal leadership when applied to teacher evaluation would involve teachers in sustained dialogue and decision making processes about instructional matters, or collective and individual practice while allowing principals to remain as central agents for the kind of transformational change required by schools to be professional learning communities.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE

RESEARCH

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of twelve school

principals in Manitoba concerning the normative imperative to develop schools as

professional learning communities. This study compared Toole and Louis's (2002)

definition of a school as professional learning community with the beliefs and

administrative practices of the study's participants. A study exploring principals'

perceptions of schools as professional learning communities was considered to be

important because principals are seen as central figures in schools that are striving to be

professional learning communities.

The study took the form of qualitative, interpretative research using grounded

theory as the methodology, and involved two focus groups and twelve individual

interviews over a five-month period. The same twelve principals participated in the focus

groups with six principals participating in each focus group. Questions for the focus

groups and individual interviews were constructed based on the research questions.

Similar and contrasting themes were identified for each research question based on the

responses of the principals.

The study revealed some consistency between both the preconditions for, and

characteristics of professional learning communities as found in Toole and Louis' (2002)

definition and the perceptions of the study's participants. The study also revealed some

differences or discontinuities between principals' perceptions of schools as professional

learning communities and Toole and Louis' (2002) definition, especially in regard to

what preconditions characterize a professional learning community and what

preconditions and structural supports enable their development and sustain them. This

chapter presents, in proposition form, significant themes based in the findings of the

study. The following eight themes are a synthesis of the findings of the study based on

their significance in terms of how frequently they were mentioned and articulated by the

participants, and by how they differed or resembled Toole and Louis' (2002) definition of

a school as a professional learning community. Finally, recommendations for future

research are then presented.

5.2. Significant Themes

5.2.1   Conceptions of Professional Learning Community Are Overly Focused on

Process

In conceiving of schools as professional learning communities, principals are

focusing on the processes of becoming a professional learning community, rather than on

the outcomes or products of such an entity. Principals believe that if schools are to be

professional learning communities, there is a requirement for transformational changes to

be made across a number of dimensions. Principals regard professional learning

communities as a continuous commitment to support the activities of staff as they grow

as community, as learners, and as professionals. Principals view a professional learning

community as a process, journey, or as existing along a continuum. If school

improvement depends on building a school's capacity for developing a professional

learning community, then principals need to know what structures, processes and

practices best enable them to do this (Silins & Mulford, 2002). Principals need to be able

to assess the strengths of their schools on the characteristics of a professional learning

community, and subsequently determine how and whether some features are tied to improving the school's performance (Mark, Louis & Printy, 200 as cited in Silins & Mulford).

Principals' conceptions lack an understanding that, besides being a process, there are valued products of schools as professional learning communities. The products of professional learning communities, which can be in-process or end-products, should be examined to provide information that is used by the professional learning community to improve student outcomes. Such an examination would allow the school's professional learning community to evaluate existing priorities and activities and make adjustments as necessary.

Principals need to move beyond the noble cause of advocating for schools as professional learning communities with their good intentions but without a focus on results. Conceptualizing a school as a professional learning community that will improve student achievement school-wide will only materialize if principals translate good intentions and respect for process into specific actions that can be measured and then use the data to build a collective commitment to improve student achievement.

5.2.2   Preconditions Support the Development of Professional Learning Communities as They Interact with One Another

The principals noted a number of conditions that support the development of schools into professional learning communities. Among these were time, school plans, interconnected teacher roles, teacher empowerment, institutional identity, trust amongst staff, staff trust of principal, principals' connectedness to staff, and the principal as being able and willing to engage staff in reflective dialogue. These preconditions can be divided
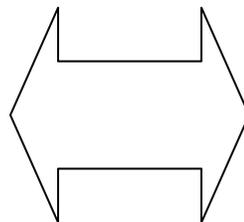
into two broad areas, namely structural supports and human and social resources (see

Figure 5.1 below, "Structural supports and human and social resource preconditions for a

school's professional learning community").

Figure 5.1 Structural supports and human and social resource preconditions of a

professional learning community

Structural supports   Human and social resources

    ☐ Time   ☐ Trust amongst staff
    ☐ School plans   ☐ Staff trust of principal
    ☐ Interconnected teacher roles   ☐ Principals' connectedness
    ☐ Teacher empowerment   to staff
    ☐ Institutional identity   ☐ Principal as engaging staff
                                            in reflective dialogue

While principals identify certain significant supportive conditions for schools to become

professional learning communities, evidence indicates that any list of items is, of itself,

insufficient to foster effective professional learning communities. The structural supports

and human and social resource preconditions enable and sustain schools as professional

learning communities only as they interact with each other. Despite the fact that research

evidence (Toole & Louis, 2002) indicates that there are various important preconditions

that should exist to support the development of schools as professional learning

communities, principals need to understand that supportive conditions alone do not

ensure the changes required in teachers' practices for schools to be professional learning

communities.

       The preconditions are perhaps best seen as mechanisms for arranging the way

people interact with each other in time and space. Structural supports and human and

social resources can shape the actions and relationships of the professional learning community, by both opening up opportunities and imposing constraints on them (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore & Manning, 2001). Principals need to develop deeper understandings of how the preconditions intersect and interact with each other to enable schools to become professional learning communities.

5.2.3   *Trust is the Foundation for the Adult Relationships in a Professional Learning Community*

Principals identify trust as one of the strongest facilitating factors for schools developing as professional learning communities. Trust is seen as the social condition that acts as a foundation for the kinds of mature adult relationships necessary in professional learning communities. While the structural support preconditions are like the framing architecture of a professional learning community, trust amongst teachers and teachers and their principal can be regarded as the "hammer and nails" required to hold the frame together.

Trust and respect act as the glue to which collaboration, reflective dialogue, and deprivatization of practice can adhere (Spillane & Louis, 2002). Social trust is critical for both the individual and organizational collaboration that leads to learning in a professional community. Principal leadership is a crucial element in the development of social trust in schools. While supportive leadership on the part of the principal influences the degree of trust teachers feel for the principal, it does not bring about trust among the faculty for one another (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). Trust in the principals is determined primarily by the behaviour of the principal. In other words as Tschannen-Moran and Hoy write, "the principal controls his or her own destiny by ways that

engender trust or distrust" (p. 348), but surprisingly trust in principals has little influence

on the trust that teachers have with each other. If a professional learning community is, as

Spillane and Louis (2002) suggest, nothing more than a form of shorthand term for the

kinds of adult relationships in schools that support individual and collective change in

classrooms, then principals need to be keenly aware of what social trust is, how it works

and is nurtured, and perhaps more significantly how it is lost.

5.2.4   *Weak Ties Dominate Principals' Conceptions of Community and These Are Inadequate for Schools to Become Fully Developed Professional Learning Communities*

While there is variation in the descriptions of how teachers experience collegial

relationships within schools, the principals were fairly consistent in their view that

teachers' connections are typically social and/or professional. A minority position was

that the relationship amongst staff most closely resembled that which might be described

as familial. The participants illustrated teacher connections with examples in which

collegiality is seen as a sharing and supporting of individual practice, but one in which

very limited professional advice is offered and only when specifically asked for.

The view of community generally presented by the participants in this study was

that it should be places for consensus. Generally, the participants did not note that a

community should be a place for critically examining individual and collective ideas of

teaching and learning. In this respect, a strong dissenting opinion was given by a single

participant who indicated that the kind of "tight" relationships among staff were an

impediment to improved teaching practice because the teachers spent the majority of time

protecting each other from any form of critique.

The kind of community that is required to shape teachers' beliefs to support students' opportunities to learn should allow and provide occasions for the kind of disagreement and disequilibrium that comes with critical questioning and debates of best practices. The type of ties in community that need to exist in professional learning communities should encourage deep collaboration on matters of instruction, the nature of teaching, and of learning that surfaces and critiques core assumptions about students, how they learn, and what the role of teachers should be (Toole & Louis, 2002). In conceiving of professional learning communities, principals need to move beyond conceptions of collaboration as comfortable and focused on non-instructional matters and begin to regard schools as places of trust (community) and places of risk-taking (learning organizations) where a commitment to improved student outcomes becomes a tie that binds community (Toole & Louis).

5.2.5   *Learning in Professional Learning Communities Needs to be about Deep and Continuous Improvement to Teachers' Practices School-Wide*

Principals regard teacher learning as an individual activity and disposition in which teachers typically master new techniques and perhaps substantially change behaviours. Principals consider teacher learning as being a teacher's commitment to learn throughout her or his career. This is often referred to as a commitment to life-long learning. This kind of learning emphasizes personal and professional growth and is for the most part self-directed. Yet, the kind of learning required in the professional learning concept emphasizes both individual and group growth. In the professional learning community concept teacher learning is one in which teachers treat ideas about and for teaching as objects that can be identified and examined collectively, critically analyzed

and reflected upon together (Hiebert et al., 2003). To improve practice fundamentally, teachers need to engage with other teachers and principals to question, unlearn, and discard their current, rooted understandings of teaching, learning, and subject matter that do not support student achievement (Spillane & Louis, 2002). "Staying connected means leaders do more than listen to the facts and circumstances being discussed. It goes beneath the surface matters and engages deeper emotional levels" (Ciancutti & Stedding, 2001, p. 90). Principals need to view teachers' learning as engagement in common activity in a way that is owned by the staff collectively, where the members of the professional community learn as an ensemble possessing a culture that supports innovation in teaching and improved practices across the school (Spillane & Louis, 2002).

5.2.6   *In a Professional Learning Community, Professional Teaching Means a Commitment to Collective Instructional Practices and a Shared Knowledge-Base that Improves Student Outcomes*

Teachers were described as professionals by the study's participants in terms of what Ingersoll (2003) refers to as attitudinal attributes. Principals in this study commonly referred to teachers' diligence, caring, warmth, respect and dedication in portraying them as professionals. From this perspective, a professional is someone who is personally dedicated to children and who is committed to meeting the needs of her or his individual students (Ingersoll). Whereas certain understandings of a professional ideologically emphasize the guild or collegium as the critical point of reference for practice, the study's participants noted teachers typically learn to rely on themselves to solve the fundamental dilemmas of their craft (Sykes, 1999).

In a professional learning community, while each individual is responsible for her or his own actions, , the "common good" is placed on par with personal professional ambition (Hord, 2004). In conceptions of professional learning community though, the concept of teacher as professional needs to move beyond individualistic notions and move to explorations of how teachers can collectively develop practices and knowledge that can be shared, examined publicly, stored and accumulated, and passed along to future generations of teachers (Hiebert et al., 2002). A struggle for principals emanates from the tension that exists between the notion of teacher as individual possessing professional attributes and the professional in a school's professional learning community where to be a competent professional means that one needs to learn constantly and be in community with others (Nieto, 2003). Professionalism in a school community is one where teachers engage in reflective dialogue, where there is a de-privatization of practice, a collective focus on student learning, collaboration, and shared norms and values (Kruse & Louis, 1995).

Professional teachers need to be viewed by principals as engaging in continual, reflective inquiry and involved in an exchange of ideas which leads to the development of a shared technical language and shared knowledge base (Little, 1993). To answer the challenges of twenty-first century schooling, teachers and principals need to become co-creators of professional knowledge (Hargreaves, 1999). In this understanding of professional knowledge, "new ideas and innovations emerge *between* rather than *within* people" (Paavola, Lipponen & Hakkararainen, 2004, p. 564).

In conceptions of schools as professional learning communities, community, professionalism, and learning are inextricably linked since effective teaching should be

about individuals working with others to critically examine their own practices to resolve

important problems of teaching and learning. Conversations about teaching, about the

problems teachers face when they enter their classrooms, about their dilemmas of

practice, and the resolutions to those dilemmas are what create professional learning

communities (Nieto, 2003). Ill conceived or inadequate ideas of what contributes to a

school's professional learning community hold little promise for efforts aimed at

improving student outcomes school-wide. Principals, as educational leaders, need to

develop better understandings of the complexities which exist in conceptions of schools

as professional learning communities. This study revealed that principals interested in

creating schools as professional learning communities will need to be cognizant of, and

adaptive to, the cultural and micropolitical meaning of embracing the conflict and dissent

which is critical to the productive functioning of professional learning communities

(Toole & Louis, 2002).

5.2.7   *Responsibility for Teacher Evaluation Can Shape How Principals Think about Schools as Professional Learning Communities.*

While the competence of individual teachers is viewed as the foundation for

improved instructional practice, the collective power of the whole staff to improve

student achievement school-wide is defined as school capacity (Newmann et al., 2001).

Principals regard teacher evaluation as a means to improve the quality of teaching in their

schools (Painter, 2000). In most schools the principal has the authority, usually set down

in legislation and/or through school or school division policy, to affect all aspects of a

school's capacity, including a school's professional learning community. Hord (2004)

notes that it ironic that in order to transform a school from an organization into a professional learning community it requires a principal's sanction and active nurturing of the entire staff's development as a community. Principals need to become aware that teacher evaluation in its broadest sense - 1) improving educational instruction, 2) enhancing educational delivery through professional development, and 3) justifying the removal of substandard teachers - can be used to influence the preconditions and characteristics of schools that are developing as professional learning communities. This study appears to demonstrate that state policies, in the form of a principal's duty to evaluate teachers, affect principals' conceptions of schools as professional learning communities.

5.2.8   *Teacher Evaluation Can Affect the Nature of Principal and Teacher Relationships in Professional Learning Communities*

Cuban (1998) identifies three dominant roles that have historically constituted the jobs of principals. First and foremost, principals hold a managerial role as an administrative chief. Second, their jobs have a political role as a negotiator and facilitator with teacher, students, parents, and other constituencies. Third, they hold an instructional role as a teacher of teachers. Cuban argues convincingly that in most cases the managerial and political roles, not the instructional role, dominate the lives of most principals. According to Yariv (2006),

> Problematic teachers present one of the toughest challenges school
> principals may ever face. Poor performing teachers not only do not bring
> the expected results, but also their bad behavior may distract others from

doing their work. They consume much of the principal's time and take the

place of other workers who might be of more help to the organization.

Their bad behavior damages the school's reputation. (p. 535)

Yet, even with this Yariv contends principals are willing to dismiss the

shortcomings of poor performing teachers. Yariv notes that principals "replace keeping

high professional standards with maintaining good relations with the appraised teacher"

(p.535). Lortie (1988, p. 10 as cited in Boyd & Hartman, 1988) concludes that,

The relationships principals find most valuable are not with their superiors

[or with parents], but those with teachers…Principals are dependent in

many ways for their personal satisfaction and their ability to advance their

careers on their ability to get along well with the teachers in their

buildings…That relationship is fragile and is often tested. Unhappy

teachers can complicate the relationship. As a result, many principals take

few risks with new programs and seek to build strong personal

relationships with teachers.

Many principals only take disciplinary action against a teacher when faced with a

teacher's intolerable deeds or when pressed by an external threat, and then often it is too

little and too late (Yariv, 2006). Principals typically prefer to a calm atmosphere amongst

staff to build a sense of community and as a result are reluctant to submit negative

feedback to underperforming teachers (Yariv, 2006).

If Spillane and Louis (2002, p. 274) are correct in their conclusion that the cross-

cultural findings are clear, "professional learning communities can generally lead to

improved school functioning in most settings", then harnessing their potential utility

comes from understanding the complexity of professional learning communities from principals' perspectives.   A school developing a professional learning community can be influenced by a principal's leadership. Since a great deal of legal responsibility, including that of teacher evaluation, can reside with the principal, principal leadership can be regarded as a critical force in a school's capacity to improve the education of students. Teacher evaluation can affect staff confidence that the principal will keep her or his word and act in the best interests of individual teachers and the staff collectively. Teacher evaluation provides principals with a formal duty to support the professional learning of the entire teacher community within a school. Evaluation provides principals with opportunities to display respect, personal regard for others, integrity, and competence as instructional leaders. Evaluation can be used to embed processes that promote cooperation which leads to the deeper kinds of collaborative practices that facilitate and support the development of a school as a professional learning community. By focusing on the nature and quality of the relationships required in a professional learning community, evaluation can become an opportunity to work with teachers collectively and collaboratively to bring about improvements in practice that affect student outcomes school-wide. With this duty comes responsibility and authority, and principals can use evaluation to not only assist schools to develop as professional learning communities but also to influence the organizational reality of teachers, and how they come to understand the school's professional learning community (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Among the suggestions for the form of supportive principal leadership required for effective schools, is the need for principals to broaden and deepen their understandings of the organizational supports, work structures, and interpersonal

processes associated with effective professional learning communities (Pounder, Reitzug, and Young, 2002). While Hord (2004) suggests professional learning communities hold the best promise for sustaining school improvement efforts, the efforts associated with nurturing them will lack results if a key figure in developing the school as professional learning community – the principal – lacks the clarity of what a school as professional learning community is and what is required for a school to be one.

5.3   Suggestions for Future Research

Since this study focused only on the perceptions of twelve Manitoba principals and their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities in the context of their duty to evaluate teachers, with a specific emphasis on Toole and Louis's (2002) definition of a professional learning community, a number of suggestions can be made for further research.

Firstly, the study could be repeated with principals using other definitions of school as professional learning community. Since the line of inquiry of this study was intended to compare the participants' perceptions primarily with Toole and Louis's (2002) definition, a comparative study could examine principals' perceptions of schools as professional learning communities in relation to a number of other definitions.

This study could be repeated with the data being analyzed to explore potential similarities and differences in the conceptions of principals, specifically between the perceptions of principals of high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. Since high schools are generally regarded as being more content driven, this perspective may yield different results. This study could be repeated with principals in different provinces

or territories. Since the legislation surrounding the duty for teacher evaluation differs

from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, a study of how principals from different

provinces/territories conceive of professional learning communities in light of their

specific legislative duty to evaluate teachers and, perhaps, how they actually exercise it

may also yield different results.

Additionally, this study could be repeated to include principals from First Nations

schools to see if there are differences which may be culturally significant. Finally, future

research could concentrate on how principals nurture specific features of a school's

professional learning community, given the participants' perceptions specifically of the

significant role of trust in professional relationships, and how they might remediate

deficiencies in it.

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APPENDIX A: ENREB APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

06 January 2006

TO: **Jerome Cranston**   (Advisor J. Stapleton)
                Principal Investigator

FROM: **Stan Straw, Chair**
                Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol #E2005:120**
                **"Holding the Reins of the Professional Learning Community: A Study
                of Twelve Manitoba School Principals Concerning the Relationship
                between the Duty to Evaluate Teachers and the Normative Imperative
                to Develop Schools as Professional Learning Communities"**

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics
approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and
operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement**.** This approval is valid for one
year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported
to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

 **-   if you have funds pending human ethics approval, the auditor requires that you
submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to Kathryn Bartmanovich, Research Grants
& Contract Services (fax 261-0325), including the Sponsor name, before your account
can be opened.**

 **-   if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you
to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval;
otherwise the account will be locked.**

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION FORMS

Included are three letters requesting permission for participation:

1. The school division superintendent, or

2. The independent school's board director, and

3. The principal (participant)

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

The School Division

Date

Dear [School division administrator]

I am currently enrolled as a doctoral candidate at the University of Manitoba - Faculty of Education: Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology, and am completing the requirements for my dissertation research study. The purpose of my research study is to explore principals' understandings of schools as professional learning communities. Specifically, I am interested in the possible effect that the duty for teacher evaluation has on principals' conceptions of professional learning communities. As part of my research I am conducting two methods of survey research – focus groups and individual interviews. **The intent of this letter is to request your permission for selected school principals within your division to participate in a research study exploring the effects of principals' statutory duties to evaluate teachers on their conceptions of schools professional learning communities.** Please read the details of the study, which are provided below and sign the bottom of the form if you are willing to give your approval.

Title of research study: Holding the reins of the professional learning
                                             community: A study of twelve Manitoba school
                                             principals concerning the relationship between the
                                             duty to evaluate teachers and the normative

imperative to develop schools as professional learning communities.

<u>Principal researcher:</u>	Jerome Cranston
<u>Purpose of study:</u>	The proposed study explores principals' conceptions of schools as professional learning communities and the effect their statutory duty to evaluate teachers has on their conceptions.
<u>Procedures to be used:</u>	Principals to be interviewed have been identified by the executive committee of the Council of School Leaders (COSL) as principals who have experience or an understanding of the concept of school as professional learning community. The time involved with each of the participants is minimal. I will ask each individual to participate in two interviews, each lasting approximately 60-75 minutes. The first is as part of a focus group, while the second is an individual interview. I will conduct these interviews at times convenient to the participant, but outside of administrative responsibilities. I will ask the participants for permission to tape-record the interviews, and I will take notes during the interviews. I do not anticipate any risk to the participants, but each individual will be informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be using pseudonyms during the analysis of the data, and in the final report of the study. I will not be using descriptions or quotations which might identify specific individuals. At the conclusion of my dissertation work in December 2006, the interview tapes will be destroyed.
<u>Potential risk to participants:</u>	The perceived risk in this study is considered to be minimal particularly since pseudonyms will be used for individuals, schools and school divisions. Despite efforts to keep personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time,
or refuse to respond to questions they feel may be linked to them personally.

<u>Confidentiality:</u>   Information gathered in this research study will be used as part of my doctoral dissertation. It may also be published or presented in public forums; however, names and other identifying information will not be used or revealed. Despite efforts to keep the personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

Included with this letter is a consent form. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It will provide you a background to what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

If you are willing to grant permission for my research, I ask that you read and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to me in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope.

If you have further questions or require further information, please contact me Jerome Cranston at: xxx-xxxx or <u>xxx@mts.ne</u>t; or, you may contact the chair of my Doctoral Studies Committee, Dr. John Stapleton at: 474-8581 or john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca.

       Thank-you for your consideration.

Sincerely

Jerome Cranston

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

The Independent School

Date

Dear [Independent school board director authorized to provide written consent]

I am currently enrolled as a doctoral candidate at the University of Manitoba - Faculty of Education: Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology, and am completing the requirements for my dissertation research study. The purpose of my research study is to explore principals' understandings of schools as professional learning communities. Specifically, I am interested in the possible effect that the duty for teacher evaluation has on principals' conceptions of professional learning communities. As part of my research I am conducting two methods of survey research – focus groups and individual interviews. **The intent of this letter is to request your permission for the principal of your school to participate in a research study exploring the effects of principals' statutory duties to evaluate teachers on their conceptions of schools professional learning communities.** Please read the details of the study, which are provided below and sign the bottom of the form if you are willing to give your approval.

<u>Title of research study:</u>	Holding the reins of the professional learning community: A study of twelve Manitoba school principals concerning the relationship between the duty to evaluate teachers and the normative imperative to develop schools as professional learning communities.
<u>Principal researcher:</u>	Jerome Cranston
<u>Purpose of study:</u>	The proposed study explores principals' conceptions of schools as professional learning communities and the effect their statutory duty to evaluate teachers has on their conceptions.

Procedures to be used:	Principals to be interviewed have been identified by the Education Committee of the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools (MFIS) as principals who have experience or an understanding of the concept of school as professional learning community. The time involved with each of the participants is minimal. I will ask each individual to participate in two interviews, each lasting approximately 60-75 minutes. The first is as part of a focus group, while the second is an individual interview. I will conduct these interviews at times convenient to the participant, but outside of administrative responsibilities. I will ask the participants for permission to tape-record the interviews, and I will take notes during the interviews. I do not anticipate any risk to the participants, but each individual will be informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be using pseudonyms during the analysis of the data, and in the final report of the study. I will not be using descriptions or quotations which might identify specific individuals. At the conclusion of my dissertation work in December 2006, the interview tapes will be destroyed.
Potential risk to participants:	The perceived risk in this study is considered to be minimal particularly since pseudonyms will be used for individuals, schools and school divisions. Despite efforts to keep personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time,
or refuse to respond to questions they feel may be linked to them personally.

Confidentiality:	Information gathered in this research study will be used as part of my doctoral dissertation. It may also be published or presented in public forums; however, names and other identifying information will not be used or revealed. Despite efforts to keep the personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

Included with this letter is a consent form. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It will provide you a background to what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

If you are willing to grant permission for my research, I ask that you read and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to me in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope.

If you have further questions or require further information, please contact me Jerome Cranston at: xxx-xxxx or xxx@mts.net; or, you may contact the chair of my Doctoral Studies Committee, Dr. John Stapleton at: 474-8581 or john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca.

Thank-you for your consideration.

Sincerely

Jerome Cranston

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
Faculty of Education

Principal Participant

Date

Dear [public school principal participant]

I am currently enrolled as a doctoral candidate at the University of Manitoba - Faculty of Education: Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology, and am completing the requirements for my dissertation research study. The purpose of my research study is to investigate principals' understandings of schools as professional learning communities. Specifically, I am interested in the affect, positive, negative or neutral that the duty for teacher evaluation has on principals' conceptions of professional learning communities. As part of my research I am conducting two methods of survey research – focus groups and individual interviews. Your name was selected from a list provided to me by the executive committee of the Council of Schools Leaders. Your school division's superintendent has given me written permission to invite you to participate in this study.

The intent of this letter is to request your participation in a research study exploring the effects of principals' statutory duties to evaluate teachers on their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities. I am requesting your permission to interview you to ascertain your perceptions on this topic.

Please read the details of the study, which are provided below and sign the bottom of the form if you are willing to give your approval.

Title of research study:	Holding the reins of the professional learning community: A study of twelve Manitoba school principals concerning the relationship between the duty to evaluate teachers and the normative imperative to develop schools as professional learning communities.
Principal researcher:	Jerome Cranston

Purpose of study:

The proposed study explores principals' conceptions of schools as professional learning communities and the effect their statutory duty to evaluate teachers has on their conceptions.

Procedures to be used:

Principals to be interviewed have been identified by the executive committee of the Council of School Leaders (COSL) as principals who have experience or an understanding of the concept of professional learning community. Your school division and superintendent [for independent schools – a member of your school's board of directors] have given me written permission to invite you to participate in this study. The time involved with each of the participants is minimal. I will ask each individual to participate in two interviews, each lasting approximately 60-75 minutes. The first is as part of a focus group, while the second is an individual interview. I will conduct these interviews at times convenient to the participant, but outside of administrative responsibilities. I will ask the participants for permission to tape-record the interviews, and I will take notes during the interviews. I do not anticipate any risk to the participants, but each individual will be informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be using pseudonyms during the analysis of the data, and in the final report of the study. I will not be using any descriptions or quotations which might identify the individuals. At the conclusion of my dissertation work in December 2006, the interview tapes will be destroyed.

Potential risk to participants:

The perceived risk in this study is considered to be minimal particularly since pseudonyms will be used for individuals, schools and school divisions. Despite efforts to keep personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

**Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time,
or refuse to respond to questions they feel may be linked to them personally.**

Confidentiality:

Information gathered in this research study will be used as part of my doctoral dissertation. It may also

be published or presented in public forums; however, names and other identifying information will not be used or revealed. Despite efforts to keep the personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

Included with this letter is a consent form. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It will provide you a background to what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

If you are willing to participate in my research study, I ask that you read and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to me in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope.

If you have further questions or require further information, please contact me Jerome Cranston at: xxx-xxxx or xxx@mts.net; or, you may contact the chair of my Doctoral Studies Committee, Dr. John Stapleton at: 474-8581 or john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca.

Thank-you for your consideration.

Sincerely

Jerome Cranston

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Principal Participant

Date

Dear [independent school principal participant]

I am currently enrolled as a doctoral candidate at the University of Manitoba - Faculty of Education: Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology, and am completing the requirements for my dissertation research study. The purpose of my research study is to investigate principals' understandings of schools as professional learning communities. Specifically, I am interested in the affect, positive, negative or neutral that the duty for teacher evaluation has on principals' conceptions of professional learning communities. As part of my research I am conducting two methods of survey research – focus groups and individual interviews. Your name was selected from a list provided to me by the Education Committee of the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools. A member of your school's board of directors has given me written permission to invite you to participate in this study.

The intent of this letter is to request your participation in a research study exploring the effects of principals' statutory duties to evaluate teachers on their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities. I am requesting your permission to interview you to ascertain your perceptions on this topic.

Please read the details of the study, which are provided below and sign the bottom of the form if you are willing to give your approval.

Title of research study: Holding the reins of the professional learning community: A study of twelve Manitoba school principals concerning the relationship between the duty to evaluate teachers and the normative imperative to develop schools as professional learning communities.

Principal researcher: Jerome Cranston

<u>Purpose of study:</u>	The proposed study explores principals' conceptions of schools as professional learning communities and the effect their statutory duty to evaluate teachers has on their conceptions.
<u>Procedures to be used:</u>	Principals to be interviewed have been identified by the Education Committee of the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools (MFIS) as principals who have experience or an understanding of the concept of professional learning community. A member of your school's board of directors has given me written permission to invite you to participate in this study. The time involved with each of the participants is minimal. I will ask each individual to participate in two interviews, each lasting approximately 60-75 minutes. The first is as part of a focus group, while the second is an individual interview. I will conduct these interviews at times convenient to the participant, but outside of administrative responsibilities. I will ask the participants for permission to tape-record the interviews, and I will take notes during the interviews. I do not anticipate any risk to the participants, but each individual will be informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be using pseudonyms during the analysis of the data, and in the final report of the study. I will not be using any descriptions or quotations which might identify the individuals. At the conclusion of my dissertation work in December 2006, the interview tapes will be destroyed.
<u>Potential risk to participants:</u>	The perceived risk in this study is considered to be minimal particularly since pseudonyms will be used for individuals, schools and school divisions. Despite efforts to keep personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time,
or refuse to respond to questions they feel may be linked to them personally.

<u>Confidentiality:</u>	Information gathered in this research study will be used as part of my doctoral dissertation. It may also

be published or presented in public forums; however, names and other identifying information will not be used or revealed. Despite efforts to keep the personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

Included with this letter is a consent form. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It will provide you a background to what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

If you are willing to participate in my research study, I ask that you read and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to me in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope.

If you have further questions or require further information, please contact me Jerome Cranston at: xxx-xxxx or xxx@mts.net; or, you may contact the chair of my Doctoral Studies Committee, Dr. John Stapleton at: 474-8581 or john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca.

Thank-you for your consideration.

Sincerely

Jerome Cranston

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORMS

Included are three forms requesting acknowledgement of informed consent for participation:

1. The school division or,

2. The independent school's board director; and,

3. The principal (participant);

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Written Consent Form – School Division

Your signature of this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation of your school division in the research and agree to permit me to conduct this research. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher, sponsors or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities**.**

The principal is free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions she/he prefers to omit, without prejudice or consequence.

Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal Researcher:	Jerome Cranston
	(204)xxx-xxxx; e-mail: xxx@mts.net.
Doctoral Studies Supervisor:	Dr. John Stapleton
	(204) 474-8581, e-mail:
	john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing REB. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 204-474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

School Division Name: _____

Name and Position of School Division administrator giving written consent:

Name: _____ Position: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
Faculty of Education

Written Consent Form – Independent School

Your signature of this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding your school's principal's participation in the research and agree to permit me to conduct this research. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher, sponsors or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities**.**

The principal is free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions she/he prefers to omit, without prejudice or consequence.

Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal Researcher:	Jerome Cranston
	(204) xxx-xxxx; e-mail: xxx@mts.net.
Doctoral Studies Supervisor:	Dr. John Stapleton
	(204) 474-8581, e-mail:
	john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing REB. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 204-474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Independent school's name: _____

Name and Position of independent school's board director giving written consent:

Name: _____ Position: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Written Consent Form – Principal Participant

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence.

Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal Researcher: Jerome Cranston   (204)xxx-xxxx or
                                                        email: xxx@mts.net

Doctoral Studies Supervisor: Dr. John Stapleton   (204)474-8581 or
                                                      e-mail:
                                                      john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca

        This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing REB. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 204-474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Feedback
        □ If you would like to have access to a copy of the summary findings of this research project upon its completion, you may do so by checking this box and including a mailing address below.

Participant's mailing address if a copy of summary findings is requested:

Address: _____

City: _____
Province: _____

Postal Code: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

<u>Moderator's introductory comments:</u>

I would like to begin by reminding you that if at any point during this focus group or any time after it, you wish to withdraw from the research protocol you are free to do so without prejudice which, means that I will not attempt to coerce you to remain in the focus group.
.

Regarding the consent form, let me highlight the issues of anonymity and confidentiality. When I convert focus group information into the results section of my research project I will give everyone involved an assumed name. I will also disguise any other identifying information that might allow others to identify you specifically.

Please take the time now to read the Informed Consent Form. It is attachment "Informed Consent Form".

Thank you for consenting to participate in the focus group.

A. First, there are no correct or incorrect answers. I am interested in understanding principals' perspectives.
B. Second, you should not feel that you have to agree with everyone else in the room if that is not how you feel. There are six people here, so I expect that people will have different views. And, it is important that I learn about all of the views that are represented here. If you find yourself feeling upset about the discussion, please feel free to leave at any time.
C. Third, I want you to feel comfortable saying affirming as well as critical things. I am not here to promote a particular way of thinking about the topic of my research.
D. Fourth, I ask that you talk one at a time so I can be sure to hear everyone's view and get it on the audiotape.

---

1. When you think about the term a professional learning community, what image comes to mind?
    a. How would you describe a professional learning community?

2. How important do you think developing schools as a professional learning communities are to principals?

3. What effect do you think a school operating as a professional learning community has on:
            a) School improvement efforts?
            b) Teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions? Individually or
                collectively?

c) Student achievement?

4. What do you think is needed to create and/or sustain a school as professional learning community?

5. What effect does teacher evaluation have on how you understand schools as professional learning communities?

6. What effect do you think teacher evaluation has on a school culture that:
   1. emphasizes professionalism amongst the staff,
   2. emphasizes learning by placing high value on teacher and principal inquiry and reflection, and
   3. emphasizes personal connections.

I would like to finish by reminding you that if at any point or any time after this interview, you wish to withdraw from the research protocol you are free to do so without prejudice which, means that I will not attempt to coerce you to remain in the focus group. Thank you for participating and for your time.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview guide code: _____

Interviewer's introductory comments:

I would like to begin by reminding you that if at any point during this interview or any time after it, you wish to withdraw from the research protocol you are free to do so without prejudice which, means that I will not attempt to coerce you to complete the interview.

Regarding the consent form, let me highlight the issues of anonymity and confidentiality. The people I interview or any statements they make will not be discussed with any of the other people I interview. When I convert interview information into the results section of my research project I will give everyone involved an assumed name. I will also disguise any other identifying information that might allow others to identify you specifically.

Please take the time now to read the Informed Consent Form. It is attachment "Informed Consent Form".

Thank you for consenting to be interviewed

This interview concerns your conceptualization of a professional learning community. There are no correct or incorrect answers. Please respond to the following questions:

Demographic information:
A. Which of the following best describes how many years of service you have as a principal?
□ 1-9 years   □ 10-19 years   □ 20-29 years   □ 30+ years

B. Do you work in a public school or a private school?
□ Public school   □ Private school

C. Do you work in an elementary school - either kindergarten to grade six or kindergarten to grade 8 – or, a secondary school – either grades 7 through 12 or grades 9 through 12?
□ Elementary school   □ Secondary school   □ Mixed school

D. Which of the following best describes your school's current student enrolment?
□ Elementary school   □ Secondary school   □ Mixed school
□ Fewer than 200 students   □ Fewer than 300 students   □ Fewer than 60 students
□ 200 to 350 students   □ 300 to 700 students   □ 60 to 200 students
□ More than 350 students   □ More than 700 students   □ More than 200 students

E. Participant's gender
□ Male   □ Female

<u>Warm up question:</u>

1. How did you get into school administration?

<u>Evaluation:</u>
2. Do you have a formal duty to evaluate teachers?
    a. How do you know this? That is how does this arise (or not arise) for you?
    Additional probes for question 2:
    - What do you understand this duty to involve for you?
    - What educational purpose(s) do you think teacher evaluation serves?
    - What do you consider to be the most significant educational outcomes of your performance of this duty? For individual teachers? For teachers collectively? For your school as a whole?
    - What connection is there between your performance of this duty and professional development? For individual teachers? For teachers collectively?
    - Is a collective agreement, or an absence of one, relevant in any way to how you perform this duty or what consequences may follow from it? Please explain your response and if possible provide examples.

<u>Professional learning community:</u>

3. Tell me some things about your school and its staff.
    Additional probes for question 3:
    - Would you describe it as a community? If so what is the sense of connection in the community? In what does it reside?
    - How would you describe the culture of the school staff? Can you provide any examples of how this culture is supported or maintained?
    - Regarding the work of the professional staff, what values and goals are shared? What is prized?
    - Is collaboration easy or difficult? Please explain why so and if possible provide examples.

4. Do you expect your staff to exhibit professionalism in their work?
    Additional probes for question 4:
    - How would describe this professionalism?
    - Can you give me examples of how this professionalism is shown by teachers in your school? Individually? Collectively?

5. Describe the strength of commitment by your teachers to collective learning, inquiry and reflection and, generally to the improvement of student achievement school-wide?
    Additional probes for question 5:
    - Can you give me concrete examples of how such commitments are expressed in your school, if they are? Individually? Collectively?
    - If they are not expressed, why do you think they are not?

6. What forces or conditions affect, that is promote or inhibit, the functioning of your school's staff as a community? If possible please elaborate on your response and provide examples.
   Additional probes for question 6:
   - What are the connections and relationships among your teachers and between the teachers and the principal?
   - Are they personal? Collegial? Professional? Social?
   - Can you say which type of relationship is predominant?

7. If you were to characterize your school as a professional learning community, in what senses is it:
   a. Professional in its approach or efforts toward being client-centered and knowledge based?
   b. Concerned with learning and inquiry, including school-wide improvement?
   c. A community that reveals a commitment and capacity for collective endeavours?
   Additional probes for question 7:
   - If you would not characterize your school as a professional learning community, why not? Please elaborate on your response.

8. What part do you as principal play in the establishment and sustenance of your school as a professional learning community?
   Additional probes for question 8:
   - What factors, conditions or circumstances favour or limit your involvement? Please elaborate and if possible provide examples.

9. If a school's professional learning community benefits from client-centered and knowledge-based teachers who are reflective and communitarian in their approach, does your performance of teacher evaluation affect how you think about and approach your school as a professional learning community?
   Additional probes for question 9:
   - If so, in what ways does your performance of this duty affect your thinking and approach to your school as a professional learning community? If not, why not?
   - Does your performance of the duty to evaluate teachers make your school's professional learning community stronger, weaker or have no affect? Why do you think so?

I would like to finish by reminding you that if at any point or any time after this interview, you wish to withdraw from the research protocol you are free to do so without prejudice which, means that I will not attempt to coerce you to not withdraw.

Thank you for participating and for your time.