Critical Teacher Leadership as Transformative Professionalism: Inquiry and (inter)Action via a Methodological Bricolage

by

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Dedications

This project is dedicated to my inspirational teacher colleagues who joined me in this project through their interactive leadership initiatives. You are all quite remarkable spirits with a commendable determination to support your student bodies. It is a privilege working alongside you all. Let us continue striving for a more equitable society through our collective professional agency. I would like to further dedicate this work to my students: past, present, and future. You have all embodied such ingenuity, humour, and a contagious sense of hope that has bolstered my outlook in this world. Raise your voice, advocate, and disrupt. We live in a very precarious world, but you have the collective power to ensure a promising tomorrow. There is ample beauty in this world worth advocating for.

Abstract

The predominant focus of educational leadership research has largely fixated on an individualistic 'heroic' interpretation, emphasizing the solo actions exercised by those in formal positions of authority. This conceptualization, underpinning both research and praxis, has been problematized for being non-dialogical, reifying hierarchical power structures, and to be both contradictory to and incongruent with social justice. To authentically enact meaningful social change in our educational institutions, it is essential to advance the emancipatory grassroots 'bottom-up' leadership initiatives of students, teachers, and corresponding community members. Utilizing a methodological bricolage, I co-engaged in participatory research methods alongside my teacher colleagues to co-facilitate various critical teacher leadership practices throughout the 2022/2023 school year. Through our dialogical (inter)actions, leadership initiatives manifested in a plethora of contexts to address varying situational needs (e.g., via critical pedagogies, committee work, mentorship, etc.). To interpret this phenomenon, I generated a novel conceptualization of critical teacher leadership drawing upon the distributed perspective on leadership, critical theory and emancipatory grassroots leadership, and transformative professionalism. Data collection and generation methods for this methodological bricolage included photoVOICE, individual and group reflection discussions, and a document analysis of Manitoba legislative, policy, and resource education documents. The thematic analysis of the textual transcriptions of these data sources revealed our perceptions on how critical teacher leadership practices positively impacted our school communities, empowered our own and others' professional agency, and fostered student engagement and collegial relationships. However, we also navigated complex social and/or structural barriers that impeded our initiatives, including a sense of occupational isolation and silencing, invisibilization of

leadership, (micro)aggressive collegial resistances, and feelings of exhaustion and demoralization. These findings illuminate how new insights into how critical teacher leadership intersects with the core tenets of transformative professionalism, practices predicated upon autonomy, exercising knowledge, activism, professional learning, collegial interactions, and ethical conduct. This study also generates new perspectives on the inherent tensions within teachers' transformative professionalism, as teachers strive to advance their own individual agency and occupational autonomy through emancipatory leadership practices, but are simultaneously governed via organizational infrastructures.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This participatory research project was heavily inspired from my professional experiences as a Manitoba public school teacher, collaboratively engaging alongside my student bodies and colleagues to advance various grassroots school initiatives. As I conclude my twelfth year in the profession, I continually reflect upon our diverse engagements, the relationships cultivated, and the impacts stemming from our advocacies. Professional learning as a public school teacher is truly *ad infinitum*, a never-ending venture so that we, as reflexive practitioners, may co-serve the public via emancipatory efforts to ameliorate the social inequities adversely affecting our learners. These occupational experiences have challenged my preconceived ontological assumptions and have necessitated my own confrontation with my privileges and internalized biases. Adhering to my occupational Manitoba Teachers' Society (2024b) *Code of Professional Practice*, it is my professional and moral duty to support the diverse needs of my student bodies. However, I can further attest to the emotionally challenging nature of this profession, as there have been innumerable days I have felt to be a failure, perceiving myself to be unable to adequately support the immense needs of students who have been so systematically disadvantaged. Regardless, I remain vigilant and continue to embark upon dialogical leadership initiatives so our youth may actualize their full human potential. Social change necessitates leadership, but I am steadfast in my conviction that no individual leader has all the necessary skills to address the myriad of complex inequities pervading our public education systems. Further, I do not believe the monopolistic focus on individual practices of formal leaders is just, but rather is counterintuitive to dialogical emancipation. I assert authentic critical leadership to be dialogical, collaborative, empowering, and shared. My commitment to engage in critical teacher leadership has led me to contemplate the ambiguous nature of my roles and

responsibilities as a public educator. What are my professional roles and responsibilities? Where does my job begin and end? Is emancipatory grassroots leadership part of my organizational and/or professional function? Am I overstepping an occupational line by engaging in this work? If I witness a social injustice and remain silent, am I not an accomplice to the further perpetuation of such injustices? Can I express public dissent and be occupationally safe? Understandably, navigating the breadth of these ambiguities can be overwhelming. Being a teacher that routinely engages in critical leadership practice has led to my own feelings of over-exertion, anxiety (e.g., should I 'stay in my lane'?), and demoralization. None of these sentiments is in any way a critique of any individual, administration, or my own organizational context. Rather, I am merely vocalizing my critical reflections on my professional experiences as a public school teacher, a challenge that countless educators also likely navigate.

Positively contributing toward school grassroots initiatives, however, has also instilled in me feelings of hope, inspiration, and confidence, knowing that these shared efforts may facilitate social change in our precarious world. That said, the parameters of what constitutes teachers' professional roles and duties are somewhat vague; leadership function, as an example, has always been an ambiguous practice within my occupational role. Over the past number of years, I have become increasingly involved in my school community and union, serving on the Executive of my local teachers' association and various committees through the Manitoba Teachers' Society. While these experiences have been largely empowering and positive, it has been my perception that we subtly prioritize formal administrative (principal) leadership over teachers' grassroots, informal leadership. The common vernacular of *school leadership* within our occupational community is generally synonymous with school principals (not students, teachers, community members, and so forth). From a union standpoint, I feel this to be

antithetical to the labour movement, specifically contradictory to the empowerment of workers' grassroots agency. As a teacher with over a decade of professional service, I have never received theoretical or practitioner-based training in leadership practice, while professional learning and development in collegial and collaborative skills have been, likewise, of limited focus. Most of my professional learning has been situated nearly exclusively in pedagogy, focusing on teaching, learning, curriculum, and evaluative practices. Although I have received ample professional development on social foundation topics (e.g., anti-racism), such sessions tend to relate back to pedagogy (and not to other professional practices, such as leadership or collaboration skills to advance school-wide agendas). I certainly concede that teachers' apex priority is to teach; however, my practitioner-insights suggest that teachers routinely engage in a myriad of informal practices, including critical leadership engagements. Further, I believe authentic critical pedagogies necessitate emancipatory grassroots leadership practices if we are truly committed to transforming the world beyond the parameters of our classrooms. It is a precarious time in our global society as teachers' professional practices are becoming increasingly publicly interrogated, accused of political proselytism to serve ulterior motives. As we navigate this disconcerting era, which comprises the threats of climate change, escalating military violence, and a rise in authoritarian tendencies, fostering teachers' involvement in emancipatory grassroots leadership practices should be prioritized as the apogee function of our public schools.

Throughout this chapter, I provide a succinct yet comprehensive overview of this participatory research study that commenced during the 2022/2023 school year. Information regarding the research problem, questions, design, significance of the study, and other general information pertaining to the study has been categorically outlined. First, I unpack a brief statement of my positionality to transparently situate my identity within the scope of this project

through interrogating my internalized biases and assumptions and acknowledging my inherent limitations in knowing and understanding phenomena. Second, I share a concise overview of the research design, objectives, questions, and conceptual underpinnings of the research. Next, I provide a brief statement regarding the significance of the practical, theoretical, and methodological insights generated as a consequence of this research project. Last, I outline the overview of the content presented within the upcoming corresponding chapters.

Statement of Positionality

My research is epistemologically and ontologically rooted in a critical paradigm. Therefore, I felt it imperative to be judiciously transparent in discussing my own identity, to unpack my own experiences of privilege, to interrogate my internalized biases, and to explore my own capacity to empathize with (and understand) certain sociological phenomena. Lopez (2014) acknowledged the fundamental importance of critical reflection when engaging in critical research, advocating for researchers to systematically analyze and unpack their own biases and lived experiences prior to undertaking such projects. I offer a critical reflection on my own lived experiences to illuminate my capacity and limitations to empathize with certain social and cultural phenomena. All research is "positioned" (Creswell, 2007, p. 179), and we cannot privilege one position as absolute truth. Thus, Hicks (2014) argued that all researchers must be transparent and upfront with their political stances and select epistemologies prior to beginning a study. In alignment with the critical literature, it was imperative for me to unpack my positionality to transparently acknowledge my privileges, sociocultural predispositions, and prospective biases throughout the study design and reflexive analytical processes. I cannot emancipate the ways in which my lived experiences informed my epistemological and

ontological understandings, but I can introspectively reflect on these contextual considerations to ensure my research process was just, conducted in good faith, and yielded trustworthy findings.

As a Canadian-born white, cisgender male of the Millennial generation from a working-class upbringing, I have been afforded innumerable privileges I cannot even begin to fully fathom. My whiteness has precluded me from being visibly *othered* in social contexts and has undoubtedly advanced me throughout my educational and occupational trajectories. As a self-identifying cisgender male, my capacity to be independent and lead has never been challenged, and such lived experiences have undoubtedly emboldened me with confidence to self-actualize my aspirations. As an able-bodied individual who has maintained general good health throughout my life, I have never needed accommodations to ensure I was safe, successful, and otherwise included in institutional or societal contexts. My socioeconomic upbringing in a working-class family was somewhat modest, as I was born and raised in a suburban community in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I have been fortunate to have never experienced the threats of hunger and malnutrition, nor needed to navigate the precarity of inconsistent home environment living arrangements. Throughout my formative years, I was provided numerous rich learning experiences, including occasional family trips, access to private music lessons, and other general provisions not necessarily enjoyed by many youth. Ultimately, I had the privilege to achieve a post-secondary university education and am the first generation in my family lineage to do so. As a Canadian, I have had the privilege of mobility in freedom to travel relatively visa-free. While I have not necessarily explored many international travel opportunities, these experiences have been largely within my grasp.

While I have so evidently benefitted from a plethora of privileges, I can empathize in understanding the egregious inequities that pervade this world. This sentiment is embodied

largely through being raised as a religious minority, as my family has had extensive affiliations within the Jehovah's Witness faith. As a child, it was beyond my comprehension as to why the name of my God was unrecognized in popular media and why I was excluded from school festive celebrations and public events. Being affiliated with a religious minority group profoundly affected my family, particularly my father. As he grew up in a predominantly Protestant rural community in Manitoba, he encountered a troubling childhood consisting of ostracization and extensive bullying from his peers. He confided to me that these lived experiences led to significant negative outcomes and led, in part, to his struggles with lifelong substance abuse. Lamentably, he ultimately succumbed to his ailments and is now at rest. The intent of sharing this narrative is to express both a sense of empathy and humility toward the impacts of intergenerational trauma. The societal oppression my father encountered has manifested deeply into my own lived experiences, both through losing a parent, but also navigating compromised confidence and mental health challenges associated with these lifelong adversities.

Last, I confide my own public *coming out* as a bisexual male, as I have remained closeted the near totality of my existence. My apprehension in actualizing my authentic self has stemmed largely from fear of systematic marginalization, in both professional and personal circumstances. My religious upbringing overtly taught that sexual pluralism was indisputably immoral, and identifying as queer mandated the excommunication from extended family and the religious congregation. Being apprehensive to face undue ridicule, exclusion from social circles, and being disregarded as *lesser* in romantic opportunities, I remained closeted. I am still on the road towards cultivating self-compassion, but I am elated to share that I have never been happier with being transparent and authentic in my identity.

As I entered the profession as a public school teacher, it has been a tremendous honour to serve the diverse communities in which I have been employed. I have learned so much from my student bodies, colleagues, and external community members about the pluralistic ways of knowing the world. However, my professional experiences have also informed my political fervour, as I have come to navigate the public education system. Although I believe public education systems to be well-meaning, they are ultimately institutions subject to perpetuating social and structural inequities. These realizations have compelled me to be increasingly involved in my local teachers' association, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and the labour movement broadly to advocate on behalf of education workers' professional agency.

My ideological viewpoint and motivational interests in (inter)action-oriented research certainly cannot be emancipated from my lived experiences. How I interpret and interact with the world is undoubtedly the manifestation of my own positionality. I wholeheartedly acknowledge my limitations in understanding various phenomena. For example, there are immense negative impacts of colonization and a multitude of social and systemic oppressive barriers that I will never be able to fully comprehend. As a global citizen, I hope to be an ally and co-advocate alongside my fellow citizens. My own experiences navigating the repression of sexual orientation and intergenerational harms relating to societal religious oppression further inform my interpretations, but also compel my interest in (co-)facilitating such advocacies for social change. This research has materialized, in part, through this positional lens.

Overview of the Study

In this section, I briefly describe: (a) the research problem, questions, and objectives underlying this project; (b) the design process implemented; and (c) the information pertaining to the context in which this study was facilitated.

Research Problem, Questions, and Objectives

The infrastructure of our public schools is inequitable, being premised upon complex colonial, racialized, classist, heteronormative, ableist ideologies (Bates, 2006; Niesche, 2018; Theoharis, 2007; White & Cooper, 2012; Wotherspoon, 2014). While there has been an abundance of interest in ameliorating social tensions to ensure schools are equitable social environments, Gronn (2003) acknowledged that no individual has the capacity to address all leadership requirements in such incredibly socially diverse, complex spaces. Anderson's (1990) earlier work further recognized that many social issues in schools are invisibilized as educational administrators have personal blind spots, are limited to their own lived experiences, and do not have the capacity to be fully aware of all social phenomena perpetually surrounding them. While Anderson's points were expressed over three decades ago, they still hold relevance today. Understandably, most school administrators are conscientious human beings who strive to improve educational outcomes and the lived experiences of staff and youth. Most of the educational leadership research and practice remains fixated on individuals operating formal positions of power (e.g., school principals) with little attention toward the leadership contributions of others (Gronn, 2000; 2003; Spillane, 2006). Viewing leadership as a fluid practice exercised by many individuals within schools opens the potential for teachers to play a considerable role in positively achieving social justice (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Hunzicker, 2022; Mundorf et al., 2019). Unfortunately, various structural barriers may inhibit teacher leadership, such as existing policy frameworks and/or fear of penalization for insubordination in deviating from the mandates of senior educational administration (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Young et al., 2021). Wenner and Campbell (2017) conducted a literature review on decades of research on teacher leadership and noted that there remains a significant gap in the literature on critical

perspectives in teacher leadership research, suggesting only a few scholars have applied critical and emancipatory epistemological frameworks to teacher leadership. While there have been recent developments in the emergence of the term *critical teacher leadership* (Bradley-Levine, 2018; 2022), there is ample need for further inquiry and advocacy. As I explain in Chapter two, there is a gap in the literature on teachers' experiences engaging in leadership for equity and social justice in Manitoba public schools. These concerns position this proposed research project as an important endeavour. Teacher leadership is an everyday occurrence in schools (Harris, 2015; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Wenner & Campbell, 2017), yet the Manitoba educational landscape simply does not reflect this as a recognized actuality. It was of considerable importance to investigate how educational policies and legislation, daily structures (e.g., teachers' work timetables), and social dynamics impact teachers' capacity to lead for equity and social justice in Manitoba public schools. These curiosities led to the formulation of the research questions and objectives of this study.

The intent of this study included three general research objectives: (a) to promote critical teacher leadership practices in Manitoba schools and explore how teachers' positively impact their school communities through ameliorating local inequities and injustices; and (b) to better understand how social and/or structural barriers impeded teachers' capacity to engage in grassroots, informal interactions alongside their communities; and (c) to generate insights into the transformative professional nature of critical teacher leadership practices. The initial intent of this study was also to better understand what participants' perspectives may be on suggesting policy and to advance structural revisions in Manitoba schools. As the research project commenced and data generation processes concluded, however, it was apparent through my colleagues' feedback and engagements that these were not the primary avenues of interest among

our participatory team of teachers. The participatory team, which comprised my teacher colleagues and I, provided an abundance of wisdom regarding our experiences engaging in critical teacher leadership, our professional learnings, the impacts of our leadership initiatives in their schools, some aspects of their personal and professional life histories, and the social and organizational challenges we encountered. As a participatory team, our discussions primarily focused on our individual agentic objectives to facilitate social change in our local school communities. Although all members of the team had mutual access to all data generated and were invited to engage in co-analysis, none of my colleagues expressed much interest in this post-pandemic context. The research questions ultimately evolved and were largely approached independently by me as the research facilitator. To accommodate the interests of the participatory team and the overall nature of the data generated in this exploratory inquiry, I generated the following research questions:

1. What were our perceived impacts of our critical teacher leadership practices within our school communities?
2. What were the social and/or structural barriers impeding our critical teacher leadership practices?
3. How is critical teacher leadership demonstrated as a transformative professional practice in the Manitoba context?

The first research question was a professional inquiry into our experiences, as Manitoba public school leadership, engaging in emancipatory grassroots leadership practices for social justice. As a participatory team, we engaged in new and/or extended pre-existing leadership experiences in our school communities to cultivate safe, inclusive, and equitable school environments. Some of the participants had ample experience in critical teacher leadership and were very enthusiastic to

share their perspectives pertaining to historical experiences engaging in such practices. As a participatory researcher, I welcomed my colleagues to unpack what they deemed important and wanted to share for dissemination. We all documented our critical teacher leadership experiences via photoVOICE (Wang & Burris, 1994; 1997) and critically reflected upon our perceived impacts within our school communities. The second research question pertained to our perceptions of how educational structures, relationships, and general workplace dynamics, at times, impeded our capacity to engage in critical teacher leadership practices. The third research question explored how our emancipatory grassroots leadership practices intersected with our prescribed transformative professional roles, responsibilities, and conduct. Through a thematic analysis of all data sources (reflection discussion transcripts, photos, and Manitoba education legislative, policy, and resource documents), I generated new insights into the transformative professionalism of critical teacher leadership practices.

Overview of the Research Design

This research was conducted via a bricolage approach to qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe, 2001; 2005; Pratt et al., 2020). The project was inspired by the tenets of participatory action research (Anderson & Herr, 2005; Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; MacDonald, 2012), such as co-engaging the research processes alongside my teacher colleagues with the intent to socially transform our communities. As the project unfolded, however, the research trajectory expanded beyond a template approach to accommodate participants' interests and developments within this post-pandemic context. Researchers creatively adapting their research projects to accommodate contextual circumstances, extending practices beyond the confines of qualitative template models, and utilizing a wide array of inspirations and methods are consistent with a methodological bricolage (Kincheloe, 2001; 2005; Pratt et al., 2020). A

detailed explanation of this research process, and contemporary developments of the methodological bricolage in qualitative research, are provided in Chapter 3.

The data sources for this project included photoVOICE and individual reflections to unpack the meaning of photos generated (Mayfield-Johnson & Butler, 2017; Sutton-Brown, 2014; Wang & Burris, 1997), textual transcriptions of our photos (Jörgensen, 2017), group reflection discussions where my colleagues and I discussed our insights and perceptions of the impacts our collegial interactions had within our school communities, and Manitoba education legislative, policy, and resource documents. I served the dual role as a teacher-researcher, participating alongside my peers in all phases of the study, while also upholding my responsibilities as a research facilitator. This position is philosophically aligned with the tenets of participatory action research, namely the intent to mitigate power differentials and to conduct research *with* my peers, as opposed to *on* my peers (Ebersohn et al., 2012; Lyke & Manolla, 2011; Savin-Biden & Wimpenny, 2007; Torre et al., 2015). Dialogical collaboration is consistent with Paulo Freire's position that "revolutionary leaders cannot think *without* the people, nor *for* the people, but only *with* the people" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 131). Seven of us, serving as teacher-participants, engaged in this research study. This research project followed a five phase process: (a) introductory planning meeting (where my colleagues and I became acquainted, shared our interests and intents through participation, and outlined the scope of the project); (b) critical teacher leadership and photoVOICE (over a three month period, my colleagues and I engaged in critical teacher leadership practices in our school communities and photo documented school artefacts that illuminated our perceived impacts of our interactions); (c) individual reflection sessions (in an interview-style format, my colleagues and I shared perspectives pertaining to photoVOICE and our critical teacher leadership practices); (d) group reflection sessions (in a

focus group-style format, members of our participatory team discussed our generated photos, critical teacher leadership initiatives, and unpacked our perceived successes and challenges associated with such practices); and (e) data analysis (originally inviting colleagues to engage in a co-analysis section, but pivoting to an individual thematic analysis process due to lack of engagement). All transcripts and textual information were accessible to all members of the teacher-participant team throughout the project. Informal feedback from some of my colleagues suggested a sense of apathy in the process of skimming and reading through dozens of pages of textual data. Ultimately, I reflexively engaged in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022) of individual and group reflection discussion transcription, the textual transcriptions of photos (Jörgensen, 2017), utilized photoVOICE analysis techniques (Mayfield-Johnson & Butler, 2017; Sutton-Brown, 2014; Wang & Burris, 1994; 1997), and a document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Dalgish et al., 2020; Morgan, 2022) of Manitoba education document texts. I provided regular updates to the participatory team on the themes I generated and regularly solicited feedback to inform the analysis. This process is thoroughly outlined and explained in Chapter 3.

Context of the Study

This research aimed to promote critical teacher leadership practices and explore how our engagements contributed toward ameliorating social inequities and injustices in our school communities. As it was a local study concerning the experiences of teachers in Manitoba schools, it was important to be cognizant of public legislation regarding the responsibilities of educators. The Public Schools Act (2023) operationally defined a teacher as “a person who holds a valid and subsisting teacher's certificate or a limited teaching permit issued under *The Education Administration Act*, or who is authorized by the minister to teach in a school” (para 1). Evidently, the primary prescribed responsibility of teachers, by law, is to “teach”; other informal

responsibilities of the position, such as leadership, are not necessarily included, nor discussed in other affiliated acts, such as the Manitoba Teachers' Society Act (2024) or the Education Administration Act (2023). The code of professional practice, as mandated by the Manitoba Teachers' Society (2024b), does not explicitly refer to teaching, but rather outlines the behavioural conduct of members, stating: "A Member's first professional responsibility is to Member's students" (para. 2). Young et al. (2021) agree with this position, stating: "the prime responsibility of teachers is the educational well-being of their students" (p. 285). As mandated by provincial legislation and the code of professional practice from the union, Manitoba teachers' primary responsibility pertains to the educational growth and wellbeing of their students. Practicing leadership, although not necessarily explicitly prescribed as a labour responsibility of Manitoba teachers, is an important practice that teachers exercise regularly for students to succeed (Harris, 2015; Harris & Jones, 2019). Examples of teacher leadership may encompass the mentoring of teacher colleagues on curricular topics or leading new school initiatives that provide students with new learning experiences (Collay, 2011; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

The Manitoba School Boards Association comprises 38 public school divisions across the province. While each school division adheres to provincial legislation, there are various interpretations across divisions pertaining to the formal work responsibilities of teachers, as outlined in divisional policy documents. This study was conducted during the 2022/2023 school year in a single school division in Manitoba, with leadership practices being exercised across multiple schools. These school communities comprised a rich diversity of students' socio-cultural backgrounds, notably large newcomer populations from India and the Philippines, but also included Indigenous, Ukrainian temporary residents, persons of colour, and white student

bodies. The socioeconomic status of these school communities was generally similar, as we instructed youth from predominantly low/middle-class backgrounds. Further, as all participants in this study taught between Kindergarten to Grade 8, our critical teacher leadership practices were confined to early and middle years contexts; as such, there were no secondary schools included within this project. To bolster the confidentiality of the identity of the participating division, policy documents analyzed from this organization were not publicly disseminated. Last, this research project was facilitated in a post-pandemic context, limiting all participant communication, interactions, and meetings to a virtual University of Manitoba (UM)-licensed Zoom digital platform, adhering to UM Research Ethics Board 2 requirements.

Overview of the Conceptual Framework

As an interpretive framework for data analysis, I generated a novel conceptualization of critical teacher leadership that was foundationally premised upon critical theory and emancipatory grassroots leadership, the distributed perspective of leadership, and transformative professionalism. A thorough overview of this conceptual framework is shared in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Critical Theory, Pedagogy, and Grassroots Leadership

We live in an inherently unjust society, and schools continue to function as powerful vehicles to reify social inequities and forms of oppression (Meroe, 2014; Wotherspoon, 2014). These issues, lamentably, have only been exacerbated in our post-pandemic world (Giroux, 2021). Social justice struggles in schools are well-documented within the academic literature (Apple, 2008; Bates, 2006; Clark & Fasching-Varner, 2015; Jackson, 2005; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Marshall, 2004; Theoharis, 2007; Waite & Arar, 2020; White & Cooper; 2012). Examples of social injustices in schools may manifest in a variety of forms, such as colonial or racialized

pedagogies (Dei, 2018), general discriminatory treatment of others (Wotherspoon, 2012), violence and harassment (Goodboy & Martin, 2018), among other oppressive phenomena. Changing the world may be possible through teaching interventions, such as critical pedagogies (Freire, 1970/2000). Through Freire's problem-posing learning framework, teachers and youth are prompted to critically interrogate the inequities that are prevalent through schools and society, eventually leading to liberatory outcomes via raised consciousness. Authentic critical learning ultimately necessitates agency for social change, and thus may be construed as an essential component of informal, grassroots leadership practices.

Advocating for social justice can be difficult, however, as Young et al. (2021) outline three prevalent tensions impacting Canadian public schools ability to function, notably: (a) uniformity and diversity (the tension between treating all Canadian youth uniformly as opposed to diversifying educational practice and structures to meet the needs of individual students' and/or communities); (b) stability and change (tensions relating to conserving school structures and pedagogies while others advocate for necessary revisions to adjust to an evolving world); and (c) power and equality (the enormous challenge of balancing power and influence between few with many, and between professionals and community stakeholders). My conceptual framework drew upon ideas of critical theory (Celikates & Flynn, 2023; Huault et al., 2014), specifically to interrogate the ideological underpinnings of leadership and professionalism, and how (micro)emancipatory efforts may mitigate school-based inequities. The concept of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2000) was utilized to generate insight into the transformative nature of knowledge co-creation to identify and disrupt social inequities and injustices, while an emancipatory grassroots leadership perspective (Davidson & Hughes, 2020; Ehrich & English, 2012; Kezar, 2011; 2012; Strawser, 2020) was incorporated to view leadership as a dialogical,

bottom-up practice shared among a diversity of actors, not via a formal individual 'heroic' (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006) lens.

Distributed Perspective of Educational Leadership

Educational leadership practice is undeniably a potentially powerful means to mitigate social and organizational tensions within schools and educational systems (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Young et al., 2021; Yukl, 2013). The predominant focus of educational leadership research and practice remains on hierarchical structures emphasizing the *heroic* efforts of individuals in positions of power (e.g., principals and/or superintendents) (Gronn, 2003; Niesche, 2017; Spillane, 2006; Tierney, 1989), while the diverse informal leadership practices of others (e.g., students, teachers, community members) are notably less emphasized in scholarly research and practice (Harris, 2005; 2015; Kahlke, 2014; Spillane, 2006). Further, various scholarly perspectives on educational leadership argue that such practices are fluid and exercised by many individuals within school systems (Tierney, 1989). Essentially, leadership is not confined to formal positions of authority (Lambert, 2002), rather, it is *practiced* daily in a variety of informal settings and for diverse purposes (Spillane, 2006). The lack of focus on informal leadership practices essentially disregards an everyday phenomenon, in essence silencing and undervaluing teachers, students, parents, and other organizational members' contributions to educational leadership and change (Gronn, 2003; Kezar, 2011). Through the distributed perspective of leadership, such phenomena are not merely constituted as the *actions* of individual formal leaders, but rather are interpreted as the collective and collaborative *interactions* of many (Spillane, 2006). Viewing leadership as an informal, collegial *practice* was foundational to the conceptual lens informing this project.

Teachers' Transformative Professionalism

Transformative professionalism (Sachs, 2003; 2016) was incorporated into the conceptual framework to generate insights into the professional roles, responsibilities, behaviour, and conduct of Manitoba teachers as we exercised critical emancipatory leadership practices. Upon embarking upon the research process, it became evident via the reflection discussions that our experiences were challenges likely not limited to a single organization, but rather seemed to be a common occupational issue that many teachers likely navigate across school districts (e.g., isolating working conditions and limited opportunities for collegial collaborations). As such, teachers' (transformative) professionalism (David, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000; Hoyle, 2001; Sachs, 2003; 2016) was utilized to interpret our informal leadership practice, exploring how our advocacies (mis)aligned with teaching schedules and prescribed organizational/occupational professional roles and responsibilities. Evetts' (2011; 2013) dichotomy between organizational professionalism (professional roles determined by bureaucratic managerial control) and occupational professionalism (autonomous professional roles crafted by workers) proved fruitful in analyzing the tensions of who ultimately controlled teachers' labour. Teachers are intellectuals and must have the capacity to control their professional working and learning conditions (Giroux, 1986). Some of the foundational components of teachers' transformative professionalism utilized throughout the analysis included: autonomy, expert knowledge, collaboration, and ethical conduct (David, 2000; Frostenson, 2015; Sachs, 2003; 2016; Sehrawat, 2014). While professionalism is a contested concept within some scholarly discussions (e.g., Mizzi, 2024; Ozga, 1999; Sorenson, 2023), it proved to be a valuable lens to better understand the tensions of critical teacher leadership practices. Notably, it was my interest to investigate how engaging in *leadership* intersects with Manitoba teachers' professional roles and

responsibilities as portrayed within provincial and divisional policies and resource documents, as well to explore the behavioural conduct expected of teachers when engaging in equity and social justice labour (e.g., being mandated to engage in anti-racism pedagogies, but limited ability to combat racialized school structures). In short, are the interactions and behaviours demonstrated by teachers engaging in critical leadership practices deemed (un)professional? Identifying various social inequities experienced within my professional practice, but being uncertain how such emancipatory, informal leadership roles intersected with my position as a public school teacher was a problem that prompted this research inquiry.

Conceptual Framework for Critical Teacher Leadership

My interpretation of educational leadership is notably fluid, inspired by postmodern and critical scholars who have problematized the concept (e.g., English, 2003; Gronn, 2003; Niesche, 2018). As such, my utilization of language about this phenomenon manifests through interchangeable, but comparable terms throughout the thesis. In Chapter 2, I present a novel conceptual definition of critical teacher leadership which is predicated on distributed perspectives (Spillane, 2006), critical theory and emancipatory grassroots leadership (Celikates & Flynn, 2023; Ehrich & English, 2012; Huault et al., 2014; Kezar, 2011; Strawser, 2000), and transformative professionalism (Boylan et al., 2023; Sachs, 2003; 2016) It is in the conceptual framework section that this conceptual interpretation is more thoroughly unpacked and justified. However, for clarity purposes, I view critical teacher leadership through a fluid emancipatory lens, and interpret such *practices* to be informal, ‘bottom up’, collegially shared enterprises (e.g., students, teachers, principals) and are *not* reserved to formal authority or office. Consequently, throughout the thesis, I use the terms *critical teacher leadership*, *critical leadership*, *informal leadership*, and *emancipatory grassroots leadership* relatively interchangeably, terms premised

on my flexible non-hierarchical interpretation of interactive practice. Speaking colloquially, leadership is something you do, not something you occupy. Last, I also use the term *(inter)action* when describing our engagements in critical teacher leadership practice. This research project drew inspiration from the action component of participatory action research (Anderson & Herr, 2005; Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). However, I also interpreted such phenomena through the distributed perspective of leadership (Spillane, 2006), whereby such practices are accomplished via socially complex informal *interactions* exercised by various actors, not the individual *actions* of a formal leader. As such, I operationalize the term '(inter)action' to acknowledge both the action-oriented nature of this project, but also to recognize the interactive nature of leadership practice.

Significance of the Study

The impacts stemming from this action-oriented study ultimately proved to be quite significant, as our practitioner-oriented leadership practices co-facilitated local change in our school communities, co-generated new theoretical insights into the transformative professional nature of critical teacher leadership phenomena, and presented new methodological understandings of the evolving qualitative research landscape via this novel bricolage approach. In Chapter 3, I thoroughly unpack the evolution of qualitative research and how this project advances new insights into the evolving methodological bricolage movement. Through the findings chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6), I disseminate my theoretical augmentations of critical teacher leadership and how such practices intersect with the transformative professional roles, responsibilities, and behavioural expectations of Manitoba teachers. Through these analyses, I identified the emancipatory potential of how our grassroots 'bottom up' leadership enterprises (being co-shared among students, teachers, administrators, and other agents) manifested

informally through our transformative professional practices, broadening understandings for the importance of teachers' autonomy, exercise of expert knowledge, collegiality and collaboration, and ethical conduct (Sachs, 2003; 2016; Stone-Johnson, 2017). Further, our photos, reflection discussions, and Manitoba education documents illuminated how organizational professionalism (Evetts, 2011) manifested via the inequitable school structures and social dynamics that, at times, impeded our transformative professional conduct from being realized. Also, our advocacies and experiences further demonstrated the intersections between critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2000) and emancipatory grassroots leadership (Kezar, 2011; Strawser, 2020), as many of our dialogical initiatives often stemmed from student-engaged learning experiences that extended beyond the parameters of the classroom, aiming to inform and influence the affect and practices of others within our school communities. Expanding upon the perspective of *teaching as leadership* (e.g., Cuban, 1988; Collay, 2011) and Gronn's (2003) problematization of educational leadership discourse, these findings further challenge the dominant parochial leader/follower binarism through demonstrating new, fluid, socially complex interpretations of this hybridity of professional practices.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I provided an introductory scope of the research project, outlining the contextual issue, synthesis of the conceptual framework, the research objectives and questions, the general research design, data generation tools, as well as the practical, theoretical, and methodological significance of the study. I have also borne my own fragility, sharing my own positionality to demonstrate transparency in my prospective biases, strengths, and interpretative limitations throughout engagement and reflexive analysis.

In Chapter 2, I provide a comprehensive review of the literature, outlining the historical development of educational leadership, transitional focuses toward distributed and grassroots leadership endeavours, and the eventual emergence of critical teacher leadership practices. Further, my conceptual framework of *critical teacher leadership* is presented which comprises tenets of critical theory, pedagogy, and grassroots leadership (Freire, 1970/2000; Giroux, 1986; Kezar, 2011; Strawser, 2020), distributed perspectives on leadership (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006), and teachers' transformative professionalism (Boylan et al., 2023; Evetts, 2011; 2013; Sachs, 2003; 2016).

In Chapter 3, I outline my novel methodological bricolage utilized for this critical, action-oriented study. In this chapter, I discuss the ongoing evolution of qualitative research methods, the emergence of the bricolage approach, the design and data sources implemented, and how I co-engaged in this participatory research alongside my teacher colleagues.

In Chapter 4, I documented our perspectives and perceived impact of our critical teacher leadership practices in our immediate school communities. A discussion section explores how these findings intersect with the conceptual framework and are further corroborated by previous research.

In Chapter 5, the social and structural challenges impeding critical teacher leadership practices are documented. These findings are interwoven via the conceptual framework and are also corroborated by the pre-existing literature.

In Chapter 6, I shared the results of the thematic analysis of all data sources, including: Manitoba education documents, photoVOICE and individual reflection discussion textual transcripts, group reflection discussion transcripts, and textual transcriptions of photos. The

thematic analysis revealed how teachers' transformative professional practices of critical teacher leadership are contextually exemplified within this Manitoba setting.

In Chapter 7, I provide a concise synthesis of the key findings generated, strengths and (de)limitations of the project, implications for future research, and propose practical recommendations to educational stakeholders to foster conditions conducive to critical leadership practices.

Conclusion

Educational leadership practices serve a crucial role in mitigating social inequities and injustices in public schools. However, it is also quite evident that no individual has the capacity to address every single challenge in such complex settings. Supporting the informal leadership of teachers may help ameliorate such challenges and assist in establishing schools as more equitable and just learning and working environments for all individuals navigating such contexts. In the next chapter, I provide a comprehensive review of the literature relating to teacher leadership and formulate a novel conceptual framework of critical teacher leadership.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Throughout this chapter, I provide a literature review on the topic of educational leadership, the developments within the field, critical perspectives, and the emergence of critical teacher leadership research. First, I explored the rise and influence of the managerial sciences, developments from the theory movement, and transitions toward constructivist interpretations of educational leadership. Second, I outlined the emergence of the distributed perspective on leadership practice, notably the interpretive shift from individuals in formal positions of authority (e.g., school principals) to a shared *practice* exercised by various organizational members in the educational system (e.g., teachers) with the purpose of ameliorating social inequities and injustices. Third, I disseminated the insights generated from teacher leadership research and its affiliation with critical perspectives within the field, particularly via the emancipatory grassroots 'bottom up' initiatives of individuals lacking formal authority. Fourth, I discussed the concept of teachers' transformative professionalism, an ideology premised upon the principles of expert knowledge, collegiality, autonomy, and shared leadership practice. Last, I presented my novel conceptualization of critical teacher leadership, justifying its tenets of the distributed perspective on leadership, critical theory and grassroots leadership, and transformative professionalism.

The Theory Movement

Upon the completion of the Second World War, there was a revitalized interest in improving educational outcomes in public schools in Canada and the United States, leading to the emergence of the theory movement whereby educational administration became an established academic discipline (Fusarelli, 2006). The theory movement emphasized a paradigmatic shift from belief in educational administration as "a loose collection of individual,

anecdotal experiences" (p. 1107) to a belief that complex social phenomena could be related to social psychology, management, and the behavioural sciences; the theoretical implications were that such phenomena could be explained, predicted, controlled, and eventually replicated, prospectively leading to improved efficiency and academic performance (Callahan, 1962). The underpinnings of this movement originated from a collection of scholars' discussions originating in the Vienna Circle, where many modernist assumptions of social scientific inquiry were formulated (Fusarelli, 2006). Organizational scientists intend to both describe and explain the replicable behaviour of individuals and groups within organizations (Hoy, 1996). These ideas were adopted to educational administration, where Culbertson (1981) summarized four core ideas that constituted the nature of the theory movement, namely that research: (a) has origins in theory and is guided by theory; (b) is epistemologically and ontologically rooted in social and behavioural sciences; (c) can produce findings that may be described, explained, and generalized to other contexts; and (d) is best approached through hypothetico-deductive methods. Fusarelli (2006) commented that by the 1950s, school superintendents and other formal educational leaders were being systematically trained in the managerial sciences. Callahan (1962) further explained that the managerial sciences can be summarized into four fundamental principles: (a) scientific findings take precedence over anecdotal experiences; (b) managers ought to be trained through scientifically verified methods, as opposed to self-exploration; (c) managers are cooperative with employees and ensure scientific principles are routinely practiced; and (d) there is an equal distribution of work between the manager and the workers. In essence, the managerial sciences were exclusively concerned with establishing structures that ensured efficiency and replicable student achievement, disregarding human intentionality as a considerable component of educational experience.

Feigl (1969), one of the founding members of the Vienna Circle, commented: "The logical positivists were adamant in excluding as *nonsensical* any question that, in the light of logical analysis, revealed itself to be absolutely unanswerable" (p. 5). However, as the field of educational administration evolved, so did the critique of such rigid inquiry methods. Culbertson (1981) also remarked:

> Educational administrators must make decisions daily which require moral judgments about what they or others 'ought' to do, and, when they lead in seeking major school improvements, moral issues become even more salient. However, the study of moral questions is meaningless to logical positivists, given their assumptions about inquiry. (p. 42)

English (2003) echoed such sentiments, referring to stimulus-response models of administration as "dehumanizing" and "morally bankrupt" (p. 56), due to their inability to recognize the moral capacity and obligations of leaders. Many public-school systems are composed of extensive social and culturally diverse complexities, and, consequently, such human considerations are methodologically silenced in positivistic research (Culbertson, 1981). Despite these criticisms, Willower (1979) stressed the importance of recognizing that science and positivism are not synonymous terms, and that scientific inquiry requires both creative (curious and inventive) and critical (sceptical and judicious) capacities. Willower continued to explain that positivism led to the development of scientific practices, yet asserted that positivism is too parochial to capture the imaginative aspects of creativity. Regardless, the inability to eliminate variances between individuals' lived experiences would eventually become an important topic of consideration in educational administration research and would spark debate over the role and influence of science in the field.

Transition from Managerial Sciences to Constructivist Leadership

Bogotch (2011) highlighted the high level of influence and historical importance of three foundational works in educational leadership: (a) Callahan's (1962) work, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*; (b) Tyack's (1974), *The One Best System*; and (c) Cuban's (1988), *The Practice of Leadership in Schools*. Each work broadened and challenged the modern interpretations of managerial sciences, setting the foundations for the ideas of human intervention and agency in organizations. The administrative sciences were limited in their capacity to explain certain social and cultural phenomena in schools, and these authors accentuated the need for theoretical pluralism when conducting research. A crucial limitation of the administrative sciences was the understanding that human behaviours "are probabilistic, not deterministic. Individuals can make technically correct decisions and fail to achieve their ends. Such is the nature of predicting human behavior" (Hoy, 1996, p. 376). Humans are inherently imperfect; therefore, educational systems will always be subject to error and shortcomings, regardless of whether prescribed structures and actions are followed diligently.

One of the most prominent critics of the paradigmatic assumptions of the managerial sciences was Thomas Greenfield (Barlosky, 2006; Hicks, 2014; Riveros, 2014). Greenfield (1986/1993a) pointedly asserted that "administrative science has failed in education, but I believe its failure is equally apparent in the other sub-fields of administration as well" (p. 132). Greenfield believed such failure was rooted in the ontological underpinnings of managerial sciences, arguing researchers should reconsider the "epiphenomena of reality" to the "phenomenological force of reality itself" (p. 133). Greenfield (1975/1993b) distinguished these two ontological beliefs as the *systems notion* (which endorses the belief that organizations exist independent of human intervention) and the *social invention notion* (a view that recognizes

reality is constructed through the decision-making and agency of individuals within organizations). Riveros (2014) expanded upon this dichotomy, explaining that via the systems theory, organizational members rely on subordination to senior administrative authorities to find guidance, whereas in the social intervention model, individuals have agency to make change based on their own free will. If organizational change is to occur, it requires the shift of perspective of individuals interacting within the organization.

These evolving perspectives shifted from the dominant focus on the managerial sciences of school structures to recognizing and exploring individuals' agency, consequently transforming educational administration research and practice. However, distinguishing management from leadership is still a misnomer committed by many even within the modern age. Marion and Gonzales (2014) humorously shared an oversimplified, anecdotal differentiation between the terms, commenting that many scholars believe that "leadership is doing the right thing while management is doing things right" (p. 10). These authors continued to explain that management is confined to formal roles that promote stability and maximize efficiency, while leadership emphasizes and recognizes the potential for human intentionality, morals, and social agency to impact school change. However, Gronn (2003) criticized the ill-defined differentiations between managerialism and formal leadership within the literature, citing a lack of clear definitional criteria distinguishing these two perspectives, and argued that both interpretations are fundamentally individualistically anchored.

Educational Leadership

As educational leadership is a socially constructed concept, it is perhaps not surprising to understand that there are a plethora of definitions and interpretations of its function within public schools. Some scholars have suggested that there may be as many definitions of educational

leadership as the number of scholars researching it (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Yukl, 2013). I present a brief recapitulation of the definitions and interpretations of educational leadership.

Definitions of Educational Leadership

While there is no universally agreed upon perspective on educational leadership, Hoy and Miskel (2013) recognized that most existing definitions emphasize the intentional influence of individuals over others as a defining quality of the phenomenon. Leithwood et al. (2010) outlined two aspects of educational leadership: (a) leadership constitutes an exercise of social influence; and (b) effects of leadership indirectly influence student learning and achievement. Spillane (2006) provided a similar, yet moderately alternative interpretation of educational leadership, stating: "Leadership refers to activities tied to the core work of the organization that are designed by organizational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, or practices of other organizational members" (p. 11). A commonality among these interpretations is the concept of *influence*. However, Spillane subtly broadened leadership perspective, acknowledging that it is not practiced exclusively by one individual, but rather may be exercised by a multitude of organizational members. Spillane further clarifies the meaning of influence, arguing that "not all influence relations are ones of leadership" (p. 12) and that such influences must be tied to the core work of the organization. For example, influencing a colleague to practice a new dietary regimen would not necessarily constitute an act of leadership.

There have been various criticisms of the study of educational leadership in general. Various scholars have drawn attention to the modernist assumptions of leadership studies, where researchers relentlessly pursued the discovery of a universal theory of leadership applicable to any situation, regardless of context. Postmodernists are critical of such positions, arguing that there are no single truths as knowledge is both contextual and referential (Hicks, 2014). English

(2003) berated the dominance of modernism in educational administration, commenting: "modernism has mangled the topic of leadership" (p. 47). Ehrich and English (2024) contemplated how leadership would operationalize without and/or outside bureaucratic institutions and generated three considerations: (a) in the absence of organizational hierarchies, leadership would neither be leader-centric or follower-centric; (b) that the interactive and relational processes of leadership would be emphasized (not the actions of individual persons); and (c) leader/follower binary would be useless, unnecessary, and should be avoided to better reflect the multidirectional focuses of such phenomenon. Gronn (2000) further acknowledged a recurring perspective by various scholars within the educational administration community to abandon leadership studies entirely. Regardless of the broad interpretations of educational leadership and criticisms of its potential usefulness, the dominating focus of educational leadership inquiry has largely been situated on the actions of individuals in formal positions of authority (Gronn, 2003).

Critiques of Heroism

While the role and influence of individuals in formal positions of authority (e.g., school principals) cannot be ignored (Dentith et al., 2006; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane & Diamond, 2007a), various scholars have begun to critique this dominating focus, the idea that there is a near "monopoly of solo-performed leadership" and that inquiry should transition to "one of dispersal and sharing of influence" (Gronn, 2010, p. 71). Further, Hoy and Miskel (2013) recognized the problematic assumptions underlying individual-focused leadership study, conceding that "no single person has the energy and skill to handle all of the leadership functions" (p. 445). Spillane (2006) outlined four issues with the heroic genre of leadership: (a) research has historically only recognized the "valiant actions" (p. 4) of school

principals while ignoring leadership functions of others in school settings; (b) the *practice* of leadership has been ignored in place of inquiry into people and personality traits, structures, routines, roles, and functions of schools; (c) the majority of focus has been on specific *actions* carried out by individuals as opposed to investigating the *interactions* between a multitude of people; and (d) leadership has been defined in terms of its outcomes, which is not necessarily accurate as "leadership can occur without evidence of its outcome" (p. 5). Dentith et al. (2006) drew attention to the school-based reform movements in the 1980s, which urged formal educational leaders and policymakers to challenge the top-down hierarchies of school functioning and advocated for the development of teacher leadership practices in schools. Gronn (2003) further illuminated the inherent binarism prevalent in educational administration research, specifically problematizing the stark definitional contrasts between *leader/follower, leadership/followership*, *superior/subordinate*, *powerful/powerless*, and so forth.

Distributed Leadership

Like the conceptual challenges of qualifying educational leadership phenomena, there is also no uniformity in distributed leadership definitions (Harris, 2005). As such, there are various interpretations of the distributed perspective on leadership.

Definitions and Defining Qualities

Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) offered a pragmatic interpretation, suggesting "distributed leadership essentially means that those best equipped or skilled or positioned to lead do so, in order to fulfil a particular goal or organizational requirement" (p. 144). For example, a teacher with a strong background in ecological education may lead a school collaborative project on outdoor agriculture in the school yard. Spillane (2006) suggested that the distributed perspective on leadership practice may be understood to include three components: (a) leaders (the

individual taking the lead on the initiative); (b) followers (individuals following the direction of the leader for the specific task); and (c) situations (opportunities that are variable and sporadically arise). Brooks and Kensler (2011) provided further clarity of these three elements of leadership practice, describing leadership practice as "an organizational phenomenon enacted differently at each site and in each situation by both formal and informal leaders who interact with and influence an ever-changing set of artifacts and tools" (p. 56). Through the distributed perspective of leadership, individuals may take on leadership responsibilities in some circumstances, while assuming followership positions in others. As no individual leader has the necessary skills and knowledge to take on every leadership responsibility (Hoy & Miskel, 2013), and educational leaders all have social blind spots, being limited to their own lived experiences (Anderson, 1990), distributed leadership may alleviate such organizational challenges. The findings from a systematic review on distributed leadership conducted by Woods et al. (2004) suggested three thematic findings: (a) *emergent property* (that leadership is carried out collectively across many networks of interacting individuals, not exclusively by individuals); (b) *boundaries of leadership* (that leadership may arise informally from various individuals regardless of their official position in the organization); and (c) *leadership across expertise* (relating to the boundaries of leadership concept, yet acknowledging that individuals with specific areas of expertise may be best suited to carry out particular leadership functions for an organization). The distributed perspective on leadership differs from many of the individualistic notions of educational leadership preceding it.

Descriptive Nature of Distributed Leadership

Unlike most perspectives on educational leadership that offer prescriptive guidelines of the qualities constituting effective leadership, Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) argued that the

distributed perspective is "descriptive before it is prescriptive" and that "any standardized prescription for distributed leadership should be avoided at all costs" (p. 144). Spillane and Diamond (2007a) conceded that there is no existing blueprint or model of distributed leadership, suggesting instead that the distributed perspective is an appropriate conceptual lens for analyzing leadership practice. A distributed perspective on leadership is a description of how leadership is already practiced; it may eventually lead to implications for generating prescriptions, yet it is not independently a prescription for leadership (Spillane, 2006). As leadership under the distributed perspective is understood as practice rather than a role or responsibility, Brooks and Kensler (2011) stated: "the theory does not prescribe any specific skills, traits, characteristics, dispositions, attitudes, organizational positions, roles, or behaviours" (p. 56). This interpretation is considerably more fluid when contrasted with the evident binaries of leadership/followership espoused in traditional educational leadership research.

Fluidity in Leadership

One of the fundamental tenets of the distributed perspective on leadership is the emphasis on the complex *interactions* between colleagues as they embark upon situationally specific practices, not the formal *actions* of an individual leader (Spillane, 2006). Via the distributed perspective, in select situations an individual may informally practice the role of leadership, while in other contexts may assume a role as a follower (Brooks & Kensler, 2011; Spillane, 2006). Through this interpretive lens, leadership is "a fluid phenomenon that happens between leaders and followers; it is not a quality vested in an organizational position" (Brooks & Kensler, 2011, p. 56). Cognizant of this fluid interpretation, Mayrowetz (2008) generated two implications for researchers: (a) to de-center, yet not ignore, the focus of leadership from formal positions (such as principals) and broaden investigations to include leadership at the school level;

and (b) to investigate the complex social interactions between individuals in leadership practice, not simply explore the actions of a single individual. Further, through this perspective, multiple leaders may not necessarily strive for uniform goals, as Spillane and Diamond (2007b) note: "whether two or more leaders seek similar, different, or even opposing goals is just another dimension of the analysis" (p. 11). This perspective is contrasted with conventional conceptions of educational leadership that prioritize the intentional outcomes of individual leaders (Marion & Gonzales, 2014; Yukl, 2013).

Sociomaterial Interactions

Through the distributed perspective, leadership practice is not the sole consequence of social engagements among actors, but may be interpreted as the "configuration of social, material and discursive relations" (Eva et al., 2021, p. 4). In essence, leadership practice manifests through the processes in which actors socially engage both alongside other actors, but also with their work environments, utilizing the tools, resources, spaces, and other physical materials in their designated workplace situations to advance initiatives (Eva et al., 2021; Oborn et al., 2013; Orlikowski, 2007; Spillane et al., 2017; Shirrell & Spillane, 2020). These sociomaterial dimensions are notably broad and complex, social behaviours that may be influenced by policies and cultures that mandate organizational dress, work schedules, work spaces and layouts, proximity to colleagues, access to technology and resources, among a myriad of other environmental factors (Oborn et al., 2013; Orlikowski, 2007). Orlikowski (2007) concisely asserts that "materiality is integral to organizing, positing that the social and the material are constitutively entangled in everyday life" and that "these concepts challenge and transcend conventional distinctions between the social and the material" (p. 1347). Another influencing dynamic of the sociomaterial lens is the concept of propinquity, understanding the

interrelation between the proximity of physical materials and their social actors and how such accessibilities impact leadership function (Spillane et al., 2017). Further, Shirrell and Spillane (2020) shared findings in educational realms indicating that teachers were more likely to socially engage with colleagues nearby, such as those working on the same floor of a school. As such, the sociomaterial element offers a broader interpretation and understanding of such highly complex social phenomena.

Misconceptions of Distributed Leadership

There are numerous misconceptions regarding the understanding of the distributed perspective on leadership. Spillane and Diamond (2007a) outline four common myths frequently shared within the academic community: (a) "The Distributed Perspective is a Blueprint for Leadership and Management" (p. 150); (b) "The Distributed Perspective Negates the Role of Principals" (p. 150); (c) "From a Distributed Perspective, Everyone is a Leader" (p. 151); and (d) "Distributed Leadership is Only About Collaborative Situations" (p. 152). These misunderstandings are further explored below under each sub-heading.

The Distributed Perspective is a Blueprint for Leadership and Management. As leadership under the distributed perspective is viewed as fluid across many individuals in many different situations, there is no blueprint or formulated prescription of the attitudes, behaviours, and/or qualities of leaders (Brooks & Kensler, 2011; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Spillane & Diamond, 2007a). For example, the leadership practices for a school initiative on curriculum professional development of teachers may manifest quite differently than the leadership practices of engaging students in learning about, and participating in, community activism.

The Distributed Perspective Negates the Role of Principals. Advocates of distributed leadership recommend the decentering of leadership study from the actions of individual school

leaders to the interactions of various individuals in an educational organization (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2007a; Mayrowetz, 2011; Spillane, 2006). While the interpretive lens transitions its focus to collegial interactions, a school administrator will inevitably be involved, in some capacity, throughout the diverse situational opportunities and practices of leadership.

From a Distributed Perspective, Everyone is a Leader. Under the distributed perspective, it is possible that any individual in a school may participate, at some point, in leadership practice. However, Spillane (2006) suggested that just because there is the capacity to engage in leadership practice does not necessitate that everyone is a leader or even should be a leader. Some individuals may lack the intrinsic interest in taking on leadership responsibilities and should not necessarily be expected to.

Distributed Leadership is only about Collaborative Situations. Another misunderstanding of distributed leadership is the idea that all educational leadership is perceived as a collective and/or collaborative endeavour. Although the notion of decentering the focus of research from the actions of individual principals to the interactions of various individuals within an organization is supported, not all practices of leadership under the distributed perspective are necessarily plural. Research may still be conducted investigating the informal leadership practices of individuals across many different roles and responsibilities. Individuals in schools may take on solo-performed leadership practices that fulfil the situational needs of the organization and/or community.

Criticisms of Distributed Leadership

A final acknowledgment regards criticisms toward the distributed perspective on leadership. The distributed perspective has been notably contentious with educational leadership communities, as Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) note: “No other leadership concept, it seems, has

caused so much controversy, angst and debate as distributed leadership" (p. 141). Most of the criticism seems to be toward the scarcity of evidence of the impact distributed leadership may have on school functioning and student achievement (Spillane & Diamond, 2007a). However, this is unsurprising considering the recent emergence of the distributed leadership perspective. In addition, the implications of researching complex interactions among various individuals practicing leadership may be more difficult to measure than the impacts of the actions of an individual school principal. A further documented criticism involves the perceived belief that through distributing leadership practices across numerous organizational members, a more democratic system may be established. Woods (2016), however, challenged this presumption by acknowledging that such occurrences are not always the case and that few researchers investigating distributed perspectives on leadership have incorporated a critical perspective on power. Lumby (2013) rebuked many of the core assumptions underlying distributed leadership, arguing that "distributed leadership literature is littered with contradictions" (p. 588), that the concept reinforces hierarchical power imbalances (workers' informal leadership necessitating permissions granted from formal authority), operates under false assumptions that leadership opportunity is equally accessible to all workers, and does not authentically consider how workers' diverse identities (e.g., gender, race, ability, etc.) intersect with informal leadership situations and practices. Jones (2014) echoed these criticisms, acknowledging that distributed leadership practices rely on the endorsement of formal authority and that the evidence supporting claims of higher democratic organizational functions was scant. Ehrich and English (2024) further problematized the concept, suggesting that distributed leadership integrates within and reinforces bureaucratic control and contributes to increased coordination and communication issues. Last, Kezar (2012) explored distributed leadership as an emancipatory phenomenon, but

identified the erroneous assumption that formal and informal leaders shared organizational values and goals (as leadership objectives between workers and management were often in stark contrast). In sum, Lumby (2013) offered the succinct criticism: “distributed leadership is a profoundly political phenomenon replete with the uses and abuses of power” (p. 592). While distributed leadership conceptually originated as a critique of the monopolistic nature of formal leadership discourse (e.g., Gronn, 2003), it appears through my overview of the literature that the concept has been largely operationalized through normative and uncritical lenses.

Distributed Leadership and Roles of Teachers

The problematization of exclusively emphasising educational leadership on the actions of individual school principals has been thoroughly documented (e.g., Gronn, 2000; 2003; Spillane, 2006); coinciding with this movement has been the increased attention and focus on exploring the capacity in which teachers may practice leadership functions within schools (Dentith et al., 2006; Harris & Muijs, 2004). Interpretations and understandings of leadership are diverse; while school principals are in considerable positions of power to exert influence, Spillane (2006) acknowledges that teachers are not necessarily influenced by their principals. The concept of *teacher leadership* is, in many ways, strongly associated with distributed leadership, and although the literature has not formally acknowledged such a relation, Harris (2015) notes that both share the same theoretical and conceptual underpinnings. Leadership and influence may arise from various members within an organization. The active negligence in considering teachers in leadership practice has been described as an “epistemological injustice” (Schmidt, 2012, p. 222) and may serve as an example of the parochial confines of what the academic community legitimizes. Ongoing calls for educational reformation have outlined the need for policymakers to distribute leadership practices among more organizational members and to

"develop the capacity of teachers to make a significant impact on professional practice, quality, and improvement of the school itself" (Dentith et al., 2006, p. 585).

Muijs and Harris (2003) identified three overlapping qualities between distributed leadership and teacher leadership: (a) the incorporation of multiple groups of individuals in schools to impact instructional change; (b) the social interactions of various individuals practicing leadership to achieve a goal; and (c) the emphasis of interdependency as opposed to dependency as modelled in other leadership practices. There is an evident aspect of fluidity in both perspectives on educational leadership, viewing the practice as a process that occurs freely throughout school systems by various individuals, a responsibility and action not confined to the principal's office. Both concepts of distributed leadership and teacher leadership acknowledge that, in certain situations, various individuals have the capacity to practice leadership functions (Muijs & Haris, 2003; Spillane, 2006). Further, Wenner and Campbell (2017) acknowledged, after conducting a comprehensive literature review on teacher leadership studies, that "the most popular theory cited by far was distributed leadership" (p. 148). Various scholars have drawn parallels between distributed leadership and teacher leadership. These insights on leadership fluidity are crucial and have inspired my interpretive lens for the construction and implementation of the study.

Teacher Leadership

The concept of teacher leadership is not particularly new, although the resurgence in its interest has been contemporary. Bogotch (2011) acknowledged that many of the educational leaders of the early 20th century possessed an "intellectual mastery of curriculum and instruction" (p. 5), preceding the eventual dominance of the managerial sciences in educational

administration. Cuban (1988) recognized the importance and relation between teachers and leadership, stating:

> For whatever reasons, the link in the early decades of public schooling between teaching and leadership and the unabashed use of the word *leadership* eroded and the closest connection between teaching and leadership seemed to be high-level managerial skills. Thus, I wish to resurrect a forgotten vocabulary of teachers as leaders that existed well over a century ago … To reconnect the notion of leadership to teaching revives a vital tradition. (p. 197)

It is important to acknowledge that much of the literature on the topic of teacher leadership appears, although not explicitly stated, to be associated with instructional leadership assumptions. However, more recent literature tends to be aligned with the distributed perspectives on leadership, as previously outlined. Cognizant of these observations, I have organized a thorough discussion of teacher leadership, specifically investigating: (a) definitions and overview; (b) research and evidence supporting teacher leadership; (c) efforts to facilitate and support teacher leadership practices; and (d) practical examples of teacher leadership in the field.

Definitions and Overview

Like other concepts of educational leadership, there is no unequivocally accepted definition of teacher leadership (Muijs & Haris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). York-Barr and Duke conducted a highly influential literature review of two decades of research on teacher leadership and suggest that the lack of uniformity in understanding the concept may be due to multiple affiliations with several other leadership theories. Harris (2015) described three historical waves of teacher leadership research, where scholars investigated: (a) the formal

leadership roles of teachers (e.g., department heads); (b) the instructional expertise of teachers and the impact of mentorship; and (c) the social interactions of teachers to achieve organizational development and various goals. The historical dominance in focus on teacher leadership study appears to be more closely associated with traditional leadership paradigms emphasizing the actions of individuals (York-Barr & Duke, 2004); however, the trend has begun to shift toward exploring the social interactions of teachers through a distributed perspective (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Cognizant of these historical developments in the research on teacher leadership phenomena, there are various definitions that illuminate the concept. Margolis (2012) defined a teacher leader as an individual "whose official schedule includes both teaching K-12 students and leading teachers in some capacity" (p. 292). Collay (2011) takes a broad position regarding teacher leadership, arguing that due to the inherently influential nature of the profession, "choosing to become a teacher at all is an act of leadership" (p. 28). Collay further argues that "Educational leadership happens at all levels, in every dimension of the teaching and learning enterprise, every day. Embracing teaching as leadership allows us to rethink schooling, leadership, and school reform" (p. 36). Through this interpretation, leadership manifests through a plethora of professional collegial engagements in- and outside the classroom. Wenner and Campbell (2017) similarly provided the interpretation of teacher leadership as "teachers who maintain K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom" (p. 140). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) identified four key qualities of teacher leaders: (a) the ability to lead within and beyond the classroom; (b) being able to identify with and contribute to a community of other teacher learners and leaders; (c) having the capacity to influence others resulting in improved practices; and (d) "accept[ing]

responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership" (p. 6). There are many perspectives on the innate qualities of teacher leadership practice, as Hunzicker (2022) further suggested five features of teacher leadership: (a) student-centricity (the apex goals are to improve students' learning and life experience); (b) action-orientation (focusing on actions to achieve goals); (c) extends beyond the classroom (practices both within and outside the parameters of a single classroom); (d) positive influence (leading to positive social changes); and (e) collaboration (a practice necessarily constituted on dialogue, partnerships, and collaboration).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) focused on the leadership functions practiced outside the classroom, describing teacher leadership as "teacher agency through establishing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshalling resources throughout the organization in an effort to improve students' educational experiences and outcomes" (p. 263). A last consideration is the potential hybridity teacher leadership may provide, specifically merging the "expertise and experience of classroom teachers (curriculum and instruction) and blend[ing] it with knowledge of school organization and change (educational administration)" (Beachum & Dentith, 2004, p. 285). The expectation is that reforming educational leadership to include teachers in leadership practices may lead to both enhanced organizational functioning as well as improved student learning. While there is some evidence to support such a notion, evidence outlining the breadth of impacts teacher leadership has within school communities is still lacking in the research (Harris, 2015).

Leadership may be practiced by teachers through formal exercises and routines (e.g., committee meetings, organizing events, instructional observations) and informal practices (e.g., social interactions with peers, mentoring professional development of colleagues, communicating ideas for change, encouraging parental involvement, working in small groups)

(Brooks & Kensler, 2011; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Despite the recognition of the potential fluidity in leadership responsibilities in which teacher leaders may be immersed, the historical focus of research has been situated on the more conventional, formal tasks (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Ryan (1998) noted that teachers, other staff members, students, and members of the community also have much to contribute in the way of leadership towards new educational initiatives.

Research on the Impacts of Teacher Leadership

Harris (2015) described research findings on the impact of teacher leadership at the school level to be "rather variable" (p. 61). While the ability to assess the impact of teacher leadership at the broad, organizational level may be difficult, Harris and Muijs (2004) shared their findings that teachers' involvement in various leadership responsibilities demonstrated positive impacts on teachers' pedagogy and students' educational outcomes. Harris and Jones (2019) assert: "This is unquestionably a potent endorsement of teacher leadership in action with clear evidence, over time, of a positive relationship between teacher leadership and positive educational change" (p. 125). Other studies documented the positive impact participating in leadership responsibilities had on teachers, notably improved self-esteem, sense of self-worth and job satisfaction, improved collegial dynamics, higher organizational retention, improved teaching practice, and stronger relationships among colleagues (Nguyen et al., 2018; Simpson, 2021; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Supporting and Facilitating Teacher Leadership

Recognizing the potential impacts that teacher leadership may have on school organizations, there has been increased emphasis on supporting leadership practices of teachers in the field (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), as well as revising

professional development opportunities and/or teacher education programs to incorporate leadership skill development (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2015; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) outlined various structural issues to the facilitation and development of teacher leadership, commenting: “It is amazing that teacher leadership is possible in schools as they are currently structured” (p. 93). Such inhibitors include the physical structure and layout of the building, school scheduling, and inability to collaborate with peers, lack of finances for professional development, autocratic decision making, and communication challenges (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Spillane et al., 2017). While not all these difficulties may be readily ameliorated, principals are vital in alleviating such tensions by embracing and valuing collaboration, engaging in dialogical decision making, and scheduling opportunities for individuals to take on initiatives. In post-secondary education, Cranston and Kusanovich (2015) share that many universities recognize the potential benefits of teacher leadership and are beginning to incorporate leadership development as a part of teacher education programs. However, these authors express concern that such programs neglect to prepare teacher leaders for the socio-emotional challenges often associated with leadership responsibilities. Clearly, efforts to facilitate and support leadership potential for pre- and in-service teachers are an area of emerging importance. There has seemingly been little investigation into the impact school districts’ policies and/or professionalism ideology have on teachers’ behaviours, conduct, and/or capacity to engage in leadership practices. It seems that many school districts operate under the axiomatic assumption that teachers simply teach and are devoid of any other professional responsibilities. Further, problematizing teacher leadership discourse and investigating the social and organizational inequities of school infrastructure are emerging areas of investigation.

Critical Theory

Critical theory is interpreted as an antiauthoritarian theoretical framework to oppose social arrangements and ideologies that impede human freedom (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Critical theorists embrace interdisciplinary methodologies with the intent to not simply describe social reality, but rather to unify theory and practice through identifying oppressive societal forces and generating practical solutions to actualize liberatory change (Celikates & Flynn, 2023). This theoretical framework employs both Marxist and neo-Marxist paradigms that critically interrogate such ideologies, social forces, histories of production and consumerism, and capitalism (Garlitz, 2020; Sementelli, 2022). Critical theory was largely developed from the Frankfurt School in Germany in the 1920s among a network of interdisciplinary scholars of the humanities and social sciences (Celikates & Flynn, 2023; Garlitz, 2020). Although there have been evolving and diverse perspectives of critical theory throughout the 20th century, today the prominent themes in critical theoretical research are generally centered around disrupting power inequities pertaining to ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, ability, imperialism, and colonialism (Garlitz, 2020).

Four basic concepts are associated with the Frankfurt School and its early development of critical theory: (a) alienation; (b) reification; (c) ideology; and (d) emancipation (Celikates & Flynn, 2023). Alienation was a term utilized by Karl Marx to describe how evolving economic and social conditions of modernity not only isolate workers from the process, product, and purpose of their labour, but also separate workers from each other (Buchanan, 2010). Buchanan further explained that modernity led to workers' labour being highly compartmentalized, non-autonomous, and invisible to the end goals and/or product. The concept of reification is closely related to alienation and is a term used to critique the objectification of humans as thing-like

objects (Celikates & Flynn, 2023). Buchanan (2010) further describes reification as "transformation of tangible human qualities, such as thoughts, ideas, and values, into physical objects" (p. 404) and that all the key aspects of capitalism involve some degree of reification. Through reification, humans are inappropriately quantified, objectified, or instrumentalized in their endeavours (Celikates & Flynn, 2023). The next core concept associated with critical theory is ideology. Ideology may be understood as the set of beliefs, views, convictions, and thought forms that bind particular groups together, inform their societal understandings of what constitutes (ab)normal, and influence their daily actions (Alvesson, 1984; Buchanan, 2010; Versieren, 2020). Ideologies are cyclically reproduced and perpetuate class inequities, false understandings of reality, and may explain why marginalized groups subconsciously accept oppressive social arrangements as normal and fair (even when such conditions are contrary to human flourishing). As such, Buchanan (2010) argued that all positions are informed by our ideologies and that non-ideological positions are "a myth or better yet a projection" (p. 243). Ideology is a multidimensional concept and may be understood through three varying dimensions: (a) the epistemic dimension (that ideologies always encompass epistemically deficient and/or false beliefs); (b) the functional dimension (ideologies contribute to the legitimization of social relations of domination); and (c) the genetic dimension (ideologies are covertly shaped by the social conditions under which they originate) (Celikates & Flynn, 2023). Last, emancipation is the process through which individuals and groups are liberated from repressive social, political, ideological, and economic forces (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Celikates & Flynn, 2023). Perspectives regarding emancipatory processes vary among scholars, as some critical theorists argue that liberation requires radical transformation of the social world, while others argue that change may be incremental (Celikates & Flynn, 2023; Sementelli, 2022).

Within organizational contexts, Celikates and Flynn (2023) acknowledged that emancipation is not achieved through the philanthropy of employers, but rather is an active process that requires workers' struggle for individual and collective self-determination to overcome discriminatory and oppressive conditions. These scholars further identified three analytical distinctions of emancipation in organizational contexts: (a) means (challenging the practices that are valued and assumed to be capable of achieving objectives); (b) social relations (analyzing the inequitable distribution of power and privilege among different workers); and (c) ends (opening dialogue about organizational value, purpose, quality of life, etc.). There are further distinctions between micro and macroemancipation. Within organizational contexts, Huault et al. (2014) differentiated macroemancipation as focusing on larger structural challenges, while microemancipation focuses on workers' daily experiences and issues. While macroemancipation may be more traditionally aligned with Frankfurt School critical theorists who aim to radically dismantle oppressive structures (Sementelli, 2022), microemancipation may be understood as prospective changes or loopholes within organizational control for workers to gain more autonomy and freedom in their practices (Celikates & Flynn, 2023). While there may be important insights in distinguishing between micro and macroemancipation processes, Huault et al. (2024) noted that there may also be analytical shortcomings in exclusively analyzing either phenomenon, as both forms of emancipation may yield complementary insights. Critical research fundamentally focuses on the core concepts of alienation, reification, ideology, and emancipation are consistent among many critical theory scholars.

Critical and Grassroots Leadership

Critical leadership is consistent with the concepts of social justice and critical theoretical interpretations of organizations. White and Cooper (2012) define social justice as "the creation of

a society based on principles of equity and equality, of understanding and valuing human rights, and recognizing the dignity of every individual" (p. 519). Essentially, school leaders concerned with achieving social justice aim to address social inequalities prevalent throughout educational systems. Through a critical lens, educational leadership is not primarily concerned with school efficiency as much as addressing the pervasive social inequalities and injustices systemically entrenched within the educational complex (Foster, 1984; Niesche, 2018). Critical leadership is about questioning power and promoting agency and democratic voice to all voices (Tierney, 1989).

New critical interpretations are necessary to broaden our conceptual understandings of critical leadership. Niesche (2018) overtly critiqued the traditional foci of constructivist educational leadership research, describing such inquiry as "theoretically weak" (p. 148), citing issues such as: an overemphasis of formulating prescriptive, descriptive, and normative models of leadership; the oversimplification of immensely socially complex learning environments and leadership practices; the continued highly gendered and racialized discourse of leadership research; the continued monopolistic focus on the 'heroic' individuals in school leadership; and the failure to acknowledge the importance of contextual cultural influences when investigating leadership phenomena. Kahlke (2014) argued that there needs to be an overt focus on the distribution of power in schools and the distribution of power in educational research. Prier (2021) problematized the dominant ideologies underpinning educational leadership research by specifically identifying the egregious underrepresentation of Black voices. This scholar further criticized the dominant foci of educational leadership research, arguing that the "very re-examination of culture in the field must be evaluated" (p. 335). Further, educators practicing leadership must be cognizant, aware, and sensitive to social and cultural diversities of individuals

and groups in school systems; this requires knowledge and adaptive strategies and skills to fit contextual needs of the immediate community.

The critical leader must engage in emancipatory politics, the process of "eliminat[ing] those situations that limit freedom. Only when these barriers have been dissolved can men, women and children control the direction of their own lives" (Ryan, 1998, p. 260). Understandably, the goal of the critical educational leader is to address and combat such social injustices. For educational leaders to truly achieve meaningful social change, Foster (1984) asserted that critical leadership practices possess four qualities: (a) leadership must be critical (rooted in the epistemological belief that systemic inequities are intergenerational and may be mitigated through human agency); (b) leadership must be transformative (leadership practices must strive to address such widespread injustices); (c) leadership must be educative (Foster argues this to be the most crucial component, as raising the critical consciousness of others is essential to transform the world); and (d) leadership must be ethical (such processes must embody qualities of dialogism, respect, and reciprocity).

There are many commonalities and conceptual overlaps between critical leadership and grassroots leadership. While the terms may not necessarily be synonymous, they both share theoretical common ground. Foundational to both concepts are the emphasis on critically interrogating hierarchical power structures within leadership discourse (Davidson & Hughes, 2022; Ehrich & English, 2012; Foster, 1984; Kahlke, 2014; Kezar, 2011; Niesche, 2018; Strawser, 2020). Kezar (2011) acknowledged the covert mobilizations of grassroots leadership, commenting: "Power remains nameless and hidden within most schools and colleges" (p. 495). There are varying understandings of such practices, as Strawser (2020) defined grassroots leadership by its core foundations of individual empowerment, shared decision-making, and

shared responsibility. Ehrich and English (2012) acknowledged the term to be used interchangeably with community leaders, while Kezar (2012) highlighted synonymizes grassroots and bottom-up leaders. Ehrich and English (2012) generated four qualities of grassroots leaders: (a) not occupying any formal position within an organization or community; (b) are concerned with facilitating positive social change; (c) they lack institutional power; and (d) their focus and efforts are often contextual, addressing specific social issues, and thus is a temporary phenomenon. Having the will and capacity to influence systemic change while not possessing any formal authority is a hallmark characteristic of grassroots leadership (Davidson & Hughes, 2022; Ehrich & English, 2012; Kezar, 2011; 2012; Strawser, 2020). In addition to lacking formal authority through a prescribed position, grassroots leadership is contingent on establishing a sense of trust among community members, establishing social networks, and sometimes mobilizing in opposition to institutional goals (Strawser, 2020). Ehrich and English (2012) outline two contrasting trajectories in establishing organizational change: (a) reformist; and (b) refinement. These scholars further clarify that reformist approaches emphasize bottom-up change that significantly affects institutional infrastructure, while refinement approaches can be initiated through either top-down or bottom-up methods and often lead to slow, minimal, and/or incremental organizational change.

There are fundamental differences between grassroots and formal leadership. Notably, formal leadership can operate without having obtained trust and respect from communities (generally through yielding institutional power and influence), while grassroots leadership is heavily reliant on community trust and listening to the needs of prospective followers (Ehrich & English, 2012). As such, cultivating trust is foundational to grassroots leadership efficacy (Davidson & Hughes, 2020; Ehrich & English, 2012; Strawser, 2020). If there are insufficient

resources and trust is not sustained, grassroots leadership is highly fragile and far more vulnerable to failure than institutionalized formal leadership (Ehrich & English, 2012). As the objectives of grassroots leaders' initiatives may be in stark contrast to the interests of organizational management, there are often pronounced tensions in facilitating such efforts. Davidson and Hughes (2022) further outlined three significant contrasts between grassroots and formal leaders: (a) conflict (noting formal leaders are more prone to avoiding conflict to maintain the status quo while grassroots leaders focus on conflicts to be addressed); (b) trust (formal leaders being able to facilitate practices without trust, while grassroots leaders necessitate cultivating trust with their corresponding communities); and (c) distributed power (formal leaders delegating individuals to facilitate leadership practice, while grassroots leaders informally emerging to address context-specific issues). Kezar (2011) identified five covert and subtle power dynamics that actively impede grassroots leadership practices within organizational contexts: (a) oppression (overt administrative threats of reprimand of termination); (b) silencing (invisibilizing and disregarding the importance of grassroots leaders' initiatives); (c) controlling (efforts to minimize grassroots leaders' capacity to meet with administration and/or find mutual time to congregate and mobilize collective actions); (d) inertia (administration publicly supporting initiatives, but acting purposely slow to implement new procedures and practices); and (e) microaggressions (a range of negative social behaviours, including bullying, microaggressions, passive aggressive comments, overloading individual's workloads, gossiping, and so forth).

Grassroots leadership also has many commonalities with critical emancipatory peace leadership. Byrne (2023) describes the "local turn" (p. 3) in peacebuilding, which has progressively begun to focus on the bottom-up everyday peace leadership practices, cultures, and

work routines exercised by individuals at the grassroots level, community members directly affected by local issues. Byrne emphasizes the importance of the participatory inclusion of local voices, notably acknowledging their *insider* wisdom and knowledge, which may be invaluable to resolving conflict and achieving peacebuilding goals. Similar to critical and distributed perspectives of leadership, peace leadership "branches away from the focus on individual leaders to demonstrate a complex concept, requiring multiple capacities, with often multiple parties involved" (Miller, 2016, p. 222) and transitions the focus from *I* to *we* (Schelhammer, 2018). Peace leadership further criticizes the discourse of managerial effectiveness so predominantly associated with leadership research and explores the dynamics of resistance and dissent espoused by revolutionary leaders (Ledbetter, 2012). Further, peace leadership foundationally emphasizes the moral qualities of leadership, which are frequently ignored in leadership research and scholarship (Amaladas & Byrne, 2018; Chinn, 2016; Ledbetter, 2012; Schelhammer, 2018). Evidently, grassroots (or bottom-up) leadership practices are inconducive to many organizational infrastructures and may be met with overt forms of resistance.

Critical Perspectives on Teacher Leadership

Upon completion of their highly influential literature review, Wenner and Campbell (2017) concluded that many teacher leadership studies remained markedly atheoretical and that there continued to be a substantive shortage of scholarship exploring issues relating to equity and social justice. Mundorf et al. (2018) further acknowledged the absence of critical perspectives, arguing that "teacher leadership is neither neutral nor apolitical" (p. 67) and that teacher leadership yielded both the potential to ameliorate or perpetuate social injustices. To address the discrepancy between teacher leadership and critical theoretical frameworks, Bradley-Levine (2018; 2022) was likely the first to coin the term *critical teacher leadership*. She identified the

notable lack of overlap in the literature between teacher advocacy and teacher leadership, and subsequently generated this foundational definition of the emerging concept: “I propose a definition of teacher advocacy on behalf of traditionally marginalized students within the classroom, across the school, and in the community as a practice of critical teacher leadership” (Bradley-Levine, 2018, p. 51). Bradley-Levine’s (2022) conceptualization of critical teacher leadership was founded upon three pillars; (a) critical pedagogy (concerning teachers’ pedagogical work with youth to identify and address social inequities); (b) teacher advocacy as leadership (pertaining to teachers’ informal leadership practices to support colleagues); and (c) ethical leadership (identifying critical teacher leadership as an intrinsically moral endeavour). While she was perhaps the first to formally conceptualize critical teacher leadership in peer-reviewed literature, there have been emerging critical perspectives in teacher leadership inquiry.

There has been an increased focus on the intersections of teacher leadership and social justice in recent years. An example includes the inquiry of Jacobs and Crowell (2018), who explored the impact a graduate program had on teachers’ consciousness of leadership for social justice. Smith (2023) focused on professional development and preparing teacher leaders, creating the Social Justice Teacher Leader Self-Assessment, a tool to guide teacher-led social justice initiatives in public schools. There have also been significant strides in feminist teacher leadership scholarship, notably through the contributions of Pham (2022) and Taylor et al. (2022). Pham (2022) particularly accentuated the normative underpinnings dominating the field, asserting that “white supremacist, colonial, and cisheteropatriarchal ontologies of ‘teacher leadership’ marginalize the counterhegemonic leadership they embody” (p. 81). In addition to challenging the patriarchal binarism espoused in most teacher leadership studies, Taylor et al. (2022) also broadened the discussion relating to the nature of critical-oriented teacher leadership

practices, identifying the absence of formal power held by teacher leaders as they navigate institutional hierarchical structures to achieve their social justice goals.

The literature suggests that critical-oriented teacher leadership studies assign teacher/student-centricity as a prioritized focus (e.g., Bradley-Levine, 2018; 2022; Hunzicker, 2018). The interactional role between teachers and students certainly cannot be ignored, as teacher leaders often engage (and share their *power*) with students (Harris, 2003; Mundorf et al., 2019). However, I would argue that critical teacher leadership endeavours are not exclusively student-focused, as many critical teacher leaders also engage in initiatives to improve the working and lived experiences of themselves, their colleagues (e.g., educational assistants, teachers), parents and the community, the natural environment, animals, public education, the teaching profession, among other efforts. The next section provides a brief (but thorough) synopsis of social justice and critical pedagogy.

Social Justice

Like other socially constructed concepts, there is no universal definition of social justice (Adams, 2014; Jackson, 2005; Theoharis 2007; Waite & Arar, 2020). Social justice is certainly not a new concept, as many cultures and religions have historically espoused ideas on how to cultivate a just society (Adams, 2014; Waite & Arar, 2020). Waite and Arar (2020) acknowledged the context-specific nature of social justice definitions, recognizing the importance in exploring interpretations beyond dominant Western ideologies, particularly the invaluable worldviews and perspectives of underrepresented groups. The traditional Western philosophical conceptualization of justice is rooted in *social contract theory*, the idea that individuals have "inalienable rights" (Adams, 2014, p. 249) that are tacitly agreed upon, consenting to be governed in exchange for such rights. However, history has repeatedly

demonstrated that “rights” are not universally recognized and that minoritized groups are particularly subject to diverse forms of oppression (Adams, 2014). The operations of oppression are complex and multifaceted, as lived experiences may vary in severity and scope depending on an individual's positionality (Clark & Fasching-Varner, 2015; Young, 1990). Young (1990) identified “five faces of oppression” (p. 40): (a) exploitation (when one group disproportionately benefits from the labour of another group; (b) marginalization (the exclusion of individuals and groups participation in societal function); (c) powerlessness (the lack of autonomy and control among individuals and groups); (d) cultural imperialism (the universalization of the dominant group’s values and sense of normativity); and (e) violence (explicit physical threats and harms committed against a group). While these five faces of oppression may be a similar experience among oppressed groups, the experiences will not necessarily be uniform.

Many scholars acknowledge the fundamental importance of defining *justice* (Miller, 1979). Rawls (1971/1999), perhaps one of the most influential 20th century scholars on this topic, defined justice as “the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advances from social cooperation” (p. 6). Despite the eminence of Rawl’s (1971/1999) contribution to the development of social justice, Rawl later adapted his model from a universal theoretical framework of justice to a pluralistic political theory (Adams, 2014). Cognizant of the multifaceted modes of oppression affecting different individuals and groups, social justice definitions should be contextual to the specific location and local communities impacted by inequities (Bates, 2006; Waite & Arar, 2020). This sentiment is embodied by Clark and Fasching-Varner’s (2015) claim that “social justice must be practiced locally to become realized globally” (para. 5). Although oppression may vary dependent on contextual circumstances, many

researchers agree social justice work is uniformly aligned in the aim to ameliorate societal inequities affecting disadvantaged peoples of diverse identities (Bates, 2006; Clarke & Fasching-Varner, 2015; Theoharis, 2007; Waite & Arar, 2020). As such, advocacy is a social endeavour. Theoharis (2007) illuminates the socio-emotional importance in these efforts, stating: "Social justice supports a process built on respect, care, recognition, and empathy" (p. 223). Regarding social inequities and injustices prevalent throughout societies, Galtung (1969; 1996) viewed these tensions and amelioration efforts through the lens of peacebuilding. Galtung (1996) described three qualities underlying the concept of peace: (a) favourable social goals agreed upon by most; (b) recognizing these goals to be difficult, complex, but attainable; and (c) peace is often interpreted as the absence of violence. Galtung (1996) later differentiated between two forms of peace, the first being premised upon the interpretation of peace being the absence and/or reduction of all forms of violence, the second emphasizing the transformative, proactive, and creative efforts to establish the conditions necessary for a more peaceful, just, and equitable society. Lederach (1997) argued peacebuilding efforts to establish more equitable and just societal conditions are a process for transformation, based on locally available cultural resources, including grassroots actors and their immediate insider knowledge of local issues, and that sustaining peace requires ongoing effort.

Social institutions, including our public education systems, serve as vehicles for social reproduction and perpetuate systemic oppression (Adams, 2014; Apple, 2008; Miller, 1979; Wotherspoon, 2014; Young, 1990; 2006). Although scholars like Bates (2006) assert that "social justice is central to the pursuit of education" (p. 153), others argue that public education systems have been historically pitted in direct opposition to social justice movements through upholding inequitable policies, procedures, and practices (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). Marshall (2004)

acknowledged that educational leaders are systematically unprepared to address social inequities and that "school leaders often provide only token, isolated stabs at inequities or see them as management challenges" (p. 4). If leaders are genuinely committed to promoting social justice in schools, they must centralize their focus on dismantling multifaceted forms of oppression to improve outcomes for staff and students (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). Prier (2021) offered this definition of social justice in educational contexts:

> Beyond critique, social justice seeks to explore the realm of possibility for underserved, under-resourced, and underrepresented students. Doing cultural work in educational leadership for social justice requires an epistemological imagination that leverages leadership in a variety of contexts and social settings. (p. 349)

We live in increasingly precarious societal circumstances pervaded with immense social inequities and injustices, as Giroux and DiMaggio (2024) warn of the rise and normalization of political authoritarianism. These scholars argue that educators, as public intellectuals, bear an enormous professional and civic responsibility to combat oppressive forces that negate students' learning and humanistic growth. Giroux and DiMaggio (2024) state: "As citizen educators, they need to help young people to become informed, active, creative, and socially responsible members of society and the larger world" (p. 171). The crucial importance of educating and leading for social justice cannot be understated.

Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire's (1970/2000) eminent book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* inspired critical pedagogical practices in schools across the world (Yen & Sengupta-Irving, 2014). To differentiate critical pedagogies from traditional teaching approaches, Freire (1970/2000) conceptualized two models of education: (a) the banking concept of education (whereby the

dominant class is the authoritarian source of knowledge, *depositing* prescribed knowledge into the minds of oppressed youth to maintain social reproduction); and (b) problem-posing education (where teachers and students co-engage in learning through dialogical, problem-based learning experiences to ameliorate societal inequities). As such, through problematizing social inequities via education, students become critically conscious agents to ameliorate widespread injustices, leading to a more equitable society (Yeh & Sengupta-Irving, 2014). The liberation of oppressed groups is fundamental to critical pedagogy. Yeh and Sengupta-Irving (2014) outlined four underlying tenets embodying this concept: (a) power (understanding that power is operationalized through language, actions, and interactions in daily social life); (b) knowledge construction (rejecting the notions that knowledge is neutral and recognizing all knowledge to be socially rooted in power); (c) dialogic learning (challenging the status quo of teacher-student dynamics, whereby students and teachers mutually engage in critical dialogue via reflection and action); and (d) liberatory action (understanding that critical pedagogies are approached with the purposeful intent to lead liberatory change). Giroux (1986) discussed the empowering potentialities of school learning experiences:

> Critical pedagogy opens up a space where students should be able to come to terms with their own power as critically engaged citizens; it provides a sphere where the unconditional freedom to question and assert is central to the purpose of public schooling and higher education, if not democracy itself (p. 717).

Foundational to critical pedagogy is the concept of raising *conscientização* or critical consciousness among learners (Freire, 1970/2000). Through praxis (engagement in cyclical patterns of political action and critical reflection in the world) (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006) individuals become conscious of social and structural injustices affecting daily function and life.

To become conscious of the diverse, intersectional forms of oppression impacting schools and society, Freire (1970/2000) argued that we must eliminate *limit-situations* impeding humanistic flourishing. Limit-situations may be understood as the societal parameters of lived experience in which oppressed individuals cannot envision their existence extending beyond (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Freire, 1970/2000; Petruzzi, 1998). Through the awakening of critical consciousness, humans may identify, challenge, and liberate themselves from these prescribed limit-situations of existence (Freire, 1970/2000).

To authentically engage in critical pedagogical processes, teachers and students must approach the process dialogically and through shared power and leadership (Yeh & Sengupta-Irving, 2014). Lopez (2014) generated five recommendations for critical pedagogues: (a) to examine oneself (critically reflecting upon positionality, life histories, and ideological positions); (b) to assess teaching contexts (evaluating the learning environment to promote dialogical, problem-posing learning experiences); (c) to examine pedagogical practices (re-examining curricular content, resources, and other materials to ensure learning experiences are dialogical and problem-posing); (d) to develop action and agency (generating avenues for concrete action to achieve social change); and (e) and foster collaborative praxis for growth (cultivating dialogical professional learning communities to support one's own, and others', critical pedagogy initiatives). Yeh and Sengupta-Irving (2014) argued that developing critical consciousness is deceptively challenging and requires two important and interrelated implications: (a) that the hierarchical structure between students and teachers is ameliorated; and (b) that students and teachers dialogically transform the world through cycles of action and reflection. The liberatory pedagogical process needs to be centered upon dialogue and shared power between teachers and their student bodies. School inequities do not exclusively impact

students, however, as teachers also struggle to navigate oppressive hierarchical structures to enact change (Pham, 2022; Taylor et al., 2022).

Teacher (Transformative) Professionalism

In this section, I generated a concise overview of professionalism ideology, the history and tenets of teacher professionalism, critical perspectives in transformative professionalism, differences between organizational and occupational professionalism, professionalization and deprofessionalization efforts, and critiques of such discourse.

Overview of Professionalism

Professionalism is a term used in a variety of senses and remains markedly difficult to define as our conceptual understandings continue to evolve (Brass & Holloway, 2021; Callender, 2019; Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Evetts, 2011; Hargreaves, 2000; Sachs, 2003; 2016). The terms *profession* and *professor* are etymologically rooted in Latin, meaning to profess knowledge in specific areas (Demirkasimoğl, 2010; Tedla & Redda, 2022). These foundational roots indicate innate associations between specific knowledge sets and occupational groups. Barber (1963) was an early figure in this field and cultivated a foundational understanding of professionalism, arguing that professionals possess four essential attributes: (a) a high degree of generalized and systematic knowledge; (b) the orientation of their work serves community interests of individual self-interests; (c) high degrees of self-control through self-regulating bodies managing members' code of ethics; and (d) a system of rewards (e.g., honorary or monetary) that is a set of symbols of work achievements. This early sociological perspective of professions had been abandoned by the mid-1960s, however, as critics argued that this interpretation was dominated by a functionalist theoretical framework (Hoyle, 2001). While conceptual understandings of professionalism have evolved, some of these attributes have remained consistent. Callender

(2019) provided a contemporary understanding of professionalism, defining it as "behaving in record with the knowledge, ethics, thinking processes, and culture of a particular group who claim to practice according to a specialized collection of knowledge and beliefs, and whose status is recognized within a community" (p. 1776). Livingstone (2019) offered a similar interpretation, describing professionals "as practitioners of specialized bodies of abstract knowledge that significant numbers of others take as applicable or needed for their own lives" (p. 143). David (2000) synthesized various perspectives of professionals into five distinct criteria: (a) providing a valuable public service; (b) requiring theoretical and practical expertise; (c) possessing distinct ethical dimensions and codes of practice; (d) requiring the capacity to self-regulate membership; and (e) practitioners needing a high degree of individual autonomy for effective practice. Further, some scholars acknowledge the legal conditions for professionalism, that professions may be legitimized through legislation outlining the duties and accreditations of such specialized workers (Hoyle, 2001; Tang, 2008).

Teacher Professionalism

Sachs (2003) shared three encapsulating tenets traditionally associated with teacher professionalism: knowledge, autonomy, and responsibility. Phelps (2006) provided a similar, but contrasting perspective on the fundamental qualities of professionalism, arguing that teachers as professionals require the attitudinal qualities of responsibility, respect, and risk-taking. Regarding supporting individual workers' practice, autonomy is regarded as one of the apex features of professionalism (David, 2000; Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Ertürk, 2023; Hargreaves, 2000; Livingstone, 2019; Sorenson, 2023). When workers are autonomous in their capacity to engage in decision-making, collaborate with peers, and exercise their expert knowledge, it positively benefits their job motivation, satisfaction, and overall quality of work produced

(Ertürk, 2023). Further broadening the perspective of teacher professionalism, Stone-Johnson (2017) discussed the concept of professional capital, which she argued entailed three subsequent forms: (a) human capital (the skills and knowledges that can be professionally developed among teachers); (b) social capital (relationships between teachers, their students bodies, and external communities); and (c) decision capital (teachers' capacity to engage in decision-making and judgment regarding their practices). Stone-Johnson further explains that decisional capital is the most important of the three capital subsets, arguing "decisional capital is equal to professionalism" and "its power revolves around what counts as 'wise and who gets to make this determination'" (p. 29). Although there may not be a generalizable definition of new professionalism, a unifying characteristic of the emerging movement is the emphasis on the improvement of workers' quality of service rather than the enhancement of social status (Hoyle, 2001).

The professional status of teachers has been extensively debated, as various groups have made concerted efforts to professionalize and de-professionalize the occupation (Frostenson, 2015; Wronowski, & Urick, 2021). While some argue that teachers are professionals, others assert that teachers may only be categorized as quasi- or semi-professionals (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010). David's (2000) work was influential in unpacking the teacher professional debate and argued that the teaching profession embodied qualities from three different occupational types: (a) vocational (similar to priesthood, an occupation that is demanding and requires self-sacrifice and life dedication); (b) professional (displaying the qualities of professionalism); and (c) limited professional or trades (skills and knowledges that not limited to accreditations, but are also acquired through practice and in the field). David explains that although "teaching seems to be an immensely complex and multifaceted activity … it seems far-fetched to maintain that

teaching is entirely reducible to skills in the manner of a science-based technology" (pp. 6-7). There is no doubt that teachers engage in professional labour, there are just some perspectives that assert teachers as not *full* professionals like law or medicine. Hoyle (2001) further elaborated that teachers' work encapsulates two forms of professional knowledge: (a) knowledge of content; and (b) knowledge of transmission. He explained that although their knowledge of content component is seldom questioned, their knowledge of transmission has been challenged and depicted as an acquired skill like other apprenticeships. To be treated as a professional, the technical knowledge that a professional body exercises is integral in categorizing the profession's status, as Sorenson (2023) concisely stated: "Expertise is regarded as the prime source of professional power" (p. 48). This may explain, in part, why teachers have historically been regarded merely as quasi-professionals. Another issue for teachers is that professionals generally engage in self-regulation, but this ability is constrained for public servants (including teachers and nurses) as their ability to self-regulate is impacted by their employers (Callender, 2019). Finally, a further recurring challenge for teachers to be publicly recognized as professionals is their affiliation with children and youth as their primary clients, which is often not taken seriously (Hoyle, 2001).

Others, however, argue that teaching is a unique profession. As conceptual interpretations have evolved, Hargreaves (2000) argued that there have been four ages of teachers' professionalism: (a) the pre-professional age (when teaching technically simple and directed by knowledgeable supervisors); (b) the age of the autonomous professional (when teachers began to acquire more autonomy, decision-making, and increasingly complex pedagogical skills); (c) the era of the collegial professional (an age of teachers becoming increasingly collaborative and uniting to serve unified occupational aims and goals); and (d) the post-professional or

postmodern professional (an era that we are entering as teachers to combat forces and groups intent on deprofessionalizing their labour and occupation, as a whole). David (2000) acknowledged the importance in extending the view of professionalism and that from this perspective teachers may be regarded alongside other professional groups as they possess "socially valued specialist expertise which requires length[y] education and training" (p. 15).

Transformative Professionalism

As the concept has been debated and evolved, new distinctions have arisen, differentiating between *old professionalism* and *new (transformative) professionalism* (Hoyle, 2001; Sachs, 2003). Under the tenets of old professionalism, professionals were identified through exclusive membership and gatekeeping, conserving practices, being self-interested, being regulated by external bodies that were slow to change, and being politically reactive (Sachs, 2003). Sachs identified a notable ethical conundrum associated with old professionalism, specifically the issue of self-serving interests and advocacies. She notes: "Old forms of teacher professionalism can run the risk of serving particular interests to the neglect of others. It is often self-serving and inward-looking, insufficiently concerned with broad social and political issues" (p. 11). New (transformative) professionalism is in stark contrast to many of the tenets of old (traditional) conceptualizations of professionalism. Sachs further categorized the qualities of new (transformative) professionalism, arguing the new wave emphasized inclusive memberships, adopting public ethical codes of practice, are collegial and collaborative, promote activism, are politically progressive and responsive to change, are self-regulating, are proactive in policy formulation and revision, are enquiry-oriented, and are committed to generating professional knowledge to improve workers' practice. McLaughlin (1997, as cited in Sachs, 2003) encapsulated six core components of a new (transformative) professionalism: "Increased

opportunities for professional dialogue; reducing teachers' isolation; providing a rich menu of nested opportunities for learning and discourse; connecting professional development opportunities to meaningful content and change efforts; increasing opportunities for professional dialogue; reducing teachers' professional isolation; creating an environment of professional safety and trust; restructuring time, space and scale within schools" (p. 14). Further, Boylan et al. (2023) acknowledged the importance of professional learning among transformative professionals, arguing that such professional development should: facilitate with the intent to socially transform institutions and society; support activist initiatives; be a social and collaborative endeavour; and generate knowledge production to disrupt inequities. Sachs (2003) notably accentuated the importance of structurally reforming the isolating and individualistic conditions in which teachers operate, arguing that the teaching profession necessitates collegial and collaborative practices to optimize teachers' creativity and intelligence. Conceptual understandings of the operational nature of transformative professionalism continue to evolve. Sachs (2016) revisited transformative professionalism and identified three dynamic factors that continue to control teachers' policy and practice: (a) performance cultures (increased emphasis on teachers to improve students' learning outcomes and test scores); (b) increased accountability (teachers being accountable to their student bodies and immediate communities, but also government accountability that teachers are enacting prescribed policies); and (c) standards (about government control in regulating standards for teachers' competency and pedagogical effectiveness). Under an old professional framework, teachers work in heavily controlled, isolating conditions; the new (transformative) professional framework advances a culture of autonomy, collegiality, and self-regulation of practices. However, as public servants, teachers are

legally accountable to the public in ensuring that children and youth are successful in their academic development.

Organizational and Occupational Professionalism

While there have been plural perspectives on the historical trajectory of conceptualizing professionalism, Evetts (2011; 2013) drew a significant distinction between *occupational* professionalism and the recent emergence of a new *organizational* professionalism. Occupational professionalism, she argued, was characterized by its internal governance, where practitioners and professional associations were highly autonomous in developing and defining their professional knowledge and practices, ethical codes, licensing, training, evaluation methods, occupational cultures, and professional identities (Brass & Holloway, 2021). Occupational professionalism has been steadily declining, however, and has been progressively replaced with organizational professionalism values, shifting to "increasing levels of managerialism, bureaucracy, standardization, assessment and performance review" (Evetts, 2011, p. 407). Under the tenets of organizational professionalism, occupational groups have decreased levels of autonomy over their occupational culture, roles and responsibilities, licensing and accreditations, and other conditions as they become increasingly controlled externally by government and/or organizations (Brass & Holloway, 2021; Hardy & Melville, 2019). There are also risks of professionalism "from above" (Evetts, 2011, p. 408), a phenomenon which employers convey support for increasing the professional labour of employees, but do so only with the intent to facilitate their own organizational interests. Evetts explained that this top-down form of professionalism aims to take the occupational control from the workers and displace it into the power of managers. Apple (2012b) demonstrated this issue through the example of elementary school teachers receiving 'increased' professionalism via training to cover additional

administrative work as a purposeful deskilling (autonomous practices replaced with prescribed tasks, often pre-packaged teaching materials) and reskilling (generally increased administrative responsibilities in addition to teaching duties). Apple further outlined three forms of administrative control of teachers' practices: (a) simple control (the highly visible day-to-day orders communicated via management); (b) technical control (subtle controls embedded into the structure of the job, which may include prescribed teaching materials, resources, classroom size and layout, feasibility to collaborate with colleagues, and so forth); and (c) bureaucratic control (the near invisible hierarchical structure of the organization as outlined in policies that mandate practice and general operational function). Apple (2012a) further problematized the patriarchal hierarchical structure of schools, arguing that teachers' labour struggles are not merely a class issue, but perhaps more importantly, a gendered issue. Apple explained that the teaching responsibilities have historically been bestowed upon women, and the rationale of the state is that female teachers 'need' to be governed by male administrators. As such, teachers' labour issues have been denigrated and categorically dismissed as insignificant. There is a long tradition of employers' interest in controlling the nature of teachers' labour. Occupational control of workers' practice compromises their professionalism, as Frostenson (2015) described the loss of workers' autonomy as the "hallmark of de-professionalisation" (p. 20). The trend in workers' pursuit to professionalize appears to be unwavering, as there has been a significant increase in the number of workers identifying as professionals throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, notably as professional occupations have doubled between 1982 and 2016 in Canada (Livingstone, 2019). As workers continue to acquire skills and knowledge, accreditations, and seek autonomy in their labour, it is important to generate a thorough understanding of professionalism.

Professionalism and (de)Professionalization

A further necessary distinction must be made between professionalism and professionalization. Professionalization entails advocacy for the enhancement of the public status of the career, whereas the literature on professionalism acknowledges advocacy for the improvement of quality and standards of practice (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Hargreaves, 2000; Hoyle, 2001). A profession may come to be recognized through a variety of ways, such as: (a) an attitude model (when a specific group of workers possess unique attributes); (b) an exclusivity model (professional status through the selective admission and/or limitation of entry into the group, often through attaining specific accreditations); and (c) a developmental model (groups progressively establishing status over long periods of time through negotiation and advocacy) (Callender, 2019). Advocacy to professionalize the standards of an occupation can lead to improved salaries and public repute, fostering pride among membership, and enhanced autonomy in workers' labour (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Hargreaves, 2000). As such, professionalization may enhance workers' opportunities for professionalism (Evetts, 2011). Callender (2019) cohesively outlined the prospective benefits of professionalizing workers:

> Professional status is a worthwhile goal for public sector practitioners. It provides a source of identity and mutual reinforcement of the goals and values of public sector organizations and enhances the status of individuals performing the full range of public sector activities. Such recognition also enhances the status of public sector organizations and their role in society, a vital outcome if the public sector is to preserve its relevance in the complex relationship between government, the community, and the private and not-for-profit sectors. (p. 1777)

Conversely, efforts to deprofessionalize the occupational standards of a group of workers can compromise their professionalism (Hoyle, 2001). Deprofessionalization often manifests through increased legislation and standardized testing of curricula (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Wronowski, & Urick, 2021). While advocacy to improve the status of an occupation (professionalization) may lead to improved working conditions and/or quality work (professionalism), these complementary phenomena can also be opposing (Hargreaves, 2000). Hargreaves explains that teaching, for example, is a field that can be negatively impacted by professionalization. As an example, increasing the technical/scientific standards of post-secondary accreditation to enter the field may, in turn, negate entry to teachers who excel in interpersonal and/or emotional intelligence, important qualities required of teachers in their daily practice. Such professionalizing efforts, whereby teachers are placed upon social pedestals, may insulate teachers from their corresponding communities, as well (Hargreaves, 2000).

There are many benefits of the core qualities associated with teacher professionalism, particularly workplace autonomy, as it may lead to workers' improved morale, job satisfaction, and quality of work (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Ertürk, 2023; Frostenson, 2015). Frostenson (2015) described three forms of teachers' autonomy: (a) general professional autonomy (regarding the general frameworks of teachers' work, such as legislation, curricula, teacher education, and so forth); (b) collegial autonomy (about teachers' collective agency and ability to engage in decision-making and influence schools at local levels); and (c) individual autonomy (relating to individual teachers' capacity to contents, frames, and controls in their immediate practice). Conversely, deprofessionalizing teachers' voice and sense of organizational autonomy may lead to demoralization, burnout, and attrition from the profession (Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Ertürk (2023) reported that teacher autonomy "significantly predicts the dimensions of commitment to

the profession, dedication to students, and selfless work" (p. 494). Sachs (2003) further recognized the intensification of teachers' work, the blurred boundaries between personal and professional lives, and the general escalation in job stressors and dissatisfaction. As such, teachers need to exercise their organizational voice on behalf of themselves and their students, engage in decision-making relating to school function and their pedagogical practices, and actively collaborate with their peers.

Critiques of Professionalism

As workers strive for improved working conditions and a sense of autonomy in their labour, professionalism may be argued to be a somewhat contentious term, as differentiating between professional and non-professional may convey elitist ideals. Sorenson (2023) critically stated that "professionalism is a problematic and contested concept" (p. 47), which is perhaps understandable as the *professional* insignia was historically reserved for careers in law and medicine, signifying other occupations to be of lesser repute (Callender, 2019; Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; David, 2000, Hoyle, 2001). As the term professional began to become more readily adopted by other occupational groups, tensions emerged as these workers sought professional status, prospectively diluting the prestige in professionalism (Callender, 2019). Ozga (1999) argued that teacher professionalism is inherently unstable, as teachers struggle either through *direct* rule (curriculum and working conditions controlled by the state and/or administration, resulting in demoralization and union militancy) or through *indirect* rule (the promulgation of professional ideologies that internally control workers' behaviours, entrance licensing, and cultivate a culture of "responsible co-option") (p. 14). Ozga argued that both direct and indirect rule are inherently unstable and are inevitably self-destructive. Demirkasimoğlu (2010) acknowledged that there are contrasting perspectives on teacher professionalism, as some

scholars view professionalism as a means to control teachers' work, while other scholars interpret professionalism positively, arguing it contributes to higher degrees of workplace standards and autonomy. There have also been stark Marxist and neo-Marxist critiques of professionalizing education, as some scholars argue that public education institutions are simply a means to perpetuate class domination, oppression, and social reproduction, and that efforts to improve the effectiveness of educational function (e.g., professionalization) should be rejected (David, 2000). Indeed, professionalism remains quite contentious and is considered problematic among many scholars, as such sentiments are illuminated through the explication of Moeller's (2019) concerns, arguing:

> The discourse around professionalism often fails to interrogate underlying assumptions and thus serves to promote a white, heteronormative, ableist perspective where the existence of any "professional" whose body or mind does not represent this default is erased by an "ideal" model of what it means to be professional. (p. 461)

These criticisms are echoed by Mizzi (2024), who interrogated the concept of a "good professional" describing the discourse to be "cis-heteronormative, productive, neutral, compliant, and a 'team player' in exchange for steady and secure work and privileges" (p. 9). Mizzi's (2013; 2016) conceptualization of heteroprofessionalism has advanced critical reflection on professionalism discourse, arguing that the oppression of queer identities, cultures, and epistemologies remains rampant within organizational contexts as heteronormative behaviours are systematically enforced. Further examples outlining the controlling nature of professionalism include the emerging discussion around the struggles of neurodivergent workers navigating workplaces mandating neurotypical expectations and policies (Schreiner & Bogden, 2020). Last, Midgley (2008) generated the concept of professional imperialism, suggesting that white Euro-

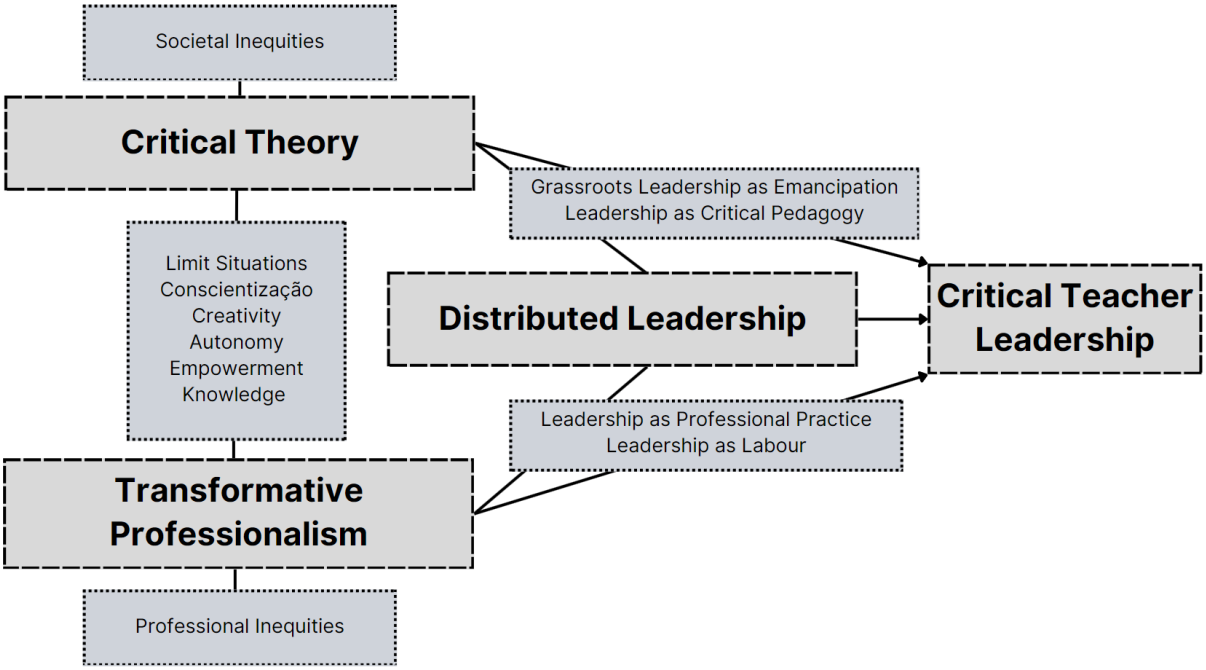
Western cultural practices are legitimized as the normative discourse within employment contexts. Mizzi (2024) recently revisited the concept of heteroprofessionalism and further problematized the inconsistencies between workplace policies (which may superficially advocate for inclusivity) and actual practices (as professional workplace expectations covertly oppress queer workers, bypassing anti-discriminatory legislation). Mizzi further explains that professionalism is strategically implemented and enforced to police, inflict violence upon, and silence marginalized employees.

Conceptual Framework

Within this section, I share my conceptual interpretation of critical teacher leadership, justify its theorization, and explain how I utilized it as an interpretive lens to understand the findings generated in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The conceptual framework was ultimately generated by integrating the concepts of transformative professionalism, distributed perspectives on leadership, and critical theory, specifically emancipatory grassroots leadership and critical pedagogies. This interpretive lens was utilized to understand critical teacher leadership practices. A visual representation of the conceptual framework is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Critical Teacher Leadership



One of the theoretical inspirations of the conceptual framework was rooted in the distributed perspective on leadership, as Spillane (2006) argued that leadership encompasses three components: (a) leader; (b) follower; and (c) situation. Essentially, different individuals serve the roles of leaders and/or followers, depending on the skills and abilities of these individuals and the intended outcomes. It is through this interpretation that leadership is understood to be a fluid *practice* of collective interactions and is not confined to individuals occupying formal positions of authority or to their corresponding individual *actions* (Brooks & Kensler, 2011; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2006). I expand beyond the distributed perspective, however, drawing upon critical grassroots interpretations of leadership (e.g., Kezar, 2011; Strawser, 2020), inspired by Gronn's (2000; 2003) problematization of the monopoly of individual-focused, charismatic, *heroic* leaders described in educational leadership discourse and research, as he advocated for future hybrid interpretations of leadership in a post-distributed mindset (Gronn, 2009). As Tierney (1989) asserts: "A critical interpretation rejects the idea that leadership resides in an

office" (p. 164). Similarly, Harris (2003) states: "teacher leadership is centrally concerned with forms of empowerment and agency which are also at the core of distributed leadership theory" (p. 316). As teacher-participants in this study often co-engaged in informal leadership *practices*, that were initiated at a grassroots level (e.g., often extending from critical pedagogies within and beyond the parameters of the classroom), both distributed and critical perspectives theoretically aligned as a leadership perspective of initiatives that aimed to serve an organizational function. Schools are incredibly socially complex environments that often include diverse demographics ranging in differences of age, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, and so forth (Clark & Fasching-Varner, 2015; Marshall, 2004; Theoharis, 2007; Wotherspoon, 2014). Schools, unfortunately, are inherently structurally unjust (Apple, 2008; Young, 1990; 2006) and reproduce intergenerational inequities and oppression (Niesche, 2018; Theoharis, 2007; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Wotherspoon, 2014). Through the intersections of distributed (Spillane, 2006) and critical grassroots perspectives (Kezar, 2011; 2012; Strawser, 2020), I conceptualize critical teacher leadership as an emancipatory, bottom-up leadership practice aimed toward ameliorating such inequities. Distributed leadership and grassroots leadership may share many commonalities, such as shared authority, democratization of decision-making, and the equitable distribution of power (Davidson & Hughes, 2020; Ehrich & English, 2012; Strawser, 2020). Although teachers may not hold formal leadership positions, they dialogically engage in school-based initiatives to improve school function, advocating to improve the academic and humanistic growth of their student bodies.

Last, teachers' transformative professionalism (Evetts, 2011; 2013; Sachs, 2003; 2016) was integrated within the conceptual framework to provide insight into the formal, organizational roles of Manitoba teachers. In short, how does *leadership* intersect with Manitoba

teachers' professional obligations and responsibilities? As a participatory team of teachers within this project, we unpacked our experiences navigating the structures, organizational expectations, and teaching schedules within their schools as we practiced leadership for equity and social justice. The concept of teacher professionalism sheds light on the teacher-participants' professional boundaries when advocating for school change and/or addressing local inequities. Further, dynamics relating to teacher voice (Zapeda et al., 2021), expert knowledge (Boylan et al., 2023; David, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000), collegiality and social collaboration (Evetts, 2011; Hargreaves, 2000; Sachs, 2003), and sense of professional autonomy (Ertürk, 2023; Frostenson, 2015; Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Sehrawat, 2014) emerged through our photos generated and reflection discussions, which are concepts associated with activist teacher professionalism (Sachs, 2003; 2016). However, recognizing the contested and problematic nature of teacher professionalism ideologies (Mizzi, 2013; 2016; 2024; Moeller, 2019; Schreiner & Bogden, 2020), I utilized this conceptual framework to explore the tensions of how teacher professional may both advance teachers' occupational flourishing and practices (e.g., enhanced autonomy, decision-making, voice, etc.), but also paradoxically impede our occupational flourishing and practices and serve as organizational control (e.g., covert discriminatory policies, social dynamics, and workplace expectations silencing their voices and human potential).

This conceptual framework integrates perspectives from distributed leadership (notably identifying leadership as a fluid, informal interactive *practice* to address contextual issues), critical theory (ontologically viewing our world in flux, riddled with social inequities, problematizing traditional binary interpretations of leadership, and necessitating teachers' actions to combat widespread injustices), and teacher transformative professionalism (considering the conventional roles, responsibilities, and behavioural expectations of teachers as these workers

embark upon critical leadership practices within their organization). In sum, I defined critical teacher leadership as an expert professional practice exercised by teachers to: (a) improve the lived experience and *conscientização* of learners; and (b) improve their working conditions and professional agency to become more equitable and supportive of educational outcomes.

Justification

The research objectives of this doctoral study were to promote critical teacher leadership practices to establish more equitable and socially just school communities. In generating the conceptual framework to analyze such phenomena, it was imperative to address various pervasive assumptions regarding educational leadership. As previously outlined, the historical focus of educational leadership emphasized a monopolistic fixation on 'heroic' leaders and their individualistic actions (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Tierney, 1989). However, scholars advocating for a distributed perspective on leadership have raised awareness that leadership is not merely *held* in formal positions; rather, it is *practiced* by various interacting individuals in organizations throughout a multitude of varying situations (Brooks & Kensler, 2011; Spillane & Diamond, 2007a). Such a sentiment implies that leadership is not reserved for school superintendents and principals, but rather is routinely practiced by teachers, educational assistants, students, community members, and others (Ryan, 1998). The distributed perspective of leadership is consistent with teacher leadership research, which has explored teachers' leadership practices in- and outside their classrooms (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Further, distributed leadership has also been the dominant theoretical underpinning in many previous teacher leadership research projects (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). However, the distributed perspective has also been criticized for a lack of critical perspectives and its potential to reify a hierarchical top-down leader/follower binarism (Lumby, 2013). I broadened this conceptual framework to

include critical, emancipatory grassroots leadership perspectives (Davidson & Hughes, 2022; Ehrich & English, 2012; Kezar, 2011; Strawser, 2020). The inclusion of critical theory was consistent with Bradley-Levine's (2018; 2022) recent conceptualization of critical teacher leadership, as well as understanding that the majority of teacher leadership research has included classroom-based responsibilities as a component of the teachers' practice (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Grassroots leadership provided insights into the bottom-up manifestations of emancipatory leadership practices, initiatives that may serve for and/or against the interests of administrators' visions. As social justice agencies may be mobilized to disrupt the status quo, such efforts are not necessarily readily embraced by management (Kezar, 2011). Centering analysis around critical theory was crucial as the objective for this participatory research project was to ameliorate inequities and social injustices within our school communities. Throughout the duration of this research project, it emerged that our critical teacher leadership practices largely encompassed some aspect of teaching and learning with their student bodies; as such, critical pedagogy, which is foundationally premised upon critical theory, was essential to include it within the conceptual framework. As teacher leadership practices are situated both in- and outside teachers' classrooms (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Harris, 2015), critical pedagogy was a necessary consideration to better understand such a phenomenon. Including teacher professionalism within the conceptual framework was integral in generating understanding into the intersections of teachers' formal roles and responsibilities, sense of workplace autonomy, and school structures and schedules impacted their agency to pursue social justice leadership initiatives within their schools. Teachers' transformative professionalism is aligned with teacher leadership, as Tedla and Redda (2022) stated: "Teacher professionalism is a mitochondrion or powerhouse where teachers draw their

leadership qualities or attributes" (p. 6). Teachers' transformative professionalism was essential to better understand the nature of critical teacher leadership practices within professional contexts.

Conclusion

It is evident within the review of literature that the approaches through which to lead and/or manage educational systems have evolved considerably over the twentieth century. The rise of managerial sciences in educational administration offered noteworthy promise, with aims to improve school efficiency and student achievement outcomes on a widespread, replicable level. However, the exclusive focus on educational structures to provide these intended benefits proved to be insufficient; scholars like Greenfield (1975/1993a; 1985/1993b) challenged the ontological assumptions of organizations as existing independent of human relations and broadened the dialogue of educational administration to consider the phenomenological force of human reality. The transition from school management to educational leadership spawned a new discussion on how individuals may lead schools (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Yukl, 2013). Despite these developments, the predominant focus of educational leadership remains situated on the actions of individuals holding formal positions of authority (Gronn, 2003; 2009). There has been a renewed interest in distributed perspectives on leadership, which emphasize the interactions of multiple leaders and followers over a variety of situations and for multiple purposes (Spillane, 2006). Grassroots leadership (Ehrich & English 2012; Kezar, 2011; Strawser, 2020) was further utilized as a part of the conceptual framework to generate insights into the 'bottom up' nature and emancipatory practices associated with critical teacher leadership in public schools. Further, the concept of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2000) was integrated as many critical teacher leadership practices stem from classroom instructional initiatives and co-engage students in such

processes (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Hunzicker, 2022). Last, transformative professionalism (Boylan et al., 2023; Evetts, 2011; Sachs, 2003; 2016) provided an additional interpretive layer to understand the behaviour, conduct, and practices expected from public school teachers. As activist professionals, I argue that teachers are implicitly expected to engage in emancipatory practices to support their student bodies, including via shared grassroots leadership practices. As schools, in many ways, have the capacity to combat or replicate societal social inequalities, it is of paramount importance that teachers take moral action to enhance students' schooling experiences and work dialogically to achieve such goals. The next chapter provides an overview of the methodology and methods utilized for this doctoral research study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology and methods that I utilized to address the following research questions:

1. What were our perceived impacts of our critical teacher leadership practices within our school communities?
2. What were the social and/or structural barriers impeding our critical teacher leadership practices?
3. How is critical teacher leadership demonstrated as a transformative professional practice in the Manitoba context?

I begin by introducing and justifying the novel bricolage approach to qualitative research methodology I designed and implemented throughout this context-specific study. The research context, design, data generation sources, and procedures implemented are then discussed in thorough detail. Next, the strategies for data analysis for the various data sources are described. Following this, I discuss how I navigated the wide array of ethical considerations while facilitating a critical-oriented participatory project alongside my colleagues. Last, I share my reflections on my commitment to establishing the trustworthiness of findings of a bricolage research project, notably through upholding the principles of competence, integrity, and benevolence throughout all processes (Pratt et al., 2022).

A Bricolage Approach to Qualitative Research

This project was conducted through a methodological bricolage drawing tenets and inspirations from participatory action research, but was broadened beyond a traditional template to adapt to the local specificities in the field, adapting processes akin to a general qualitative interpretive inquiry. As such, this methodological bricolage comprises methods and processes

that align with both participatory action research and general qualitative interpretative approaches. This section is organized into three main areas of discussion: (a) qualitative research and the bricolage approach; (b) participatory research methods; and (c) an overview of the bricolage approach to qualitative research I formulated. First, I succinctly discuss the ontological and epistemological tenets, evolution of, and critical perspectives on qualitative research methodology and the emergence of the bricolage approach. Second, I share the qualities of participatory research methods, specifically emphasizing the philosophical underpinnings of participatory action research with its core intentions on social transformation and affiliations within the critical paradigm. Last, I characterize the tenets of this novel methodological bricolage and its applicability to address the emerging, local, context-specific needs of, and resources available for facilitating this critical-oriented, participatory research project.

The Evolving Qualitative Research Landscape

Qualitative research methodologies are well-established in education and other disciplines in the social sciences. While there have certainly been advancements in such research approaches, Morse (2020) argues that "qualitative research had to edge its way into academia and is still earning its place" (p. 1). In contrast to the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of positivism, qualitative researchers are interested in the social construction of realities, the perspectives and lived experiences of participants, and aim to understand contextual forms of knowledge and ways of doing things (Cohen et al., 2000; Flick, 2018). Flick (2018) acknowledged that the development of qualitative research largely flourished in the 1960s and 1970s and that its term was initially coined to directly contrast *quantitative* research approaches, specifically through utilizing text as empirical material in qualitative inquiries (as opposed to numbers in quantitative approaches). Schwandt (2001) similarly identified the dichotomous

nature between qualitative and quantitative terminology and suggested: “To call a research activity qualitative inquiry may broadly mean that it aims at understanding the *meaning* of human *action*” (p. 213).

Qualitative research methodologies are diverse, evolving, and locally situated to address specific contextual issues and inquiries (McMillan, 2012; Morse, 2020). Although there are a plethora of perspectives on the differing underpinnings of varying qualitative design models, McMillan (2012) argued there to be eight unifying qualities of qualitative research: (a) natural settings (that phenomena or perspectives are investigated naturally without any external manipulation); (b) direct data collection (that researchers generally collect data directly from the source); (c) rich narrative descriptions (data generated to produce in-depth understandings of contexts and behaviours); (d) process orientation (research tends to focus on why and how such behaviours occur); (e) inductive data analysis (findings are induced from synthesizing gathered information); (f) participant perspectives (prioritizing a focus on participants’ viewpoints in understanding and meaning); (g) socially constructed meaning (the belief that knowledge is socially constructed and based on the experiences and social interactions with others); and (h) emergent research design (recognizing that qualitative research designs, questions, and analyses frequently change throughout the course of study). Cohen et al. (2000) further elaborated upon the qualities of qualitative research, such as: the intentionality of participants via their deliberate and creative actions; the active social construction of social worlds; the fluidity of situations and knowledge; the unique nature of individuals and rejection of broad generalizations; and the belief that the interpretations of phenomena are heavily influenced by social and cultural lived experiences. Understandably, as there is ample variety in qualitative research approaches, Creswell (2007) argued that there are generally five philosophical assumptions that lead to a

researcher's choice in a design method: (a) ontological (understanding what constitutes reality); (b) epistemological (the researcher's position of knowledge); (c) axiological (how values intersect with the research); (d) rhetorical (the language of research); and (e) methodological (the choice of methods incorporated into the research design).

While qualitative research has become an established, recognized approach to conducting research, there is no generalizable definition unifying these designs (Creswell 2007; Morse, 2010; Schwandt, 2001) as pluralistic qualitative research methodologies and methods continually evolve and emerge (Creswell, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Flick, 2018; McMillan, 2012; Morse, 2020). The ambiguity as to what constitutes qualitative research may be attributed to the perpetual flux in definitional frameworks. McMillan (2012) cited the shifting perspectives of Denzin and Lincoln, highly eminent scholars in qualitative research methods and methodologies, noting that their definition of qualitative research changed three times between 1994 and 2005, transitioning their interpretation from social construction to interpretivist, and eventually to social justice-oriented understandings. These changing positions of what designates qualitative research, and how to design such projects, are further encapsulated in Creswell's (2007) statement: "At the outset, I need to say that there is no agreed-upon structure for how to design a qualitative study" (p. 41). While qualitative research has established a foothold as legitimate research discourse, such methods and methodologies are continually evolving (Morse, 2010; 2020).

In recent years, new methods and approaches have emerged and become established in the academy, such as mixed qualitative research designs (consecutively and/or concurrently integrating multiple qualitative data sources) (Morse, 2020), utilizing one's own lived experiences as a data source via autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011), increased participant

engagement in research processes (such as through photoVOICE techniques) (Wang & Burris, 1997), among other developments. There are various reasons for such progressions, as Morse (2020) outlined six underlying variables influencing such change: (a) qualitative methods are not static and emerging; (b) there have been ongoing advancements in technology; (c) there are changing knowledge bases regarding social phenomena; (d) there are ongoing changing societal conditions; (e) there are external pressures from non-qualitative researchers advocating for enhanced rigor; and (f) the agenda and support from funders are similarly mandating change in process and practice. In addition to these fluctuating circumstances, various scholars argue that single qualitative design templates are limit our capacity to authentically understand social phenomena, as Searle et al. (2004) argues traditional methodology design templates are "an outcome of a rationalistic view" (p. 7), that it "would be dangerous to give only to methodology and its inner rationality the task of evaluating a theory" (p. 8), and that researchers should adapt various methodological processes to their specific contextual needs. Searle et al. continued by warning, "forcibly applying abstract methodological rules to contingent situations, the research situation is placed in a position of dialogue with methodological rules" (p. 8). Pratt et al. (2022) further problematized the template approach to qualitative research as being inherently parochial, stemming from positivist traditions, and as an inauthentic means to understand the true nature of reality, as consolidated in their statement:

> No template can comprehensively describe all of the methodological steps that need to be taken in any research project. As abstract descriptions of research processes, templates cannot accommodate the particularities of specific research projects and the subtle ways projects differ. Even projects that can be described as having followed a template require a lot of work on the part of the researchers to achieve that effect. The analogy of the map

> and the terrain is useful here. A template is at most a map; the project is the terrain and infinitely more complex than the map. (p. 213)

Western epistemological and ontological frameworks continue to dominate research practices. Gaudet (2014) argues for the further incorporation of Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing, problematizing the status quo forms of knowledge production in academic institutions, stating: "Implying that there is a singular methodology compartmentalizes the power upheld by research participants themselves" (p. 71). Kovach (2005) similarly espoused this position, identifying emerging participatory and Indigenous approaches as "marginal methodologies" (p. 26), as Western institutions continue to mandate the parameters of what constitutes legitimate research. Clearly, qualitative pluralism is epistemologically and ethically essential for future research inquiries. Pluralism in qualitative research methodology is increasingly recognized and encouraged as there is a myriad of ways of knowing and generating knowledge (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Fast & Kovach, 2019; Gaudet, 2014; Mertens & Cram, 2016; Reay et al., 2019). Concurrent to these developments, the bricolage is becoming increasingly utilized, an approach that comprises the mixing of qualitative methods and theories for the contextual purposes of individual studies, broadening the interpretation of qualitative research beyond pre-set design templates and traditional Western modes of knowledge production (Kincheloe, 2005; Kincheloe et al., 2018; Sanchez et al., 2024).

The Bricolage Approach

The term bricolage was first introduced to social scientific literature by Lévi-Strauss (1966) in his influential book, *The Savage Mind*. Although Lévi-Strauss offered no specific definition of the concept (Baker & Nelson, 2005), he suggested the bricolage researcher (the *bricoleur*) to be akin to a *jack-of-all-trades* craftsperson, making use of the tools, resources, and

creative imagination readily available to address the needs of specific research projects (Bologna et al., 2020; Kincheloe et al., 2018; Lincoln, 2001). In addition to the craftsperson, various other metaphors have been likened to the bricoleur, such as the quilt maker, jazz musician, producer of visual mosaics, and so forth (Kincheloe, 2001). Through developing the concept, Lévi-Strauss (1966) argued that researchers exclusively concerned with presenting empirical findings via prescribed methods were more closely aligned with the functions of an engineer, while, by contrast, the bricoleur utilized a plethora of methods and resources to achieve their context-specific goals and would be better interpreted as a craftsperson (Ben-Asher, 2022). Lévi-Strauss differentiated the concepts of the *scientific mind* from *wild thinking* and argued that the bricolage approach legitimized thinkers' capacity to engage in creative, free, pluralistic thought, not being confined by rigid boundaries of conventional methods and/or approaches associated with positivist traditions. Hase (2014) recognized the creative and ambiguous nature of the bricolage approach, describing the process as "less clear, non-formulaic and to a certain extent unknowable" (p. 84). Bricolage researchers challenge the dominance of positivist research traditions that continue to linger in qualitative research, arguing that template design models are manifestations of monological epistemologies and stifle creative ingenuity and adaptability to contextual specificities of individual studies (Kincheloe 2001; 2005; Pratt et al., 2022; Rogers, 2011).

While the concept of the bricolage has been present within social scientific research for over 60 years, it has only been in recent years that the approach has been comprehensively developed and increasingly utilized within research (Ben-Asher, 2022; Phillimore et al., 2019). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) contributed to this revitalization in interest by describing five different dimensions of bricolage: (a) methodological (entailing the use of a variety of data

generation strategies in a single study); (b) theoretical (drawing upon a diverse breadth of social theoretical frameworks); (c) interpretive (reflexively understanding and incorporating one's own positionality, life history, and other personal aspects of identity into all aspects of inquiry); (d) political (recognizing that all actions and modes of knowledge production are inherently power-laden and that the criticality of bricolage is premised on engaging in research via diverse ways to disrupt such injustices and inequities); and (e) narrative (the understanding that all knowledge is creating via stories, and that bricoleurs explore the diverse unconscious narratives in retelling their truths during the knowledge production process). Kincheloe (2001) has been a highly influential figure in developing a contemporary perspective on bricolage. He argued that bricoleur's research processes are fundamentally rooted in interdisciplinarity, are open and sensitive multivocal perspectives across changing contextual landscapes, and challenge the monological limitations of single methodological processes associated with Western institutions, claiming these discursive "certified modes of knowledge production" (p. 681) limit authentic understandings of social realities. Lincoln (2001) responded to Kincheloe's (2001) expansion on the concept, reflectively contemplating bricolage to embody two forms, either via: (a) methodological eclecticism, allowing for variance in methodological processes to adapt to the circumstantial factors relevant to locally situated research projects; or (b) engaging in a genealogy/archeology of the research disciplines with a meta-methodological purpose in mind. In response, Kincheloe (2005) argued that the bricoleur may engage in either approach. Kincheloe (2001; 2005; Kincheloe et al., 2018) has since been a pivotal figure in augmenting the theoretical development of the bricolage, arguing that bricoleurs recognize the inherent power dynamics always present in research, acknowledge and embrace the immeasurable complexities of lived realities, utilize interdisciplinary methods to generate locally situated knowledge, and

hold the epistemological and ontological belief that all knowledge and reality to be in perpetual flux. Regarding the multi-methodological nuances, Kincheloe (2005) described the bricolage practice as:

> …the process of getting down to the nuts and bolts of multidisciplinary research. Ethnography, textual analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, historiography, discourse analysis combined with philosophical analysis, literary analysis, aesthetic criticism, and theatrical and dramatic ways of observing and making meaning constitute the methodological bricolage. In this way, bricoleurs move beyond the blinds of particular disciplines and peer through a conceptual window to a new world of research and knowledge production. (p. 323)

Bricoleurs may integrate various methods in an interdisciplinary manner to engage in qualitative research.

Various other perspectives on bricolage certainly have emerged in recent years. Not all researchers who recognize the qualities of bricolage necessarily employ the term, as some scholars, such as Shirley (2014), synonymize the bricolage with “pluralistic and multi-perspectival” (p. 205) approaches to qualitative research. Many scholars recognize the bricolage to be a rejection of Western-oriented monological modes of knowledge production (Kincheloe, 2005; Kincheloe et al., 2018; Pratt et al., 2022; Shirley, 2014) and expanding beyond single methodological design templates by combining methods and theories (Ben-Asher, 2022; Bologna et al., 2020; Phillimore et al., 2019; Pratt et al., 2022). In addition to these qualities, there is also a pragmatic sense of “making do” or “cobbling together”, the idea that bricoleurs' adapt to the inevitable progressions of any research project, changing methods or analytic strategies to coincide with participants' changing social realities, ultimately utilizing whatever

resources are available for knowledge construction (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Duymedjian & Rüling, 2005; Phillimore et al., 2019). Researchers may begin with a preconceived method, but adapt by changing methods or analytical approaches while in the field, engaging in creative problem-solving through utilizing the available resources (Rogers, 2012). Sanchez et al. (2024) view the emergence of bricolage as a promising development for the future trajectories of qualitative research and highlight various conceptual hallmarks of the approach, including resourcefulness, creativity, problem-solving, flexibility, adaptability, and plurality.

The next subsection succinctly outlines the literature pertaining to the approaches that were foundational in my methodological bricolage, specifically drawing inspirations from the tenets of participatory action research (with the philosophical underpinnings premised on community action, social transformation, liberatory practices, and empowerment through locals' expert knowledge).

Participatory Research

Participatory research is an umbrella term that encompasses methodological forms of inquiry conducted alongside community members with a foundational premise on action or social change (Vaughn & Jacques, 2020). There is no uniform approach to participatory research as the field continues to evolve, as evidenced by Vaughn and Jacques (2020), who outlined over 27 different participatory research methodologies, such as participatory action research, community-based participatory research, participatory evaluation, and so forth. In addition to these designs, other recent emergent approaches include Indigenous participatory methodologies (Fast & Kovach, 2019; Gaudet, 2014; Mertens & Cram, 2016), participatory case study (Reilly, 2010; Sion & Keady, 2021), participatory phenomenology (e.g., Firth, 2020), among other evolving template designs. While there are a myriad of approaches to participatory inquiries that

may deviate in design and/or process, participatory research methodologies generally align with the principles of: democratic partnership with community members affected by the local issue under investigation, being structured to decenter the inequitable power dynamics associated with traditional research approaches, challenging elitist epistemological notions traditionally associated with Western research (specifically through utilizing locals' expert knowledge and insights to dialogically generate knowledge), and aiming to socially transform the world by resolving local social injustices experienced by community members (Fast & Kovach, 2019; Gaudet, 2014; Mertens & Cram, 2016; Reilly, 2010; Vaugn & Jacques, 2020). Participatory research approaches share Freirean (1970/2000) values of dialogical partnership between researchers and communities, specifically research that "is ideally done *by* the local people and *for* the local people" (Reilly, 2010, p. 659). According to Mertens and Cram (2016) participatory methodologies are founded upon three assumptions: (a) ontological (believing in plural, multifaceted interpretations of reality); (b) transformative epistemological (understanding that all knowledge is situated within the context of power structures and that trust is essential to authentically generate liberatory knowledge); and (c) methodological (approaching research practices as dialogical and ensuring all voices are represented throughout projects).

Discussion on how to authentically and ethically approach participatory research in a truly respectful, dialogical manner is ongoing. McTaggart (1991) accurately noted that "in situations where people with different power, status, influence, and facility with language come together to work on a thematic concern, the idea of participation becomes problematic" (p. 170). It is important to identify the roles and responsibilities of every member involved in a participatory research project. Schwandt (2001) noted that there are a variety of ways to collaborate in community-engaged projects, such as taking on roles as participants-as-

researchers, participants networked to share their insights and knowledge, participants as co-constructors of research problems, researchers as colleagues, and researchers as participants. There is not necessarily uniformity in the participative aspects of such projects, as Herr and Anderson (2005) acknowledged that participatory projects may vary in the extent to which community members are involved in the process (as outlined in Table 1).

Table 1

Herr and Anderson's (2005) Modes of Participatory Research

Mode of Participation	Involvement of Local People	Relationship of Research and Action to Local People
Co-option	Token; representatives are chosen, but no real input or power	on
Compliance	Tasks are assigned, with incentives; outsiders decide agenda	for
Consultation	Local opinions asked, outsiders analyze and decide agenda	for/with
Cooperation	Local people work together with outsiders to determine priorities; responsibility remains with outsiders for directing the process	with
Colearning	Local people and outsiders share their knowledge to create new understanding and work together to form action plans with outsider facilitation	with/by
Collective action	Local people set their own agenda and mobilize to carry it out in the absence of outsider initiators and facilitators	by

		(Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 40)

As outlined in Table 1, participatory projects may range from being structured in superficial, tokenistic, low levels of participation (*co-option*), to high levels of participation whereby community members are largely responsible for the formulation of research questions, methods, action plans, analyses, and dissemination of findings (*collective action*). The next sub-section further explores the philosophical tenets, benefits of, and challenges in facilitating participatory action research.

Participatory Action Research

Like many other methodologies and concepts in the social sciences, there is no universally agreed upon definition of participatory action research (PAR) and no specific PAR protocol is necessarily more authentic than others (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). Despite a history and evolution of over 80 years, Chevalier and Buckles (2019) described PAR theory as "far from being united", the breadth of interpretations and approaches to be that of a "big tent" and is ultimately premised upon "pluralism and creativity in the art of discovering the world and making it better at the same time" (p. 11). While there are ample variances in understanding and designing PAR inquiries, there are notable concepts characteristic of this methodology. Torre et al. (2015) argued that PAR is fundamentally rooted in justice and democracy, and that it is "an inclusive, collaborative approach to research defined both by participation and a determination to produce knowledge in the interest of social change" (p. 540). Lyke and Mallona (2011) argued that PAR has historically aimed to "systematize and amplify local knowledge, transforming it into social activist movements that contested the power of elites and struggled for greater socioeconomic justice, often through collaboration with external agents of change who were

frequently based in universities" (p. 111). Savin-Biden and Wimpenny (2007) emphasized both the participatory and action-oriented nature of PAR, suggesting the "research is about a group of people who are affected by some problem or issue and decide to get together to work out how they want to tackle the problem, and then do something about it" (p. 331). Finally, Ebersohn et al. (2012) further accentuated the dialogical nature of this methodology, commenting that PAR is "characterised by shared ownership of a research project, community-based analysis of social problems and an orientation towards community action" (pp. 456-457). Consistent throughout these definitions are the principles of collaboration, collective knowledge generation, and action for social change.

The origins of participatory action research methods are largely associated with educational philosopher Paulo Freire, who believed critical reflection was essential to achieve personal and social change (Lykes & Mallona, 2011; MacDonald, 2012). Freire (1970/2005) argued that the apex purpose of education systems is to awaken the critical consciousness, or *conscientizacao*, of the oppressed, a process by which individuals become empowered in their ability to socially transform the world through action and reflection. Social change without the input and collaboration of the community, Freire argued, is ultimately inauthentic and potentially perpetuates further marginalization of the already disadvantaged. Freire exemplified this stance in his statement: "Revolutionary leaders cannot think *without* the people, nor *for* the people, but only *with* the people" (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 131). Participatory action research embodies these ethical obligations to research, as Savin-Biden and Wimpenny (2017) noted that "the purpose of PAR is to generate knowledge to inform action; the research methodology is conducted with people as opposed to on people" (p. 334). The empowering benefits of PAR may only be achieved through authentic collaboration with individuals affected by the immediate social issues

being investigated (Ferreira et al., 2015; MacDonald, 2012; Savin-Biden & Wimpenny, 2017). PAR as a methodology is an overt rejection of traditional positivistic research paradigms that have dominated Western academic institutions, as Herr and Anderson (2005) noted:

> In Freirean-inspired participatory research, the academic research model is challenged at almost every point. The dualisms of macro/micro, theory/practice, subject/object, and research/teaching are collapsed. This perspective also challenges many of the premises of more traditional models of action research (p. 16).

PAR is particularly acknowledged for its inclusivity, inviting minoritized communities to meaningfully engage in the co-construction and/or co-analysis of research projects; this is noteworthy, as such groups have historically been excluded by elite academics residing within the "ivory towers" of Western academic institutions (p. 540). Creswell (2007) further elaborated on the benefits of participatory research, as such inclusive methodologies may enable individuals to plan and enact positive social change in their communities.

Through the collaborative dialogue of PAR, power that has historically resided exclusively with the position of Western academics is more equitably distributed and shared with community members affected by immediate social issues (Ferreira et al., 2015). Comparable to other critical-oriented practices, participatory action researchers reject the positivistic research practices dominating Western academic institutions. Western universities have historically exalted the ontological assumption that the world exists objectively of human existence and that legitimate knowledge is exclusively drawn through individualistic inquiry by experts (Abma, 2020; Cohen et al., 2000). Participatory action researchers challenge the epistemological beliefs espoused by positivists, arguing that knowledge is fluid and collectively constructed (Torre et al., 2015). Torre et al. (2015) explained that participatory action researchers draw from "situated

knowledge" and assume "that the subjects and agents of knowledge are multiple, heterogeneous, contradictory, embodied, and socially constructed" (p. 540). Savin-Biden and Wimpenny (2017) reiterated such sentiments, asserting that that knowledge is discovered in collaboration with "local expert knowledge and the voices of the 'knowers'" (p. 334). Participatory action researchers believe that the world is in constant flux and that legitimate knowledge may encompass multimodal media.

As outlined, there are a plethora of benefits by utilizing a PAR methodology when engaging in research for social justice. Savin-Biden and Wimpenny (2017) further categorized four specific benefits PAR may offer: (a) the empowerment of silenced groups (providing a space and opportunity for community members to contribute to liberation of their respective communities); (b) collective support (supporting and encouraging many individuals to be involved in the research process, whereby generating opportunity to learn from many diverse perspectives); (c) facilitating change in a practical sense (as PAR research generally focuses on addressing contextual issues affecting local community members involved); and (d) development of a sense of agency and voice (in addition to generating knowledge, PAR may also positively impact community members communication skills and general sense of confidence in speaking up).

Despite the undeniable strengths and benefits that PAR may provide about knowledge generation and its potential to impact social change, there are notable logistical and ethical challenges associated with the methodology. Chevalier and Buckles (2008) provide a succinct yet comprehensive overview of the theoretical and practical challenges in authentically implementing a PAR study:

> The key challenge in both the theory and practice of PAR lies in the exercise of power by those who convene the activity. This is especially the case when PAR is started and directed by more powerful outside actors whose goals and methods are linked directly to their mandates and problem definitions. In principle, local people are then invited to contribute to decisions about projects by being part of a PAR process. In reality, they may have little scope to challenge the agenda or argue for other methods to approach the problem. As a result, a PAR exercise may simply uphold assumptions and solutions already built into the process (p. 20).

There is an inextricable relationship between power and knowledge that must be attended to by the primary researcher in PAR (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2017). Savin-Biden and Wimpenny (2017) expand upon the difficulties in authentically implementing a PAR study, describing four main challenges: (a) sharing processes (the primary researcher achieving a sound dialectic among participants to mitigate any power differentials and anxieties); (b) ensure all voices are heard (ensuring there are opportunities for all participants to express their views freely); (c) issues of power and control (being essential for the primary researcher to be continually reflective of power differentials among the participatory team and to respect the perspectives of all participants); (d) shared ownership of findings (validating participants' experiences via the presentation and write-up of any findings). In addition to ethical dilemmas of establishing a community that is inclusive and receptive to all perspectives, there are also logistical challenges. MacDonald (2012) outlined the difficulties for community members to engage in PAR due to its notable time commitments, as participants may be requested to engage in projects over extended periods of time with variable amounts of responsibilities (which may, consequently, result in attrition). There is an important distinction between *involvement* and *authentic participation* in

PAR (Borda, 2013; Ebersohn et al., 2012; McTaggart, 1991). McTaggart (1991) explained that authentic participation is established via shared ownership and responsibilities in the co-construction of research projects to achieve meaningful social change. McTaggart continues by explaining that mere involvement is the antithesis of authentic participation and the intent of PAR, arguing that "mere involvement implies none of this and creates the risk of co-option and exploitation of people in the realization of the plans of others." (p. 171). Unfortunately, many studies have historically been portrayed as PAR, but the conduct of principal researchers have contributed to further exploitation of community members.

Although participatory research poses many benefits and possibilities to conduct research in an ethical and authentic manner, there are numerous other challenges associated with such approaches. For doctoral students. Herr and Anderson (2005) particularly acknowledged Western academia's' ongoing emphasis on students' individual pursuits, as such institutions continue to systematically discourage collaborative theses. In educational settings, teachers navigating (participatory) research processes are often met with various challenges disrupting their abilities to facilitate their projects, such as: lack of resources; organizational resistance to change; apprehension to intervene in others' professional practices; finding time to conduct projects; and challenges finding forums through which share findings. Further, many teachers, particularly those not in formal positions of power, often feel unable to challenge the status quo of organizational structures and practices (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Borda (2013) warns that (participatory) action research "is in constant danger of being co-opted" (p. 238) and that universities policies and structures significantly contribute to this actuality. While all participatory studies do not necessarily need to achieve the level of *collective action*, careful and meticulous planning is essential to ensure that the contributions of participants are made upon

their own volition. Reilly (2010) further acknowledges the difficulty of participatory projects, such as the challenge in continually liaising, communicating with, and maintaining relationships alongside participants/partners. Consequently, attrition and lack of interest are common challenge in participatory projects (MacDonald, 2012; Reilly, 2010). Cornish et al. (2023) also identify the inherent unpredictability of participatory projects, as there is a lack of control in such contextual, dialogical processes.

Participatory research marks a fairly recent evolution in qualitative research practice, challenging the dominant epistemological and ontological assumptions of traditional Western academic institutions. While there are many benefits associated with participatory methods, researchers must be attentive to the potential ethical and logistical challenges associated with dialogical projects. In the next and final section, I justify my utilization of a bricolage approach, whereby I outline the inspirations and practices drawn from participatory action research, but also exercise my expertise as a craftsperson to "cobble together" the available resources in the field in a more general qualitative interpretative manner.

A Bricolage of Qualitative Interpretative and Participatory Action Research Methods

It warrants reiteration that qualitative research is continually evolving and that there is no single correct way to design and conduct qualitative research (McMillan, 2012; Morse, 2020; Pratt et al., 2022) or participatory projects (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). Although research templates may provide ample benefits (e.g., simplifying design processes and establishing somewhat-uniform approaches to conduct inquiries), templates do not necessarily adhere to the specific attributes of all research contexts and may result in the production of monological theoretical output (Pratt et al., 2022). The methodological bricolage is an increasingly established approach to qualitative research whereby scholars creatively "cobble

together" and "make do" with the available resources, often pivoting midway through inquiries to utilize an interdisciplinary wide array of methods beyond the original design template approach (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Duymedjian & Rüling, 2005; Kincheloe 2001; 2005; Phillimore et al., 2019). In this section, I outline the evolution of this methodological bricolage and how I, as a bricoleur, creatively "cobbled together" and "made do" with the circumstances and resources readily, drawing upon my skills and creativity as a craftsperson to generate new insights into critical teacher leadership phenomena in the Manitoba context.

'Cobbling Together' and 'Making Do'

Several contextual circumstances influenced the scope and trajectory of this research project. A significant factor underlying this study was the COVID-19 pandemic. Through my experiences in the project working alongside my teacher colleagues, navigating COVID-19 restrictions (e.g., limited to meeting virtually via University of Manitoba-licensed Zoom meetings), and having limited engagement from (and communication with) participants in co-analysis in this participatory project, a methodological bricolage emerged whereby I "made do" with the circumstances in the field. These pandemic-related conditions impacted my research design and decision-making, as I was careful not to overburden participants with requests (e.g., asking them to journal their reflections in addition to all other responsibilities). Teacher burnout from the pandemic is well-documented (Laidlaw, 2023; Sokal et al., 2020) and I was very sensitive about how much I asked of my colleagues. As a teacher who personally navigated COVID-19 related burnout, I was highly attentive to this contextual factor and attuned to the emotional state of teachers as a part of our team.

While participatory action research projects often encourage participatory processes in all phases of projects (MacDonald, 2012; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020), engaging in co-design

alongside my colleagues was not particularly feasible due to my contextual circumstances. First, as a doctoral student operating under stringent conditions (e.g., pre-emptively generating research questions for a proposal defense), it would have been difficult to entirely co-design research questions, decide upon data generation sources, and so forth. Second, during the 2022/2023 school year, physical distancing protocols were implemented by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board 2. As such, only being able to confer via online meetings limited how collegially I could engage with and/or support my colleagues. In addition to difficulties co-designing a project, this also negated any prospect of meeting in-person, whether to meet, dialogue, support, observe, or engage in various aspects of the participatory study. Even without physical distancing protocols, it would have been challenging to meet as teachers received no formal release time to engage in this project. It would have also been further challenging to meet in-person given the covert nature of this study, as I would not want to inadvertently identify my colleagues' participation in this work. Last, as a teacher conducting participatory research alongside my colleagues, I did not want to take an authoritative role by prescribing too many aspects of this study; I wanted teachers to have ample agency in their leadership endeavours and reflect on qualities they deemed important. For these reasons, this study was inspired by the tenets of participatory action research and utilized methods affiliated with such processes, but deviated from the traditional iterative action research cycles and utilized the resources available, drawing upon strategies more consistent with a general qualitative interpretative study.

Inspirations from Participatory Action Research

This methodological bricolage drew inspiration from participatory action research methods, processes, and philosophical alignments. Cognizant of the critical-oriented objectives

of this project to challenge power structures, draw upon teachers' expert *insider* knowledge, and lead to meaningful local emancipatory change, participatory methods were congruent with the objectives of this study. In a Freirean (1970/2000) spirit, I did not want to advocate *for* my colleagues, but rather *with/by* them. As such, participatory approaches were employed to encourage increased engagement alongside my colleagues. This study was inspired by participatory action research tenets, notably engaging in action for social transformation to ameliorate social inequities affecting our students in our school communities and to critically reflect upon our professional practices (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). Participatory research methods, such as photoVOICE (Wang & Burris, 1997), were also incorporated into this study with the purpose to visibilize teachers' emancipatory grassroots leadership efforts. Further, all members of the participatory team were invited, but not obligated, to engage in the co-analysis of all data generated. My colleagues and I had access to all data generated via a University of Manitoba (UM)-licensed OneDrive account and were encouraged to co-generate knowledge and findings together in a participative manner. Further information regarding these methods and design procedures is thoroughly explained later in the research design section of this chapter. This research project was fundamentally premised upon many of the philosophical values of participatory action research.

Beyond Templates to Incorporate Qualitative Interpretative Approaches

While there were many inspirations and methods associated with participatory action research influencing the scope of this study, there were noteworthy variances beyond a qualitative template. The intent of this research project was to encourage participants to engage in local (inter)actions via critical teacher leadership practices, documenting and later reflecting upon learning and impacts of such emancipatory practices. However, this study deviated from a

traditional participatory action research template as participants did not document their iterative action cycles (e.g., via journaling), which is a defining characteristic of action research (Anderson & Herr, 2005). Rather, the interaction-oriented nature of this study was more fluid and exploratory, whereby participants were able to engage in critical leadership practices, generate insights, and share their perceptions on the impacts of their collegial interactions in their school communities, but not necessarily measure the before and after effects of leadership consequences. I did not request my colleagues to engage in journaling or other methods to document the *observe* phase of participatory action research (Anderson & Herr, 2005), as I was concerned of requesting too much from my colleagues during the precarious teaching circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, definitively attributing the before and after impacts of distributed leadership has been problematized and challenged within the literature (Jones, 2014; Lumby, 2013) as, through this perspective, leadership is inherently fluid and is based on the highly complex social interactions of the collective (not resulting from single formal leaders' individual *actions*). Another variable circumstance pertained to my colleagues' interest in engaging in this work. As an example, one teacher-participant explicitly informed me at the beginning of the project that they had little interest in the initial professional learning and growth components of the study, but rather participated with the intent to illuminate their experiences in critical teacher leadership, hoping that sharing their stories would bring about organizational/occupational change. In the spirit of participative research, I followed the interests and desires of my colleagues.

Another methodological variance was the shift in focus from an initial interest in combining participatory action research with participatory policy analysis (Durning, 1993; Geurts & Joldersma, 2001) to advocate for policy change and improved teacher leadership

conditions. Despite this initial intent, the study's focus eventually evolved to align more closely with an interpretative document analysis approach (Bowen, 2009; Dalgish et al., 2020). An original interest during the research design phase was to explore how educational policies impeded our critical teacher leadership potential and, as a participatory team, co-generate knowledge based on our insights to reform educational policy. However, as the study unfolded, my colleagues expressed little interest in discussing policy and expressed little concern as to how policy impacted their practices. Consequently, there was very little engagement in the co-analysis phases, and policy conditions did not emerge as significant barriers to practice. This deviation is consistent with the bricolage approach, however. Rogers (2012) acknowledges that the *'making do'* component is not premeditated, but rather emerges as studies unfold, sharing the hypothetical example whereby "a methodological bricoleur could be a researcher who begins an inquiry process with an action-research approach and then realizes that discourse analysis could help develop a more complex portrait of a phenomenon" (p. 5). Again, responding to the ebb and flow of these actualities in the field, I ultimately creatively problem-solved, adapting the study to incorporate an interpretive document analysis approach, using educational documents not from a participatory policy analysis positioning, but rather broadly triangulated these documents to contextualize our experiences and generate insights into the transformative professionalism underlying critical teacher leadership in the Manitoba context. Cognizant of these circumstances, this methodological bricolage emerged to address the context-specific needs of this individual qualitative study.

Methodological Bricolage for the Context of this Study

In sum, this methodological bricolage incorporated methods and processes consistent with both participatory action research, but was broadened beyond the traditional template to

accommodate the actualities in the field, thus adopting qualities akin to a general qualitative interpretative study. As such, this project extended beyond the template of a participatory action research by incorporating broad qualitative interpretive analytical foci into the process not typically utilized in PAR projects. Some aspects of this project highly engaged my colleagues in the research process using methods and processes inspired by participatory action research (e.g., photoVOICE methods, engaging in emancipatory action in our communities to enact meaningful change, having co-equal access to data sharing, inviting my colleagues to engage in data co-analysis, etc.). 'Making do' with contextual circumstances, some components of this study ultimately deviated from the traditional scope of participatory action research. These variances in my study included the independent analysis processes whereby I explored how educational documents contextualized our experiences and broadened understanding into the transformative professionalism of critical teacher leadership practices, as the initial interest in participatory policy analysis was no longer relevant nor feasible. Further, the photos and perspectives shared by my colleagues illuminated their struggles experienced in facilitating critical teacher leadership practice, deviating from action-oriented analyses to more qualitative interpretative understandings of perspectives, perceptions, and experiences. The analysis and findings of these photos and perspectives were analyzed in a qualitative interpretative style as opposed to the cyclical action-oriented style of participatory action research, utilizing the resources available in the field. This methodological bricolage generated highly insightful findings regarding critical teacher leadership phenomena and led to meaningful change in our school communities. Qualitative research designs are frequently emergent, adapting to the ebb and flow of worldly conditions in flux, and often comprise an element of surprise (Creswell, 2007; McMillan, 2012; Pratt et al., 2022). The methodological bricolage celebrates methodological diversity that extends

beyond traditional templates and is often characterized by emergent ‘surprise’ qualities (Kincheloe, 2005; Pratt et al., 2022). There is no universal method, approach, or agreed-upon understanding of the methodological bricolage (Hase, 2014) as this approach is becoming increasingly utilized in academia and is still developing (Sanchez et al., 2024). Regardless, bricoleurs embody the qualities of creativity, problem-solving, flexibility, adaptability, plurality, and resourcefulness (Ben-Asher, 2022; Pratt et al., 2020; Sanchez et al., 2024). As an emerging bricoleur, I creatively optimized the resources readily available in the field, problem-solving via adapting my approaches to generate new, invaluable insights into critical teacher leadership practices. Drawing upon my experience and expertise as a classroom teacher certainly bolstered my capacity to engage in the adaptive tasks consistent with bricoleurs. The next section outlines the overview of the research context, design, data generation sources, and general procedures taken.

Overview of Research Context, Design, and Procedure

Within this section, I discuss information pertaining to the research context, information pertaining to participant recruitment, the participatory team, the research context, data sources, and the five-phase design I implemented.

Participatory Recruitment

To fulfil the objectives of this methodological bricolage of qualitative research methods, I established a participatory research team of teacher-colleagues, all of whom were members of the Manitoba Teachers’ Society and were employed within the same school division. In September 2022, I received formal approval from a school division to conduct this research alongside teacher colleagues. A recruitment email was sent to all teaching staff in the participating school division. Prospectively interested participants were invited to fill out a brief

information form including name, teaching experience (e.g., number of years, subject area), and self-identification information (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability (Appendix G). The rationale for including the self-identification form was to establish inclusion and exclusion criteria, particularly if an abundance of interest in participation (but limited space) emerged. The intent was to recruit seven to ten teacher leaders who were not occupying formal positions of authority (e.g., consultant roles and/or principal positions) to be involved in this study. After the recruitment email was shared, 14 teachers filled out the form and expressed interest in participating. I then shared the Informed Consent Form and Oath of Confidentiality with these prospective teacher-participants (Appendix H). Six teachers decided to participate alongside me, while the other seven teachers did not.

Participatory Team

This team of seven teacher-participants engaged in the critical teacher leadership practices in their school communities, generated photographs as a part of photoVOICE, and unpacked their experiences in individual and group reflection discussions. All teacher-participants had access to each other's data, including photographs, and individual and group reflection discussion transcripts. Although all teachers in the division from Kindergarten to Grade 12 were invited to participate, teachers who instructed early and middle years (Kindergarten to Grade 8) elected to participate in this study. I have provided a very concise positional description of each member of the participatory team. These positional statements were purposefully crafted to be short to help ensure the protection of their identities. Each teacher-participant was invited to generate their own pseudonym for dissemination; those who did not indicate a preferred pseudonym were assigned one (and confirmed their approval). The members of this diverse participatory research team were as follows:

- Gaou is a black, male, bilingual, newcomer teacher who served as an itinerant teacher between multiple schools.
- Apple is a white, female, Jewish teacher who instructs middle years students.
- Stefan is a white, queer, male teacher who instructs early years students.
- Ross is an Indigenous, queer female teacher who instructs early years students.
- Mark is a Filipino, male teacher who instructs middle years students.
- Aileen is a white, female teacher who instructs early years students.
- Kris is a white, queer, non-binary teacher who instructs middle years students.

To explore the diverse informal leadership efforts for equity and social justice in Manitoba schools, it was intended to include teacher leaders (recognized within their respective communities) who were ameliorating various social and organizational challenges in their school communities, such as social equity efforts pertaining to decolonization and reconciliation, anti-racism, inclusion, 2SLGBTQIA+ initiatives, ecological change, financial accessibility, and so forth. I served the dual role as a teacher-researcher, engaging in photoVOICE, and the reflective discussion alongside my teacher-participant colleagues.

All the members of the participatory research team served as general classroom, specialist (e.g., music), or learning support teachers. None of these teacher-participants served in formal roles of authority (e.g., school principal). The rationale for excluding principal teachers and other teachers occupying formal positions of authority is reflective of the dominant focus in educational leadership research, which remains fixated on the *heroic* individual efforts of individuals in formal positions of power (Gronn, 2003; 2010; Tierney, 1989). Such exclusion is also cognizant of the concepts derived from the distributed perspective on leadership, the idea that leadership is fluid and may be practiced by various organizational members, for a multitude

of purposes, and achieved in diverse situations (Spillane, 2006). Further, while teacher leadership has been researched for decades, investigation into the informal leadership practices of teachers has only been conducted relatively recently in the *third wave* (Harris, 2015), as the historical emphasis of research similarly emphasized teachers leading through formal positions (e.g., department head roles) and not on the fluid leadership interactions of multiple actors (Harris, 2015; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Finally, there is an emergence in critical perspectives in both distributed perspectives on leadership as well as in teacher leadership studies (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). As such, inquiry into how and why teachers practice leadership for social change is a relatively recent phenomenon (e.g., Bradley-Levine, 2018; 2022).

As teacher-participants of this study initiated and/or extended pre-existing leadership practices in their school communities, they co-facilitated many of the endeavours that emerged via the interactions among students, parents, colleagues (e.g., educational assistants and fellow teachers), school administration, and senior administration. Most (if not all) of these leadership practices materialized via shared and collaborative engagements and could not be attributed solely to the efforts of these teacher-participants. Thus, this interpretive lens accounted for the immeasurable complexities that leadership practices entail and acknowledged that outcomes could not be isolated to the actions of a single individual, but rather were more accurately constituted as social, collective interactions in these school communities.

Research Context

The critical teacher leadership practices exercised by teacher-participants occurred in multiple public schools in the same and/or adjacent neighbourhoods within a metro region of Manitoba, Canada. A definitive number of schools will not be issued to bolster confidentiality, but also as one teacher-participant served in an itinerant position (instructing at multiple

locations). All of the schools ranged from Kindergarten to Grade 8. None of the locations were secondary education (Grade 9 to 12) or adult education; this was not intentional, but rather as a consequence of teachers who elected to participate. The student demographics of these school communities shared various commonalities, particularly large newcomer populations from India and the Philippines. Students' cultural demographics further included Indigenous, Ukrainian temporary residents, persons of colour, and white. The community socioeconomic status of these public schools was also variable, predominantly educating youth from families of low/middle-class backgrounds, but also from some upper-middle class incomes. This research was conducted in a post-pandemic context, whereby I adhered to UM Research Ethics Board 2 requirements to only schedule interactions with my colleagues virtually via UM-licensed Zoom digital meetings.

Data Generation and Collection

This methodological bricolage employed participatory and qualitative methods and processes. The rationale for qualitative data generation tools coincides with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of critical research. Both PAR and critical qualitative research share the position of rejecting positivistic claims of universal truths, that reality exists independently of human interpretation, and that local contextual perspectives and people's stories are of utmost significance for generating knowledge to lead to social change (Lykes & Mallona, 2011; MacDonald, 2012; Mayfield-Johnson & Butler, 2017; McTaggart, 1991). The data sources utilized for data generation in this study were photoVOICE and individual reflection discussion transcripts, textual transcriptions of photos generated, group reflection discussion transcripts, and education documents.

PhotoVOICE and Individual Reflections

PhotoVOICE is a research method that is still emerging and developing in qualitative

research inquiries (Tsang, 2020). Wang and Burris (1997), key figures in the development of photovoice as a data generation tool, described the method as:

> A process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. It entrusts cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders, and potential catalysts for change, in their own communities. (p. 370)

Mayfield-Johnson and Butler (2017) defined photovoice as "a community-based approach to documentary photography that is grounded in the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and documentary photography" (p. 49). Photovoice as a method shares similar philosophical assumptions related to PAR, particularly its challenge of the traditional research paradigm that exalts university scholars as sole experts in knowledge generation and interpretation (Abma, 2020; Mayfield-Johnson & Butler, 2017). Wang and Burris (1997) described the immense visual benefits that photography provides, noting that documentary photographers have used such media to present poverty, isolation, and experiences of social humiliation. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) acknowledged three particularly unique qualities that photovoice may provide as a qualitative research method, namely: (a) the ability to record and reflect upon participants' community's assets and concerns; (b) the opportunity to discuss local, important issues in small and large groups to promote critical dialogue and collectively generate knowledge; and (c) provide a means to reach policymakers. The rationale for practicing photovoice with teacher leaders is to provide them with the opportunity to document examples of social oppression present within the school system that have impacted their lives, their practice, or the well-being of colleagues and/or children and youth. While the strengths and benefits of photovoice as a data generation tool for a participatory study are

considerable, there are notable challenges associated with the method. Wang and Burris (1997) identify several potential barriers when participants engage in such activities. These issues include the political nature of research for social justice, and those participants (for their own protection and/or well-being) may be required to self-censor their actions, deciding which phenomena are appropriate/inappropriate to document. Further, these scholars continue by noting that participants are given the authority to decide which photographs are included/excluded, suggesting that "methodologies hide as well as disclose" (p. 374). Finally, Wang and Harris argued that photographs are not objective representations of reality, and that photographs (including angles, foci, and so forth) are subject to human interpretation and action.

Cognizant of the pluralistic interpretations that encompass visual research methods, I chose to utilize tenets of the Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experiences (VOICE) photo analysis technique developed by Wang and Burris (1999). The VOICE process comprises three stages of analysis: (a) selecting (the act of choosing a finite number of photos that accurately reflect the community's needs); (b) contextualizing (storytelling of the significance and meaning of the photograph); and (c) codifying (identifying emerging themes and drawing understandings of the phenomena). VOICE was specifically developed for PAR studies and was highly applicable to this project. For this project, all teachers generated multiple photos documenting their critical teacher leadership experiences, and subsequently engaged in individual reflection discussions to describe their photos, experiences, and perspectives on the phenomena (Appendix E). All teacher-participants uploaded their photos to a University of Manitoba OneDrive account, where all participants had access to each other's data generated. Five of the seven participants included textual captions and/or accompaniments to their photos, further contextualizing their leadership experiences. The individual group reflection discussions were held virtually through a

UM-licensed Zoom platform. During this session, many of the participants elected to discuss their experiences in critical teacher leadership broadly, discussing aspects of leadership beyond the photographs documented (e.g., their motivations, historical experiences, current endeavours, etc.). In a participative style, I welcomed my colleagues to share however they deemed appropriate. All individual group reflections were textually transcribed. The textual transcriptions and accompanying contextualizing descriptions of photos were used, later, in thematic analysis.

Textual Transcriptions of Photos

Like the interpretative nature of understanding words and text, photographs and other visual media may similarly draw pluralistic meanings. Banks (2011) made the succinct claim: "Good visual research rests upon a judicious reading of both internal and external narratives" (p. 12). Banks clarified that interpreting visual phenomena includes understanding the nature of photographs, arguing that "all visual objects represent nothing but themselves" (p. 12), while further acknowledging that all photographs are the product of intentional human action and, consequently, the meaning of such images illuminate the complex social dimensions of human experience. Collier (2011) explained that the purpose of analyzing visual records is to search for, and identify, patterns and meaning. However, this process is not necessarily linear and may be a complicated endeavour, arguing that photographs may encapsulate a plethora of information that may not be purposefully captured by the beholder. Collier explained:

> This visual field usually contains a complex range of phenomena, much of which is outside our awareness as camera person or subject. Consequently, the content of the visual image is rarely shaped only by the constructive influences of recorders and subjects, a fact reflected in the frequent discovery of previously unseen phenomena and

> relationships in the process of visual analysis. Much of the promise and value of visual images in research is based on this aspect of their character. (p. 35)

Jörgensen (2017) described the historical use of image indexing, whereby photos are textually transcribed for cataloguing and research purposes. She noted that the two predominant approaches are either through: (a) concept-based indexing (a process whereby researchers systematically assign textual descriptions to photos, selecting terms from a pre-set controlled vocabulary); or (b) content-based indexing (using computer software programs to analyze photos and produce descriptions of the visual content).

Although my colleagues described and analyzed the contextual meaning behind photos generated during our individual reflection session, I elected to further analyze the photos and their textual transcriptions independently. There 61 photos generated, but only 40 were used for thematic analysis (as some photos were duplicates of the same image or others that contained human subjects, which were excluded from analysis). These 40 photos were generated for public dissemination (to illuminate critical teacher leadership impacts), included no human subjects, and featured a variety visual elements, such as contextual locations (e.g., hallways, staircases, classrooms) teaching resources (e.g., books, handouts), committee artifacts (e.g., meeting agendas, emails), professional learning and development sessions (e.g., content on projectors), club-related items (e.g., composting bins for ecological justice clubs), among various other foci. Photos were textually transcribed through a content-based image indexing technique (Jörgensen, 2017). Each photo elicited between five to seven sentences of textual descriptions of the digital content. These textual transcriptions were later utilized in the thematic analysis process.

Group Reflection Discussions

Following their engagement in informal critical leadership practices and the photovoice experiences, teacher-participants were invited to participate in individual and group discussions via a University of Manitoba-licensed online Zoom discussion (see Appendices E & F). It was during these reflection discussions that teacher-participants unpacked the perceived impacts of their informal leadership practices, the social and/or structural barriers that impeded their efforts, and feelings associated with their engagements. Group reflection sessions are very common in photoVOICE studies as they give an opportunity for participants to share their stories alongside others affected by the problems under investigation (Tsang, 2020). While many photoVOICE studies often use the group reflection session as an opportunity to engage in the photoVOICE component, some researchers elect to use an individual reflection session to explore participants' experiences in greater depth (e.g., Nykiforuk et al., 2011). I followed this individual reflection model to explore the in-depth impacts of teachers' critical leadership practices and the accompanying stories of such efforts. As such, the group reflection was an opportunity to broadly share stories, professional learning, and reflections, and to compare and contrast experiences through engaging in such practices. All teacher-participants had access to each other's photos generated and individual reflection session transcriptions via the shared UM-licensed OneDrive network. All teacher-participants were invited to review others' contributions and perspectives prior to the discussion. The conversations were conducted through semi-structured questions (Appendix E) similar to a focus group format (McMillan, 2012) and fluidly followed the directions of my colleagues' interests and perspectives. These group reflection discussions were later textually transcribed and shared with all members of the participatory group. These textual transcriptions were later used in thematic analysis.

Education Documents

Education documents were included to triangulate the other data sources, bolstering the trustworthiness of findings, but also to add contextualizing information regarding our critical teacher leadership within the broader Manitoba landscape and to provide insights into the ideological underpinnings of teachers' transformative professionalism. Analyzing documents may be used in qualitative research as either a stand-alone method or in conjunction with other data sources to triangulate and/or broaden contextual understandings of investigated phenomena (Bowen, 2009; Bretschneider et al., 2016; Gross, 2012; McMillan, 2012). Similar to other approaches in qualitative research, there is no one fixed universal method for document collection and analysis, as there is a plethora of perspectives on how to conduct such approaches (Bowen, 2009). Regarding the fluidity of the method, Olson (2010) comments, "Document analysis is a helpful research tool that can be used in as wide a variety of ways as a researcher has the imagination to create" (p. 320). There is ample fluidity in document analysis approaches, and there is no single prescribed design. The nature of documents is extensive, and may include both textual and non-textual forms, such as: newspapers, journals, policy documents, student attendance records, books, letters, social media posts, speeches, maps, pictures, diagrams, diaries, test scores, and so forth (Bretschneider et al., 2016; Fitzgerald, 2012; McMillan, 2012). Morgan (2022) acknowledged the importance of which interviews and/or focus groups may provide in generating understanding of social phenomena, but argued that these methods may insufficiently provide a complete understanding and thus argued that including documents may broaden the knowledge generated in an investigation. Bowen (2009) outlined five uses for documents in qualitative research: (a) contextualize the data from other sources (e.g., interviews); (b) inform research studies on what to observe or questions to ask; (c) supplement other data sources to broaden the scope of a study; (d) can be used to track change and

development of certain phenomena; and (e) can be used to corroborate and/or verify findings from other data sources. My interest in incorporating education documents was to broaden the understanding of critical teacher leadership phenomena in the Manitoba context, specifically exploring how teachers' transformative professionalism is locally documented in the field (as evidenced in teachers' practices) and further contextualized in policy and/or other relevant educational texts.

There is no pre-specified number of documents to use in an analysis, as Dalgish et al. (2020) acknowledge some studies may reference a select handful while others may include thousands of documents, all depending on the scope and nature of the inquiry. Gross (2018) emphasizes the importance of inclusion criteria when selecting documents for research purposes, including: the age of the document, geographic location, and forms (e.g., policies, newspapers, journal entries, etc.). Further, Gross suggests utilizing exclusion criteria for deciding which documents not to include, such as conducting an in-depth review of the documents prospectively chosen for inclusion, assessing their representativeness, content relevance, and reliability. When selecting documents for inclusion, Morgan (2022) provided four criteria for assessing the quality of documents: (a) authenticity (evaluating whether the document is genuine, consistent, is a primary source, etc.); (b) credibility (if the document is free from error and/or distortion, such as purposeful revisions/omissions); (c) representativeness (how typical the document is in relation to other documents of its genre); and (d) meaning (how significant the content of the document is and whether the evidence is clearly presented). For this study, I wanted to explore documents that outlined the prescribed roles and responsibilities of Manitoba teachers, texts that may generate ideological *meaning* underlying teachers' professionalism and leadership. I only wanted to include documents that were produced by *authentic* or 'official' organizational groups that had

authority or some level of say in determining the professional roles, responsibilities, conduct, and practices of Manitoba teachers. Being produced by *authentic* sources, I further wanted to ensure these documents were *credible* and free from typographical or consistency errors. Last, it was imperative to ensure the documents were all *representative* of critical teacher leadership and its underlying transformative professionalism, the phenomena under investigation. Documents that embodied these characteristics would be used to contextualize the critical teacher leadership phenomena practiced by participants in this study, broadening the understanding of transformative professional ideology in Manitoba.

Inclusion Criteria

When reviewing documents for scoping and/or analytic purposes, Bowen (2009) offered a simple three stage process for understanding the content of documents: (a) skimming (a superficial examination of the document and the content contained); (b) reading (a more thorough examination of the document and its corresponding content); and (c) interpreting (the formal analysis stage to interpretive the meaning of data collected). I ultimately searched the websites of the participating school division, the Manitoba Teachers' Society (the regulating professional body), the Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, and provincial legislation, engaging in both the skimming and reading stages of Bowen's protocol. Upon assessing the authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning of these texts, I included the following documents for analysis, as presented in Table 2, followed by a corresponding brief description of the documents and their relevance to this inquiry. It was my intent to engage in an in-depth exploration of these documents in relation to teacher-participants' critical teacher leadership practices in the field. The Tri-Council Policy of Canada (2022) notes: "Research does not require REB review when it relies exclusively on information that is: … in the public domain

and the individuals to whom the information refers have no reasonable expectation of privacy" (n.p.). As such, permissions and ethics approval were not required, as these documents are accessible via the professional associations' corresponding websites for public viewing and accountability purposes.

Table 2.

Legislative, Policy, and Resource Educational Documents

Provincial Government ***(Manitoba Legislation)***	
Document	***Section(s) Analyzed***
Public Schools Act (2023)	Part VII Teachers: - Sections 91-96
The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act (2024)	The Society - Sections 2-3 Code of Conduct - Section 12
Education Administration Act (2023)	General Responsibilities - Sections 39-40
Manitoba Human Rights Code (2023)	Introduction - Section 1: Definitions Part II: Prohibited Conduct and Special Programs - Section 9: Discrimination - Section 11: Affirmative action permitted - Section 13: Discrimination in service, accommodation - Section 18: Discriminatory signs and statements - Section 19: Harassment - Section 20: Reprisals
Provincial Government ***Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (MEECL)***	
Mamàhtawisiwin: Indigenous Education Policy Framework (2022)	- Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With (p. 7) - Policy Direct and Conceptual Framework Context (pp. 8-9) - Conceptual Foundation for an Indigenous Education System (pp. 15-18) - Conceptual Framework for Implementing an Indigenous-Inclusive Education System (pp. 19-30)
Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse	- Introduction and Context (pp. 1-5) - Legal and Policy Framework (pp. 7-9) - Understanding Trans and Gender Diverse Identities and Expressions (pp. 11-16)

Students in MB Schools (2018)	-- Implications for Educators (p. 16) - Creating Affirming Schools for All (pp. 17-21) -- Roles and Responsibilities: Educators (pp. 19-20) - Guidelines for Supporting and Affirming Trans and Gender Diverse Students (pp. 23-34) - A Whole School Approach to Integrating Trans and Gender Diverse Students (pp. 35-36)
Creating Racist-Free Schools (2017)	- Racism in the Canadian Mileu (pp. 1-2) - Introduction (pp. 3-5) - Racism and FNMI Peoples (pp. 7-8; 13-14; 20) - Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (pp. 21-24) - Recognizing and Accepting Challenges that Remain (p. 25) - Recognizing Racism (pp. 27-31) - What are Critical/Courageous Conversations (pp. 23-40) - Call to Action (p. 41)
Safe and Caring Schools: Provincial Code of Conduct (2017)	- Safe and Caring School Environment (p. 1) - Safe Schools - Legislative Framework (p. 2) - Provincial Code of Conduct (pp. 4-8) - Appendix B: Rights and Responsibilities regarding Student Discipline (pp. 11-14) -- Responsibilities and Authority of Teachers (p. 12)
The Division	
Divisional Policies (n.d.)	- Teacher Function Policy - Equity Policy - Anti-Racism Policy - Indigenous Education Policy - 2SLGBTQ+ Policy - Safe and Caring Schools Policy - Professional Learning Framework Policy - Student Discipline Policy - Assessment Policy
Manitoba Teachers' Society	
Provincial Collective Agreement (2024)	Article 6: Working Conditions (pp. 31-34) - 6.01 Preparation Time Allocation (p. 31) - 6.02 Length of Instructional Day (p. 31) - 6.03 Meal Period (p. 32) - 6.04 Extra-Curricular Activities (pp. 32-33) - 6.07 Students with Additional Learning Needs (p. 34)
Constitution, Bylaws, and Policies (2024)	Bylaw I: The Manitoba Teachers' Society - Part I: Mission, Objects and Goals (pp. 15-16) - Part III: Membership (pp. 21-28) - Part VII: Committees and Task Force (pp. 36-43) Bylaw IV Professional Practice - Part I: The Teaching Profession in Manitoba (p. 85) - Part II: Code of Professional Practice (pp. 85-86) - Part III: Professional Misconduct (pp. 87-92)

	Policy I: Policies and Procedures - Part III: Individual Political Rights and Society Political Action (p. 119) Policy II: Society Belief Statements - Part I: Interpretation (pp. 134-135) - Part II Indigenous Voice and Action (p. 135) - Part III Collective Bargaining (pp. 135-137) - Part IV Curriculum and Teaching (pp. 137-143) - Part V Education Finance (p. 144) - Part VI Equity and Social Justice (pp. 145-146) - Part VIII Professional Development (pp. 149-153) - Part IX Teacher Education and Certification (pp. 152-153) - Part XI Teacher Conduct (pp. 155-156)

School Division Policies. The divisional policies are presented on the participating school division's website. I reviewed all the policy documents, searching for content that pertained to the tenets of critical teacher leadership phenomena and/or transformative professional ideology (e.g., practices relating to leadership, equity and social justice, professional learning and development, collegiality, etc.). After reviewing these divisional documents, I only included nine documents for analysis: teacher function, equity, anti-racism, professional learning and development, Indigenous education, 2SLGBTQIA+ education, student discipline, assessment, and safety and inclusivity. These policies outlined prescribed roles, responsibilities, and behaviours expected of employed teachers. Further, these policies ranged in textual length (some being a single paragraph, while others were around three pages in content). To bolster the confidentiality of the school division, specific policies are not identified in findings chapters, but rather I quote divisional policies broadly (e.g., "the divisional policies state …"). The textual content from these divisional documents that was deemed relevant (as outlined in Table 2) was extracted into a MS Word document for later thematic analysis.

Manitoba Teachers' Society. The first document from the Society was the *Manitoba Teachers' Society (2024) Constitution, Bylaws, and Policies* document. This document was

retrieved through the Manitoba Teachers' Society website. The document contains information relating to democratic governance of the professional association, belief and value statements of the Society, roles and responsibilities of teachers within the professional regulatory group, and the mandatory Code of Professional Practice required of all members at all times. This is an evolving document that is subject to change depending on revised legislation and/or resolutions passed by members of the Manitoba Teachers' Society at Provincial Council.

The second document from the Society was the *Manitoba Teachers' Provincial Collective Agreement (2024).* This document was retrieved from the Manitoba Teachers' Society website and included information regarding teachers' salaries, benefits, occupational obligations and expectations, and other details regarding teachers' professional roles and responsibilities. It is a signed agreement between the Manitoba Teachers' Society (the professional regulatory group) and the Manitoba School Boards Association (representing the employers). This document was chosen for inclusion as it contextualizes teachers' occupational expectations, work hours, prescribed lunch hours and breaks, and other information relating to when/how critical teacher leadership practices may manifest. The textual content from these documents that was deemed relevant (as outlined in Table 2) was extracted into a MS Word document for thematic analysis.

Manitoba Government. I retrieved documents from the Manitoba government websites, including legislative documents, as well as educational/resource documents from Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Manitoba Provincial Legislation. The legislative documents: *Public Schools Act* (2023), *Manitoba Teachers' Society Act* (2024), *Education Administration Act* (2023), and *Manitoba Human Rights Code* (2023) all outline the legal responsibilities of Manitoba teachers specifically

relating to instruction, evaluation and reporting, public accountability, ensuring students' safety, and adherence to the Professional Code of Conduct (which explicitly mandates Manitoba teachers to uphold the *Manitoba Human Rights Code*). These legislative documents are in continual flux pending legislative amendments. The textual content that was deemed relevant from these legislative documents (as outlined in Table 2) was extracted into a MS Word document for thematic analysis.

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning* (MEECL) *Documents. In addition to provincial legislation, I retrieved three documents from the MEECL website: (a) *Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students* (2018); (b) *Creating Racism-Free Schools through Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race* (2017): (c) *Mamàhtawisiwin: Indigenous Education Policy Framework* (2022); and (d) *Safe and Caring Schools: Provincial Code of Conduct* (2017).

The first document from MEECL, *Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students* (2018), was developed through the Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning department, with advice and consultation from community organizations, scholars and professors, medical professionals, staff from the Manitoba Teachers' Society, school administration, and other community voices. The intent of the document is premised on cultivating safe, welcoming, and inclusive school environments and serves as a public educational resource for teachers, administrators, and school boards to facilitate these efforts. This educational/resource document guides teachers and other educational staff on supporting trans and gender diverse students, families, and community members in school contexts and provides insights into queer perspectives and cultural identities.

The second document from MEECL, *Creating Racism-Free Schools through Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race* (2017), was developed in consultation with

representation from Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, MEECL, Manitoba Association of Parent Councils, Manitoba School Boards Association, and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. The purpose of the document is to "recognize the multi-faceted nature of racism in our land" (p. 1), informing and supporting public school teachers and administrators in cultivating safe and inclusive school environments through identifying and ameliorating individual and systemic racism. Manitoba teachers' roles, responsibilities, and expectations regarding anti-racism practices are outlined in this document.

The third document from MEECL, *Mamàhtawisiwin: Indigenous Education Policy Framework* (2022), was "developed in collaboration with Elders/Knowledge Keepers, interdepartmental government working groups of public servant representatives, and over 100 individuals from across the province" (p. 6). The creation and vision of the document is inspired by the *Calls to Action* outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), specifically aiming as a resource to assist Manitoba teachers in incorporating Indigenous language, pedagogies, perspectives, and culture into their everyday professional practices. The document notes the historical adversities faced by Indigenous communities, but also highlights the triumphs and resistances of Indigenous peoples. In addition to serving as an educational resource, there are sections outlining how Manitoba teachers should augment their practice through professional learning, diversifying pedagogies, and building relationships with Indigenous community members.

The fourth document, *Safe and Caring Schools: Provincial Code of Conduct* (2017), is published by MEECL but does not specify individual authors and/or affiliated development groups or stakeholders involved in its publication. Regardless, the document serves as a resource to support individual schools and the division's policy development regarding the cultivation of

safe and caring schools. The document provides references to relevant provincial legislation and offers prescribed guidance to teachers and administrators regarding their roles and responsibilities in this collective effort.

The textual content from these four documents that were deemed relevant (as outlined in Table 2) were extracted into a MS Word document for thematic analysis.

Excluded Documents

While there is a plethora of insightful education-related documents in the Manitoba context, I ultimately elected to exclude various documents from the MTS, MEECL, and government websites. From the MTS website, I excluded social media posts, website content, and other documents that I deemed were not necessarily *representative* of official positions on teachers' leadership practice or transformative professionalism. From the MEECL, I decided to exclude provincial curriculum frameworks as I deemed the documents to dilute the focus of the explored phenomena (as the content was wide ranging from Kindergarten to Grade 12 across a multitude of subject disciplines). While these documents were unquestionably *authentic* and *credible*, I did not evaluate these documents to be ultimately *representative* of the focus of this research project. Further, I decided to exclude various other documents, such as *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula* (2004). The rationale for such exclusion pertained in part to data saturation (as I deemed other documents to be sufficient in generating insights on teachers' professional roles in relation to decolonizing practice in schools) and/or the date of publication (as this 2004 document was published over 20 years ago). Further, I decided to exclude the recent MEECL publication, *Manitoba School Leadership Framework* (2024), as it nearly exclusively focused on school principals' *formal*, position-based leadership practice, negating any focus or discussion regarding teachers' *informal* professional roles and

responsibilities in relation to leadership. While this document was certainly insightful into leadership practice in the Manitoba context, it did not align with the purposes of this grassroots leadership study. Investigation into this document may be worthwhile for future inquiries, particularly problematizing the discourse of formal, position-based educational leadership language in Manitoba.

Research Process and Timeline

This participatory study commenced throughout the 2022/2023 school year and followed a five-phase module: (a) introductory planning meeting; (b) critical teacher leadership and photoVOICE; (c) individual reflection discussions; (d) group reflection discussions; and (e) data analysis.

Phase 1: Introductory Planning Meeting

It was of paramount importance to cultivate a teacher leader action team rooted in compassion, reciprocity, and dialogue. The objective of Phase 1 was to establish a positive relationship with my colleagues, engage in a brief overview of the research project and discuss participants' responsibilities, engage in a brief discussion over our collective understanding and experiences in leading for equity and social justice in schools, introduce excerpts of educational policies on leadership, provide an overview of photoVOICE techniques and discuss our action plan. The initial intent was for the entire team to meet via the digital online platform Zoom. However, due to conflicting availability and inconsistent teacher schedules, three sessions were hosted to orient teacher-participants with the research project, and we were never able to congregate as a full team.

I began this session with brief introductions, introducing myself, my experiences in critical teacher leadership, and asked colleagues to share about their perspectives and

experiences. The intent was to cultivate camaraderie, trust, and relationships prior to embarking upon this project. Many of my colleagues stated that they were aware of my previous engagements in Manitoba education. My colleagues briefly shared their experiences, perspectives on being a teacher leader for social justice, wonderings, and interests in the project. Team building was simplistic, whereby we briefly introduced ourselves, our teaching backgrounds, our experiences in (informal) leadership, and shared why we were interested in the project. Teachers signed and verbally agreed to an oath of confidentiality not to share or distribute the contents with any member external to the team. As educational professionals and members of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, teachers frequently have access to highly confidential information relating to students; as such, teachers have a professional understanding of the importance of safeguarding sensitive information. Following introductory conversations, I shared my research objectives and research questions that were approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board.

After becoming acquainted, I shared that this was a participatory research project and that participants were to engage in action research. I briefly mentioned the qualities of Anderson and Herr's (2005) action research helix of *plan*, *act*, *observe*, and *reflect*, but I did not unpack the tenets of action research in thorough, systematic detail. I emphasized the concepts of *planning* their leadership initiatives, engaging in *action* for social transformation, *observing* the perceived impacts of their interactions, and that this was a participatory project whereby all participants could *reflect* on their experiences and provide input on the findings. The rationale for a succinct overview of action research was due to concern pertaining to the amount of information to disseminate and limited time. As such, I followed my professional judgement and discussed the concept fluidly. Consequently, the study emerged in a bricolage approach, beyond the templates

of traditional scopes of PAR, and resulted in a more exploratory qualitative inquiry of teachers' experiences in, and perspectives on, engaging in critical teacher leadership (rather than an explicit documentation of the iterative action research cycles).

All members had the same roles but encouraged fellow teacher-participants to pursue their own initiatives to address the needs and/or interests in their school communities. As the intent of the research project was for teachers to engage in grassroots leadership practice for equity and social justice, it was imperative to ensure all members felt confident in their conceptual understanding of *social justice*. I read a perspective espoused by Theoharis (2007), that social justice leaders "make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions … central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (p. 233). My colleagues similarly shared their interpretation of the social justice concept, why it was important to their practices, and the nature of leadership initiatives they have engaged in.

Following the informal discussion of equity and social justice, I provided concise excerpts of educational law, the code of conduct from the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and policy documents pertaining to educational leadership from the participating school division. I invited team members to contemplate throughout the project on how their actions in teacher leadership for equity and social justice may be impacted by these laws and policy regulations. My colleagues expressed little interest in discussing educational policy, so we proceeded to the photoVOICE component of the study.

Last, I introduced members to the concept of photoVOICE, following the procedural guidance of Sutton-Brown (2014). Sutton-Brown explains the tenets of the introductory phase meeting:

> The initial group meeting serves three main purposes: to introduce the participants to one another, to explain the methodology of photovoice, and to discuss the responsibilities and risks of being a photographer. Photovoice is discussed with a brief overview of its theoretical premise and examples of past projects. It also informs the potential participants of the commitment and intent toward policy change so that they are aware of this primary outcome and what their role may involve. Also included in the discussion are the responsibilities associated with photographing people and events in the community, particularly with respect to the risks, the power, and the ethics involved. (p. 173)

During this meeting, I introduced the tenets of Wang & Burris (1997) concept of photoVOICE (voicing our individual and collective experiences), explaining how photo generation may illuminate our perspectives and experiences engaging teacher leadership for equity and social justice. Further, I reminded my colleagues of the visibilizing nature of photos and that all photos must not contain other human subjects (e.g., students, colleagues). Last, the theme of teacher leadership for social justice, which underpinned this interaction-related inquiry, was further discussed through brainstorming of hypothetical images that may be generated in relation to their critical practices (e.g., school spaces, classroom resources, etc.). Through photoVOICE, participants are considered the experts on the topic of inquiry and rely on their everyday knowledge and expertise to guide their practices (Tsang, 2020). Teachers were invited to either engage in new leadership experiences or continue leadership experiences they were presently involved with before beginning this project. I discussed my own leadership plans that I intended to pursue in my school community as a part of this interactive project. Members of the team were ultimately invited to explore a wide diversity of social justice interests and/or issues in their

immediate school communities (e.g., issues relating to access to gender inclusive bathrooms, anti-racist efforts, decolonization practices, peer mentoring, club initiatives, adjusting school timetables, advocacy for breakfast programs, and so forth). If requested, I assured my colleagues that I would be available to assist in formulating an (inter)action plan, via email, phone call, or Zoom meeting to support their efforts. As teachers engaged in leadership practices, they were asked to photo-document artefacts that illuminated the nature of their collegial interactions (e.g., spaces and/or resources corresponding to committee meetings). Photo documentation of spaces, resources, materials, and so forth was generated to visualize our engagement in grassroots leadership practices and to critically reflect upon our experiences. Each member of the participatory team was advised to engage in photo documentation over a period of three months and to upload their digital files to our shared and secure password-protected UM-licensed OneDrive network.

Phase 2: Critical Teacher Leadership and PhotoVOICE

Following the introductory meeting, teachers were invited to go out to their school communities to engage in either new and/or pre-existing (and ongoing) leadership experiences. Teachers photographed places, objects, and artefacts that were reflective of their experiences in informal leadership for equity and social justice. This phase of the research project was inspired by the *act* and *observe* stages of Anderson and Herr's (2005) action research helix, as the leadership interactions constituted *action*, while the photovoice documentation served as *observation*. Teacher-participants engaged in several individual, though unspecified and undocumented, (inter)action cycles throughout this phase. Many of the teacher-participants did not engage in one leadership initiative but rather oscillated among various collegial projects. During this phase, teacher-participants informally *planned*, (inter)*acted*, *observed*, and *reflected*

on various teacher leadership initiatives (e.g., mentoring a colleague). Teacher-participants had three months to fluidly engage in this phase and engaged in varying numbers of individual interaction cycles, depending on their interest and/or other miscellaneous variables. Teacher documentation was not of the specific details of each individual cycle, but rather of their perspectives on their perceived impacts of leading for social justice in their school communities. Teacher-participants also had complete autonomy in deciding their personal leadership objectives to be facilitated within their school communities. To ensure confidentiality, teachers were advised not to photograph others or items that may lead to the identification of others. There were ultimately 40 photos generated by our team of seven teacher-participants.

Phase 3: Individual Reflection Session

Following the teacher leadership interaction and photoVOICE experiences, teacher-participants were invited to participate in an individual reflection session with me and unpack their experiences. The intent of this phase of the research project was inspired by the *reflection* stage of Herr and Anderson's (2005) action research helix. During this phase, we reflected upon our experiences engaging in the photovoice activity, delving into the meaning behind the visual representations of equity and social injustices, and/or impediments to teacher leadership practices in our school communities (see Appendix E). All members of the participatory team engaged in the individual reflection session, describing and analyzing photos generated (Sutton-Brown, 2014; Wang & Burris, 1997), and unpacking perspectives and experiences in critical teacher leadership through in-depth individual reflection discussions. These individual reflections lasted approximately one hour and were video/audio recorded via the UM-licensed digital platform Zoom. I textually transcribed these sessions and uploaded the texts to a UM-licensed OneDrive account where all members of the participatory team had access.

Phase 4: Group Reflection Session

Through focus group-style reflection discussions, all members of the participatory team were invited to elaborate in greater detail upon their experiences engaging leadership for equity and social justice in Manitoba schools. Like scheduling inconsistencies documented in Phase 1, we were unable to meet in totality as a large group to reflect. In lieu of this, two small group discussions were organized. Some of these group reflections consisted of only two teacher-participants (myself and a colleague). Consequently, the nature of these reflection discussion sessions was approached via a conversational method, dialogically unpacking questions and experiences together. Through semi-structured questions in a focus group-style format (McMillan, 2012), we reflected upon our own professional learnings, development, impact in our school communities, and stories pertaining to social and/or structural barriers we navigated (see Appendix F). Due to extenuating circumstances, two of the seven teacher-participants were unable to participate in a group reflection discussion. However, one of these teacher-participants elected to email a textual response to questions, which was integrated into the thematic analysis. This was also inspired by the *reflection* stage of Herr and Anderson's (2005) action research helix. Similar to the process of Phase 3, the group reflections were approximately one hour in duration and were video/audio recorded via the UM-licensed digital platform Zoom. I textually transcribed these two sessions and uploaded the texts to a UM-licensed OneDrive account where all members of the participatory team had access. The textual reflection submitted via email by the one teacher-participant unable to attend was also uploaded to this shared account.

Phase 5: Data Analysis

Upon the completion of the leadership interactions and previous research phases, all participatory team members were invited to a co-analysis session in June 2023 to interpret the

textual and photo data and to review our divisional policy documents. Throughout the duration of the project, all team members had access to each other's textual discussion transcripts and the visual data generated. This data was secured via a UM-licensed password-protected MS OneDrive network. Ultimately, three of the seven teacher-participants attended this session. However, fellow teacher-participants requested to postpone the co-analysis meeting as there was: (a) a substantive amount of data shared; and (b) teacher-participants expressed limited energy to embark upon this task (as it was in June and coincided with the conclusion of the school year). All teacher-participants were emailed the postponement update and were invited to meet later as a group, individually, and/or submit feedback via email. I also reminded my colleagues that their participation was welcome but was also voluntary and not compulsory. It was imperative to respect the teacher-participants' agency and decision-making regarding their capacity of engagement in the project (particularly cognizant of contextual workplace factors in a post-pandemic environment). I followed up with teacher-participants after the summer holiday, but there was limited interest expressed in participatory co-analysis. As such, I embarked upon reflexive thematic analysis independently, but would send periodic updates to the participatory team of my preliminary findings and invited them to voice their input with the intent to integrate their perspectives into the final analysis. This was evidenced throughout the thesis writing process, as I shared via the online MS OneDrive the findings chapters with the participatory team (soliciting feedback for revision). There were minimal responses, however, throughout the co-analysis phase. Cognizant of the relatively high level of engagement in a participatory project (which spanned several months and involved interactive leadership practices) and general teacher exhaustion coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic (Laidlaw, 2023; 2024; Sokal et al., 2020; 2021) the attrition of engagement was not necessarily surprising. Ultimately, I engaged in

data analysis primarily independently. My thematic analytic processes are explained in further detail in the next section.

Data Analysis

The primary modes of data analysis were through a reflexive analysis of the textual data via thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022; Saldaña, 2013; Schwandt, 2001). The textual data utilized for thematic analysis included the textual transcriptions of the photoVOICE and individual reflection sessions, the photos generated, the group reflection discussions, and these were contextualized with education document texts.

Thematic Analysis

Textual data drawn from the photoVOICE and individual reflection discussion, textual transcription of photos generated, group reflection discussions, and education documents were coded, categorized, and thematically analyzed to derive meaning from the phenomena. Although thematic analysis has become a widespread practice in the social sciences, there is no universally agreed upon approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke defined this approach as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (p. 78). When interpreting phenomena, themes may be categorized as major codes (broader, general categories) or sub-codes (divisions among the major codes) (McMillan, 2012). Saldaña (2013) defined a code as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). Schwandt (2001) identified three different types of coding strategies: (a) a priori content-specific schemes (codes that are inspired by theoretical frameworks or pre-existing literature before analysis); (b) a priori non-content-specific scheme (codes inspired by theoretical frameworks or pre-existing literature, yet not

necessarily specific to the phenomena investigated); and (c) a posteriori context-sensitive schemes (codes generated from the immediate data without prior theoretical frameworks or literature influencing their generation). For this research study, I generated themes both inductively (generating codes, categories, and themes from teacher-participants' reflective words) and deductively (identifying themes inspired by the conceptual framework) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Examples of inductive codes included "tired", "pride", "collaboration", "dialogue", among other forms of data that were generated from the thematic analysis process. Examples of deductive codes included "leadership", "teach[ing]", "autonomy", among other pre-informed concepts drawn from my critical teacher leadership conceptual framework. For thematic analysis, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) six phase process: (a) familiarizing myself with the data (highly immersing myself in the data by personally transcribing reflection discussions and repeatedly revisiting and re-reading the texts); (b) generating initial codes (producing units of codes that identify various features of the data); (c) searching for themes (sorting the various codes into prospective overarching unifying themes); (d) reviewing themes (revisiting and testing the viability of the generated themes by re-visiting and re-reading the data set); (e) defining and naming themes (identifying and finalizing the essence of the nature of each theme); and (f) producing the report (disseminating the themes generating). Charts outlining the codes, categories, and themes I generated are presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. I engaged in the thematic analysis process through two sequences of Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) thematic analysis approach.

Thematic Analysis Sequence 1

The first sequence was an in-depth analysis of our experiences in critical teacher leadership, exploring the impacts of interactions, photos and perspectives shared by my

colleagues, challenges encountered, and other general information relating to social phenomena. For this first sequence, only the photoVOICE and individual reflection discussions, photo textual transcriptions, and group reflection discussions were analyzed. The findings generated during this thematic analysis sequence were disseminated in Chapter 4 (pertaining to Research Question 1, documenting our perceived impact of our critical teacher leadership practices) and Chapter 5 (outlining the findings relating to Research Question 2, unpacking stories that revealed the social and/or structural challenges impeding our practices).

Thematic Analysis Sequence 2

For the second thematic analysis sequence, I utilized the data sources utilized in the first thematic analysis sequence, but further contextualized these data sets through utilizing the educational documents to explore a broader understanding of the transformative professionalism ideologies associated with critical teacher leadership in the Manitoba context. Through this second thematic analysis, all data sets were thematically analyzed together (Braun & Clarke, 2006), but also following Dalgish et al. (2020) READ method for the document analysis component: (a) ready your materials (setting inclusion/exclusion criteria, collecting documents, becoming acquainted with the content of the texts, and so forth); (b) extract (extracting relevant textual content from these documents and inputting it into a Microsoft Word document); (c) analyze (through the generation of codes, categories, and themes); and (d) distill findings (presenting the results in findings chapters). The textual transcriptions of individual and group reflections and photos were thematically analyzed alongside the textual content retrieved from these educational documents. The findings shared in Chapter 6 were generated through this second thematic analysis sequence of all data sources and answer Research Question 3.

Reflexivity in Analysis

As I recognize the fluid nature of interpretation in critical research and how positionality may influence my ontological and epistemological assumptions, it was important to be transparent in my own research reflexivity. Reflexivity is a discussion on how researchers navigated their own inherent biases, values, and lived experiences throughout the analytical process (Behar-Horenstein, 2018). Creswell (2007) noted that all writing is "positioned" (p. 179) and reflective of our own social, cultural, gender, class, and individual political orientations. In Chapter 1, I unpacked in greater detail my statement of positionality regarding my identity, lived experiences, and personal socio-political convictions. Research is never neutral nor apolitical (Freire, 1970/2000; Giroux, 2010), so I do not purport findings drawn from my project to be generated independent of my own positional stances. What I prioritized as being key issues from the analysis were undoubtedly interconnected with my own lived experiences. As a white cisgender male, there are innumerable privileges I have been afforded throughout my life, the magnitude of which I cannot fully fathom. I have never encountered racialized expressions of hate nor been impeded by Euro-Western systems. My analytical interpretations of racism and ongoing colonization are consequently limited. As a queer male who has struggled with the near totality of my life with self-loathing and fear due to prospective religious and/or societal repercussions, I acknowledge my own vested interest in supporting youth to actualize and embrace their authentic selves. Last, as a teacher who is actively engaged in union activities and is sympathetic to the labour movement broadly, it is very conceivable that my motivations are somewhat intertwined in my research trajectories. Cognizant of these admissions, all data generated has been accessible to all members of my diverse participatory team, efforts to engage in co-analysis have been continually extended, and I have provided my colleagues with several updates regarding proposed findings throughout the research process. Although the parameters of

my own lived experiences may be construed as a limitation, it was also a notable strength as I have documented my capacity (and willingness) to be vulnerable, empathize and sympathize with others' oppressive struggles, and express humility in acknowledging my enormous privilege. As a teacher who actively engages in critical leadership practices and is immediately affected by the social and/or structural conditions that directly inform my professional practice, I have a personal stake in ameliorating prospective inequities for myself and others. Analytical interpretations have been crafted through my positional lived experiences and my *insider* knowledge of the Manitoba education system.

Ethical Considerations

Being attentive to the ethical intricacies of teacher-participants' facilitating critical leadership practices in their schools (and subsequently, places of employment) was of imperative importance. As such, ensuring transparency and active communication throughout all phases of the research project was conscientiously exercised. In September 2022, I emailed the Assistant Superintendent requesting permission to conduct research in the division, providing information on the nature of the study, and included the Participant Recruitment form (Appendix H). In September 2022, I was approved, and an invitational email was sent to all teaching staff. The nature of the study, details of the five phases, prospective risks and benefits, and other general information were comprehensively outlined in the participant consent form (Appendix H). Throughout all phases of data generation, teacher-participants were reminded that they could elect to participate in all, some, or none of the procedural aspects of the study, pending their level of comfort and/or interest. Acknowledging the inherently visual nature of photoVOICE (and potentially identifying aspects of such dissemination), participants were encouraged to only generate photos they felt comfortable publicizing. Further, participants were contacted via email

to share the evolving stages of the thesis, soliciting teacher-participants to confirm photos and content chosen for dissemination (including the capacity to withdraw photos, make suggestions for alternative photos to be selected, or offer general constructive feedback on altering the nature of findings). All data generated was stored on an online University of Manitoba-licensed Microsoft OneDrive account. Access to all data generated included myself, my research advisor, and all teacher-participants of the study. This participatory research project was approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board 2 at the Fort Garry Campus (Appendix A) (protocol number HE2022-0048).

Trustworthiness of Findings

Ensuring the trustworthiness of research findings was of paramount importance. There were very specific aspects to be attentive to, including the general nature of interpretive inquiry, as well as the emancipatory considerations of engaging research through a critical paradigm while utilizing participatory research methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have been highly influential in establishing guidelines for measuring the quality of interpretive inquiry research. These scholars eventually proposed the following tenets for assessing the quality of qualitative research studies: (a) credibility (being confident that findings are just); (b) transferability (the ability to demonstrate that findings are applicable in other, similar contexts); (c) dependability (the ability to demonstrate that findings may be replicated); and (d) confirmability (the ability to demonstrate that findings were drawn independent of researchers' biases). While these tenets have been foundational in the discussion of ensuring the trustworthiness of findings in qualitative research, the field has continued to evolve as scholars have continued to broaden the discussion of trustworthiness.

Lincoln (1995) expanded the conversation on trustworthiness in qualitative research, suggesting that the assessment should also include additional qualifiers, such as: *positionality* (also referred to as standpoint epistemology, the belief that researchers' must be conscious and transparent of their own lived experiences, as author objectivity is considered a barrier to quality); *community* (the quality in which social research is reflective of communities goals and interests); *voice* (the transparency with which researchers incorporate local perspectives in the analysis and dissemination of findings); *reflexivity* (the ability to empathize and understand others' lived experiences); *reciprocity* (the degree in which researchers have cultivated relationships with participants to positively contribute to their needs); and *sacredness* (the manner in which researchers are attentive to participants sense of humanity, dignity, and interpersonal respect).

Pratt et al. (2022) note that scholars who incorporate a methodological bricolage may encompass a wide array of methods, data sources, designs, analytic approaches, etc., and that this may make it difficult to demonstrate trustworthiness to readers. For this study, I adopted the recommendations by Pratt et al. (2022) to demonstrate trustworthiness within a bricolage approach to qualitative research, through exemplifying the qualities of: (a) competence; (b) integrity; and (c) benevolence. Pratt et al. drew these concepts from the work by Mayer et al. (1995), where these scholars argued these three qualities to be essential to cultivate a sense of trustworthiness within organizational research contexts. I outline the characteristics of these three qualities below and explain how I ensured trustworthiness in each domain.

Competence

In relation to a bricolage approach, Pratt et al. (2022) define competence as demonstrating adequate knowledge and expertise to design and implement a study that may

encompass a wide array of analytic strategies. I demonstrated competence in this study through my thorough unpacking of the literature and conscientious effort to ensure the data methods, sources, and analytic approaches were all epistemologically and ontologically congruent. Further, as a teacher serving a dual role in this participatory research project, I have an expert *insider* knowledge of Manitoba school systems and have the unique competence to conduct this inquiry that many other scholars would not necessarily possess. However, I acknowledge the prospective limitation in my competence as a doctoral student, recognizing that I am an emerging researcher and have much knowledge and expertise yet to acquire. Regardless, my extensive documentation of the literature, diligent study and reflection, and possession of *insider* knowledge of Manitoba schools demonstrate a high degree of competence for this local, interaction-oriented participatory study.

Integrity

Pratt et al. (2022) describe integrity as providing evidence that the various methods and analytic moves "cobbled together" do cohesively align and are adequately explained. These scholars provide the example of a scholar who decides to alter their study by utilizing both positivist and interpretive methods within the same study; this is potentially possible, but such changes should be described and justified to demonstrate that the amendment was ontologically and epistemologically compatible. For this study, I incorporated methods and analytic approaches from both a qualitative interpretivist and participatory paradigm, both from the onset and "cobbled together" in the field. Ideally, participatory research projects should be participative at all stages in a project (MacDonald, 2012; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). However, as a doctoral student who navigated pandemic-related protocols (e.g., virtual meetings only), this was not necessarily feasible. As such, I predetermined the general research design and data

sources. The intent was to engage in participatory co-analysis, but unfortunately there was little enthusiasm expressed by my colleagues for this process. This actuality is consistent with previous documentations of attrition in co-analysis in participatory projects (MacDonald, 2012; Reilly, 2010). To "cobble together" this occurrence in the field, I analyzed most of the data independently, which is more consistent with an interpretivist than a participatory paradigm. Regardless, this study exclusively employed interpretive qualitative methods and rejects positivist epistemological assumptions, tenets consistent with most participatory projects (Clark et al., 2020; Torre et al., 2015). There is no universal approach to participatory projects (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Vaughn & Jacques, 2020) as each project may range on a spectrum of participation (Herr & Anderson, 2005). While I recognize these limitations, I argue that I was still able to maintain an elevated level of integrity through my approach.

Benevolence

The last quality of a trustworthy methodological bricolage is the demonstration of benevolence in the research process and findings. As qualitative research studies are approached through inductive means, Pratt et al. (2022) describe benevolence as "stay[ing] faithful to the insights provided by informants" and that the researcher "took the time to understand the 'voice' of those studied" (p. 221). As qualitative research is highly interpretive, it is essential to be authentically benevolent in a bricolage. While there was a limitation in co-analysis with my colleagues, I made very concerted efforts to be communicative, transparent, and invitational throughout the project. This was evidenced in ensuring all data was co-shared alongside my colleagues (e.g., reflection transcripts, photos), sending reflection transcripts to be peer debriefed to ensure accuracy, inviting my colleagues to engage in a co-analysis session (or to contact me if interested in co-analyzing alongside me in the future), sending my colleagues updates on themes

as they were generated (with invitation to contact me for amendments or offer their perspectives), and even sharing my initial draft of dissertation chapters (again, soliciting invitation to revise, omit, or offer inputs). There was limited engagement in these processes, but regardless, I made a concerted effort to demonstrate benevolence by trying to ensure all teachers' voices were accurately accounted for.

Conclusion

As the intent for this research project was to ameliorate social inequities and injustices impacting public schools, it was clear that this methodological bricolage of the tenets of participatory action research and broad qualitative interpretive approaches was suitable for the nature of this transformative study. To ethically address such challenges, change must be achieved *with* teachers, not *for* teachers. As such, I served a dual role as both a participant and researcher and engaged in all phases of the research project alongside my teacher-participant colleagues: practicing critical teacher leadership in Manitoba schools, photo documenting the social interactions and impacts, reflecting upon the experiences, and thematically analyzing data generated. The next chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the perceived impacts of our critical, informal leadership practices in their corresponding school communities.

Chapter 4: Emancipatory Impacts of Critical Teacher Leadership Interactions

In this chapter, I provided a comprehensive outline of findings relating to the first research question: *What were our perceived impacts of our critical teacher leadership practices within our school communities?* Findings were generated from our engagement in the Phase 2: Critical Teacher Leadership and PhotoVOICE component of this participatory research study. These leadership (inter)actions occurred between September and February 2023. During this time, we engaged in a myriad of varying critical teacher leadership practices in our school communities and photo documented our experiences. We subsequently participated in individual reflection sessions, whereby we critically reflected upon our experiences by reviewing, describing, and analyzing our photos to generate meaning relating to our informal grassroots leadership experiences. Following this, we engaged in group reflection sessions where we listened to each other's perceptions of the impact of our leadership (inter)actions and generated insights into professional practices. For the group reflection discussions, we all had shared access to each other's photos generated and individual reflection transcripts and had the opportunity to read and learn from our colleagues' perspectives. All seven of us on the participatory team of teachers engaged in the Phase 3: Individual Reflection Session. Six of the seven members of our participatory team offered their perspectives in Phase 4: Group Reflection sessions, but one was unable to participate due to a personal matter. The thematic analysis and findings were generated based on our photoVOICE and individual reflection textual transcripts, group reflection textual transcripts, and photo textual transcripts. The codes, categories, and themes created are shared in Table 3.

Table 3

Codes, Categories, and Themes of Critical Teacher Leadership Impacts

Codes	Categories	Themes
■ Mentorship ■ Teaching ■ Planning ■ Critical pedagogies ■ Culturally responsive pedagogies ■ Lead/Leadership ■ Grassroots leadership ■ Shared leadership ■ Supporting students ■ Supporting colleagues ■ Supportive administration ■ Committees ■ Clubs ■ Collaborating ■ Partnerships ■ Collegiality ■ Interactions ■ Context-specific ■ Collegiality ■ Dialogue ■ School events ■ Fundraisers ■ Assemblies ■ Autonomy ■ Decision-making ■ Teacher voice ■ Planning ■ Volunteering ■ Extra-curricular ■ Professional learning community (PLC) ■ Professional development ■ Meetings ■ Advocating for self ■ Advocating for students ■ Advocating for colleagues ■ Resisting ■ Challenging ■ Personal growth	Leadership through teaching ■ Teaching ■ Autonomy ■ Decision-making ■ Critical pedagogies ■ Culturally responsive pedagogies ■ Planning ■ Shared leadership ■ Grassroots leadership ■ Context-specific ■ Mentorship ■ Supporting students ■ Professional learning community (PLC) ■ Professional development ■ Liaising with community members ■ Dialogue Leadership through events ■ Professional development (sessions) ■ Fundraisers ■ Assemblies ■ Committees ■ Clubs ■ School events ■ Planning ■ Meetings ■ Decision-making ■ Autonomy ■ Dialogue ■ Extra-curricular Leading together ■ Interactions ■ Supporting ■ Collaborating with colleagues ■ Collaborating with students ■ Collaborating with administration ■ Collegiality ■ Dialogue	Diverse grassroots leadership practices in school communities

<table>
<tr>
<td rowspan="3">

Confidence
Patience
Pride
Humility
Patience
Emotional regulation
Anti-racism
Eco-sustainability
Indigenous knowledges
Anti-bullying
Queer education
Democracy education
Presentations
Collaborating with students
Collaborating with administrators
Collaborating with colleagues
Liaising with parents
Liaising with community members
Decision-making
Dialogue
Navigating structures

</td>
<td>Leadership through advocacy

Advocating for self
Advocating for colleagues
Resisting
Challenging
Navigating structures
Dialogue

</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth

Confidence
Pride
Humility
Patience
Professional learning
Emotional regulation

Professional learning for self

Professional learning
Professional development
Professional learning community (PLC)
Mentoring/Mentors
Curriculum

Professional learning for others

Supporting colleagues
Professional learning
Professional development
Professional learning community (PLC)
Curriculum
Liaising with community members
Dialogue
Advocating for colleagues

</td>
<td>Empowerment via professional learning and personal growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student engagement

Critical pedagogies
Anti-racism
Eco-sustainability/justice
Indigenous knowledges
Anti-bullying
Queer education
Democracy education
Dialogue
Students’ voice
Teachers’ voice
Advocating for/with

</td>
<td>Improved student-engagement and school collegiality</td>
</tr>
</table>

	students Learning through activism ■ Shared leadership ■ Collaborating with students ■ Presentations ■ Assemblies ■ Dialogue ■ Teachers' voice ■ Students' voice	
	Collegiality with peers ■ Collaborating with colleagues ■ Collaborating with administrators ■ Interactions ■ Collegiality ■ Dialogue ■ Planning ■ Meetings Collegiality with students ■ Critical pedagogies ■ Collaborating with students Collegiality with community ■ Communication ■ Liaising with parents ■ Liaising with community members	

As a result of this analytical process, three major themes were formulated based on our perceptions of our interactive leadership experiences: (a) diverse grassroots leadership practices in school communities; (b) empowerment via professional learning and personal growth; and (c) improved student engagement and school collegiality.

Diverse Grassroots Leadership Practices in School Communities

Through critical reflection on our photos generated, individual experiences, and listening to our colleagues' insights in group discussions, we perceived there to be a wide array of positive

impacts within our school communities that resulted from our critical teacher leadership practices. These grassroots initiatives ranged from critical/culturally-responsive pedagogies that extended beyond the parameters of the classroom, engaging in peer mentorship opportunities, facilitating professional learning and development sessions within our schools, participating and influencing decision-making as a part of school committees, informally liaising and negotiating with our school administration on local social issues, among other highly socially complex interactive endeavours. Our critical teacher leadership practices have been concisely synthesized. To illuminate the breadth of interaction-oriented experiences we engaged in, it was important to include a brief synopsis of each team member's school initiatives.

Ross is a queer Indigenous woman and served the role as a resource teacher. Although she was involved in various critical teacher leadership practices throughout the duration of the study, she emphasized her involvement in a student letter campaign organized by her and her teacher colleagues.

Figure 2

Ross' Critical Teacher Leadership Practice



Note. A classroom photo of the Treaty One flag.

When uploading this photo to the OneDrive account, Ross wrote as an accompanying caption:

> My leadership role this school year is grounded in Truth and Reconciliation. My goal was to expose Indigenous students in our school to cultural teachings and practices. My hope was that it would elicit learning and pride in our students, something that was taken away from them and their families through the inner generational trauma of Residential Schools.

During the individual reflection session, Ross further reflected:

> The leadership was kind of under the umbrella of Truth and Reconciliation, and the main goal was especially [to support] children that identified as being Indigenous, but being detached from their culture, while at the same time educating and providing opportunities for the non-Indigenous kids, too.

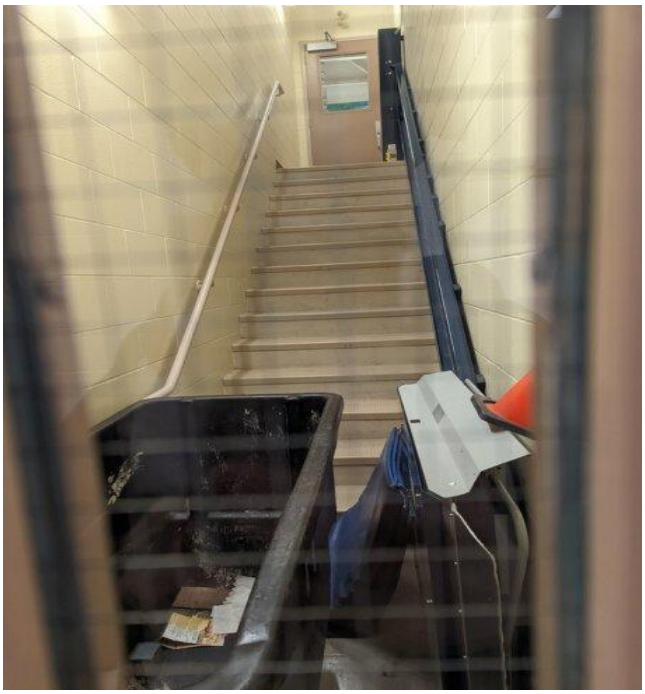
Working alongside other classroom teachers and their student bodies, Ross and her community engaged in critical learning on societal inequities negatively affecting Indigenous communities and reflected upon the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) *Calls to Action* to rectify systemic injustices. Her team resolved to begin a letter-writing campaign to the school superintendent advocating for the installation of a permanent Treaty One flag at their school site. In addition to students' letter writing, she and school community members facilitated presentations to school trustees and superintendents, arguing for the importance of the initiative. Ross and her school community further participated in student-facilitated presentations to neighbouring schools, advocating for other communities to join their effort. Ross and her school community were successful in their reconciliatory efforts and were given confirmation from the divisional Board Office to finance a permanent installation of the Treaty One Flag at their school. The flagpole was installed and erected following the completion of this study. In addition to these practices, Ross also helped facilitate school assemblies to celebrate Indigenous practices

and knowledges. She also supported students' and colleagues' learning and development in Indigenous education, through drumming workshops with a local Knowledge Keeper, baking, and liaised with principals to advocate for various miscellaneous initiatives.

Kris is a white, queer, non-binary middle school teacher and was heavily involved in their school Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) club. Through their collaborative leadership, working alongside colleagues, they coordinated a concerted effort to address issues relating to safety and accessibility of bathrooms in their building.

Figure 3.

Kris' Critical Teacher Leadership Practice



Note. Barriers to accessing gender inclusive washrooms.

Kris described the context of their critical teacher leadership practice during the individual reflection session:

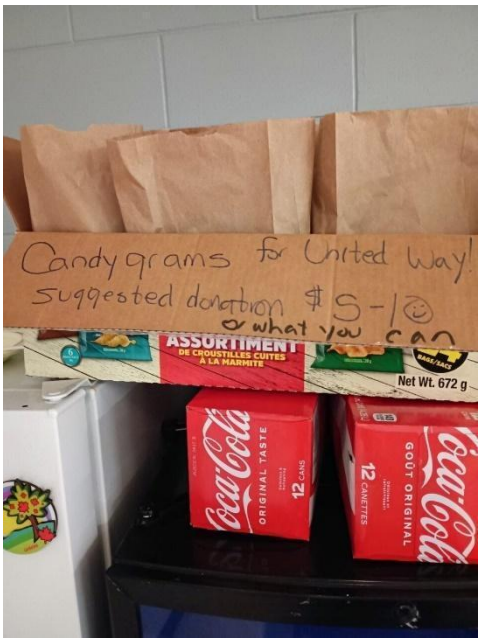
> The GSA (the Gender and Sexuality Alliance at my school), we have been in discussion with administration on having a gender-neutral washroom more centralized. Right now, there are some, but they're kind of tucked away in a part of the school that isn't accessible to everybody, and they're often vandalized. So, I don't really feel like [they are] the safest place for students.

In their school, the only gender inclusive bathroom was decentralized, not wheelchair accessible, and was often obstructed by school storage. The circumstances did not necessarily appear to be deliberate, but rather were an organizational oversight. They advocated to their school administration to establish a centralized gender inclusive bathroom and for financial support to install privacy stalls (to mitigate risks of bullying), informally liaising and negotiating to advance this effort. They were successful in persuading their school administration to repurpose a centralized bathroom to become gender inclusive, but were not successful in acquiring funds for installing new privacy stalls and other recommended renovations. In addition to this initiative, Kris also co-organized their school GSA with students and their colleagues and co-led an anti-bullying campaign with students, who were prompted to design logo designs for their Pink Shirt Day initiative to address queerphobia in schools and society.

Apple is a white, female Jewish teacher who instructs middle years students. She embarked upon numerous critical teacher leadership practices, including collaborating with colleagues to organize a ‘Student Vote’ learning experience at her school (to promote students’ learning on democracy), led public fundraising events to support a local non-profit organization, and advocated for the recognition and support of Jewish cultural practices across the Division.

Figure 4

Apple’s Critical Teacher Leadership Practices



Note. Co-facilitating with students a fundraiser for a local non-profit organization.

Apple shared her lived experiences engaging in social activist work and her advocacy in combating anti-Semitism:

> The words ‘social justice’ and ‘social action’, it's part of how I was raised in our Jewish community with the youth groups specifically. I was very involved ... We [my family and I] were demonstrating at the Legislature in, like, 1980, when Soviet Jewry existed and Jews weren't allowed to be free within the Soviet Union or leave the Soviet Union, and that was part of a movement at the time … And so, in my growing understanding of the world and the construction of the world, democracy and people and movements and ideas like that were very real. And also, how we study them.

Apple reflected upon both her experiences during the duration of this study, as well as her past lived experiences advocating for Jewish education in the division. A major effort she facilitated during the photovoice and (inter)action-oriented phase of the study was her initiative to establish a network of Jewish educators, focusing on educating staff on Jewish culture and mitigating anti-

Semitism. Following the conclusion of the study, she and her colleagues successfully established this professional network. Further, Apple took on various roles and responsibilities to further advance school-based tasks, such as co-facilitating school events with her colleagues and student bodies, such as a Student Vote! campaign to advance knowledge on democratic processes and infrastructures. She also co-led a fundraiser for a community program, working with students and colleagues to raise awareness of local social inequities and aimed to raise funds for this external group. She also participated in an anti-racism committee and liaised/negotiated with school and senior administration to raise awareness of anti-Semitism in schools and society.

Aileen is a white, female early year resource teacher. While she engaged in various informal leadership practices throughout the participatory study, her reflections focused primarily on her concern for textile waste in her school community.

Figure 5

Aileen's Critical Teacher Leadership Practice



Note. Establishing a 'free store' for unclaimed lost-and-found clothing.

> I have a major problem with the amount of things that we consume. And I think that we're very wasteful … We all have to change the way we behave, because right now the message is: 'It doesn't really matter if you lose your stuff because we have a Lost and Found, and you can just throw it there. And if you get tired of having that stuff, it's okay, because you'll just get more stuff.'

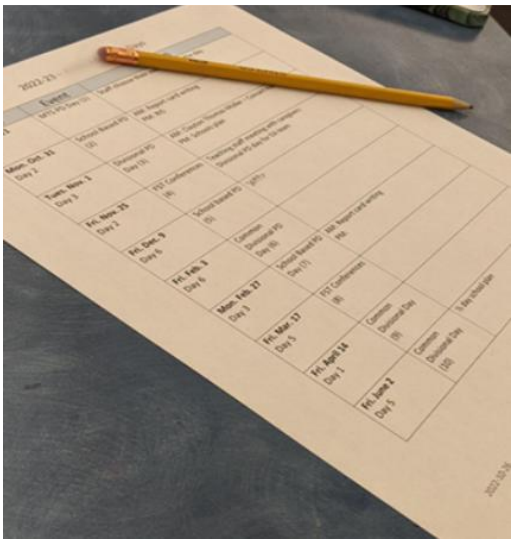
Stemming from her environmental concern of large-scale textile waste, Aileen aimed to repurpose her school's *Lost and Found* to be more ecologically responsible and to benefit her immediate school community. She observed that most school *Lost and Founds* generally donated unclaimed clothing items, which predominantly resulted in being discarded in landfills. Working alongside student volunteers, they enhanced the visibility of the *Lost and Found* by relocating its space and via school announcements. As a team, Aileen and her school aimed to create a community *Free Store* where unclaimed clothing items (e.g., winter boots, mittens, ski pants, tuques, etc.) could be acquired by community members for free. Following the conclusion of the study, her initiative was successful, and the school organized this event for the external school community.

Mark is a Filipino male middle years teacher in his school community. Like other members of the participatory research team, he engaged in numerous informal leadership practices relating to social and/or organizational inequities in his workplace. A main area of critical teacher leadership Mark engaged in was his involvement in staff mentorship, engaging in his school sustainability club and committee, promoting Indigenous education and practices (such as his school smudging program), identifying his important role of offering the perspectives as a Person of Colour through committee work, and aiming to informally influence

colleagues and administrators in his school.

Figure 6

Mark's Critical Teacher Leadership Practice



Note. An agenda for teachers' committee dates and meetings.

When uploading the photo to the shared OneDrive account, Mark shared the textual caption: "Professional Development Committee - Provide classroom teacher and oppressed voices at meetings". During the individual reflection session, Mark expressed the importance of exerting his voice as a POC staff member in committee work:

> I think the biggest [leadership] is participation in different committees, and just having that person of colour representation, and even more specific, the Filipino voice on staff (or the immigrant voice). So, a lot of times it's almost like just us in our roles as teachers or university graduates. We're coming from a certain class or a middle class that sometimes we forget our students' voice in that or even families. So, I think a lot of times I just put it upon myself to make sure that voice is there. Culturally speaking for

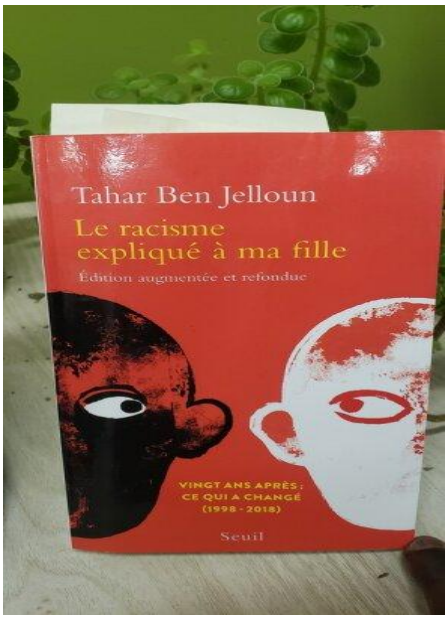
> Filipinos, it's like we cannot speak up. So, when I do speak up, I get a lot of affirmation from other staff in the Division, saying: 'Thanks, because we can't. We can't say that.'

Mark reflected upon his experiences mentoring new teaching staff, both formally (through Divisional support allocating release time) and informally (routinely assisting staff in his school). He acknowledged the importance of teacher mentorship, as he felt his mentors significantly supported him early in his profession. He was also compelled to participate in many school committees as he felt it was imperative to have minoritized voices represented during decision-making and planning.

Gaou is a black male teacher and is an internationally trained educator working primarily in early years education. He was an itinerant teacher, designated to work in multiple schools. In his main school, his critical teacher leadership endeavours largely involved committee work for Francophone week and Black History Month, helping co-organize professional learning for the staff, and organizing learning experiences and events for the student body.

6

Gaou's Anti-Racism Leadership Practice



Note. A photo of an anti-racist text used in teaching practice and committee work.

Gaou described his informal school leadership practices through anti-racism literature:

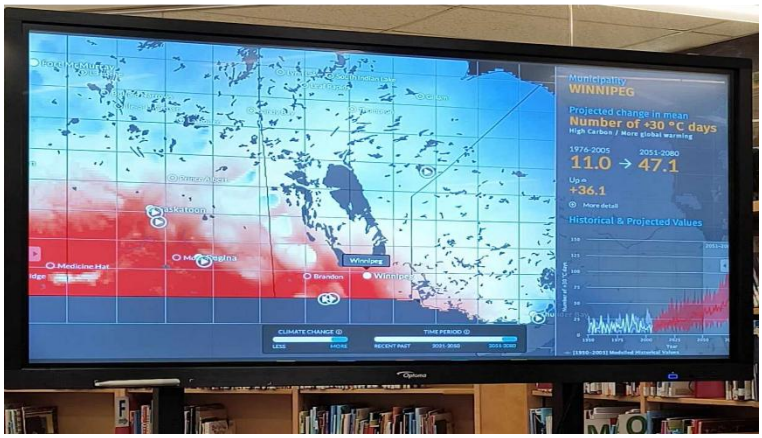
> When you start explaining to [students] those concepts, you realize that it's not all the time easy. So, this is why this book really attracted attention, and I picked it as someone who wants to undertake leadership actually in the community, like this school.

Gaou expressed the importance of cultivating community and a sense of belonging for all students and staff. This underlying motivation led him to address racism through critical pedagogies with students, as well as involvement in committee planning to organize public school events and assemblies.

Stefan is a queer, white male early years music teacher and engaged in various critical teacher leadership initiatives, including working and learning from a community Indigenous Elder, committee engagement, organizing public school events, union involvement, and facilitating professional learning for colleagues.

Figure 8

Stefan's Critical Teacher Leadership Practice



Note. Facilitating professional learning development.

Stefan reflected heavily upon his initiative in establishing a social justice club for colleagues. The professional learning community originated as staff expressed their concern of the lack of opportunity to engage in professional learning on social justice issues (as the Board Office had prescribed the professional learning agenda for the school). He commented:

> It arose out of concern that there just isn't an opportunity to talk about queering your practice, or anti-racism education, or decolonizing schools or pedagogies, or ecological justice. There's just so many topics in the world to learn as a teacher, and we have not had an opportunity through our conventional PD at the school.

Working alongside the support of his colleagues and school administration, he established an after-school social justice professional development club for staff, inviting external guests to disseminate knowledge and facilitate discussion regarding societal inequities and injustices. As a part of his informal leadership practices to influence social and/or organizational school change in practices, he also promoted Indigenous education and practices in his school by partnering with an Indigenous Elder, participating in school sustainability initiatives, and serving on his school assembly committee to help design and plan the focus of inquiry for the events.

Our engagement in Phase 2: Critical Teacher Leadership and PhotoVOICE Experience served as the (inter)action-component of this study and resulted in both: (a) the origin of new informal leadership practices; as well as (b) the encouragement for members of the participatory team to augment practices preceding the beginning of their involvement in this study. As such, the Phase 2 prompted (inter)actions that consequently resulted in diverse, collaborative leadership practices aimed at ameliorating complex social and/or organizational inequities in our schools. Through our individual and collaborative efforts, we advanced various school-based initiatives, such as the creation of clubs, facilitated professional learning, addressed school-based

ecological concerns, and combated various intersecting forms of societal oppression (including racism, anti-Semitism, colonization, and queerphobia). The photos and accompanying textual transcriptions revealed various locations and artifacts associated with these informal practices, such as taking place in- and outside classrooms, including teaching resources (e.g., books), committee planning materials (e.g., agendas), and so forth. While these narratives were concise, they demonstrated that our critical informal leadership practices both resulted in the formulation of new initiatives (e.g., club formation) as well as fulfilling routine, necessary organizational functions (e.g., mentoring and committee work). Our testimonies (inter)action-oriented efforts further provide context for our perception of the broad impacts these informal leadership practices had on ourselves, our colleagues, our students, and their communities, as a whole.

Empowerment via Professional Learning and Personal Growth

Through individual critical reflection on our photos illuminating our experiences, and by engaging in group dialogue, we realized a sense of personal growth and professional development, emerging as another theme among our participatory team of teachers. From this theme, three sub-themes were subsequently generated: (a) enhanced personal growth; (b) enhanced personal professional learning; and (c) enhanced professional learning for/with colleagues.

Enhanced Personal Growth

Following our engagements in critical teacher leadership practices and critically reflecting upon our photos illuminating our experiences, and learning from our colleagues' inputs, we acknowledged various sentiments relating to our perceived personal growth. I differentiated between *personal growth* and *professional learning* as we reflected upon changing personal aptitudes, such as enhanced confidence in leadership potential, strengthened emotional

resilience, and other intrinsic personal developments. Expressions of pride were highly associated among our group when reflecting upon the achievements associated with our critical leadership practices. There was a genuine sense of accomplishment as we critically reflected upon our (inter)actions in our school communities and considered the impacts of our individual and communal efforts. The context and underlying meanings associated with pride differed, however, among members of our team. Ross reviewed her photos generated and critically reflected upon her experiences engaging in critical teacher leadership, her initiatives relating to Truth and Reconciliation in her school, and its relationship with her own lived experiences:

> There's a sense of pride. There's a sense of hope when I look at those photos, and there's a sense of like, 'Holy crap!' Like, I grew up being told: 'Don't tell anybody you're Native! You pass, you look like your dad, you pass. 'And now I'm in a spot where I'm so proud of who I am, and I'm so proud to go to ceremony now, and I'm so proud to be Indigenous, and to share what I know with others, and to work with Indigenous colleagues, and to work with colleagues that are allies and that love that our Indigenous kids as much as I do. It just gives me so much hope to know that I could do this.'

Ross shared her pride in reconnecting with her cultural heritage and recounted her feelings of personal growth. As a queer Metis woman, she shared that she was raised with an associated shame of being Indigenous and made concerted efforts to masquerade her identity throughout her life. Through engaging in critical teacher leadership and pedagogies with her students, she expressed sentiments of pride in her accomplishments and growth.

Apple also expressed pride when reflecting upon her critical teacher leadership experiences during the group reflection session after listening to her colleagues' perspectives:

> It's the work of social justice. Work is important, right? I feel true to myself, how I really feel. I can't not do it. I can't not be myself. So, in that way I always feel proud when I take a stand, or when I spend some time, or when I write, and I say what I want to say or speak my truth that way. Then I have to feel proud of that, because otherwise it would all be nothing.

Through collegial discussion, Apple expressed a strong sense of conviction in her social and organizational justice efforts. Specifically, she felt a sense of pride in her commitment to speak and act based on her principles, not fearing judgment from others or from being reprimanded.

A final excerpt is from Stefan who shared that his feelings of pride were related to statements expressed by his colleagues. He commented during a group reflection session:

> There is a little bit of pride. I've actually had some colleagues that come up to me and said: 'Thank you for saying something. I don't have the confidence to say something.' Or I remember actually after a PD once, I said to a colleague like: 'Oh, man, am I just to stick in the mud?' Because I was feeling kind of heavy, like, I don't want to be a jerk, and a colleague said to me: 'Stefan, honestly, I don't listen much, but when you start talking, I start to listen.' To me, that kind of, like: 'Well … thank you. That's really quite flattering.'

Stefan had shared that he often felt apprehensive about challenging organizational practices relating to professional development, notably as he felt he and his colleagues lacked input in its planning and facilitation. There was a sense of pride in hearing from his colleagues that they appreciated his advocacy and speaking up for teachers' voices. Feelings of pride were both explicitly and indirectly expressed among the participatory team as they reflected upon their achievements. Whether being proud of personal growth, or the impacts their (inter)actions had

on students and/or colleagues, pride was undoubtedly a positive feeling associated with critical teacher leadership practices.

Another area of personal growth was expressed in the sense of humility. Some of the members of the participatory team recognized the limitations of their organizational role (e.g., level of authority in decision-making) and accepted the perimeters of their voice within the school system. Others also grew conscious of various aspects of their own privilege working with marginalized youth and reflected upon how their privilege may influence their interactions with their colleagues and student body. These sentiments are exemplified in Aileen's statement during a group reflection session:

> I have a feeling that I'm going to be learning some hard truths about my own privilege, because I sure think I'm being so great and helpful. But that's not really a reason to take on something (to compliment yourself on how great you're doing).

There was recognition among a few of the members of the participatory team of underlying assumptions associated with critical teacher leadership practices, and we recognized attributes of our own privileges. The photos and accompanying textual transcriptions of the content contained within them did not intrinsically reveal emotive qualities, but did illuminate the pervasive nature of social inequities and injustices in schools (e.g., inaccessibility to gender inclusive bathrooms), providing further visual insight into the importance and magnitude of these leadership practices. While our efforts were sincere and approached in *a good way*, a few members of the participatory team appeared conscious of how their own lived experiences may have impacted their underlying motivations to embark upon social activist work.

Our Reflections on Professional Learning

In addition to personal growth, we realized various forms of professional learning associated with our critical teacher leadership practices, both in ourselves and our colleagues. Through critical reflection and dialogue, we shared various revelations regarding our professional learning on how to engage collegially with staff, students, and administrators. We expressed new understandings in the areas of social justice and critical pedagogies, as well as interpersonal social skills and collegial strategies to navigate the political structures of Manitoba school systems. Many of the members of our team both overtly and implicitly unpacked professional learning on social justice topics. Apple reflected upon the intersections of evolving societal attitudes with critical teacher practices. During a group reflection session, she commented:

> I've been given a language that I didn't have before. I've been given a language, a vocabulary and a vernacular. When you say things like 'a microaggression', now some people know what it is. Whereas in the past, if you explained a feeling, someone would say, 'Oh, you're pulling a race card, or you're complaining, or this or that.' Now there's a language for it, which I find extremely helpful.

Apple reflected upon her ongoing professional learning and understanding of social justice vernacular and terminology, and felt empowered being able to utilize such language in her mobilizing efforts. Mark, a Filipino middle school teacher, reflected upon his experiences mentoring new teachers in his school. He unpacked: "Now, the things I'm learning through sustainability, sexism, anti-racism, decolonizing Filipino culture, is having younger mentors. People who are my mentees are my mentors, too." Mark shared that he was unable to engage transparently in professional learning on many of these critical-oriented topics earlier in his career, but felt societal and structural progressions were increasingly conducive to these

conversations. He further noted the professional learning he received informally through mentoring new teachers, as many of his mentees broadened his understanding of various social justice topics. He felt that both the significance of the *Black Lives Matter* movement and the recent establishment of an anti-racist coordinator within the school division were contributing factors to promoting critical conversations within the organization, Mark expressed.

Through collaborating with students in the school graphics program, Kris unpacked their experience co-facilitating leadership to support their GSA during the individual reflection session:

> As a graphics teacher, I've been learning how to use a bunch of fun technology, including a vinyl printer. So, with the help of a couple of students, one of whom is technologically savvy, and another who would like nothing more than to be anywhere but school … together these students designed the logo that we are printing on shirts for pink shirts that we are selling to staff and giving as guests to all of the members of the Gender and Sexuality Alliance.

Through their initiative to support anti-bullying awareness (particularly against 2SLGTBQ* communities), Kris realized they acquired new pedagogical skills working alongside their students in this campaign. Several other members of the team acknowledged their growth in critical pedagogies as they navigated their informal leadership experiences.

School systems are highly political work environments, and (following our critical teacher leadership practices), many members within our team discussed sentiments of a growing understanding of the organizational structure and functions of school divisions. This expanded knowledge, specifically related to internal political dynamics, notably the presence and influence

of organizational hierarchies had on professional conduct. This area of professional growth was concisely documented in Kris' reflection on their advocacy within their school:

> [I am] finding a delicate balance between being part of positive change and not rocking a boat inadvertently, because I may not realize there is even a boat there to be rocked, because I am still figuring out the parameters … there's expectations that I think I'm not completely aware of, and they may not be communicated. So, I'm trying to tread lightly and dare bravely at the same time.

Some members of our participatory team similarly shared stories regarding their journey in learning to navigate the political and hierarchical structures of the school system to enact social and/or organizational change. As teachers, we did not yield any formal authority in financial or procedural decision-making; upon reflection, many members of the team acknowledged an understanding of the delicate nature of our informal, critical leadership. Stefan echoed these feelings after reviewing his photos, commenting on his professional learning:

> I've learned a lot of people skills, a lot of social skills, and I'm still learning. I think it's going to be a lifetime of learning. The biggest thing I've really learned about teacher leadership is the political nature of schools, and how tactful you have to be in your language … I've also learned a lot of people skills, social skills, interpersonal skills, and this has been hard, because I am very introverted.

The integral importance of social skills was recognized by many members of our team as possessing these capacities was essential in collaboration, negotiation, and their informal advocacies. There was also a realization of the lethargic speed in enacting organizational change expressed by many of the members of the participatory team. While it may seem axiomatic of the importance of addressing social and/or organizational issues, a few of the members of the

team shared their evolving understanding of how to facilitate change within school systems. Aileen encapsulated this understanding through her group reflection:

> I seem to want change to be immediate. And that's something I can work out is just because I believe that something needs to change, and I can't decide to talk to people about it once, and then expect everyone, too, completely agree with me, and be completely on board immediately.

Ross also recognized the slow nature of social and organizational change and learned of the importance of negotiation and regulating personal emotions. She explained during a group reflection session:

> I'm a very fiery person, I'm a Leo. I like things to happen fast. I like to help people. I like to get it done. And I found that I really don't have patience when there's something in my way. I'm kind of like a bull in a china shop, and something I learned about myself is that that fiery passion can absolutely help, like that's what it takes to get it done, for sure. I just need to learn to control myself a bit more, to sleep on things 24 hours before responding, and to really accept the fact that people are on different journeys.

An enhanced understanding of negotiation skills was identified as an area of professional growth discussed by some members of our team. As we learned more about the political structures and processes of school divisions and accepted the slow nature of social and organizational change, we understood the importance and necessity of improving negotiation skills and reflected upon our conduct when approaching school administration. Some members of the team shared newly adopted strategies, such as pre-emptively preparing clear objectives and corresponding financial breakdowns of leadership initiatives before entering discussions with school administration. Other members of the team recognized the sensitivity of social justice work within schools, as

Apple described her understanding of critical-oriented leadership: “figuring out which tree is worth shaking”. Further, a better appreciation and understanding in the importance of school-based relationships was expressed by members of our participatory team. These informal leadership processes were highly social and shared distributed responsibility alongside self, colleagues, and students. As such, all members of the team recognized the cruciality of cultivating dialogical relationships in schools to achieve our objectives. Stefan outlined his professional learning:

> I've realized you just have to put people's interests and people's feelings ahead of your own. And that can be really difficult. And I've learned how important it is just to say to people how much you value them and tell them: ‘What a great job you're doing.’

He further realized:

> I've learned a lot of people skills, a lot of social skills, and I'm still learning. I think it's going to be a lifetime of learning. The biggest thing I've really learned about teacher leadership is the political nature of schools, and how tactful you have to be in your language.

Many members of the team empathized with others through their experiences in critical teacher leadership, realizing how many hours are frequently allotted during lunch or after school hours. As a result, many of the members of the team expressed growth in humility and altruistic attitudes as we began re-orienting their perspective toward valuing our colleagues and their contributions. The photos and their textual transcriptions further revealed the small-scale nature of many of these critical teacher leadership practices, such as through school committee work with colleagues or facilitating classroom-based learning experiences with students. The photos of these relatively small-scale leadership ventures further corroborate the feelings of limited social

influence in the grand scheme of the world and the importance of collegial interconnectedness to ensure grassroots practices are actualized. As such, professional learning on how to foster interpersonal social skills, to serve collegial professional functions, is certainly understandable.

Professional Learning for/with Colleagues

There was also a sub-theme regarding our ongoing professional learning for and with our colleagues. Understandably, these enhancements were based on our perception (and not data explicitly derived from dialogue with our colleagues). However, via our critical reflection sessions, we acknowledged that some of our initiatives appeared to result in our colleagues co-engaging in professional development and learning. This is evidenced in Ross's initiative to support *Truth and Reconciliation* work among colleagues in her school, through co-organizing school events, such as a Winter Solstice celebration, or professional learning opportunities with local Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. Ross reflected during the individual reflection session:

> A colleague and myself, who's also Indigenous, we really felt that Winter Solstice had never been celebrated at our school site, and there wasn't any knowledge or teachings, or any even literature in the building that talked about Winter Solstice, and it's such an important part of Indigenous culture, and we really feel like the point of Winter Solstice is to stop busy life and to take a step back and be thankful for what you have, and to really practice self-care in a mindful way.

Ross held the position as a resource teacher and, consequently, was only formally responsible for supporting teachers and students in specified grade areas. However, she expressed concern for all students in her school community, not just students under the immediate jurisdiction of her position. Her concern for the welfare of Indigenous youth led to her facilitating professional learning experiences for students and colleagues to help ensure that these students' needs were

met. Through organizing the Winter Solstice school assembly, she introduced the protocol on the celebration to staff through emails, made herself available to support classroom teachers to teach and learn about the cultural significance of the Winter Solstice, and ultimately co-led the school event, sharing knowledge about Indigenous perspectives and practices with the entire school community. In addition to this, she also led a drumming workshop for her colleagues and students, inviting an Indigenous drumming group to share informative perspectives and protocol related to song and drum. Her experience exemplified various aspects of critical teacher leadership practices, including the moral predispositions motivating such endeavours, and the fluidity of such efforts (e.g., educational labour done in addition to her formal responsibility). Mark also perceived his mentorship practices with newer staff to benefit his professional learning and practice. He commented: “Now, the things I'm learning through sustainability, sexism, anti-racism, [and] decolonizing Filipino culture is having younger mentors. People who are my mentees are my mentors, too. So, it's becoming very much a symbiosis.” Mark’s mentorship was facilitated both formally (via Division-provided services, including paid teacher leave time) and informally (via everyday conversations and relationship building with peers in his school). Further, Stefan’s efforts to organize a Social Justice Club in his school community, whereby he co-facilitated learning experiences alongside his colleagues to support professional practices, demonstrated the role leadership serves to promote ongoing professional dialogue and learning. Other members of the participatory team similarly demonstrated motivation to initiate professional learning experiences among teacher colleagues. These examples included Apple establishing a professional learning community of Jewish educators aiming to promote anti-Semitism education in the Division. Initiating professional learning among colleagues emerged as a consistent objective among critical teacher leaders.

Reviewing the photos and their textual transcriptions further demonstrated that our practices were fundamentally rooted in knowledge generation. Although many of these practices were designed to support students' learning, there were many instances that colleagues would be engaged, as well. These photo documented artifacts, such as anti-racism books, planning materials for committees or assemblies, formal professional development sessions, corroborated this theme of communal professional learning.

Improvements in Student Engagement and School Collegiality

The final theme outlined a sense of improved collegiality and relationships in our school communities, as students, colleagues, and external community members co-engaged in varying capacities with our grassroots leadership practices. We identified that many of our initiatives led to enhanced student engagement in learning, advocacy, and broad school function. Through implementing critical pedagogies in and outside the classroom, we perceived our critical teacher leadership practices to materialize through collaborative efforts alongside our student bodies in our school communities. Every teacher-participant in this study co-facilitated some form of critical teacher leadership alongside their student bodies, often extending from critical pedagogies to new leadership practices across our school communities. Through individual and group-based critical reflections on our practice and photos generated, we identified a sense of improved collegiality with students, colleagues, and parents/guardians via their associated interactions in critical teacher leadership practices. One example included Ross, who recognized the impacts that her advocacy for Indigenous education and practices in school curricula had on her school community. One initiative included baking Bannock alongside students and staff in celebration of the Winter Solstice and planning for a school-wide assembly to share Indigenous teachings, perspectives, and practices.

Figure 9

Enhanced Relationships through School Efforts



Note. Baking Bannock with Students for Winter Solstice.

Ross individually reflected upon the significance of this photo:

> People came from different classrooms, Indigenous students were finding their way, were mozying into the kitchen, and kids were coming into the kitchen, and even though I had only asked one or two people to help me, there might be 10 of us just sitting around and sharing and talking, and it didn't hit me how momentous it was until one of our kids that came from Poplar River quite far up north, said: 'I haven't felt this good in a long time,' he said. 'This is like a Native kitchen,' he called it.

Through this initiative, Ross advocated for staff and students to bake Bannock at home and to share it for school-based celebrations at their Winter Solstice assembly she co-organized. Baking Bannock, smudging, drumming, advocacy for the Treaty One flag, and other practices were a part of her efforts to Indigenize perspectives and practices in her school. With school administration and guardians' approval, she began taking students with her to a local Indigenous shop for materials. In doing so, students' families began taking requests for items:

> So, I started taking these kids with me to pick up tobacco, or whatever we needed, and from that it grew all of a sudden, you know, I had one parent say: 'Well, if you're going, my grandma needs a braid of sweet grass, and I need beads.' So, the kids started getting more excited and more into it, and it's really grown.

Another example of Ross' grassroots leadership practices emerged from her student letter-writing campaign to install a Treaty 1 flagpole in their school community. She, her teacher colleagues, and student bodies engaged in critical learning inspired by the *Calls to Action* in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). She recounted her experiences:

> So, the letter writing was interesting because I was supporting five teachers at the time that all did it differently with the same goal in mind … One teacher, we looked at any article we could find that mentions where Treaty flags are flown, and we did a jigsaw. So, for example, one group of students took over, kind of all the materials that were coming out of Saskatchewan. As we learned that all their schools have Treaty One flags flown, another group took on City of Winnipeg and Government buildings, and so from that we kind of came together and let the kids teach us.

In addition to letter writing, this team of teachers and students facilitated advocacy/informational presentations to classrooms and the Board Office, advocating for the installation of a Treaty 1 flag:

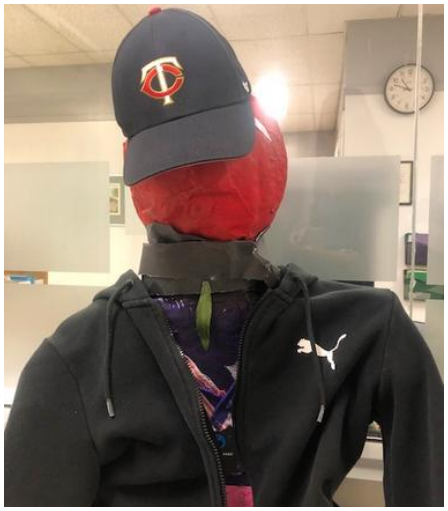
> That was a lot of walking over to schools and meeting with admin and meeting with classrooms, and that was a lot on our kids. It was a lot on our staff, and so that point was brought up, that you know we did all this work, and how are we going to say no now to our parents that stood with us, and to those schools that came with us to the Board office that night and stood beside us.

Through her critical reflections, she identified how critical pedagogies later materialized into student-engaged grassroots leadership, whereby students and teachers collectively advocated for change in their local community, influencing their peers and school board administrators to erect a Treaty One flag in their school community. Following the cessation of this research project, these students and teachers were successful, and the flag was ultimately installed.

Ross was not the only teacher-participant, however, to reflect upon how improved school relationships were associated with informal leadership practices. Through her *Lost and Found* initiatives, Aileen noted that students with exceptional needs (particularly those with trauma and antisocial tendencies) began seeking her out.

Figure 10

School Lost and Found Mascot



Note. A student-created mascot for the school's *Lost and Found* program.

She critically reflected:

> Another kid, who just so happens to be a child in care, who has experienced lots of ruptures, who has a really hard time at recess sometimes, maintaining – well, initiating and maintaining peer relationships - Often, if you want to say it this way 'Gets in trouble

> at recess, and often needs plans for recess or support from an adult for recess', and now she wants to make a sign for the Lost and Found.

She further acknowledged that together with these students (frequently during recess), they would often help organize clothing in the *Lost and Found* or collaborate on advocacy initiatives (e.g., creating school posters on textile waste). She noted that this initiative led to both an improved relationship between her and these students, but also that these students began developing interpersonal skills, learning to cultivate and maintain relationships, while also acquiring conflict mediation skills with their peers. Aileen further critically reflected on enhanced student engagement while reviewing her photos:

> I'm not picking these children, they are picking me! She [student] wants to be the lost and found ambassador, and she wants to organize all the lost and found clothing, and she wants to do announcements every Thursday, and we do our announcements on Teams, so you can see all the classrooms.

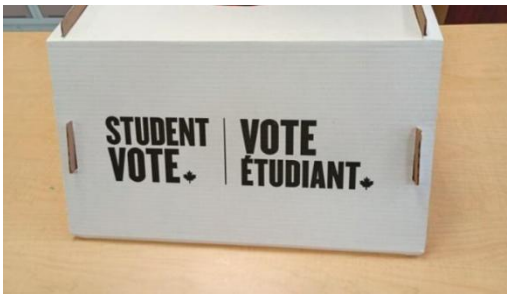
Through learning about local sustainability issues and encouraging students to critically think about mass clothing consumption and textile waste, students became impassioned to be involved in repurposing their school's Lost and Found and advocating for others in their community to change their practices.

Other members of the team further identified improved school-based relationships in conjunction with their informal leadership practices. Further examples of perceiving the enhanced social dynamics included Gaou's reflection upon how his anti-racist work as a black educator inspired students in his community, Mark described his improved friendships with colleagues through mentorship, and Kris unpacked the sense of community and belonging their colleagues had established with students in their school GSA.

Another example included Apple's co-facilitation of the Student Vote campaign, whereby she, her colleagues, and students co-organized the event.

Figure 11

Apple's Democracy Education Leadership Practice



Note. Facilitating a 'Student Vote' learning experience in Apple's school.

As Apple co-facilitated a 'Student Vote' learning experience alongside her colleagues and student bodies, youth learned about Canada's parliamentary system, the electoral processes, and other tenets of democratic principles. Working alongside her student bodies, they helped organize the event, operating within the arguably blurred boundaries of teaching, learning, and leading. Apple also acknowledged a sense of improved collegiality with her school principal as she engaged in her local critical teacher leadership practices, noting, "In these recent times, my current administrator has grown a lot, and we have grown together. Which is also why relationships are important with administrators." She felt that she and her administrator fostered an improved relationship as they negotiated and navigated her local grassroots initiatives.

Further examples of student-engaged leadership stemming from critical pedagogies included Kris's working with students in their graphics program to design posters and t-shirts for a school anti-bullying campaign, or Mark working alongside students in his school ecological club to promote sustainable practices at their school, among other grassroots practices demonstrated in this study. Evidently, critical teacher leadership practices were often highly

interactive and collegial, often associated with critical pedagogies and learning ventures, whether in the classroom, through clubs, or other school-based initiatives. Reviewing the photos and their textual transcriptions independently does not convey the highly social nature of critical leadership. However, this is due to our adherence to the human research ethics board protocol in not documenting human subjects; thus, the photos portray a highly solitary nature of these practices. Regardless, these photos, when contextualized through our critical reflections, demonstrate how these local, small-scale leadership practices were highly social and shared enterprises. These endeavours were premised upon informing and influencing others to make changes in practices and manifest through socially complex, interactive shared leadership experiences.

Discussion

These findings demonstrated the fluid, informal, interactive, grassroots, and (micro)emancipatory impacts of critical teacher leadership practices within our local contexts. These experiences were prompted and inspired by the plan, act, observe, and reflect qualities associated with action research (Anderson & Herr, 2005) to promote practitioner and/or social enhancement and change in our local school communities. Alongside our students and colleagues, we co-engaged in various informal (inter)action and reflective cycles to ameliorate social inequities and injustices and help collectively cultivate a better world. Critical reflection on action is integral to practitioner-based research to enhance professional knowledge and to adapt approaches to enhance practice (Schön, 1992). Through our critical reflections by reviewing our photos generated and listening to our colleagues' perspectives on their experiences, we generated various realizations of the role our interactions served within these highly socially complex shared leadership ventures.

Specifically, the documentation of our leadership practices illuminates new theoretical connections between distributed perspectives of practice (Spillane, 2006) and (micro)emancipatory grassroots leadership (Davidson & Hughes, 2022; Kezar, 2011; 2012; Strawser, 2020) in educational contexts. Through this merged perspective of (critical) grassroots and distributed perspectives of leadership, we engaged in emancipatory efforts with the intent to support students' learning, wellbeing, and overall humanistic growth, often through negotiating with principals and collaborating with students and colleagues. Both the distributed and grassroots interpretations of leadership shared understandings that leadership is a context-specific, collegial practice that operates fluidly without occupying formal positions of authority and generally emphasizes shared power and decision-making (Davidson & Hughes, 2022; Ehrich & English, 2012; Gronn, 2003; Kezar, 2011; 2012; Spillane, 2006; Strawser, 2020). Throughout the study, our critical teacher leadership practices manifested through a plethora of initiatives, emerging to address various context-specific organizational/community needs and purposes, were facilitated in- and outside the classroom, and comprised both individualistic and social endeavours. Foundational to this novel conceptualization of critical teacher leadership is the distributed perspective of leadership (Spillane, 2006), which suggests that these fluid, informal leadership practices were context-specific to achieve organizational goals and/or address situational needs. There is no prescribed blueprint for facilitating distributed leadership practices (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Spillane & Diamond, 2007a); similarly, there was not necessarily uniformity in the nature and/or context of critical teacher leadership practices in this study. However, many of our leadership practices were social in nature, and achievements emerged via the collective interactions (Brooks & Kensler, 2011; Harris, 2010; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2006) of students and colleagues, not necessarily because of individualistic formal actions of

leaders in positions of authority (nor as a consequence of being directed by administrators). Despite the historical (and ongoing) monopolistic fixations on exploring *heroic* individuals and their solo enterprises (Gronn, 2003; 2008; Spillane, 2006), the engagements disseminated in this research further document the potentialities and necessity for authentic, dialogical, and collaborative grassroots leadership practices in public schools. This interpretation extended beyond the distributed perspective in that there was no explicit differentiation between *leader*/*follower* roles. This dualistic distinction was unnecessary as these various individuals in our school communities co-performed leadership practice for equity and social justice purposes. This interpretation is consistent with other scholars' positions (e.g., Ehrich & English) who argued for moving away from these confining binaries.

Leadership was dialogically co-facilitated *with* (and not *for*) school communities and was shared practices between us and our student bodies, a central tenet of critical pedagogies (Freire, 1970/2000; Giroux & Giroux, 2008; Lopez, 2014; Yeh & Sengupta-Irving, 2014). We all engaged in some form of shared leadership practices alongside our student bodies and/or colleagues. Aileen, along with students, co-led efforts to repurpose textile waste from their school's lost and found; Kris collaborated with their students to design pink shirts as a part of their anti-bullying school campaign, among various other examples. Ultimately, these complex engagements were not the mere result of our individual actions but would more accurately be constituted as the community-based (Ehrich & English, 2012), bottom-up (Kezar, 2011), collective interactions (Spillane, 2006) among teachers, students, and school administration to influence others and enact change. Empowering students through critical, problem-posing learning experiences (Freire, 1970/2000) was often initiated in class, but this mobilization of knowledge often led to advocating for local change outside the classroom (e.g., Ross' letter

writing campaign to install a Treaty One flag). These findings demonstrated that critical pedagogies, which are principally founded on transforming the world for liberatory purposes (Freire, 1970/2000; Yeh & Sengupta-Irving, 2014), share many commonalities with Spillane's (2006) position that leadership is about influencing others, as well as critical emancipatory grassroots leadership perspectives (Strawser, 2020) to transform the world. Such praxis was achieved through students' participative inclusion and co-engagement in leadership practices. Through these critical teacher leadership endeavours, we interactively engaged in microemancipatory efforts (Huault et al., 2014) to improve students' learning and lived experiences, but also to bolster our occupational flourishing. The social dynamics associated with many of these critical teacher leadership initiatives demonstrated the imperative importance of collegiality in teacher professionalism (Sachs, 2003; 2016), that teachers need ample opportunity to socialize, collaborate, and co-engage in leadership with students and colleagues. As Giroux (2010) asserts: "Critical pedagogy opens up a space where students should be able to come to terms with their own power as critically engaged citizens" (p. 717). As teachers, we modelled an authentic willingness and capacity to share power alongside our student communities.

These findings were also significant in generating theoretical interconnections between teachers' critical leadership and transformative professionalism (Sachs, 2003; 2016). Through this integrated viewpoint, participative engagement in shared leadership is essential for teachers to occupationally flourish, as teachers need to be represented in decision-making and influencing the ever-evolving trajectories of our public education systems. As already noted, our critical leadership practices manifested in a plethora of contexts, including extensions of classroom-based critical pedagogies, committee work, school clubs, mentoring colleagues, facilitating

professional learning sessions, organizing assemblies and school events, among many other grassroots efforts. These grassroots leadership endeavours manifested through our sociomaterial interactions (Eva et al., 2021; Oborn et al., 2013; Orlikowski, 2007), whereby we, as social actors, utilized our available resources to achieve our goals, directly affected by the propinquity (Spillane et al., 2017; Shirrell & Spillane, 2020) of our school layouts to engage with youth and colleagues. Further, these interactive initiatives mobilized through our transformative professional practices, as we exemplified expert knowledge (David, 2000; Demirkasimoğlu; 2010; Evetts, 2011; 2013; Hargeaves, 2000; Giroux, 1986), workplace autonomy (Ertürk, 2023; Hoyle, 2001; Frostenson, 2015; Sehrawat, 2014), collegiality (Sachs, 2003; 2016), and commitment to ethical standards (David, 2000; Evetts, 2011; Tang, 2008) to support our students' learning, wellbeing, and humanistic growth. As workers' autonomy is considered a core component of professionalism (Frostenson, 2015, Sachs, 2003), we navigated varying levels of autonomous decision-making and agency in our school communities. We particularly acknowledged our autonomous trajectories when designing and implementing pedagogy, and that we were generally supported by our school administrators to facilitate critical learning alongside our students and colleagues. Individual and collegially autonomous practices (Frostenson, 2015) were evidenced via the diversity of grassroots leadership initiatives, such as: Ross' engagement in the Treaty One Flag learning and letter writing campaign; Gaou's participation in anti-racism leadership via critical pedagogies, committee work, and assembly organizing; Kris' activism in their GSA, teaching about anti-bullying and co-facilitating a pink shirt campaign; among a variety of other collective efforts. There was a fair amount of workplace autonomy afforded for these diverse initiatives to be facilitated. These local interactive experiences further revealed the importance of not only pedagogical autonomy, but also

autonomy to be involved in shared leadership practices to influence school function. Apple (2012b) previously identified teachers' differential levels of autonomy in schools, suggesting that teachers often enjoyed relative autonomy in teaching. It was quite evident that our pedagogical autonomy was quite high, while their leadership autonomy was mixed (as further elaborated in Chapter 5).

Ultimately, our transformative professionalism manifested as a hybridity of emancipatory grassroots leadership practices and critical pedagogical practices, both tenets being foundationally premised upon our mobilization of knowledge via dialogical collaborations to promulgate critical learning and advance social improvements within local communities. As teachers, we exercised our local and expert knowledge (Giroux, 1986; Hargreaves, 2000; David, 2000) to facilitate learning on anti-racism, ecological justice, queer education, and various forms of equity and social justice topics. To actualize radical pedagogies, teachers must exercise their intellectual capacities to transform their teaching conditions and support students (Giroux, 1986). As Sorenson (2023) asserts: "Expertise is regarded as the prime source of professional power" (p. 48). To ameliorate societal and/or school-based inequities, we co-engaged in various problem-posing learning experiences (Freire, 1970/2000) alongside our student bodies and exercised our critical thinking capacities to achieve our learning and leadership objectives. Through various cycles of praxis, oscillating between (inter)action and reflection, we felt that we raised *conscientização* (critical consciousness) of social injustices among our student bodies, colleagues, and within ourselves. Not only did critical teacher leadership phenomena manifest via critical pedagogies with students, but it was also cultivated via professional learning communities with our colleagues. Examples of exercising transformative knowledge were demonstrated through Stefan's social justice professional learning club with his peers; Apple's

establishment of a Jewish professional learning community; Ross' sharing her Indigenous perspectives and inviting Knowledge Keepers to share ways of knowing with staff and students; Mark's engagement in mentoring new colleagues; among various other examples of exercising professional knowledge. Teachers as intellectuals, Giroux (1986) argues, are "concerned with empowering students so they can read the world critically in order to change it through the power of struggle and community" (p. 195).

Our experiences also illuminated various limit-situations (Freire, 1970/2000; Petruzzi, 1998; Shudak & Avoseh, 2015) within schools, empowering students to critically examine inequities and foster agency within their communities. Further, many of us on the participatory team expressed perceptions of a raised *conscientização* within ourselves and our colleagues, prompting critical reflections on the parameters of professional practice, advocating for teachers' increased voice and agency in decision-making and organizational function (e.g., enhanced role in professional learning trajectories). The sense of awakened critical consciousness was exemplified through our expressions of enhanced feelings of confidence and self-belief in being able to facilitate leadership practices, such as Ross' increasing sense of pride in identifying as Indigenous and knowledge with her school community, or Stefan reflecting upon his willingness to speak up for colleagues to safeguard their professional agency. The precursor to social transformation is through cultivating self-actualization (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Freire, 1970/2000; Yeh & Sengupta-Irving, 2014). Critical teacher leadership practices were not necessarily exclusively student-focused, but were also demonstrated among colleagues as we critically reflected and identified our own professional limit-situations impeding our practices.

Many of these findings were generally consistent with the pre-existing literature. While our local contributions are noteworthy, measuring the "effectiveness" of distributed leadership

practices is not necessarily possible as initiatives were the manifestation of diverse, complex interactions exercised (and co-influenced) by many (Spillane, 2006). However, we perceived our communal interactions to lead to various positive impacts, including personal growth, professional learning and development, and bolstered collegial dynamics and school relationships. These perceived school impacts were corroborated with other teacher and/or distributed/grassroots leadership inquiries, specifically relating to personal enhancements, like a sense of feelings of empowerment, increased confidence, improved sense of self-efficacy, and overall job satisfaction (Harris, 2015; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2018; Simpson, 2021; Taylor et al., 2022; Wang & Ho, 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). The critical teacher leadership practices resulting in individuals' own professional development in this inquiry are also consistent with other research (Harris, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2018; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Harris (2015) somewhat provocatively posited that "by far the most discernible and powerful effect of teacher leadership is on the teacher leaders themselves" (p. 61). While critical teacher leadership practices led to feelings of self-growth and professional learning, it was not the most distinguishable impact of this participatory research project. Our professional learning experiences are consistent with previous findings. Harris (2015) analyzed decades of teacher leadership inquiry and identified three waves of research, noting that the second wave centred on the instructional expertise of teacher leaders (often via facilitating professional learning for colleagues). Teacher leadership practices resulting in the professional learning of colleagues via mentorship, professional learning communities, and/or facilitating professional development sessions is well-documented (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Simpson, 2021; Wang & Ho, 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Teachers making concerted efforts to become involved in extraneous school-wide functions are further consistent with both the

distributed and grassroots perspective leadership, specifically that organizational members both informally fulfilled workplace/community responsibilities based on situational needs and the skills and interests of individuals (Brooks & Kensler, 2011; Ehrich & English, 2012; Spillane, 2006).

Students engaging in leadership through the augmentation of learning experiences have been well-documented (Harris, 2015; Hunzicker, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019; Simpson, 2021; Taylor, 2022). However, Wenner and Campbell (2017) have observed that the evidence supporting claims of students' improved academic achievement is sparse, in part due to scholars' lack of inquiry into students' perspectives and experiences associated with teacher leadership practices. This finding is consistent with this research study, as documentation of students' enhanced learning is limited to our perceptions of student engagement and learning, not necessarily documented via formal evaluation methods (e.g., test scores). Last, Harris (2015) notes that there is "substantive evidence" (p. 62) within the literature corroborating the positive impacts teacher leadership had on professional relationships. Improved relationships through teacher leadership are affirmed by numerous other scholars, as well (Hunzicker, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2019; Simpson, 2021; Taylor et al., 2022). In their comprehensive literature review, Wenner and Campbell (2017) generated contrasting findings on this position, identifying declining relationships (as colleagues became resentful of perceived authority and preferential treatment toward teacher leaders). However, these scholars also acknowledged prior findings indicating that teacher leadership practices may cultivate positive relationships among colleagues through collaboration and shared leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter identified the pluralistic nature and impacts of our informal critical leadership practices within our school communities. Our critical leadership interactions helped facilitate various new initiatives in our school communities, which we perceived to result in personal and professional growth within ourselves, contributed to professional learning for/with colleagues, enhanced students' engagement in agency and school function, and cultivated positive relationships within our school communities. These local contextual findings illuminated new theoretical insights of critical teacher leadership phenomena in the Manitoba context, particularly interpreting such practices as a part of teachers' transformative professionalism, but also generating novel understandings of the intersections between critical pedagogy and distributed/emancipatory grassroots leadership. In sum, teachers as transformative professionals need to be involved in leadership practice to optimize their autonomous, collegial, and knowledge potential. It is through shared, dialogical leadership that teachers may be empowered to enact microemancipatory practices to benefit their students' learning and humanistic growth. The next chapter unpacks the social and structural challenges associated with our critical teacher leadership practices.

Chapter 5: Challenges in Facilitating Critical Teacher Leadership

In this chapter, I outline the professional challenges we experienced throughout this study and address the second research question: *What were the social and/or structural barriers impeding our critical teacher leadership practices?* As some of the perspectives shared were highly personal, sensitive, and vulnerable in nature, the findings in this chapter are presented through assigning each teacher-participant a randomized identification number, ranging from Teacher Participant 1 (TP1) to Teacher Participant 7 (TP7). This was done to further bolster teachers' confidentiality (an additional layer beyond their assigned pseudonym), but also to demonstrate clarity in the breadth of perspectives shared.

Many of the photos generated during Phase 2 were reflected upon with positive feelings (e.g., as presented in Chapter 4), but also elicited negative feelings (e.g., sadness associated with social resistance experienced during our leadership interactions). While there were many thematic commonalities shared among the participatory team regarding social and structural barriers affecting our leadership efforts, there were some variances expressed among the participatory team. As such, I also included contrary perspectives to broaden the understanding of these local critical teacher leadership experiences. These themes were generated primarily from the photos and reflections shared by six of the members of our participatory team. Of these six members, TP6 felt their flexible schedule as a resource teacher was conducive to their critical teacher leadership efforts (but empathized and acknowledged this difficulty for many teachers in their building, corroborating other teacher-participants' experiences). Last, TP7 was unable to attend the group reflection session, but expressed few social and/or structural challenges affecting their practice during their individual reflection. Of the seven teacher-participants, three

served in general classroom instruction, one teacher as an itinerant supply teacher, one teacher as a specialist, and two as resource teachers.

We reflected upon our school- and community-based engagements and unpacked the social and organizational issues we encountered throughout this research inquiry, as well as sharing perspectives on some of our historical experiences in critical teacher leadership. Some of the members of our teacher team had extensive professional experience in critical teacher leadership before engaging in this research project; as such, our reflections from engagement in this study were interconnected with historical experiences faced throughout the duration of their careers. It should be noted, however, that most perspectives shared through Phase 3: Individual Reflection and Phase 4: Group Reflection sessions focused on our interaction-oriented initiatives as a part of this research inquiry. As this was a participatory research inquiry, I felt it was important to consider and include any perspective shared by the membership to inform the findings of this study. Further, there were crucially informative insights that may be derived from my colleagues' histories in the field. All photos and quotes generated by our participatory team related to our engagements in their Phase 2 PhotoVOICE and interaction-oriented leadership practices (unless otherwise specified in my dissemination). During individual and group reflection discussions, my colleagues were advised to refrain from identifying names of students, staff, and/or colleagues.

Upon the completion of reflexive thematic analysis of our photos, individual reflection, and group reflection textual transcripts, four major themes were generated relating to the impediment of teachers' transformative professionalism through facilitating emancipatory grassroots leadership practices: (a) isolation, resources, and school structures unconducive to leadership; (b) silencing and invisibilization of teachers' leadership (c) (micro)aggressive

collegial and/or administrative resistances; and (d) occupational exhaustion and demoralization. The process for generating codes, categories, and themes generated are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Codes, Categories, and Themes of Critical Teacher Leadership Challenges

<table>
<tr><th>Codes</th><th>Categories</th><th>Themes</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">■ Structural inequities
■ School schedules
■ Isolation
■ Time
■ Teaching
■ Lunch hour
■ Recess
■ After school
■ Committee meetings
■ Collegiality
■ Collaboration
■ Collaborate
■ Decision-making
■ Autonomy
■ Authority
■ (in)subordinate
■ Extra-curricular
■ Voluntarism
■ Silencing
■ Invisiblization
■ Teachers’ voice
■ Students’ voice
■ Self-censuring
■ Grassroots leadership
■ Shared leadership
■ Resistance
■ Apathy
■ (Micro)aggressions
■ Negotiate
■ Advocate for self
■ Advocate for students
■ Advocate for colleagues
■ Finances
■ Apathy</td><td>Collaborating with peers
■ Grassroots leadership
■ Shared leadership
■ Teachers’ voice
■ Autonomy
■ Advocate for students
■ Advocate for colleagues
■ Dialogue
■ Collaborate
■ Collegiality
■ Committee meetings
■ Decision-making

School schedules/structures
■ Structural inequities
■ School schedules
■ Isolation
■ Time
■ Authority
■ Teaching
■ Supervision
■ Lunch hour
■ Recess
■ After school
■ Extra-curricular
■ Voluntarism</td><td>Isolation and school structures unconducive to dialogism</td></tr>
<tr><td>Teachers’ grassroots leadership invisibilized
■ Invisibilization
■ Unrecognized
■ Unappreciated</td><td>Silencing and invisibilization of teachers’ leadership</td></tr>
</table>

■ Limited/no financial support ■ Unrecognized ■ Unappreciated ■ Demoralization ■ Overwhelmed ■ Tired ■ Frustration ■ Futility ■ Burnout ■ Stress ■ Self-loathing ■ Fear ■ Anxiety ■ Physical exhaustion ■ Emotional exhaustion ■ Compassion fatigue ■ Overwhelmed ■ Leave of absence ■ Dialogue ■ Decision-making ■ COVID-19 Pandemic ■ Low morale	■ Resistance ■ (Micro)aggressions ■ Voluntarism ■ Extra-curricular ■ Time ■ Structural inequities ■ School schedules ■ Authority ■ Dialogue ■ Teachers' voice ■ Students' voice Limitations in teachers' voice ■ Teachers' voice ■ Students' voice ■ Dialogue ■ (in)subordinate ■ Negotiate ■ Advocate for self ■ Advocate for students ■ Advocate for colleagues ■ Anxiety ■ Fear ■ Decision-making ■ Silencing ■ (micro)aggression ■ Resistance	
	Colleagues' apathy and resistance ■ Dialogue ■ Resistance ■ Apathy ■ Burnout ■ (Micro)aggressions ■ Voluntarism ■ Committee meetings ■ Collegiality ■ Collaboration ■ Time ■ After school ■ Recess	(Micro)aggressive collegial and/or administrative resistances

	■ Isolation Support from administration ■ Dialogue ■ Inequitable structures ■ Advocate for self ■ Advocate for students ■ Teachers' voice ■ Collegiality ■ Dialogue ■ Decision-making ■ Autonomy ■ Negotiate ■ (Micro)aggressions ■ Apathy ■ Resistance ■ Finances ■ Support from administration	
	Physical exhaustion ■ Tired ■ Exhausted ■ Overwhelmed ■ Burnout Emotional exhaustion ■ Fear ■ Worry ■ Anxiety ■ Stress ■ Frustration ■ Futility ■ Unappreciated ■ Unrecognized ■ Demoralization ■ Self-loathing ■ Compassion fatigue ■ Teacher voice Post-pandemic contexts ■ Leave of absence ■ Burnt out ■ Demoralization	Occupational exhaustion and demoralization

	■ Tired ■ COVID-19 Pandemic ■ Low morale ■ Leave of absence	

Isolation, Resources, and School Structures Unconducive to Leadership

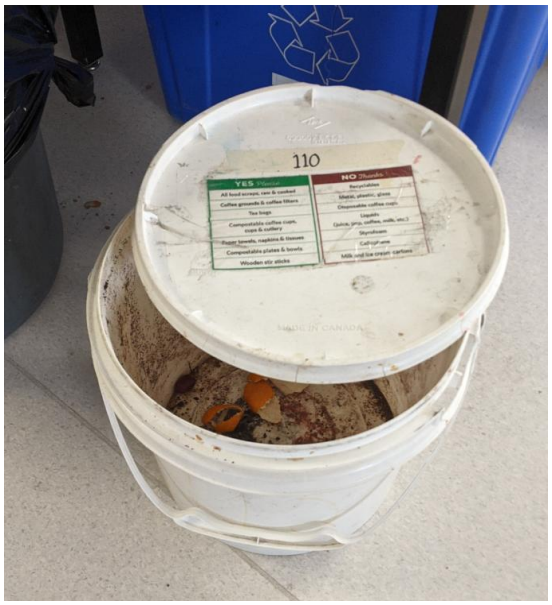
This theme was generated through reviewing the photos and the individual and group reflection discussions, as many members of our team repeatedly lamented the rigid parameters of their work schedules. A considerable structural barrier centered around *time*, issues largely stemming from schedules that were inconducive to liaising with colleagues and insufficient time to engage in collegial tasks. As a result, there was a sense of occupational isolation as opportunities to socially collaborate with peers were scant. A recurring challenge expressed by most members of our team related to the rigid parameters of their work schedules. As disseminated in Chapter 4, critical teacher leadership practices were highly collaborative endeavours whereby teachers frequently co-facilitated informal leadership practices alongside their colleagues and student bodies. Unfortunately, many members of our team lamented the infrequent opportunities during the school day to congregate with colleagues and/or to engage in leadership planning and (inter)action (variable to the scope of the project). One teacher-participant commented during TP1's reflection session:

> It's more planning to do on top of all my teaching. It's so difficult to get everybody together, because either we have to meet at lunch hour or after school, because none of us have mutual meeting time to do any collaboration. So, as a consequence, almost inevitably there's one or two people as a part of the planning committee that can't meet at a time. And so, meetings just repeatedly get cancelled.

A further observation was noted by TP5 during the photoVOICE phase of the study, who identified the individual-dependent nature of critical teacher leadership initiatives in schools:

Figure 12

Compost Bucket for Ecological Club



Note. Teacher reflecting on club responsibilities falling on their shoulders.

> We have to make sustainability sustainable. What if one of us, one of the teachers, leaves? We all run these certain things. It's not going to happen in the building, because we know it's very teacher-run, it's not part of the system of the building, right?

TP5 reflected on their involvement in ecological justice efforts, organizing school composting across all classrooms in their school community, but acknowledged that their engagements were external to the school scheduling infrastructure. This teacher-participant was involved in both school clubs (working alongside students) and committees (collaborating with colleagues). However, this teacher-participant acknowledged that many of the responsibilities pertaining to their ecological leadership practice fell nearly exclusively on them, expressing sentiments of exhaustion and moral obligation to continue such efforts (as many of the practices would likely

cease if they individually stopped). Efforts like this were often exercised outside the classroom during their own time (e.g., lunch hour or after school). While teachers' schedules were identified as a structural barrier that, at times, impeded critical teacher leadership practices, the varying roles and responsibilities of teachers affected these challenges. When reflecting on their initiatives and photos during the individual reflection session, TP6 acknowledged the increased flexibility that coincided with their position as a resource teacher:

> It's a workload issue for teachers, and not to say that I don't have work to do but having those after-school things that I don't have to do, the not having to plan as many lessons, and do as much of the day-to-day enables me to do a little bit more of the bigger picture stuff.

As resource teachers are tasked to support numerous classrooms and are not bound to instruct one specific student body, there is evidently more flexibility in their schedules to facilitate and/or engage in leadership opportunities. TP7 served in an itinerant position in multiple schools and expressed difficulty in liaising with colleagues to plan as a part of an assembly committee:

> And the fact that I'm a supply teacher, absolutely, that impacts my contribution, because for the week for the Francophone [event] that's coming, we should have a meeting on this upcoming Monday. But because I'm not assigned in my home school, we postponed that activity, that meeting for the coming day. You know, that impacts because my colleagues are flexible. But if they have some obligations, but they have some other things important to do, that does not allow them to meet on the coming day, I will miss that meeting and I won't be able to contribute as I wanted to contribute. I can send an email, I can do it on video conference. But that won't be the same. We have interactions talking, and seeing

> your colleague in for real, in presence that can inspire you to have some other ideas and discuss.

These teacher-participants acknowledged that their working schedules were primarily designed around instructional time and not necessarily around collegial time among their fellow staff members.

A further barrier challenging our practice relates to the distribution of, and procedural decision-making on, funds and resources to support their efforts. While teachers may advocate for certain causes, they ultimately hold no formal authority. Consequently, many of the outcomes of participants' informal leadership practices were determined by the level of support from their local school administration, particularly if there were monetary considerations associated with such initiatives. During the individual reflection session, TP4 elaborated on their experience:

> We'll have to meet in the middle, you know, in terms of our vision, and what is actually possible as long as it genuinely fits the needs for students. But it does feel very financially motivated. And there's a sense of this being not discussed further. Because I think my admin knows that further up in the chain of command that this kind of thing may not … be approved financially for a single school to make such a renovation.

As there are limited funds allocated to individual schools throughout the Division, some members of our team felt that their efforts were ultimately dependent on their school principal's willingness to advocate to senior administration for increased funds and/or resources. Monetary concerns were not the exclusive concern among teachers, as various types of necessary resources were not readily accessible to facilitate certain critical teacher leadership practices. Some of the teacher-participants further expressed the non-dialogical process of decision-making, as school principals often served as the arbiter to support or negate grassroots initiatives. This issue was

particularly exacerbated when supplemental resources and/or finances were required to foster leadership practices.

During the individual reflection session, another teacher-participant recounted the difficulty in organizing Indigenous learning and leadership initiatives, citing the limited resources to provide honorariums for Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers. TP2 made a concerted effort to write grants to supplement this important grassroots effort. They expressed:

> And funds are definitely something, right? You have to, like, I think I've applied for two grants this year just to bring in an Indigenous artist. But never mind all the other stuff we could be doing that needs money and personnel and Indigenous leadership, too, which is, of course, lacking in many. Not just our division, but in many others.

Supporting Indigenous education and leadership practices was supported by their school administration, but this teacher-participant also acknowledged that many of these efforts would not occur if they had not individually advocated for such practices or if there were insufficient resources (e.g., funds, community members available). Consequently, this teacher-participant recognized how individually responsible they were in facilitating such efforts and further identified limited resources as a barrier.

Further reviewing the photos and accompanying textual transcriptions visualized and further corroborated the isolating situations and routines relating to our workplace scheduling, as the contextual location of many of the photos was outside the classroom, such as in hallways, offices, resource rooms, and so forth. As such, many of these occupational functions were conceivably conducted in addition to our instructional duties, which comprise much of the school day. The fact that there are no students or colleagues documented in these photos also conveys a sense of isolation. However, this is not necessarily surprising, as per our adherence to the UM

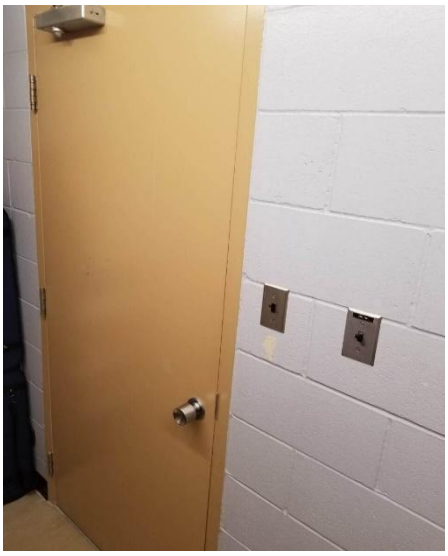
research ethics board 2 protocol to not photograph other human subjects. Ultimately, we, as teachers, lacked formal authority in financial decision-making and relied on liaising/negotiating with our school administration to support our local, context-specific efforts. We further identified that our rigid work schedules were tailored around instructional time and were not structurally designed in a manner conducive to dialogue and leadership planning with colleagues.

Silencing and Invisibilization of Teachers' Leadership

Although many of us were successful in facilitating many of our informal leadership practices, some of us critically reflected upon the multifaceted challenges pertaining to individual voice and agency. Some of us felt morally compelled to advocate for colleagues and/or our student bodies and held positions that were, at times, at odds with the visionary direction of our local school administration. While our underlying motivations were premised on promoting equity and social justice in our school communities, some felt that their status as a subordinate within the hierarchical organization led to their inability to publicly dissent. Some members of our team felt compelled to withhold opinions out of fear of reprimand from school administration. As a result, some members of our team felt that they had to speak covertly with colleagues when advocating for certain equity and social justice initiatives. TP1 shared an image of a closed door (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Teacher-Participant's Discrete Conversations



Note. Picture of a closed door where covert discussions took place.

TP1 further elaborated on the photograph during the photoVOICE individual reflection session:

> That's why I have that closed door picture, I have to really self-censor myself so often, and there's so many things with the organization that I often disagree with, but I can't openly say it, because I could be charged with insubordination or something like that. And for the most part it's not because I want to say things to be critical or petty. I just have constructive feedback that I think would really lead to organizational improvement, or the benefit of students and staff. But if it's not in the interest of the division, really you have to remain silent about a lot of things.

This teacher-participant engaged in discrete conversations with colleagues to voice disagreement regarding organizational decisions and/or procedures and would brainstorm with select colleagues on how to navigate leadership initiatives under such circumstances.

Another teacher-participant reflected upon their historical (and ongoing) experiences expressing dissent regarding their perception of the Division’s lack of efforts to mitigate certain

forms of marginalization. While reflecting upon photos and individual experiences, TP3 further unpacked their feelings on vocalizing their position to those in formal positions of authority:

> I'll tell you honestly that the feeling of 'I wish I said this.' There's almost no worse feeling than 'I wish I had said something.' Especially, there's the feeling of, 'Oh, I wish I thought of that at the time' and that's a very different feeling then like, 'Oh, but I wish I should have said something when I had the chance, and I didn't'. It's like … I get mad, that's one of the worst feelings. As hard as it is, I try to speak up in the time. Or, if not in that moment, you can take time.

TP3 again unpacked their frustrations around feeling invisibilized and silenced as an oppressed individual, sharing these sentiments during the group reflection session:

> So, when it comes to what I see as injustice in our schools are advocating for teachers or communities, I can't not stand up … But as a woman … as a non-body conforming, as a marginalized human being to speak. I don't have the privilege not to speak. My voice is my only power, for whatever it does. And what I've learned recently is that it is exhausting, but that hasn't changed about me.

Consequent to their interactions, this teacher-participant further elaborated that they had encountered microaggressive resistance throughout their employment, specifically being denied interviews for dozens of internal job applications. Despite this, they continued to advocate for divisional anti-racism initiatives throughout Phase 2 of this study.

Similar perspectives regarding silencing and limited opportunity to engage in critical discourse were echoed by other teacher-participants. TP5 argued that there needed to be more concerted efforts to establish safe spaces for critical dialogue in public schools. This teacher-participant argued in the group reflection phase: "[We need] safe spaces to be deliberately

created, supported, and mainstreamed to make concrete strides for change in schools and education." This teacher-participant felt their leadership practice was invisibilized, that a significant portion of their labour was in facilitating leadership to make schools more inclusive and safe. TP1, as they co-organized various clubs and co-facilitated professional learning sessions to support staff in establishing equitable learning environments. TP1 lamented during a group reflection discussion:

> Like teachers, do so much, there's no shortage of committees to be involved with. But you just rarely get a 'thank you'. And not that it should be about external validation, we're not doing this (or we shouldn't be doing this just so we always get a treat or a pat on the back for every single thing we do), but I would say largely, it just goes unnoticed.

Feeling unnoticed and unappreciated for leadership endeavours were common sentiments espoused by the teacher-participant group.

The feelings of being invisiblized or silenced were documented in another teacher-participant's reflection of their effort to promote 2SLGBTQIA+ initiatives within their school. Through negotiation with their school administration, they felt that the dialogue was terminated prematurely without providing an avenue to explore alternative solutions, as the initiative required additional finances. TP4 expressed during the individual reflection session:

> There's definitely, like, frustration … It was discouraging to see that it wasn't opened up as a conversation. It was just: 'No, we're not doing [that]. Find another way.' [That's] how it read to me and to my colleagues. And so, yeah, that was disappointing, especially as a new person to the school, just to see that the admin was not a little more open to even inquiring a bit or coming to some kind of compromise on that front. It was just said: 'No, we're not doing that.'

While some of us feared voicing perspectives on certain social and/or organizational issues within our schools, there were also examples of bravery. This was reflected in one of the statements of TP5 during the group reflection session: “Teacher leadership takes courage and sacrifice: Courage to speak and work against those in power, reinforcing the status quo. Sacrifice your time, heart, and thought towards the plight of the oppressed and how to get them out.” Last, TP2 noted their defiance and commitment to their local cause, stating: “Even if we're told, ‘no,’ I don't think we're going to accept ‘no’”. From a legal and accountability standpoint, it is understandable that the school principal is the deciding voice on most school-based decisions and has the responsibility to be the final deciding voice. However, some of us were disappointed that some initiatives were not welcomed for further discussion and that the extent of our voice was ultimately determined by our school administration’s willingness to brainstorm for prospective resolutions.

As we reflected upon our photos and engaged in communal discussion, we identified the struggle in trying to find avenues and/or strategies to vocalize dissent with organizational trajectories, recognized the parameters of their own formal authority in decision-making, and felt (at times) that our voices were not authentically incorporated in school planning. The content of our photos contained various resources pertaining to equity and social justice foci, such as anti-racism literature, textile waste, accessibility issues, Indigenous education and practices, and so forth. These photos visualize the emancipatory purpose underlying our efforts and the essential need for us to vocalize our concerns and engage in critical dialogue to address these tensions and to cultivate more equitable and inclusive school environments. The feeling that our leadership practices were sometimes invisibilized, unnoticed, and/or unappreciated was commonly expressed among our teacher-participant team.

(Micro)Aggressive Collegial and/or Administrative Resistances

A further challenge experienced by several of the members of our team was the perceived (micro)aggressive resistance they encountered from staff and/or school administration. These forms of resistance manifested both overtly (e.g., explicitly being denied by school administration), as well as microaggressive forms (e.g., apathy and lack of support from colleagues). As these teachers embarked upon new school-based projects to support students' learning, wellbeing, and/or overall humanistic growth, they reflected upon the impacts of staff apathy, overt resistance, and variable levels of support from administration.

Figure 14

Co-organizing Indigenous Practices and Pedagogies



Note. A picture of a smudging bowl to promote Indigenous practices in schools.

RP2 wrote an accompanying textual caption to this photo: "Providing students and staff with opportunities to smudge together to bring knowledge and experience of the Indigenous culture to the school community for those that are interested in learning and participating in this type of ceremony." Regarding their perception of microaggressive resistance from a school administrator, TP2 further mentioned during their photoVOICE individual reflection session:

> And so actually, today I finally had a meeting with my admin, and I said, 'You know, stop putting us outside, especially in the winter, like, there needs to be a space where we can go, because by the time I round up the kids that do want to smudge, and we get our outdoor stuff on, and it's minus 40 ... Smudging should be something enjoyable, and it should be slow and not rushing because it's so cold. We don't want to get frostbite.' So, as much as I'm aware that people are allergic and stuff like that, I said to my admin: 'We really have to be aware of how we talk about smudging and being respectful because it is sacred. It's a sacred medicine. And to say that it stinks or it bothers you, there's so many more appropriate ways we can do that.'

TP2 further elaborated on their experience, notably their challenges with one of the school administrators, whom they perceived to be resistant to their initiatives to promote Indigenous practices and pedagogies with colleagues and youth. This teacher-participant eventually scheduled a meeting with all the school administrators to advocate for more inclusive practices in the building. RP2 further reflected: "I thought we were going to have a fight, but my admin said, 'I'll write a letter tonight, and I'll send it to families, and we'll start having a morning place where these kids can smudge'". While RP2 experienced initial microaggressive resistance, they were ultimately successful in negotiating and influencing their school administration to find more equitable and inclusive ways to incorporate Indigenous practices and pedagogies in their school community.

Other microaggressive resistances and apprehensions were expressed by other members of our participatory teacher team. Reflecting on their committee initiatives during the photoVOICE individual reflection session, TP5 remarked upon how colleagues' privilege negated their advocacy for anti-racism professional learning opportunities in their school:

> I was asking, like: ‘We should do a PD on anti-racism.’ And most of the committee probably, 8 out of the 10 were like: ‘Yeah, let's go through with it.’ And I think 2 of the committee [members] and admin were like, ‘Well, you got to deal with, like, white fragility we had to put up with, and we have to be careful, and then maybe we shouldn't’. And I was like: ‘Wait! That's exactly the perfect definition of, like, white fragility. Like, we're worrying about them and not doing the work, and now we're not going to get the work done’.

As a member of their school's professional development committee, this teacher-participant advocated for the school to embark upon professional learning sessions to interrogate how white supremacy structures affect students’ learning and development. However, engaging in this topic was viewed apprehensively and ultimately denied, sparing white colleagues’ discomfort.

In addition to the perceived indifference among some teacher-participants’ staff, there were examples of administrative resistance noted. During the individual reflection session, TP4 commented on their relationship with their school administration and its influence on critical teacher leadership practices:

> With the vice principal, I feel completely comfortable, and they are a very welcoming individual, whereas by contrast the principal is not a person that I would feel comfortable trying to collaborate with outside of work. Because they're just … yeah, we have very different personality types, and there have been some moments of putting my best foot forward and not realizing I've made a misstep, and it being treated as though I intentionally didn't care, or that I was trying, you know, just being careless or thoughtless.

Cordial relationships with the school administration were interpreted to be highly influential in determining the outcome of our critical leadership endeavours. In this particular narrative, TP4 recognized the bond and support they had with their vice principal but felt their principal to be less receptive, approachable, and otherwise supportive of their initiatives. Conversely, it was important to recognize that other teacher-participants acknowledged high levels of support from their school administration and felt they were, therefore, very successful in facilitating their leadership practices. It was clear among the participatory team that school administration was a significant determining factor in promoting or impeding critical teacher leadership practices.

During the group reflection phase of the project, TP5 aired their exasperation in navigating social resistances by their colleagues and/or school administration over anti-racism initiatives as a part of their committee work. They argued that "injustices are fought on paper, but are perpetually reinforced by systemic *educational* practices and ideology. For example, Eurocentric-male dominated school cultures." This teacher-participant further expressed "discomfort when asking for school support because not all teachers approve or admin wants to appease white fragility. [I feel] fear from parental or public complaints." Not all participants agreed, however, as two participants noted a sense of high morale and support among colleagues and administration. In an individual reflection session, TP6 reflected:

> We have a very supportive school community, or we've had different administrators. They've all been supportive. Our colleagues have always been supportive. When substitute teachers come into this building. They say this is a very nice place to be. Yeah, like it's, I would say we have very high morale.

This teacher-participant empathized with colleagues during the group reflection session, however, and expressed an understanding of their (micro)aggressive struggles navigating the

social complexities entailed with critical teacher leadership practices. Another teacher-participant acknowledged the social complexities between being supported, at times, by their school administration for some leadership initiatives, but being dissuaded in other instances. Overall, TP1 acknowledged the importance of their positive relationship with their school administration: "I have a great school principal that is really, very supportive, and I think is a very compassionate person, actually cares to know what I would like to do and wants to support it."

Reviewing the textual transcription of teacher-participants' photos generated, and their corroborating perspectives contextualizing these photos, generated further insights into collegial and/or administrative resistances. The photos illuminated the context and location where leadership practices were exercised (e.g., a picture of a hallway associated with advocacy for accessible bathrooms, or an Indigenous drum relating to attempts to organize staff professional learning in Indigenous perspectives). Some of these leadership practices could not be fully actualized, as these teacher-participants were met with apathy from colleagues or denied financial support from their administration. Consequently, there were no photos definitively documenting the transformative *after-effects* of these leadership practices, as they were impeded.

Overall, it was difficult to ascertain whether these experiences were due to microaggressive resistance, general apathy to the initiatives, or manifestation of their colleagues' over-exertion (being already involved in other miscellaneous committee works and responsibilities). As there were inopportune times for us, as teachers, to congregate and plan for teacher leadership projects (e.g., exclusively during lunch hours and/or after school hours), general apathy or over-exertion is understandable. However, some members of our team vented their frustration reflecting upon their efforts to co-facilitate student-centric clubs for social activist causes, but found that classroom teachers (their colleagues) were not promoting the club

and/or reminding students of upcoming meeting times. As such, staff apathy was a notable form of collegial resistance documented. None of the members of our team identified overt resistance experience from student bodies and/or school external communities (e.g., parental groups).

Occupational Exhaustion and Demoralization

Cognizant of the circumstances impeding our ability to engage in informal critical leadership practices, it was perhaps unsurprising to identify exhaustion and demoralization as a reflexively generated theme. There was a sense of exhaustion expressed by many members of our team as many of us felt, at times, over-exerted with the level of responsibilities we navigated. The feelings of lethargy were consequent to various reasons, including excessive work hours, collegial apathy and/or resistance toward initiatives, low morale, and not feeling valued by administration and others. These feelings are encapsulated through this TP5's words during an individual reflection session:

> I think it's solely that I'm tired … It feels with all the things that happen in the world, and with anti-racism, and Indigenous education, it's just tiring. Still, now that it's open, it's still falling all on the same people's shoulders. It's actually not opening up. It's just the workload is happening more, and the same people are saying that it shouldn't be falling on you.

Concern was expressed over the magnitude of expansive responsibilities placed upon teachers while being inadequately resourced to facilitate such duties. TP2 stated: "It is difficult to keep up stamina and to do leadership initiatives like this in the school when there is so much put on teachers and so much being asked of teachers, but not a lot of resources given." TP1 further expressed, "On top of that, there wasn't any gratitude for doing what we're doing. [Although] that's not why we're doing what we're doing." Many of the members of the participatory team

expressed feelings of futility and demoralization. TP4 shared their wonderings during the group reflection session regarding the nature of teacher burnout in their school community:

> I've been reflecting as I listen to everybody share, and I feel as though a big piece of the nature of this leadership work, because it is on our own time, and because it's, I guess I want to say … the nature of how stressed we can become, and what I see around me is like: 'Oh, I can see why people have burnout on their mind and why this is a topic of conversation that I'm hearing around me in my school.' Like, even just points, the ebb and flow of, like, what's going on, what has been going on in my own personal life as I've been engaging in these different forms of leadership, my ability to give. You know, you can't pour from an empty cup.

During the group reflection session, the phenomena of physical and emotional exhaustion was also recognized by another TP2, as they identified the lack of gratitude or recognition as a demoralizing factor:

> And on top of that there wasn't any gratitude for doing what we're doing. And that's not why we're doing what we're doing. But at the same time, sometimes people try to make things difficult just by [saying]: 'Oh, this doesn't work for this or this time doesn't work here. This space is supposed to be used for this, don't you know?' Or 'We want to do it this way.'

There were strong indications of the emotional toll that social justice leadership had on teacher-participants, notably as they, at times, challenged organizational protocols and/or social norms. During a group reflection session, TP3 observed:

> It's exhausting. I feel exhausted and drained. I sometimes feel, again, it's part of an identity piece, because it's like, if people assimilate, life's easier. Sometimes I feel like it

> would have been easier not to stand out. I wonder sometimes what reputation [I have] left, and how that has impacted me, and so that annoys me more than anything.

Engaging in equity and social justice labour necessitated, at times, challenging power inequities within school structures and/or formal authorities. Unfortunately, such conduct led some teacher-participants into precarious circumstances as they worried about their reputation and social standing within the organization. In the aforementioned narrative, TP3 reflected broadly on their decades of experiences engaging in critical teacher leadership practices (not exclusively their engagements in their Phase 2 PhotoVOICE capacity). However, it was a common sentiment among our team, particularly those willing to challenge formal authority on perceived inequitable structures and processes, that remaining silent and assimilating would have been *easier* and less strenuous on our own wellbeing.

As we reflected on our photos generated during the photoVOICE phase of the study, many of us demonstrated multifaceted emotions relating to the photo illuminating our leadership experiences. Some of our memories revealed feelings of joy and pride as we reminisced about our accomplishments. However, these photos also elicited negative emotions, such as sadness and/or disappointment, as we unpacked the social and/or structural challenges we encountered. The review of photos and accompanying textual transcriptions of visual content revealed that the majority of these photos were created outside the confines of the classroom, extending beyond our prescribed instructional time. For example, many of the locations were in hallways, resource rooms for meetings, offices, and so forth. As many critical teacher leadership practices extended beyond classroom pedagogy into influencing broader school function, these photos further bolster understanding that teachers engage in a multitude of practices across various contexts, in addition to their classroom duties.

Not all members of our team expressed exhaustion during their critical teacher leadership practices, however. TP6 did not convey these feelings, while another noted that they did not specifically share the sentiments expressed, but felt because of their current position as a resource teacher, they had more flexibility in their schedules; this teacher-participant also expressed empathy for classroom teachers, stating that they understood the difficulty classroom teachers face in navigating rigid school timetables. There were varying degrees of physical and/or emotional exhaustion expressed by the five teacher-participants, some ranging from feelings of "burnt out" to others being disappointed and tired. These efforts were highly exertive as we largely engaged in our practices during lunch and/or after school hours. The feelings of futility, lack of appreciation, the perceived invisibilization of our contributions, and emotional associations via engagement in social justice work all contributed to emotional difficulties expressed among our participatory team.

Discussion

New theoretical insights were drawn from these findings, notably identifying tensions in how teacher professionalism as an ideology and occupational value (Evetts, 2011) intersected with critical teacher leadership practices. While there were many impacts associated with our leadership practices in this study (as outlined in Chapter 4), there were various social and/or structural barriers impeding such endeavours. In particular, new tensions emerged in understanding how informal, grassroots leadership practices are a necessary function to ensure teachers' transformative professional potential (Sachs, 2003; 2016), but are met with (micro)aggressive resistances. Further, our critical reflections illuminated the exceptionally isolating nature of teachers' working conditions, explicitly negating our transformative professional potential to interact in critical dialogue, reflection, and planning to facilitate

emancipatory grassroots change. Consequent to such barriers compromising our dialogical agentic potential, members of our participatory team expressed sentiments of frustration, futility, exhaustion, demoralization, and occupational burnout.

While teachers' professional practices are commonly predicated on collegial relationships and collaborations (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Evetts, 2011; Hargreaves, 2000) and distributed leadership functions are facilitated to address organizational objectives (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Spillane, 2006), teachers are also markedly impacted by isolating working conditions (Apple, 2012a; Sachs, 2003; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). We, as teachers, strived to fulfil various organizational functions (e.g., committee work, engaging in professional learning and development, etc.), but were displaced to meet during our lunch and/or after school hours as there were no designated collaborative meeting times during the school day. Engaging in professional dialogue, which was an interest among our team, was consequently limited to informal conversations in the hallways or lunch table. As such, the scarcity of our scheduled time to engage in critical/reflective dialogue, collaborate, plan, and engage in other necessary collegial activities was particularly noted. Our leadership engagements were ultimately confined through our sociomaterial interactions (Eva et al., 2021; Oborn et al., 2013; Orlikowski, 2007) with the materials and spaces readily available, further impacted by the propinquity (Spillane et al., 2017; Shirrell & Spillane, 2020) of colleagues and resources accessible to us throughout endeavours. Physical school layouts and scheduling structures separated our capacity to socially engage with our colleagues throughout our engagements, negatively impacting our professional agencies. Our experiences illuminated the highly isolating nature of the teacher profession and how unconducive school structures are in fostering dialogical shared leadership (collegiality and shared leadership being core components of transformative professionalism) (Boylan et al.,

2023; Sachs, 2003; 2016; Stone-Johnson, 2016). Teachers' isolation may be interpreted as the embodiment of Apple's (2012b) technical control of teachers' labour, specifically controlling physical spaces and work schedules, determining when and how teachers may collegially interact. Spillane et al. (2017) have continued inquiry into distributed leadership practices in organizational contexts, specifically exploring how physical layouts and the infrastructures of space impact the potentiality for collegial, shared leadership practices to occur. As grassroots leadership practices necessitate community dialogue and organizing (Davidson & Hughes, 2022; Ehrich & English, 2012; Freire, 1970/2000; Tierney, 1989), the isolating nature of our work was a notable barrier to our potential in engaging in emancipatory practices. Critical dialogue, reflection, and planning all necessitate mutual time for teachers to congregate; the current infrastructure of school structures explicitly negates such occupational culture and function. Wenner and Campbell (2017) identified the necessary social conditions for teacher leadership to flourish, commenting that teachers "are usually isolated during their work, and perhaps more so now given the intensification of their labor" (p. 127). Sachs (2003) affirmed the occupational limitations associated with teachers' isolation, noting that the inability to interact with colleagues diminished their capacity to engage in learning and professional dialogue. The commodity of time in public school systems has been well-documented, as it is considered routine practice among many teachers to arrive at their schools early, leave late, and engage in additional labour at home in the evening (Apple, 2012a). Teachers being preoccupied with extensive duties and having little time within the school day has been reported in previous teacher leadership inquiries (Nguyen et al., 2019; Simpson, 2021; Wang & Ho, 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Simpson (2021) commented that "time is possibly the greatest challenge teachers face in general, and it is a significant reason why teachers may be hesitant to get involved in leadership" (p. 242). Last,

regarding the organizational structuring of schools, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) overtly stated: “It is amazing that teacher leadership is possible in schools as they are currently structured” (p. 93). Allotting time to teacher dialogue is not prioritized to support teachers’ (transformative) professionalism.

Another key finding related the limitations of our organizational voice in facilitating leadership practices. Many of the members of our participatory team expressed frustration at the lack of organizational voice to facilitate our leadership practices, as well as lamenting over the perceived invisibilization of their work (labour that is regularly unrecognized). Teachers’ voices may manifest through a variety of channels, such as inclusion in decision-making, autonomy over professional practice in- and outside their classrooms, and for the ability to freely exercise perspectives on school function (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Hargreaves, 2001; Sehrawat, 2014). Apple (2012b) acknowledged the covert masking of inequities in school systems, stating: “Power could be ‘made invisible’ by incorporating it into the very structure of the work itself … control must come from what seems to be a legitimate overall structure” (p. 96). Within this research, we identified that the structural parameters of the education system limited our voice. While some members of our team liaised and negotiated with school principals, decision-making was ultimately at the sole discretion of the administrator. As such, some of our leadership initiatives stagnated when our school principal was unwilling to advance the dialogue (e.g., willingness to advocate to senior administration for additional monetary support). Many members of our team also reflected upon the limitations of free expression, feeling unable to either publicly dissent or provide constructive feedback on school function. Further, teacher leadership practices were documented to be quite laborious, but we felt our work was often invisibilized and unrecognized by our supervisors. From the distributed perspective of leadership, Gronn (2010) acknowledges

the significant role of workers' voice, describing it as "the quintessential mode of mass political engagement in a liberal democracy, entail[ing] the articulation of affirmative or negative claims, either directly by virtue of membership or indirectly through representation, to managers and power-holders" (p. 154). Giroux (1986) affirmed the integral role teachers serve in enacting school change, commenting: "[it] is through the mediation and action of teacher voice that the very nature of the schooling process is often either sustained or challenged" (p. 207). Organizational silencing as a methodical purpose to control workers' emancipatory potential was previously documented (Kezar, 2011; Lumby, 2014). As such, exploring the silencing of teachers' voices in leadership practice certainly warrants further investigation.

Teachers' autonomous voice is a necessary workplace condition to ensure individuals' professional development, the professionalization of the teaching career, and for teacher leadership and agency to flourish (Frostenson, 2015; Livingstone, 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Zepeda et al., 2023). Spreitzer (2007) emphasized the fundamental importance of workers' capacity to utilize their voice, arguing that increased opportunity to engage in critical dialogue would result in workers' empowerment. Frostensen (2015) previously reflected upon the multilevel interpretation of teachers' autonomy (e.g., individual, collegial, and general). I argue that new tensions in teachers' autonomy emerged, specifically differentiating teachers' pedagogical autonomy from leadership autonomy. As teachers, we reflected upon relatively high levels of autonomy in designing and implementing critical pedagogies in our classrooms throughout the duration of this study. Teachers' pedagogical autonomy is affirmed within the literature, as Apple (2012b) notes, "Given the relatively autonomous nature of teaching, one can usually close one's door and not be disturbed" (p. 97). However, we demonstrated mixed levels of leadership autonomy, specifically regarding our potential to engage in decision-making,

influence organizational trajectories, organize with peers, and so forth. Our perception of autonomy was mixed in this study, as some teachers were largely successful in achieving the objectives of their practices but navigated their labour through a hierarchical system not necessarily conducive to such efforts. While there were occurrences when we were included in some decision-making processes, there were also circumstances where we felt that our voice was absent in school and/or divisional-based decisions. Loss of workplace autonomy via de-professionalization of teachers' practice has been an increasing concern for several decades (Apple, 2012a; 2012b; Frostenson, 2015; Giroux, 1986). Through the reflexive thematic analysis, two teacher-participants who self-identified as racialized expressed the belief that their perspectives were, at times, tokenistic and not authentically incorporated into meaningful decision-making with their schools and/or division, particularly when involved in anti-racist committee work. This finding is, unfortunately, consistent with other findings on marginalized perspectives remaining invisibilized in education systems (Apple, 2008; Marshall, 2004; Taylor et al., 2022). Discussion pertaining to the intersections of teacher leadership and organizational voice is limited in the literature. There is ample research, however, outlining the interconnections of teachers' involvement in school decision-making with both the efficacy of their leadership practices as well as their overall feeling of appreciation (Hoy & Tarter, 2004; Simpson, 2022; Wang & Ho, 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). De-professionalization of practice sparked some teacher-participants in this study to engage in critical teacher leadership (e.g., responding to their reduced input in organizing school professional development sessions, leading to the establishment of professional learning communities).

Coinciding with the sentiments of teachers' limited voice and self-censorship, it was evident that to be a transformative (or activist) teacher professional (Sachs, 2003; 2016) was, in some cases, implicitly perceived as being *unprofessional*. Many of us expressed frustration in participating in microemancipatory efforts (e.g., dissenting against organizational trajectories) and pondered how our resistance may affect our professional reputation, fearful of being labeled a troublemaker. While grassroots leadership often materializes with the intent to ameliorate social inequities, traditional educational leadership practices have historically aimed to suppress conflict or public dissent of social issues (Davidson & Hughes; Ehrich & English, 2014; Lumby, 2014). As such, teachers' relationships with school principals appeared to be of paramount importance in navigating grassroots leadership endeavours alongside their employers. It must be further noted, however, that school principals' determination of which leadership practices to support and/or impede may constitute as Apple's (2012b) simple control of labour, practices being informally regulated at the behest of local administration. These findings generated new insight into the tensions between activist conduct/behaviour and traditional professionalism ideologies within the teaching profession. While teachers are generally assumed to support and advocate for their students' academic and humanistic needs, such processes require dialogue with individuals in positions of authority. Therefore, critical teacher leadership may, at times, necessitate challenging the status quo within educational infrastructures and may require negotiation and/or confrontation with individuals in positions of authority. However, advocacy efforts may be contrary to the organizational visions and directions, thus leading to adverse outcomes, such as overt confrontation (e.g., a teacher-participant explicitly emailing formal administration to express disagreement on an issue) and/or microaggressions (e.g., a teacher-participant passive aggressively asking public questions at staff meetings with the intent to raise

awareness to colleagues over school function and decision-making). As one teacher-participant noted in a reflection discussion: “Even if we're told: ‘No,’ I don't think we're going to accept ‘no’.” Such engagements, however, may jeopardize teachers’ professional reputation, potential for career advancement, organizational relationships, and/or job security. In Chapter 6, I further explore Manitoba educational documents to create an in-depth understanding of teachers’ professional practice engaging in equity and social justice teachings and emancipatory grassroots leadership.

The findings generated in this study, identifying the significant role that school administration has on the efficacy of teachers’ leadership practices, is consistent with other studies (e.g., Nguyen et al., 2019; Wang & Ho, 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). In many instances, our school principals served an integral role in facilitating and/or impeding our critical teacher leadership practices, which is consistent with other studies (Nguyen et al., 2018; Simpson, 2021; Wang & Ho, 2019; Wenner & Campbell). This is consistent with other findings, as teacher leaders frequently encounter sentiments of resentment from colleagues (often attributed to colleagues’ perceptions that teacher leaders receive preferential treatment from administration, or do not value teacher leaders as they do not hold any formal authority) (Simpson, 2021; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Many of us also experienced conflict with administrators who were not necessarily supportive of certain initiatives (particularly projects that required increased monetary funding). Resistance from administration was also previously documented within the literature as school principals serve a crucial role in determining factors of many teacher leadership practices (Kezar, 2011; Simpson, 2021; Wang & Ho, 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Many of us documented our experiences navigating colleagues’ apathy in participation in new leadership initiatives. It was not ascertained whether collegial resistance was

consequent to microaggressive resistance, general apathy, scheduling incongruence, or colleagues' overexertion and exhaustion. However, colleagues' lack of engagement impeded some critical teaching leadership practices. Collegial resistance (and even resentment) toward teacher leaders has been documented in previous research (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Kezar, 2011; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). None of the members of our team shared experiences of community resistance (e.g., parental communities) as they engaged in social justice-related leadership initiatives. Teachers feeling uncomfortable or unsafe to advocate for social justice issues was previously documented (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Lopez, 2014).

Consequent to these social and/or structural barriers, expressions of exhaustion and demoralization were reported by several of the teacher-participants in this study. The limitations in teachers' occupational voice were particularly noted. This was evidenced in TP3's lamentation of publicly expressing dissent, remarking that: "If people assimilate, life's easier. Sometimes I feel like it would have been easier not to stand out." Engaging in critical dialogue is essential to confront the status quo and advance emancipatory change. Many of the contributing factors to this sense of exhaustion were associated with frequently working during lunch hours and after school to engage in initiatives, often feeling individually burdened with specific tasks, while navigating periods of apathy and resistance from staff to fulfil our goals. This sentiment was encapsulated in TP5's reflection, identifying how many grassroots leadership initiatives fall on individual teachers and that there are few structures in teachers' schedules to foster such critical functions. Kezar (2011) reflected on how administrators' concerted efforts to minimize grassroots leadership opportunities led to workers' feelings of being devalued and invisibilized. Wang and Ho (2019) comment that "it is a pity that few literature studies are focusing on discussing the impact of job satisfaction on teacher leadership" (p. 362). In their comprehensive

literature review, Wenner and Campbell (2017) did note that teachers feeling unappreciated and/or unrecognized have been documented, and state, “it was noted that they felt more inclined to be teacher leaders if they received some sort of recognition” (p. 154). Simpson (2021) since advocated to school administrators to recognize (and even compensate) teacher leaders for their contributions to their communities. Wenner and Campbell (2017) acknowledged teacher leaders’ feelings of over-exertion and difficulty balancing responsibilities, while Taylor et al (2022) similarly raised this concern, commenting that teacher leadership “is an incredibly daunting, and at times exhausting, task that involves wearing multiple hats and moving fluidly in and out of different spaces.” (p. 215). Although time is a consideration in the facilitation and/or impediment of teacher leadership, investigating the equitable distribution of labour among teacher leaders remains largely unexplored. It is of utmost importance to contextualize the sentiments shared by the teacher-participants in this study, however. This research was conducted during the 2022/2023 school year as we facilitated leadership tasks in (post) pandemic environments. Teacher burnout is a phenomenon that has been documented for decades (Falecki & Mann, 2015; Puttwain & von der Embse, 2019) as high rates of attrition continue to affect the profession (Beltman et al., 2011). Teacher control and non-autonomous workplace conditions have been strongly correlated with burnout and demoralization (Ertürk, 2023; Ozga, 1999 Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Unfortunately, the decline in teachers’ wellbeing has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Laidlaw, 2023; 2024; Sokal et al., 2021). Further, it was also during this period that Manitoba public schools were navigating several years of chronic underfunding from the provincial government. Public schools reported significant deficits in public funding, leading to significant educational staff layoffs (MacIntosh, 2023), exploring private-public partnerships to construct new schools, and eliminating school programs. Therefore, it is important to

acknowledge these extenuating circumstances and their prospective influence on teacher-participants' attitudes associated with our critical teacher leadership practices.

A further consideration that could have influenced our perspectives on engaging in critical leadership is the momentous socio-political developments emerging across the globe. Particularly, a surge in popularity for far-right political ideology, rhetoric, and policy over the past decade. Giroux and DiMaggio (2024) warn of the mounting threat to teachers and public schools, highlighting the increase in volatile rhetoric directed towards teachers and legislation impeding practices. Consequently, Giroux and DiMaggio further assert that there is a growing distrust of teachers' practices, specifically a growing perception that teachers are inappropriately engaging in political proselytism to convert youth and exert ideological content on vulnerable minds. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the magnitude to which these external socio-political developments may have impacted our critical teacher practices exercised in this study. It is imperative to acknowledge, however, that none of the seven teacher-participants recounted feelings and/or experiences of being socially repressed by parental groups and/or our external communities as they engaged in our critical teacher leadership practices. Further, none of us on the participatory team explicitly reflected upon hesitancy to facilitate critical leadership practices out of fear of rebuke by our community. Regardless, even if we did not individually experience external social resistance, it is quite conceivable that our corresponding school principals may not support select emancipatory grassroots initiatives.

Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated many of the organizational tensions that affected our leadership potentialities in our school communities. The predominant factors impeding such practices included incongruent school schedules, lack of organizational voice, collegial apathy

and/or resistance, and exhaustion and demoralization. The findings demonstrated the importance of teachers' autonomous voices in emancipatory grassroots leadership practices, which were often impeded by silencing, the inability to freely exercise voice, decision-making, and overall professional judgement in public schools. Further, these findings highlighted the foundational importance of collegiality in critical teacher leadership, specifically the compromised ability to congregate, plan, and engage in dialogical discourse with colleagues. These social and/or structural barriers consequently limited our agentic, transformative professional potential through not being able to dialogically enact meaningful change in our school communities. The next chapter explored the intersections between Manitoba's prescribed professional responsibilities and our actual, local critical leadership practices (inter)enacted.

Chapter 6: Contextualizing the Transformative Professionalism of Critical Teacher Leadership Practices in Manitoba

This chapter unpacked the third research question: *How is critical teacher leadership demonstrated as a transformative professional practice in the Manitoba context?* As our participatory team engaged in critical teacher leadership practices during the 2022/2023 school year, our reflections and perceptions of the impacts of our initiatives were thoroughly described and analyzed in Chapter 4, while the social and/or structural challenges impeding our practices were discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter disseminates the thematic analysis of all data sources, exploring how our professional roles and responsibilities, as prescribed in Manitoba education documents, intersect with our critical teacher leadership practices in our school communities. The thorough description of these documents and their relevance to the research question was presented in Chapter 3 in the data sources section. Through this thematic analysis process, codes were generated, later organized into categories, and eventually establishing themes were established across all data sources. I share the summation of this process in Table 5.

Table 5

Codes, Categories, and Themes of Teachers' Transformative Professionalism

Codes	Categories	Themes
■ Teaching ■ Pedagogy ■ Curriculum ■ Learning ■ Plan ■ Design ■ Implement ■ Accountable ■ Assess/Evaluate ■ Report ■ Share ■ Equity	Design, implement, assess, report on/for students' learning ■ Teaching ■ Pedagogy ■ Curriculum ■ Learning ■ Plan ■ Design ■ Implement ■ Accountable ■ Assess/Evaluate	Leadership practice through critical pedagogies

■ Anti-racism ■ Queer pedagogies ■ Inclusion ■ Diversity ■ Truth and Reconciliation ■ Support ■ Well-being ■ Discipline ■ Maintain order ■ Classroom management ■ Safety ■ Health ■ Growth ■ Collaborate ■ Collegiality ■ Meeting ■ Committees ■ Advocate ■ Liaising ■ Decision-making ■ Professional learning ■ Professional development ■ Mentoring ■ Autonomy ■ Reflect(ions) ■ Continue/ongoing ■ Dialogue ■ Discuss ■ Listen ■ Decision-making ■ Behaviour ■ Diligence ■ Conduct ■ Integrity ■ Good faith ■ Ethical/Moral ■ Public figure ■ Responsibility/ Responsible ■ Obligations ■ Safety ■ Well-being	■ Report ■ Autonomy ■ Behaviour ■ Dialogue ■ Listen ■ Discussion ■ Committees Co-engage students in learning on equity and social justice topics ■ Share ■ Equity ■ Anti-racism ■ Queer pedagogies ■ Inclusion ■ Truth and Reconciliation ■ Dialogue ■ Discuss ■ Advocate Supporting students' physical safety/mental health and development ■ Responsible ■ Discipline ■ Accountable ■ Maintain order ■ Classroom management ■ Safety ■ Health ■ Support ■ Ethical/Moral ■ Growth ■ Support ■ Well-being ■ Ethical/Moral ■ Growth ■ Safeguard ■ Listen Instruction to support safe and inclusive school communities ■ Responsible ■ Liaising	

■ Growth ■ Report ■ Participate	■ Committee work ■ Decision-making ■ Ethical/Moral	
	Engaging in ongoing professional learning ■ Dialogue ■ Discuss ■ Professional learning ■ Professional development ■ Reflections ■ Mentoring Self-directed professional learning ■ Autonomy ■ Dialogue ■ Discuss ■ Collegiality ■ Professional learning ■ Professional development ■ Reflections ■ Mentoring	Empowering self and colleagues to lead through emancipatory learning
	Ethical conduct ■ Responsible ■ Decision-making ■ Behaviour ■ Diligence ■ Conduct ■ Integrity ■ Good faith ■ Ethical/Moral ■ Responsible Professional practice ■ Collaboration ■ Collegiality ■ Listen ■ Conduct ■ Committees ■ Advocate ■ Liaising ■ Decision-making ■ Professional learning	Transformative professionalism premised on collegiality and shared leadership

	■ Professional development ■ Autonomy Cultivating safe and inclusive school communities ■ Liaising ■ Committee work ■ Decision-making ■ Ethical/Moral ■ Listen	

After reviewing these Manitoba education documents, it is considerable to acknowledge that the term *leadership* is almost never formally equated with teachers' identity or prescribed role and responsibility within the school system. In fact, *school leader(ship)* is frequently synonymized with formal roles (e.g., school principal) and is often directly juxtaposed with teachers' prescribed responsibilities. One implicit assumption contained in these documents is that teachers are designated followers and that school leaders are individuals who hold formal positions of authority in the Manitoba education system. However, the underlying meaning of the language contained within these documents, as well as the perspectives and photos generated by my colleagues and I, reveal that teachers' professional practice entails routine engagement in informal, emancipatory grassroots leadership practices to serve a variety of situational purposes. These informal leadership practices serve vital school functions, such as supporting students' learning, well-being, sense of safety, and inclusion through collective "whole school approaches" to cultivate safe school environments in- and outside the parameters of the classroom. These collegial efforts manifest via highly socially complex interactions among various individuals within the educational system. I reiterate my conceptual interpretation of leadership practice through the distributed perspective, drawing upon Spillane's (2006) assertion: "Leadership refers to activities tied to the core work of the organization that are designed by organizational

members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, or practices of other organizational members" (p. 11). Through thematically analyzing the educational documents, photo transcriptions, and individual and group reflection discussion textual transcripts, three themes were generated: (a) leading through critical-oriented pedagogies; (b) empowering self and colleagues to lead through emancipatory learning; and (c) transformative professionalism is premised on collegiality and shared leadership.

Leading through Critical-Oriented Pedagogies

A foundational tenet of teachers' transformative professionalism in this Manitoba context lies within the practice of knowledge generation, both through raising the critical consciousness of students, but also via the ongoing pursuit of sharing this liberatory knowledge across school communities beyond the parameters of the classroom. In essence, the teaching profession in this Manitoba context is about planning, designing, and creating learning opportunities to ameliorate social inequities and cultivate a more democratic, just society through combating the oppressive forces that impede students' learning and full humanistic potential. Such practices cannot be isolated to a single classroom, but rather manifest in the sharing of knowledge across school communities and beyond. In turn, such initiatives serve as an informal leadership practice premised upon influencing others to make informed changes to bring about change and mitigate social inequities, and to cultivate safe school environments through collective "whole school approaches". Facilitating critical knowledge generation, to raise students' critical consciousness, challenge misinformation, instil moral values, cultivate safe and equitable school environments, and empower students and teachers as an informal emancipatory leadership professional reflective practice is evidenced both in Manitoba educational documents and through the perspectives and experiences shared by the participatory team.

This theme is subtle, though evidenced across the Manitoba education documents analyzed. Within the divisional policies analyzed, teachers are mandated to plan, design, and implement critical-oriented pedagogies to accommodate the needs and interests of their student bodies. Further, teachers in this context are bestowed the responsibility to ameliorate social inequities and injustices through problem-posing education and critical emancipatory knowledge generating. Within the divisional policy documents, teachers are "responsible for establishing and maintaining conditions conducive to learning and teaching within their classroom and within the school" (n.p.). Cultivating learning environments is not limited to the classroom, but is rather encapsulated within the broader context of the school and adjacent community. Teachers in this context are required to plan, design, and implement critical-oriented learning experiences for students to "engage students in anti-racism learning and activities across all grade levels" n.p.), to integrate Indigenous perspectives "in all core curricular areas" (n.p.), and to "respond to the diversity of their students (e.g. cultural, linguistic and developmental)" (n.p.). Teachers' professional conduct is not limited to promoting students' academic achievement, but rather to cultivate safe and inclusive school environments and to be "responsive to their students' academic, social and emotional needs" (n.p.). In addition to ameliorating social inequities through critical pedagogies, teachers in this context are also mandated to cultivate moral values and a sense of democratic citizenship among their learners. As such, these teachers must "develop a sense of their [students'] place in a global context and of their responsibility as global citizens" (n.p), to "teach our students to behave in ways that are respectful, considerate and safe" (n.p), "to value diversity, respect difference and to behave accordingly" (n.p), and to "teach children to do the right thing for the right reason, to take responsibility for their actions, to solve problems, understand one another and to correct and learn from their mistakes" (n.p.). All

teachers are expected to instruct critical pedagogies, as well, particularly to address racism, colonial perspectives, queerphobic attitudes, and so forth. As one divisional policy document states, "it is everyone's responsibility to incorporate Indigenous education" (n.p.) while another notes that "we must address their [students'] learning needs and lived experience through anti-racist teaching through an equitable distribution of resources" (n.p.). Evidently, teachers serve a pivotal role in generating critical knowledge and moral values among youth so that they contribute to a welcoming, inclusive world free from oppression.

The Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) (2024b) takes similar positions on teachers' responsibility to teach from an equity and social justice lens and to be an agent in cultivating a more just society. In addition to MTS affirming that "the primary role of the teacher is to teach" (p. 139), the *Code of Professional Conduct* clearly articulates that a "Member's first professional responsibility is to the Member's students" (p. 85), but also that "a Member upholds the principles and protections outlined in the Manitoba Human Rights Code, and develops an environment that is free from all forms of discrimination, hate, and oppression" (p. 86). Teachers are expected to address all forms of discriminatory hate and to be contributing agents in establishing safe and inclusive school environments. Regarding the philosophical foundations of teaching, MTS believes that:

> … the fundamental aim of education is the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, aesthetic and moral development of individuals into people who realize self-respect, self-fulfillment and their relevance in society, with the aim that students become contributing members of their communities, able to think critically about society and participate in the democratic process. (pp. 137-138)

Fostering a sense of democratic citizenship is core to Manitoba teachers' transformative professional practice and thus must encourage students to exercise their voice and be involved in broad school activities and influence function. MTS takes the position that the apex purpose of public education is to empower students with problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking skills (p. 138) and to foster their interpersonal social development to benefit broader community life (p. 139). MTS further advises its members to review and monitor curricula and/or classroom resources for oppressive bias, generalizations, or stereotypes that induce discriminatory attitudes (p. 146), oppose all forms of standardized learning (p. 141), and advocates that teachers "must have the autonomy to design learning experiences that support achievement of the learning outcome" (p. 143). Similar to the divisional policy documents, the MTS also demonstrates the transformative professional responsibility of teachers to foster students' critical-oriented learning and to contribute in the collective effort to ameliorate social inequities through educational practice.

Manitoba legislation sets the foundation of teachers' professional practice, particularly on instruction, although is quite vague and does not offer specifics of teaching or leadership practices. Manitoba teachers are responsible for "providing an effective classroom learning environment" and "teaching the curriculum prescribed or approved by the minister" (Education Administration Act, 2023, n.p.), must comply with the MTS Code of Professional Practice (Manitoba Teachers' Society Act, 2024), and "teach diligent and faithfully" in accordance with school divisions' prescribed policies and expectations (Public Schools Act, 2015, n.p.). Further, teachers' practices and pedagogies must be in accordance with the Manitoba Human Rights Code (2024) as "much discrimination is rooted in ignorance and education is essential to its eradication, and therefore it is important that human rights educational programs assist

Manitobans to understand all their fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as their corresponding duties and responsibilities to others" (n.p.). The MTS (2024a) *Provincial Collective Agreement* does ensure Manitoba teachers' instructional day is no longer than five and a half hours. However, this agreement does acknowledge that "the instructional day does not constitute the entire workday. Nothing in this Article limits a Teacher's obligation to discharge their professional responsibilities outside the instructional day" (p. 32). While the provincial collective agreement guarantees Manitoba teachers prep time and uninterrupted lunch breaks, their transformative professionalism never ceases and are always expected to uphold their moral servitude to their student bodies. Manitoba legislation and the provincial collective agreement suggest that teachers, as transformative professionals, are ambiguously always 'on duty' to morally serve their students and the public good.

In several of the MEECL documents, the concept of a *school-wide approach* or shared responsibility is consistently exemplified in teaching youth anti-discriminatory, inclusive, moral attitudes. Teachers serve a crucial role in this collective, interactive view on co-facilitating students' learning and growth in this domain. The MEECL *Safe and Caring Schools* (2017b) document describes the school-wide approach, specifically that it is a shared responsibility in "preventing, intervening in, and responding to violence and bullying, cyberbullying, and other unacceptable student behaviour" (p. 4) and that such practices may be mitigated through teaching self-discipline and other instructional engagements. The MEECL *Supporting Trans and Gender-Diverse Students* (2018) document similarly acknowledges this shared perspective and expresses the sentiment that respect and affirmation for students' diverse identities may be achieved through instruction. Teachers are thus requested to critically review curricula and classroom resources for potentially oppressive content or processes and are prompted to "integrate T/GD

topics, themes, and content (including learning resources)" into school learning experiences and to actively challenge "T/GD stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination" (p. 37) in schools. In the MEECL *Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race* (2017a) document, there is a firm position that "FNMI peoples need to know and understand how systematic racism continues to affect them and their children" (p. 20) and that the best approach is by "empower[ing] students to think critically" through teaching about "equality, justice, and power" (p. 38), and that Manitoba teachers must taking a critical stance and actively "engage student in critical and courageous conversations on race and racism" (p. 38). Last, heeding teachers to take critical-oriented approaches is further evidenced in the MEECL (2022) *Mamàhtawisiwin Indigenous Policy Framework* prompting teachers to "embed learning about Indigenous values and traditions into daily teaching (not as a specific theme or unit)" (p. 25). To support Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, Manitoba teachers are prompted to "create opportunities for students to share their knowledge and their stories" (p. 24), to learn about historical events and atrocities (such as the Residential School systems), but also to facilitate "safe discussions of difficult issues" (p. 24). These MEECL (2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2022) documents all share the sentiment that Manitoba teachers are to cultivate safe and equitable school environments through shared educational practices and are responsible for assisting in the societal effort to mitigate many of these social injustices.

By reading the documents independently, one could surmise that critical pedagogies occur in an organizational vacuum and are compartmentalized to teaching students exclusively within the confines of the classroom. However, the educational documents also iterate the concept of shared responsibility through collective "whole school approaches" to cultivate safe, welcoming, and equitable school environments. This theme of critical leadership through

teaching was further evidenced in the photos and reflection discussions of our school initiatives, practices that occurred in- and outside the classroom. As an example, Mark, one of the teacher-participants, was involved in various leadership initiatives that were interwoven with critical pedagogies to establish school environments to were safe and welcoming. One example was his involvement in promoting the school morning smudge program. A photo of his experience is shared in Figure 15.

Figure 15

Promoting Indigenous Practices and Pedagogies in School



Mark wrote as an accompanying textual caption to this photo: “Volunteered to have cedar hung over classroom door and provided ‘Tansi’ signs to classroom and support the daily smudging group at the school”. Mark further elaborated in the individual reflection session:

> So, usually they give a reminder on the announcements every day. But, just like land acknowledgments, I'd say it just turns it to a blur and kids ignore it. Or maybe, I don't

> know if teachers are going right into work … So, I started - when I walk down the hallway, I started poking my head into [classrooms] saying: "Hey, let's go! Yeah. Why don't you go to smudging today?" I say: "Let's go, let's go!" And getting siblings to grab their siblings. So, I don't know if teachers are, like, annoyed by me for doing that. But is that really inclusion? Is that really being open and welcome if the schools are inviting it, but classroom teachers aren't giving that space, right?

Through other committee work and his participation in various school initiatives, Mark made a concerted effort to promote anti-racist and Indigenous education and practices in his school community. This was done in an effort to help cultivate a safe and inclusive school environment for the student population. He demonstrated his commitment to encourage students across the school community to participate and to influence his teacher colleagues by promoting various initiatives, such as the smudging program.

Similarly, Aileen, another teacher participant, also navigated the intersections of teaching and leadership to address ecological concerns in her school by educating students about textile waste through repurposing the school's *Lost and Found* to inform and influence their actions. Her experiences are further described in Figure 16.

Figure 16

Leadership Initiatives to Ameliorate Textile Waste



Note. A photo of unclaimed Winter apparel at the school Lost-and-Found.

Aileen commented in the individual reflection session: “So, I'm trying to teach children to take care of their clothing and prevent textile waste from ending up in the landfill, and to stop children from thinking that donating things is the answer to preventing waste.” She further acknowledged the impact she and her students were having in their school community:

> Our administrators will talk about the Lost and Found now during announcements, as well. Yeah, I overhear teachers talking about why it's important to take care of our belongings. So, everyone is doing it … But the common thread in all of these things is you're not going to have anyone buying into something that you think is important unless the kids are part of it.

Aileen mentored these students to become *Lost and Found ambassadors*, co-leading school efforts to influence others to be mindful of their clothing and accessories through education on the impacts of textile waste. Various other teaching leadership initiatives were demonstrated by our team of teachers, such as Kris co-facilitating an educative campaign on queerphobia and anti-bullying through designing pink shirt day logos. Similarly, Gaou modelled his commitment to anti-racist education by being involved in co-planning his school's *Black History Month* assembly, informing and influencing the school community on the importance of diversity,

equity, and inclusion. Both critical pedagogies and critical leadership practices are premised on emancipatory change, liberation, and influencing others. Consequently, teachers and students aimed to engage in emancipatory grassroots leadership practices stemming from their critical learning. As evidenced within our interactive leadership experiences, critical learning extended beyond our classrooms and aimed to influence others within our school communities.

Empowering Self and Colleagues to Lead through Emancipatory Learning

As transformative professionals, Manitoba teachers need to continually enhance their practice via self-directed knowledge generation in critical emancipatory topics. The education documents analyzed illuminate the imperative function self-improvement efforts serve for advancing Manitoba teachers' transformative professional practice in teaching and informal grassroots leadership practice. This theme is further corroborated in our reflection discussion and photo transcriptions of our local critical teacher leadership interactions. This analysis reveals the expansive breadth of critical learnings in which Manitoba teachers are mandated to continually engage. Areas of ongoing professional learning include: the history and atrocities of Residential school systems, systemic racism in Canada and school systems, the marginalization of queer and trans youth, disability and inclusion, climate change and sustainability, classism, among other critical-oriented topics. To mitigate these social tensions, Manitoba teachers must facilitate knowledge generation on these topics via engaging in routine informal discussions, professional learning communities, mentorship, or participation in self-directed initiatives (e.g., personal readings, research, etc.). Being empowered through new knowledge and critical reflection are necessary for teachers' transformative professional practice in teaching and informal grassroots leadership.

The divisional policies in which our critical teacher leadership practices were initiated outline various mandates regarding our conduct in professional learning. Various divisional policy documents exemplify this core function, asserting employed teachers "acting as professionals who serve the public interest … must ensure that they are current in the knowledge of the profession and must take responsibility for the application of that knowledge in diverse situations" (n.p.). Another divisional policy document states that teachers should "seek continuously to develop their professional skills and academic knowledge in the context of current education research." Participating in routine critical dialogue and reflection is also an essential component of teachers' professional learning. The divisional policy document demonstrates this quality:

> Dialogue and action are built upon enabling conditions of trust and open communication. Leadership built on trust and communication will foster the professional learning which results through reflection, dialogue and action. Administrators and teachers benefit from collegial discussion of education and teaching and are encouraged to engage in such discussion frequently. Educational judgement is negotiated through reflective dialogue. (n.p.)

This divisional education policy document further states:

> Teachers are called upon to make hundreds of decisions or judgements each day. It is important to be able to stop and to reflect upon the assumptions, ideas, beliefs and values that underpin the actions that are taken. It is also important for educators to talk to each other about what they are doing and why. (n.p.)

To transform the world through critical pedagogies and informal grassroots leadership practices necessitates Manitoba teachers' empowerment via generating professional knowledge through

formal and informal processes. Critical action and reflection are constituted as vital practices in this endeavour. In this particular context, employed teachers are further required to engage in critical self-reflective writing on their practices and to "submit to their administration a commentary on their professional learning once each school year" (n.p.). Other divisional policy documents mandate all staff to "engage in various anti-racism opportunities and professional development to enhance understanding of the issues that impact student well-being and achievement" (n.p.), and another document states for staff "to develop a healthy knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous history, culture, perspective and ways of teaching and learning". Enhancing practice through critical dialogue, action, and reflection premised on ameliorating social inequities is clearly evidenced within these divisional policy documents.

Positions of ongoing learning to advance Manitoba teachers' diverse practices so that they are equipped to ameliorate social inequities negatively affecting students are clearly articulated in the MTS (2024b) *Constitution, Bylaws, and Policies* document. MTS takes the firm position that Manitoba teachers are ethically and legally obligated to support their students through critical learning and ameliorating social issues that impede their development. As such, MTS argues that teachers engage in ongoing learning and require autonomy in self-directing their personal learning trajectories and should be dialogically involved in decision-making in school systems. Within this document, the *Code of Professional Practice* mandates that "a Member makes an ongoing effort to improve professionally" (p. 86). MTS further believes that "education is a lifelong pursuit" (p. 137) and that members' obligation to support and enhance the professional standing and reputation of all teachers and the status of the profession of teaching" (p. 138). To advance the public reputation and standing of the teaching profession,

teachers' must continually advance their own learning to support and accommodate the diverse needs of Manitoba youth. Regarding professional development, MTS insists that:

> (a) professional development encompasses formal and informal activities which Members undertake to direct their own learning and to enhance their professional practice; (b) all Members are responsible for their own ongoing professional development which should be equitable, inter-active, self-directed, and related to the Member's career and profession; [and] (c) all Members have the right to professional development. (pp. 150-151)

Manitoba teachers advancing their practices and the status of the profession via ongoing learning is a core function. Further, critical learning in the areas of "Indigenous content, perspectives, racism and inclusive instructional practices should be readily available to teachers" (p. 135). To engage in critical pedagogies and socially complex leadership interactions in school communities, Manitoba teachers must necessarily be empowered in these knowledge domains. As a self-regulating professional body, Manitoba teachers are also encouraged to be involved in standing committees overseeing social issues affecting the teaching profession and to support Manitoba teachers' practice.

In regard to Manitoba legislation, Section 39 of the Education Administration Act (2023) states that "a teacher is responsible for … ongoing professional development". Although the Public Schools Act (2023) does not include any explicit content on Manitoba teachers' professional development, Section 96 of the document does require teachers "admit to his [sic] classroom student teachers enrolled in a teacher education institution approved by the minister, for the purpose of practice teaching and of observing instruction." This provision exemplifies the mentoring nature associated with the teaching profession, that through accreditation and training

teachers acquire practitioner knowledge through *practice* and via guidance from their mentors. Last, the Manitoba Human Rights Code (2024) further reiterates the importance for all Manitobans to know their democratic civic rights and that the amelioration of social inequities is ultimately through educational intervention. Cognizant of these insights further drawn from these legislative documents, Manitoba teachers need to be aware of Manitoba's history of oppressive and discriminatory practices, reflect upon their own biases and privileges, and be constantly educating themselves to conduct such efforts. Although the MTS (2024b) *Constitution, Bylaws, and Policies* document shared ample positions on teachers' professional development, the MTS (2024a) *Provincial Collective Agreement* document provides little details regarding Manitoba teachers' requirement to enhance their professional knowledge and expertise in practice. The document provides information on provisions for substitute teachers, learning engagements of summer holidays, and other details regarding prospective financial compensation.

Teachers' professional obligation to make continual, concerted efforts to enhance their knowledge base is further outlined in various MEECL education documents (e.g., MEECL, 2017; 2018; 2022). In these documents, teachers are required to "take personal responsibility to educate themselves" (MEECL, 2018, p. 19) on 2SLGBTQIA+ topics, as well as anti-racist pedagogies and Indigenous ways of knowing (MEECL, 2017; 2022). Further, within the MEECL (2018; 2022) *Supporting Trans and Gender Diverse Students* and *Mamàhtawisiwin* Indigenous Education document, teachers are differentiated from "school leaders" in their prescribed responsibilities, as teachers are prompted to engage in ongoing professional learning of Indigenous topics, while school leaders (implied to be school principals) are tasked with facilitating and supporting teachers' professional development. In the MEECL (2017a) document, *Creating Racist-Free Schools through Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race*,

advocates for anti-racist pedagogies, stating, “critical literacy requires that teachers adopt a critical stance. This stance requires the educator to first become critically aware of race and racism and other issues related to power and inequity and then to develop a personal understanding of critical literacy” (p. 33). The described intent of this education resource document is to “inform and encourage educators to recognize the importance of critical/courageous conversations about the impacts of racism on Canadian society” and “of where and when racism can occur” (p. 1). This is an implication of this text that Manitoba teachers’ critical self-reflective learning is a never-ending venture. The document acknowledges the importance of Manitoba teachers embodying these qualities, stating: “Self-reflective and reflexive ways of being and doing within the classroom, our community, and our home are important ways to develop a personal understanding of critical literacy, social justice, and anti-racism as a whole” (p. 33), a process which comprises “‘unlearn[ing]’ racism” (p. 34). This education document further insists on Manitoba teachers to reflect upon their biases, privilege, experiences, and perspectives on Whiteness, and to critically analyze their own practices and classroom/school resources that perpetuate race-based inequities. The MEECL (2022) *Mamàhtawisiwin* document corroborates the importance of Manitoba teachers’ critical, reflective, empowering learning initiatives to mitigate social inequities and injustices affecting youth. This document prompts Manitoba teachers to “identify places in the curriculum where issues of sustainability, environmental stewardship, and ethical citizenship can be incorporated” (p. 24), to “reflect on what they are teaching and how they are teaching to ensure no student feels excluded” (p. 24), to “learn about the impact of intergenerational trauma on families and children” (p. 24), to “find ways (e.g., professional learning sessions, reading materials) to learn about the diversity across and within Indigenous communities” (p. 24), and to “understand their

own origin story and take ownership of their own biases" (p. 24). Critical reflexivity, learning, and unlearning are clearly a mandated responsibility of Manitoba teachers' transformative professionalism to serve as social agents.

These educational documents articulate that Manitoba teachers' professional learning and development is not an apolitical endeavour to merely improve pedagogical efficacy, but rather serves a broader emancipatory, self-reflective, liberatory venture to combat oppressive forces impeding students' wellbeing, academic achievement, and overall quality of life. This theme is further corroborated by our critical teacher leadership experiences engaging in emancipatory knowledge generation. One example is through Ross' professional learning event she organized for staff and students, as shared in Figure 17.

Figure 17

Indigenous Drumming Learning Experience



Note. An Indigenous drum as a part of Ross' school drumming initiative.

> We brought in an Indigenous drummer into our building and it was different. It was a drumming workshop and we invited myself, my admin team, and my learning support colleagues. We looked at the kids in our building that were in Grades 5, 6, 7, 8, that were

> Indigenous, that we felt were really needing it. And by needing it, I mean: Who are the outliers? Who are the folks walking in the hallway that didn't feel connected to any classroom? Who were the folks that came from families that had attended residential school? And, of course, who were the folks that showed interest in drumming and getting to know their culture? So, the drummer joined us for about an hour and a half. We had about 12 individuals, not including the adults that came.

Ross shared her initiative to invite a local Indigenous Knowledge Keeper to share their wisdom on drumming protocol, the cultural significance of the drum, and empowered herself, her colleagues, and students with this transformative knowledge to be drum carriers. As evidenced through her experience, critical/Indigenous pedagogies and professional learning opportunities were often interwoven, whereby both youth and adults learned together. Other examples of teachers in our participatory team engaging in transformative professional knowledge generation included Stefan co-organizing a Social Justice professional learning community to enhance his and his colleagues' learning on emancipatory topics. Mark also discussed his involvement in both formally and informally mentoring his colleagues on anti-racist topics. Apple further reflected on her initiative to establish a professional learning community of Jewish educators to promote knowledge generation on anti-Semitism for colleagues in the division. The photos we generated also documented artifacts relating to these emancipatory learning experiences, such as committee agendas, classroom environments, and other content relating to these topics.

While the theme of supporting critical leadership through professional learning was common among the education documents and our photo/reflection discussion data, there were some noted tensions. Although the education documents expect teachers to regularly engage in professional learning dialogue to enhance our practices, this policy expectation was particularly

challenging for us to adhere to, particularly due to the lack of time during the school day. Teacher Participant 5 (TP5) noted:

> I hardly get to talk about those philosophies of, like, supporting ourselves as a teacher and students. [Speaking with a colleague] I was like: 'Yeah, it's kind of awful. I'm right across from the hallway with you, and we check in with each other.' But we get bogged down on the day-to-day stuff, like: 'Where are the Chromebooks?' Or 'Is a student here?'

The excessive demands of teachers' responsibilities during school hours preclude ample opportunity to engage in substantive professional dialogue. It was also observed that many professional learning sessions were scheduled after school hours during evenings. TP2 thoroughly identified this concern:

> Now [professional learning sessions] are all after school, which for me, as a mother of a young kid, and it doesn't work, you know? I saw one that I got really excited about. I'm sure enough, I saw 5 to 8, and that 5 to 8 is the one window of time I get every day during the week with my daughter. It also puts a lot of pressure on my partner to prepare dinner and do bedtime and do all this by himself while I'm at a PD. So, that doesn't feel good. I also know for me, learning from 5 0'clock to 8 0'clock during the week isn't the best learning time, just after a full day's work.

Evidently, recognizing the rigid parameters of teachers' school schedules, many professional learning opportunities were identified to take place during evenings. Last, an additional professional learning challenge we identified was the impacts of staffing shortages, and for fear of being recalled from learning opportunities external to the school community. While some professional learning sessions were available during the school day, ongoing substitute teacher shortages have negated these opportunities. TP2 encapsulated this sentiment in their statement:

> It's at times that are very hard to get to, and if there is during the day, you know, it's often, well, you get called back from the PD because your position wasn't being able to [be] filled, or even in this role, I often feel guilty if I'm going to a PD. And nobody has said that to me: 'Don't leave school for PD.' But there are certain tones and ways to go about it, that through email, usually, or something that makes you feel like, 'Okay, maybe I shouldn't go to this PD because there's this on this and this and last week there was, they announced that there were 109 staff absences.' So, when they always announce when there's a lot of absences, it kind of feels like: 'Should I be going to this PD?'

Feelings of guilt and apprehension in attending professional learning sessions were a further contributing factor impacting teachers' capacity to engage in professional learning to support their teaching and/or leadership practices. While critical dialogue, autonomously designing self-determined learning trajectories, and perpetually improving practice to address social injustices are core functions of Manitoba teachers' transformative professionalism, being able to engage in this necessary component underlying grassroots leadership practice was possible, but was also met with tensions.

Transformative Professionalism Premised on Collegiality and Shared Leadership

This third theme pertained to the transformative professional qualities necessary to facilitate emancipatory bottom-up grassroots leadership in Manitoba schools. In particular, informal critical grassroots leadership is predicated on collegiality, specifically via collaboration, dialogue, and informally sharing leadership duties to advance emancipatory efforts. The prescribed professional expectation of Manitoba teachers to collegially collaborate was thematically noted among the education documents analyzed, as well as through our photos generated and our reflections on perceptions and experiences practicing critical leadership in the

field. Many of the education documents describe a holistic, collective *whole school approach* to ameliorating social inequities that negatively impact students in- and outside the classroom. Teachers serve a pivotal role in this shared leadership practice via socially complex interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, and the community. As evidenced in Manitoba education documents, teachers regularly engage students in shared leadership practices and decision-making, negotiate with colleagues and administrators to facilitate school change, and participate with parents and external corresponding community members to cultivate a more equitable and socially just world.

The divisional policy documents outline teachers' varying responsibilities beyond teaching and assessment to include participating in school decision-making, be involved in school/educational projects and activities, cultivate collegial and professional relationships, and contribute to the formulation and implementation of a divisional philosophy of education. The importance of teachers' collegial dialogue is comprehensively articulated in this divisional policy document:

> Dialogue is a public, collective activity through which one explores purposes and negotiates educational judgements. In a discussion, different views are presented and sometimes defended. The aim is to reach a decision or a course of action. On the other hand, a dialogue does not seek agreement, rather views are presented as a way of discovering/reinventing new views. Consensus is not required in dialogue … The purpose of a dialogue may arise as a result of a specific teaching experience, student feedback, results of action research, responses to current literature and research, exploration of broader purposes of education, questions raised by parents or the broader community and so forth. (n.p.)

Teachers' responsibilities are not merely confined to instructional practices, but rather include a wide array of social tasks requiring interpersonal skills, such as collaboration and negotiation, to help facilitate schools' broader functions in promoting learning and mitigating social tensions. The divisional policy document further outlines various scenarios for such dialogue to occur, including staff meetings, mutual prep time, peer mentorship, action research, university studies, book discussions, journaling, among other social opportunities. Regarding teachers' broad social function within schools, teachers are requested to: "participate in formulating and implementing a philosophy of education for the school division and for the school in which they teach", to "participate in decision-making within their school" and to "participate in a professional community, contribute to school projects and activities, and establish collegial and professional relationships" (n.p.). Divisional documents further encourage teachers to engage students in various school functions, both relating to in- and outside classroom practices. One divisional document espouses the importance of including students' voices to inform decision-making, stating: "students work together with school staffs [sic] in such activities as planning and evaluating school programs" (n.p.). Cultivating safe, equitable, and inclusive school environments is also a shared responsibility among teachers, EAs, principals, the school board, and so forth. This position is encapsulated in one divisional policy document's mandate: "Our staff is expected to work on a daily basis to build safe, respectful, considerate and caring communities in our classrooms and schools" (n.p.). Such facilitation is through collegial discussions and collaborative efforts (e.g., committee meetings, organizing assemblies, etc.). Teachers and administrators are formally prompted to engage students in informal collegial functions that may result in informal grassroots leadership practices to change local practices and/or processes in schools. Further, liaising with parents, Indigenous Elders, and other

community voices are exalted in this Manitoba divisional context. This is explicitly identified in one divisional policy document that mandates teachers to "maintain open communication between the home, school and community", "demonstrate a willingness to engage with families and other members of the community around educational issues", and to "promote learning and growth of all students through partnerships with families, caregivers, community members and organizations" (n.p.). Another divisional document affirms this position: "staff at all levels shall seek to engage Indigenous parents/community in active and meaningful ways that demonstrate respect and reciprocity". Teachers exercising their voice, expressing dissent/disagreement, and informing schools' broad social function is clearly an apex professional function in addition to instructional practices in the classroom.

Interpersonal communication skills are a core tenet of teachers' transformative professionalism, as described within the MTS (2024b) *Constitution, Bylaws, and Policies* document. Within this document, the *Code of Professional Practice* outlines the collegial conduct expected from its members, as "Members are bound by the following principles and each Member's professional behaviour must reflect the spirit as well as the letter of these principles" (p. 85). These behavioural qualities include: "act[ing] with integrity and diligence in carrying out professional responsibilities" (p. 85), and conduct that is "characterized by consideration and good faith. The Member speaks and acts with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with others, always mindful of their rights" (p. 86). Further within this code, Manitoba teachers are not to publicly criticize their colleagues' conduct, but rather to engage in remedial dialogical discussion to resolve differences. In addition to this mandate, Manitoba teachers must not bypass immediate authority figures (e.g., school principals) to express professional criticisms. As informal leadership initiatives arise in schools, Manitoba teachers

need to be empowered with communicative skills and dialogical capacity to express dissent and/or differences in the trajectories of such planning. As public advocates, MTS further advances the position that "teachers have the right to communicate with parents, colleagues and the general community, and to advocate on behalf of students and public education without fear of reprisal" and "teachers have the right to be directly involved in all professional decisions affecting them" (p. 139). Engaging in collegial discussion and collaboration with peers and community members is an integral component of Manitoba teachers' transformative professionalism and is necessary to participate in shared leadership for social change. Therefore, Manitoba teachers must be able to exercise agency through their occupational voice without fear of reprimand. Committed to being allies of decolonial efforts, "both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators have a responsibility to work together to resolve existing inequalities and to heal the legacy of the past for the benefit of all Manitobans" (p. 135) and that "educators have a responsibility to establish mutually supportive relationships with parents and the community to promote the education of students" (p. 138). Again, Manitoba teachers' professionalism is not confined to instructional practice, but rather serves as a part of a collective, wider purpose to ameliorate social injustice and co-facilitate healing initiatives. Last, as a professional regulatory group premised upon a parliamentary documentary governance structure, MTS expects its members to participate and co-facilitate various overseeing standing committees (e.g., *Curriculum and Teaching*, *Equity and Social Justice*, *Indigenous Voice and Action*, *Professional Development*, *Teacher Education and Certification*, etc.) and to exercise occupational voice to influence trajectories of MTS direction and function. MTS upholds members' rights, including:

> (a) sharing equally in governing the Society in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws; (b) fully participating in the democratic debate of the Society; (c) free speech

> including the right to criticize the Policies and governance of the Society; (d) participating in the activities of the Society or a Local free from harassment, discrimination and bullying; and (e) fair and reasonable consideration of individual interests and concerns when collective decisions are made. (p. 22)

As a professional regulatory body premised upon democratic infrastructures, Manitoba teachers are expected to participate in shared leadership efforts via critical dialogue, debate, and collective decision-making.

Manitoba legislative documents are less explicit in the dialogical nature of teachers' professional obligations, but do highlight key functions in which they must oblige. Both the Education Administration Act (2023) and Public Schools Act (2023) allude to the obligatory "reporting" duties teachers serve to students' parents/guardians regarding their academic development, but also relevant reporting to their school administration or government, as requested. The Public Schools Act (2023) shares Manitoba teachers' professional responsibilities relating to assessing students' safety and health, requiring teachers to report to their school principal if they believe the student's wellbeing is jeopardized. The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act (2024) is scarce in prescribing teachers' daily routines, as the document focuses on legislative information outlining the governing structure of the teachers' union. However, the document does note that all members must comply with the MTS (2024) *Code of Professional Practice*, thus legislatively enshrining Manitoba teachers' collegial duties. Last, the Manitoba Human Rights Code (2024) does dictate the specifics of Manitoba teachers' professional practice, but does corroborate the importance of critical dialogue in barring oppressive hate speech in public spaces and for the importance of ameliorating vitriol through cultivating safe spaces and educating Manitobans on the damaging effects of racism, colonialism, queerphobia,

ableism, sexism, and ageism. As Manitoba teachers are obligated to adhere to the Manitoba Human Rights Code (2024) as per their MTS (2024b) *Code of Professional Practice*, these legislative documents further illuminate the communicative and liberatory nature of transformative professional practice in this context. Regarding Manitoba teachers' working conditions, the MTS (2024a) *Provincial Collective Agreement* states that Manitoba teachers are entitled to 210 minutes of prep time per every six-day cycle. Teachers are expected to "utilize the preparation time provided to them in a productive, efficient manner towards fulfilling the educational needs of the Teacher's students. Preparation time is not rest periods nor is it personal time" (p. 31). Further, Manitoba teachers are obligated to participate in non-instructional professional duties (e.g., staff meetings, parent-teacher conferences, miscellaneous meetings, etc.), while we are also subtly encouraged (but not officially required) to participate and/or facilitate extra-curricular school functions (e.g., coaching, running school clubs, and other student-related academic, social, or recreational activities). Evidently, Manitoba teachers' transformative professionalism never ceases and is implied to be exercised beyond the parameters of instructional hours and duties.

Last, the MEECL documents (2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2022) all corroborate the theme of Manitoba teachers' dialogical professional practice via a common language, suggesting holistic, collective, *whole school approaches*, particularly as such efforts pertain to cultivating equitable, safe, and inclusive school spaces. The MEECL (2017b) document argues that all citizens "share a responsibility to work together to provide school environments where all students feel safe and respected, thereby allowing them to reach their full potential" (p. 1). This collective venture includes teachers via the "development of a positive school climate, a positive school-wide approach, team planning, community involvement, and professional support" (p. 4). In this

document, Manitoba teachers are encouraged to regularly communicate and collaborate with parents, colleagues, and administrators to mitigate violence, bullying, cyberbullying, and other harmful behaviours demonstrated by youth. The MEECL (2018) *Supporting Trans and Gender Diverse Students* resource document echoes the importance of a shared, dialogical, "whole school approach" (p. 18) to support vulnerable youth. The MEECL (2018) document states that

> Every person in the school community plays an important role and has a shared responsibility in creating supportive environments for trans and gender diverse students. It is important that the entire school community recognize diversity as the norm. All divisional and school staff should be proactive and prepare in advance to meet the needs of trans and gender diverse students. (p. 18)

This document further asserts that trans and diverse students' voices are collaboratively included in school decision-making and that parents/guardians are "key partners" in school planning (p. 18). Regarding teachers' specific roles, teachers are reminded of their fundamental responsibility in fostering safe and inclusive school environments, being explicitly requested to: "Participate in developing and implementing an action plan for transphobic incidents", to "work with parents/guardians as key partners in supporting every student in the classroom" and routinely "listen to gender diverse students" and to "ask gender diverse students whether, when, and how they wish to share their experiences" (p. 19). The MEECL (2017a) largely focuses on the importance of cultivating school environments conducive to critical/courageous conversations about race. While classroom-based critical pedagogies may serve this role, the document acknowledges that these conversations must occur throughout schools and society to ultimately ameliorate such oppressive forces. The documents explicitly note that critical/courageous discussions must occur "in the educational system, schools, and communities with respect to the

impact of racism on FNMI children and youth and families" (p. 1) and that such discussions are "a means of facilitating change" (p. 1). The document further recommends that parents be actively engaged in the educational experience of their children through participating in school decision-making and regular communication with teachers. Last, the MEECL (2022) *Mamàhtawisiwin Indigenous Policy Framework* accentuates the shared accountability all stakeholders possess in cultivating safe, equitable, and inclusive school environments for Manitoba youth. While this is certainly not a simplistic venture, the document does accentuate the importance of community involvement. This document states that "the importance of family, community, and culture are other points of connectivity that must be reflected in the conceptual foundation for an Indigenous-inclusive education system. Students find purpose, hope, belonging, and meaning through their educational and lived experiences" (p. 16).

As allies in decolonial efforts, Manitoba teachers are requested to "teach alongside an Elder or Knowledge Keeper" to share Indigenous pedagogies and insights, to learn appropriate Indigenous protocols as to "participate in community events and ceremonies", to regularly communicate with parents/guardians and families, and to "create opportunities in the classroom for parents, aunties, uncles, and other family members to share their knowledge and contribute to their children's learning" (p. 24). Through these MEECL (2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2022) documents, the highly interactive, transformative professional expectations of Manitoba teachers are exemplified. Through collective *whole school approaches*, Manitoba teachers serve an integral role in building community relationships, collaborating with students, colleagues, administrators, and are bestowed the ethical responsibility to facilitate critical/courageous discussions to identify and ameliorate oppressive practices and school structures.

In addition to the Manitoba education documents, the theme of collegiality was also demonstrated in our photos generated and sentiments shared via individual and group reflection discussions. Many of our initiatives were premised upon the interactions alongside students, colleagues, community members, and administrators. One example of interpersonal collaboration to facilitate a school event was encapsulated in Apple's fundraising efforts, as shared in Figures 18 and 19.

Figure 18

Co-facilitating a Community Fundraising Event

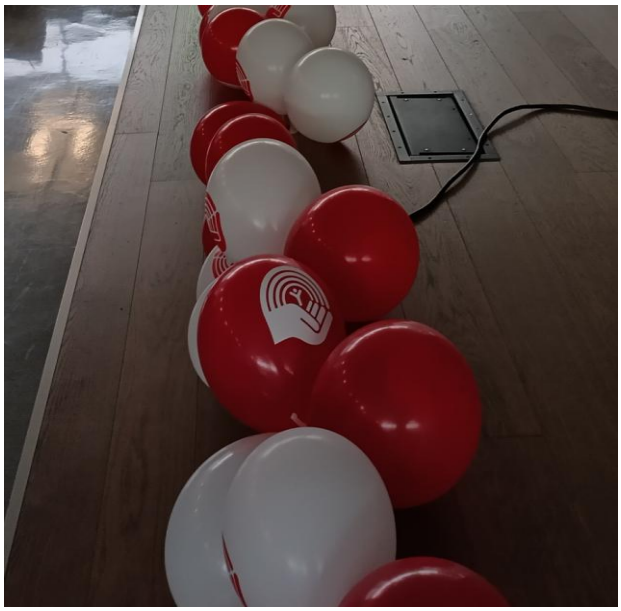


Figure 19

Students Fundraising for a Community Cause



Apple reflected upon her co-engagement, facilitating a community fundraising event:

> The United Way [initiative] is volunteer time and I'm happy to donate my time and money, too, to United Way. So, that is a volunteer thing. And it's a fun thing to work with kids and, like United Way trivia night, that's what we like about it, it's one night it doesn't take more than that, and we candy grams are a week long.

As a part of a divisional initiative, Apple helped lead her school's involvement to fundraise for an external community program to assist disadvantaged citizens. While voluntarism is deemed extra-curricular in the MTS (2024a) *Provincial Collective Agreement*, teachers' participation is also *encouraged*. Through her co-engagement alongside colleagues, she educated students about local social inequities and the work this particular community program offered. Students were co-engaged in this effort by selling candy grams to raise funds. Further, Apple helped co-organize a trivia night for colleagues and external community members to further fundraise. The highly collegial and collaborative nature of critical teacher leadership was further demonstrated among our participatory team. In reflection discussions, Ross and Stefan reflected upon their experiences inviting Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers into their classrooms to foster students' learning and appreciation for Indigenous practices and ways of knowing. Mark and

Gaou both reflected upon their photos generated and discussed their collaborations with colleagues on school committees to promote anti-racism learning for staff and students. Further, Kris and Aileen discussed their involvement with students to co-facilitate local efforts, such as Kris' anti-bullying campaign, or Aileen's efforts to raise awareness of local textile waste. All of these endeavours manifest through highly social, interactive engagements between teachers, students, colleagues, administrators, and community members.

Despite many of these leadership practices being facilitated successfully, there were also some tensions identified. For example, our social agency was, at times, compromised by limited free range of critical speech. This uncertainty and apprehension to express some ideas were exemplified in TP1's reflection:

> I wish I could say what I really think about something. Or I wish I could advocate more transparently about something, or against something. But often what I'll do at a staff meeting, I might have to very indirectly challenge something. It's kind of like a microaggression. I'll ask a question that I already know the answer to, but I ask it just so the entire staff gets an answer.

Although Manitoba teachers' transformative professionalism is premised on dialogue, collaboration, and interpersonal interactions, there was a notable tension in the limitations of freedom of speech, particularly in being able to express dissent or organizational disagreement. As some members of our team could not vocalize their true sentiments on certain contextual issues at risk of reprimand and/or breaking our MTS (2024b) *Code of Professional Practice*, some teachers engaged in indirect microaggressions to voice dissent with school operations. Other examples expressed among the participatory group were accounts of participating in school/divisional committees (with the perception their voices were tokenistic and not

authentically considered), being unable to orate personal convictions on school practices that affect the wellbeing and/or rights of their students, and ambivalence in approaching difficult conversations with colleagues and/or administrators.

Discussion

The thematic analysis of these educational documents, our reflection discussions, and photos generated various insights into the transformative professional nature of critical teacher leadership practices. Specifically, I identify how core tenets of transformative professionalism (Sachs, 2003; 2016) (e.g., autonomy, collegiality, expert knowledge) interconnect with critical emancipatory grassroots leadership *practices* (Kezar, 2011; Spillane, 2006; Strawser, 2020). I argue that Manitoba teachers, as transformative professionals, are both explicitly and implicitly mandated to co-perform shared emancipatory grassroots leadership practices to ameliorate local, social inequities and injustices to assist in the collective effort to cultivate safe, equitable, and inclusive public schools. While this theme was prevalent across the data sources, there were notable tensions identified that compromised our professional potential (e.g., variable autonomy, limited occupational voice, and difficulty in co-engaging in collegial tasks). As such, the vagueness and ambiguity in qualifying leadership practice within Manitoba education legislation, policy, and resource documents may serve as a vehicle to advance organizational professional control (Evetts, 2011) over our practices.

First, these findings generate new theoretical insights into the tensions, ambiguities, and broadened possibilities beyond the leader/follower scholastic binarism, which has been previously problematized for being parochial and akin to propagating individualistic heroic interpretations of such phenomena (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006). Regarding the leader/follower dualism, this analysis revealed the vagueness as to whether or not participating in critical

leadership function is within Manitoba teachers' prescribed professionalism of practice, is considered an individualistic enterprise of activism and extra-curricular engagement superseding professional duties, or if teachers are to simply assume followership roles. The term *leadership* was nearly entirely absent as a directly prescribed function to teachers in the divisional policy documents, MTS (2024a; 2024) documents, and MEECL (2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2022) documents. Only the divisional policy documents explicitly identified *instructional leadership* as a professional role for teachers, but this term was infrequently used. Not even the MTS (2024b) *Constitution, Bylaws, and Policies* document explicitly equated leadership practice with teachers' professional function, despite operating as the professional advocacy and regulatory group representing Manitoba public school teachers. The MEECL (2017b; 2018; 2022) documents did include "school leadership" as a term, but it was synonymous with school principals' identities and roles. There is no explicit indication from Manitoba legislative, policy, and/or resource documents that teachers are expected to participate in *leadership*. While this absence in teachers' prescribed professional function may be interpreted as a misalignment between professional responsibility and practice, this is not necessarily surprising. Scholars advocating for the distributed perspective of leadership argue that informal leadership practices are not confined to formal position or explicitly prescribed roles, but rather emerge to address situational needs within a school system (Brooks & Kensler, 2011; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Spillane, 2006) and that leadership is a *practice* premised on co-influencing change and outcomes (Gronn, 2003; Harris, 2005; Harris & Jones, 2019; Simpson, 2021; Spillane, 2006). Further, various scholars argue that teacher leadership is a practice that often supersedes explicated roles and responsibilities and is co-performed beyond their designated professional responsibilities (Harris & Jones, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018). However, through my analysis I

argue that these findings in the Manitoba context support the notion that shared emancipatory leadership *is* a professional role and expectation of public school teachers, implied through the various critical emancipatory co-performances in which teachers are expected to oblige.

These findings demonstrated that critical teacher leadership comprises a hybridity of *teaching* and *leadership* professional practices, broadening understandings of such phenomena beyond the rigid leader/follower binarism (Gronn, 2003; 2009). Although I do not necessarily assert teaching and leadership to be synonymous endeavours, I do argue that these practices share many commonalities, are not mutually exclusive, and that (critical) teacher leadership may be better understood as a hybridity of these two practices. As Collay (2011) argues: "Embracing teaching as leadership allows us to rethink schooling, leadership, and school reform" (p. 36). The Manitoba education documents recurrently iterate the concept of teachers participating school wide approaches to cultivate safe and inclusive learning environments by ameliorating social injustices and inequities (Divisional Policies, n.d., MEECL, 2017a; 2017b; 2022) and for teachers to adopt critical stances and incorporate critical pedagogies (Divisional Policies, n.d.; MEECL, 2018). The ambition to ameliorate social injustices and to cultivate safe, inclusive, and equitable school environments is recurrently described as a collective *whole school approach* and shared responsibility (e.g., MEECL, 2017a; 2022). Various education divisional documents called upon Manitoba teachers to combat societal racism, queer pedagogies and practices to address queerphobia, engage in reconciliatory efforts to support Indigenous perspectives, and cultivate school environments conducive to students' wellbeing and flourishing. These positions were further encapsulated in documents from MEECL (2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2022) and MTS (2024b) which all suggest that Manitoba teachers are occupationally expected to incorporate critical/social justice stances as a part of their professional practice and to co-engage in school-

wide efforts to mitigate social inequities and injustice. Understandably, we, as teachers, serve a crucial role in this collaborative endeavour. Further, our MTS (2024a) *Provincial Collective Agreement* affirms that our obligation to co-perform miscellaneous school functions (e.g., committee work, professional development, organizing assemblies, etc.) and that professional duties and conduct extend beyond our prescribed instructional duties and schedules. It is important to note, however, that simply engaging in these tasks does not necessarily equate leadership practice. However, it is through these informal routines and situations that leadership practice is possible and emerges as teachers and other human agents constantly co-influence school trajectories through such co-performances. This was evidenced in our experiences, such as Apple working alongside her student bodies to co-facilitate school events and fundraisers and teach/learn about local inequities, or Ross organizing collaboration with a community Indigenous Knowledge Keeper to share insights and knowledge to staff and students regarding drumming, music, and perspectives on knowing. Various other demonstrations of critical teacher leadership practices (e.g., mentoring, critical pedagogies extending beyond the classroom, repurposing the school Lost and Found, etc.) were further shared in Chapter 4. The literature affirms that teacher leadership manifests via various informal situations and routines, including mentoring, committee work, professional development sessions, liaising and planning with colleagues, among a plethora of various school-based scenarios (Collay, 2011; Harris, 2003; Wang & Ho, 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As such, teacher leadership practices are not confined to the classroom and materialize throughout school communities to serve various situational purposes (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Collay, 2011; Dentith et al., 2006; Hunzicker, 2022; Taylor et al., 2022). Further, critical grassroots leadership is predicated on disrupting power inequities within schools and organizations, advancing social justice, is often

exercised by individuals lacking formal title or authority, and empowers teachers and students via shared leadership (Ehrich & English, 2012; Kahlke, 2014; Kezar, 2011; Tierney, 1989; Niesche, 2018). Therefore, the leader/follower distinction is not necessarily so clearly defined, nor should it be, as such informal forms of leadership emerge to address contextual needs and are achieved through shared collegial interactions (Lumby, 2013; Spillane, 2006). The myriad of situational tasks in which teachers professionally co-perform and influence school function are fertile ground for informal, distributed, emancipatory grassroots leadership opportunities to proliferate.

(Co-)designing and implementing critical pedagogies was an exemplary avenue for members of our teacher team to fulfil our transformative professional obligations and potential, extending practices beyond the boundaries of the classroom to emerge as informal emancipatory grassroots leadership efforts to *influence* (Spillane, 2006) social and/or organizational change in affect and practice across our school communities. This perspective is aligned with Collay's (2011) assertion that "educational leadership begins in the classroom and moves outward" (p. 36). Many of our critical pedagogies were dialogically co-organized as collective (inter)actions between colleagues and students to advance new initiatives throughout our school communities. For example, in Chapter 4, Ross, working alongside other classroom teachers and students, co-facilitated a student letter-writing campaign and community presentations to the School Board advocating for the installation of a Treaty One flag. Critical teacher leadership practices that were initiated as a consequence of critical pedagogies and were co-engaged alongside student bodies appeared to be less resisted than the individualistic initiatives advocated by members of our participatory team, as these endeavours arguably more closely aligned with our core function *to teach* (MTS, 2024b) and were often shared alongside student bodies. We achieved various

successes in facilitating various critical pedagogies that were largely congruent with our prescribed professional roles and expectations. The ability to exercise expert knowledge and judgement is both consistent and integral to teacher professionalism, as Sorenson (2023) states: "Expertise is regarded as the prime source of professional power" (p. 48). In many circumstances, we felt we were autonomous in being able to explore the interests and/or local concerns of our student bodies. The importance of autonomous trajectory in planning and implementing critical pedagogical practices is paramount (Apple, 2012b; Giroux & Giroux, 2008; Harris, 2003; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Zapeda et al., 2023) and is the official position of MTS (2024b). The divisional policy documents, MEECL (2017b; 2018; 2022), and MTS (2024b) documents analyzed all consistently iterated teachers' professional responsibility in integrating anti-racist, Indigenous, and inclusive pedagogies to address social injustices, to critically reflect upon instructional approaches, to engage students in decision-making and design trajectories, and to make concerted efforts to critically analyze classroom resources and curricula for oppressive-perpetuating materials and content. Teachers are presented as emancipatory social agents to work with youth to prompt their critical consciousness so they are prepared to navigate the complexities challenges of this socially unjust world. Sharing power and decision-making and co-engaging in liberatory (inter)actions is core to critical pedagogical practices (Freire, 1970/2000; Giroux, 1986; Lopez, 2014; Yeh & Sengupta-Irving, 2014). Acting collaborative and collectively via the bottom-up efforts of individuals not possessing formal authority to bring about social change is consistent with the grassroots leadership literature (Byrne, 2023; Coleman et al., 2024; Davidson & Hughes, 2022; Ehrich & English, 2012; Kezar, 2011; 2012). The ability to authentically embark upon such bottom-up leadership initiatives necessitates mutual time for all individuals to co-design and (inter)act (Harris, 20023; hooks, 2009; Simpson, 2021). This

congruence pertained to our classroom responsibilities as their apex function as many of the critical pedagogical endeavours were co-designed and implemented *during* class time, subsequently sharing power alongside their student bodies. Teacher leadership practices that originated as classroom pedagogies and extended beyond the classroom to influence school function are corroborated with other studies (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Collay, 2011; Harris & Jones, 2019; Hunzicker, 2022; Taylor et al., 2022). As teachers are bound by ethical codes to safeguard their students' wellbeing and development (David, 2000; MTS, 2014b; Tang, 2008; Young et al., 2021), these pedagogical initiatives were certainly in alignment with our prescribed core functions within the school system. Critical pedagogies are predicated on transforming the world through dialogical problem-posing educational learning experiences whereby students are empowered to make meaningful changes in their communities (Freire, 1970/2000; Yeh & Sengupta-Irving, 2014). Therefore, I argue that it would be inauthentic for teachers to restrict critical pedagogies to the parameters of the classroom without any purposeful intent in transforming the world. Thus, viewing emancipatory teaching and learning (Freire, 1970/2000; others) as a grassroots leadership enterprise (Strawser, 2020; others) bridges the intersections of these domains.

These findings also further identify the tensions between occupational professionalism and organizational professionalism (Evetts, 2011) in relation to critical teacher leadership practice. Leadership is not a prescribed function, but through an occupational (Evett, 2011) or transformative professional (Sachs, 2003; 2016) lens, it is implicit in the language expressed in Manitoba education policy and resource documents, and manifests informally via autonomous, collegial, grassroots initiatives, as evidenced in our photos and reflection discussions. It is through this perspective our critical leadership practices may be understood as the manifestation

of our yearning to be transformative professionals through participation in shared leadership, to ameliorate social inequities and injustices in our school environments via autonomous practices, exercising our voices, and collegially interacting to plan and implement social action. However, the professionalism rhetoric contained in these Manitoba education documents could also be interpreted through an organizational professionalism lens, as a means to control our practice through prescribing additional laborious duties in addition to our instructional responsibilities and to assume mere followership roles. As such, advocating for *professionalization* via the explicit inclusion of "leadership" roles and responsibilities to teachers' function may be precarious, as it may subtly manifest as de-skilling (Apple, 2012b) our professional practice. The analysis revealed the extent to which legislation and policies are externally regulated by the government or teachers' employers, and the minimal level of control teachers have over their own professional practices. Most teachers' practices are mandated through legislation, notably via the Public Schools Act (2023) and Education Administration Act (2023), but also through their employing school division. Although Manitoba teachers were consulted in the formulation of many provincial documents, these texts also further outline the attitudes Manitoba public school teachers should embody (e.g., MEECL, 2018; 2023). As such, Manitoba teachers really have minimal control of the policies that outline the professional nature of their daily work, and is an example of Apple's (2012b) bureaucratic control of teachers' practice. While self-regulating professional roles, responsibilities, behavioural norms, and other conduct are typical qualities of occupational professionalism (David, 2000; Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Sachs, 2003; 2016), the external regulation of Manitoba teachers' professional agency is evidenced.

Through an organizational professionalism lens, Manitoba teachers' miscellaneous prescribed functions are a manifestation of organizational 'top-down' professionalism and serve

to ensure the technical and bureaucratic control (Apple, 2012b) of our behaviours and practices, to routinely fulfil administrative work (in addition to teaching responsibilities). Ultimately, Manitoba teachers' practices are predominantly externally controlled through legislation, policy, resource documents, and the provincial collective agreement. These varied work-related tasks could emerge as leadership opportunities based on the autonomous interests of teachers and the needs of their student bodies. Via this vague followership-esque language, school systems prescribe a myriad of administrative duties whereby we, as teachers, are merely expected to oblige our contractual responsibilities (e.g., participate in professional development, engage in committee work, etc.). The tension of organizational professionalism (Evetts, 2011) and technical/bureaucratic control (Apple, 2012b) was particularly evident in our uncertainty about how to publicly voice disagreement with school initiative trajectories. There were various tensions we navigated as transformative professionals, such as recognizing the limitations of our voice, experiencing varying levels of autonomy over our practices, and limited situations to engage in collegial interactions to achieve our goals. Although the divisional policy documents suggested that dialogue and disagreement were encouraged, there remained a feeling of precarity among our participatory team of teachers. The MTS (2024b) Code of Professional Practice mandates members resolve individual differences among members privately, but often teacher-participants' disagreements were not individual-specific, related to the broad trajectories of the school division. Thus, voicing dissent could prospectively jeopardize a teacher's employment, reputation, or potential for career advancement. Many members of our team reflected upon their anxiety in demonstrating activist behaviours, as these were, at times, met with resistance and perceived to be *unprofessional* (e.g., Teacher-Participant 3 worrying about their professional reputations through their disruptive advocacies for social justice). Therefore, some of the

teacher-participants resorted to closed-door conversations to plan with colleagues or engage in covert microaggressive forms of resistance (e.g., asking provocative questions in staff meetings), or overtly challenge authority (confronting school administration about local social justice issues).

These examples were documented throughout this study, as our engagements in emancipatory grassroots leadership outside the classroom were often met with apathy and aversion from administration, perceived labelling as troublemakers (not being *team players*), which subsequently resulted in teacher-participants' own feelings of futility and demoralization (as previously outlined in Chapter 5). As critical emancipatory efforts are foundational, premised upon notions of dialogue and reciprocity (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Giroux, 1986; Strawser, 2020; Yeh & Sengupta, 2014), this was undoubtedly a significant hindrance. As voicing dissent with school and/or divisional practices could result in formal reprimand and/or affect collegial relationships and reputations, this affected how teacher-participants liaised with their administration regarding their advocacies (including confrontation, microaggressive public expressions, and/or self-censoring). Giroux (1986) argued that "it is through the mediation and action of teacher voice that the very nature of the schooling process is often either sustained or challenged" (p. 207). As teachers, we are bound by professional codes of ethics and practice to safeguard their students' wellbeing (David, 2000; Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Education Administration Act, 2023; MTS, 2024b; Tang, 2008) but are also expected to maintain a composure of professional behavioural conduct as employees in school systems (MTS, 2024b). This was a notable challenge for us, as social justice efforts emerge with the intent to challenge existing institutional structures, to accentuate inequities among social identity groups, and to advance, recognize, and respect marginalized members' voices (Adams, 2014; Lopez, 2014). In

Chapter 4, one TP3 reflected upon their "fiery" passion for equity and social justice initiatives, but unpacked the social and structural challenges in navigating the behavioural parameters associated with being a teacher professional. School policies and/or practices that limit teachers' organizational voice and/or sense of autonomy have been similarly corroborated with other teacher leadership studies (Harris & Jones, 2019; Taylor et al., 2022; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Overt and/or micro-forms of resistance associated with grassroots leadership within organizations are corroborated with other studies (e.g., Kezar, 2011).

This analysis also generates further insights into the tensions in our semi-autonomous practices as transformative teaching professionals, particularly being limited in our capacity to socialize, interact, and plan with colleagues. Autonomy is a crucial component of transformative professionalism, notably being to exercise expert knowledge, judgement, and decision-making over one's own practice (Boylan et al., 2023; Sachs, 2003; 2016; Stone-Johnson, 2017). Occupational autonomy is fundamental to employees' flourishing and is a characteristic of professional status (David, 2000; Ertürk; 2023; Hargreaves, 2001; Sehrawat, 2014; Sorenson, 2023; Tang, 2008; Zepeda et al., 2023). Frostenson (2015) differentiated three forms of teacher autonomy, namely individual, collegial, and general. As teachers, we demonstrated relatively high levels of individual autonomy, as evidenced throughout Chapter 4 (e.g., control over critical pedagogies originating in the classroom with students), but Chapter 5 demonstrated the variable collegial autonomy (e.g., influence over local decision-making, designing their own teaching schedules, deciding when are where to meet with colleagues, etc.) and general autonomy (e.g., control over teacher legislation and regulations, influence over large-scale organizational function and decision-making, deciding the qualities necessary in teacher certification requirements, etc.) within the education system. This further outlines how teaching may be

considered merely a “semi” or “quasi” profession as teachers lack self-regulatory and self-governance control of their practices, a hallmark characteristic of professional status (David, 2000; Demirkasimoğlu; 2010, Hoyle, 2001; Tang, 2008). Another variable, however, is noting that teachers operate within a broader liberal democracy and serve the public interests of the community (Young et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers’ autonomy will perhaps necessarily always be compromised to ensure individual teachers’ private interests do not supersede public interests. The analysis of these legislative, policy, and resource document texts revealed the alignments and tensions and the delicate balance of power in teacher autonomy in shared school leadership (e.g., teachers yearning to engage in critical leadership practice to disrupt the status quo in school systems, but simultaneously potentially controlling teachers’ private initiatives via policy to ensure teachers serve the public interest). Being collegial as transformative professionals was also a challenge, and isolating our roles could further be interpreted through an organizational professional lens (Evetts, 2011) to control our work. As documented in this study, we often had little opportunity in our school schedules to dialogue about practices or felt our inputs toward decision-making were, at times, only tokenistic. Praxis comprises time for both action and reflection to transform the world (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Freire, 1970/2000; Giroux, 1986; Lopez, 2014; Yeh & Sengupta, 2014). Teachers being collegially isolated and receiving inadequate time to socially collaborate and/or otherwise engage in leadership tasks has been well-documented in previous literature (Apple, 2012a; Harris, 2003; Sachs, 2003; Simpson, 2021; Wang & Ho; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Zapeda et al., 2023). Through contrasting occupational and organizational professional interpretive lenses (Evetts, 2011), critical teacher leadership practices challenge the dichotomous boundaries between teaching and leadership, but its emergence are often furtive, intricate, and perhaps even a paradoxical professional pursuit, as

the Manitoba documents could be interpreted to imply teachers' role to merely engage in followership (e.g., complying, following directives to fulfil organizational duties), yet simultaneously and indirectly expect teachers to co-engage in social justice leadership endeavours to disrupt social inequities negatively impacting their students. Through this viewpoint, Manitoba teachers are both contradictorily expected to disrupt and oblige by systems of educational oppression.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the findings of a thematic analysis of Manitoba education documents, our individual and group reflection discussions, and photos generated, which provided novel insights into the interconnections of transformative professionalism (Sachs, 2003; 2016) and emancipatory grassroots leadership practices (Ehrich & English, 2012; Kezar, 2011; 2012; Strawser, 2020). While some aspects of critical teacher leadership practice were congruent among this participatory group (e.g., individual autonomy in designing and facilitating critical pedagogies alongside our student bodies), there were numerous social and/or structural barriers impeding their grassroots leadership practices, thus impeding their collegial and general autonomy. Through this analysis, I challenge the parochial binary distinctions between leadership/followership and argue for the advancement of a spectral interpretation that merges the practices of teaching and leadership. Although *leadership* as an explicit function was absent from many Manitoba education documents analyzed, these findings suggest that the implicit mandate underlying language in these texts is for Manitoba teachers to co-perform collective emancipatory leadership practices, often espoused through *school-wide approach* colloquialisms. These documents subtly suggest that teachers need to engage in emancipatory grassroots leadership practices. Various provincial and divisional documents call for Manitoba teachers to

engage in a plethora of equity and social justice pedagogies, professional learning, and agencies to cultivate safe and inclusive learning/school environments to ensure the academic and humanistic growth and development of their student bodies. Therefore, I argue that grassroots leadership co-performance is an inherent component of teachers' transformative professionalism. Critical pedagogies are predicated upon the intent to advance liberatory change and socially transform the world. Thus, such critical learning requires grassroots leadership initiatives to proliferate emancipatory learning beyond the parameters of the classroom. Other professional routines and functions, such as through committee work and professional development, could be excellent opportunities for grassroots leadership and agency to manifest. However, the language utilized does not preclude teachers from facilitating/leading, but implicitly suggests that teachers are only to participate and comply with their occupational and contractual obligations. This documents the constraint of teachers' occupational (or transformative) professionalism, whereby professionals need agency to self-regulate their own practices, conduct, and function. Last, while autonomy is core to professionalism, Manitoba teachers' autonomy is markedly variable. As demonstrated by our participatory team in Chapter 4, there was evidence of relatively high individual autonomy (e.g., agency to explore a wide breadth of critical pedagogies with their student bodies), while Chapter 5 demonstrated that our collegial and general autonomy were quite limited (e.g., limited organizational voice, decision-making, and structures unconducive to collaboration and social engagement). Teachers' autonomy needs to be an ongoing area of discussion, particularly navigating the balance of power within a wider liberal democratic society. In one regard, teachers need autonomy in their daily function to design and implement pedagogies, but also to collegially interact with colleagues, fulfil necessary committee work, and contribute to wider organizational function. However, teachers, as public servants of a broader

liberal democracy, adhere to curricula and policy frameworks established by democratically elected provincial governments and local school boards. Serving the public good may need to take priority over teachers' individual private convictions (which may be variable and contrary to public interests). This research identified new understandings and tensions of the transformative professional practice of emancipatory grassroots leadership engagement. Chapter 7 disseminates a synthesis of key findings; strengths, limitations, and delimitations; practical recommendations to take stakeholders; theoretical implications for future research; and general conclusions.

Chapter 7: Implications, Recommendations, & Conclusions

In this concluding chapter, I provide a concise synthesis of the key findings generated from this research project, discuss the theoretical significance of the study, provide practical recommendations to educational administrators and stakeholders to support critical teacher leadership practices, provide implications for future research and advocacies, and share summative conclusions.

Synthesis of Key Findings

I synthesized the key findings to address each of the corresponding research questions.

Research Question 1: What impacts did our critical teacher leadership practices have in our school communities?

The (inter)actions of our participatory team demonstrated the diverse manifestations in critical teacher leadership practices in our Manitoba schools. Informal grassroots leadership for equity and social justice materialized via peer mentorship, professional development and learning communities, classroom pedagogies, school clubs, serving on school/divisional committees, organizing school events, among various other initiatives. These grassroots leadership advocacies were diverse, as evidenced within our reflection discussions and photos generated, such as Ross' community effort to install a Treaty 1 flag at their school, or Kris' effort to have gender inclusive washrooms installed in a more centralized and safe location for students (as their photo illuminated accessibility issues currently experienced). These impacts were not necessarily consequent to our individual *actions*, but rather resulted from our collective interactions working alongside student bodies, colleagues, and (in some cases) community members. Our critical leadership practices operated within varying contexts to serve a wide variety of purposes, but were largely premised on cultivating equitable school environments and

with the intent to support our students' diverse needs. Engaging in such practices led to our perceived professional learning and growth, improved collegial relationships, and students' engagement in learning and school function. We demonstrated that public school teachers (working alongside colleagues and student bodies) have the competency to positively impact their school communities through initiating new projects or serving as a part of prescribed professional functions (e.g., committee work). The ability to be collegial and collaborate alongside colleagues was essential in facilitating many of our critical teacher leadership practices. We were generally able to collaborate, but such congregational efforts were notably constrained by our teaching schedules, consequently necessitating lunch hour meetings and other inopportune times (as further elaborated under the synthesis of research question two). Some members of our team acknowledged that their roles (e.g., learning support) improved their flexibility and capacity to socialize, while general classroom teachers had less collegial autonomy. These findings demonstrated the significant role grassroots/shared leadership serves within teachers' transformative professional (Sachs, 2003; 2016; Stone-Johnson, 2017) function. Specifically, our experiences exemplified the highly collegial nature of teachers' professional practices and the foundational importance of teachers' ability to exercise expert knowledge, judgment, and occupational voice within school environments. Through such dialogical processes, teachers and their student bodies can advance their agentic potential to ameliorate local inequities and manifest meaningful social change within their communities. These findings both broaden and challenge the dominant narrative within educational leadership discourse that espouses such practices to be confined to formal authority, but rather suggest authentic critical educational leadership practices emerge via the complex collaborative interactions of many agents at the grassroots level. Teachers' transformative professionalism is not limited to the

parameters of pedagogy and the classroom, but is exercised fluidly throughout school communities via diverse initiatives and endeavours.

Research Question 2: What were the social and/or structural barriers impeding our critical teacher leadership practices?

Through visual documentation via the photoVOICE experiences and as expressed during the individual and group reflective discussions, we, as Manitoba teachers, acknowledged various social and structural barriers impeding our capacity to facilitate emancipatory grassroots leadership practices in our school communities. Perhaps most notable were our rigid, isolating teaching schedules that negated social and collaborative opportunities with our peers. Consequently, we congregated either during lunch or after school hours to plan and/or enact our initiatives. Further, we demonstrated via photos generated and their reflective discussions the limitations of our organizational voice, whether through limited involvement in decision making or our ability to publicly voice dissent. Grassroots leadership for equity and social justice requires challenging power structures and the status quo (e.g., Kezar, 2011). As evidenced through photoVOICE documentation, individual and group reflection discussions, some of the members of our participatory team were willing to confront school administration over local inequities within the organization (e.g., advocacy for more representation as a part of anti-racism committee work). As Karpinski and Lugg (2006) acknowledged, educational leadership and social justice have been historically dichotomized and argued to be theoretically incongruent. I argue that confining educational leadership to a formal individualistic lens is antithetical to social justice, as emancipatory practices necessitate disrupting social and organizational inequities (Kezar, 2011; Niesche, 2018; Strawser, 2020). Critical educational leadership through a formal lens would entail paradoxically advocating to challenge formal authority while simultaneously

reifying hierarchical power structures. Therefore, critical educational leadership practice may be more authentically actualized via shared, dialogical, emancipatory grassroots activism that provokes institutional change. Our 'bottom-up' leadership co-engaged alongside colleagues, and our student bodies evidenced this perspective. However, as teachers are employees and prospectively subject to formal reprimand and/or damaged professional reputation, some of the members of our team shared covert strategies like closed-door conversations or microaggressive questioning during staff meetings. The compromised sense of teachers' occupational voice to express dissent and/or engage in critical dialogue was significant. Many of our critical teacher leadership practices rely upon the immediate support of our corresponding school principals. Some members of our team reflected upon the generous support from their school principals, while others shared that their school principals were unreceptive to initiatives. To navigate these circumstances, some of the members of our team discussed the importance of principled negotiation skills to circumvent such resistances (particularly when financial aid was required) (e.g., Fisher et al., 2011). Our colleagues were also integral in the success and/or impediment of grassroots leadership practices. While some members of our team acknowledged the immense engagement and support from colleagues for certain initiatives, other endeavours were sometimes met with apathy or disengagement from colleagues. These occupational and organizational constraints contributed to many of the members of our team expressing demoralizing sentiments, lack of recognition and appreciation, and otherwise exhaustion. Overall, existing school structures were not necessarily conducive to critical teacher leadership. This conclusion is consistent with Katzenmeyer and Moller's (2009) earlier perspective: "It is amazing that teacher leadership is possible in schools as they are currently structured" (p. 93).

Research Question 3: How is critical teacher leadership demonstrated as a transformative professional practice in the Manitoba context?

The results of the document analysis, which was triangulated with the other data sources, revealed Manitoba teachers' professional roles, responsibilities, and conduct were expansive, such as teaching and implementing government-regulated curricula, to routinely engage in (and/or facilitate) professional learning, to discipline and ensure students' wellbeing and safety, to participate in shared *school wide approaches*, to maintain professional and ethical conduct during such practices, among other duties. Although some aspects of critical teacher leadership were congruent with prescribed legislative, policy, and resource document frameworks, there were also various misalignments and tensions. The document analysis demonstrated that the term *leadership* was seldom used when associated with teachers' professional practices. However, through the Phase 2 interactions of the research project, some members of our team indicated that informal leadership practice could be interpreted as an implicit responsibility held by teachers (even if not explicitly prescribed). Many provincial and divisional policies mandated teachers' expectations to adopt critical stances, to embark upon a multitude of equity and social justice work, whether by addressing anti-racism, decolonizing practice, queering pedagogy, cultivating safe learning spaces, and so forth. Many of these ventures necessitated practices that extended beyond the classroom and manifested as advocacies through prescribed functions, such as co-facilitating professional learning sessions for self and colleagues, establishing school clubs, extending critical pedagogies to enact school (and/or community) change, among various other initiatives. Many of our leadership practices were successful and positively impacted our corresponding communities. Although it may be axiomatic to conclude *teaching* to be the apex function of teachers, it certainly is not the exclusive occupational expectation as Manitoba

teachers' duties extended far beyond the parameters of the classroom. This analysis augmented the theoretical discussion regarding the problematization of leader/follower binarism, specifically regarding teachers' engagement in emancipatory grassroots leadership practice as a core component of professional practice. Informal grassroots leadership practices are not, nor necessarily should be, prescribed functions within Manitoba legislation and policy frameworks. As many of our initiatives originated to address situational issues within our corresponding school communities, mandating leadership as a job duty would seem counterintuitive to dialogical liberatory practices. However, by explicitly excluding leadership co-engagement within teachers' realm of professionalism, there is a covert implication that teachers are not perceived to be leaders, but rather serve a subordinate role of followership within the hierarchical school system. This finding illuminates the parochial dimensions of the leadership/followership binarism within teachers' prescribed functions, a tension particularly exacerbated when pertaining to *critical* leadership functions (e.g., disrupting local inequities and social injustices). My analysis suggests there are intersections between teaching and leadership practice; while I do not synonymize these terms and practices, the findings drawn from this study demonstrate various commonalities in such shared, co-performed practices, foundationally rooted in school influence and advancing emancipatory change. Further, there were evident tensions within the confines of the professional code of conduct, as occupationally/organizationally controlled behaviours limited how teachers navigated equity and social justice issues within schools. Fearing risks of formal reprimand or compromised professional reputation led some teacher-participants to engage in covert forms of resistance, whether via closed-door planning discussions or microaggressive endeavours (as outlined in Chapter 5). As such, I concluded that teachers are bestowed with a wide array of responsibilities that are, at times, somewhat

inconsistent and unclear regarding the parameters of organizational expectations. These findings outlined new understandings in how organizational 'top-down' professionalism controls teachers' practices and limits their occupational autonomy and agentic potential. Although explicit behavioural expectations of teachers were largely unspecified within the analyzed policy documents (e.g., dress codes), teachers, as employees, are expected to fulfil routine organizational functions. Most of these mandated functions are externally regulated beyond teachers' control. Some scholars have acknowledged that teachers may only be categorized as quasi or semi-professionals as they lack autonomy over the regulation of their own practices (David, 2000; Demirkasimoğlu; 2010, Hoyle, 2001; Tang, 2008). However, as teachers are tasked to serve the public good and adhere to policies generated by democratically elected local school boards (Young et al., 2021), external regulation is somewhat necessary to ensure broader societal democratic function. This is a novel tension between teachers' subordinately following prescribed professional expectations (thus lacking autonomy and not necessarily conducive to social justice work) and teachers' yearning for increased occupational autonomy to engage in emergent grassroots leadership practices that may challenge inequities within the system (thus consistent with social justice activism but may ambiguously fall outside prescribed workplace behaviours). As autonomy is foundationally core to professionalism (Frostenson, 2015), balancing teachers' individual practitioner autonomy with externally regulated (but publicly endorsed) policy frameworks is a notable conundrum. How much autonomy and agency *should* teachers have? It is worth noting that our initiatives were generally consistent with prescribed professional expectations (e.g., engaging in anti-racism practices to cultivate safe learning environments), but, at times, necessitated challenging formal authority. Teachers in other

jurisdictions may operate within school systems that do not have policies promoting equity and social justice, but individually strive to support their diverse students' needs.

Strengths, Limitations, and Delimitations

The findings generated are the manifestation of the novel conceptual framework, methods, and methodologies utilized, the breadth of our interactions experienced throughout the research project, and the positioned interpretations of the phenomena. There are no claims of universality in the findings, as the conclusions drawn are not generalizable to all teaching contexts, but rather may be transferable to comparable school environments. This research design, process, procedures, data generated, and interpretations consist of various strengths, limitations, and delimitations that must be acknowledged.

Strengths

Perhaps the greatest strength in this research was that it was facilitated *by* and *with* teachers via participatory approaches (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Vaughn & Jacques, 2020). As practicing teachers with an *inside* knowledge of the process and procedures of Manitoba schools, we had an intimate understanding of both the potentialities and prospective barriers in critical teacher leadership practice (particularly in post-pandemic contexts). As this methodological bricolage drew inspiration from action research, Anderson and Herr (2005) comment: "Action research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation" (p. 4). Serving the dual role as both a teacher-researcher, I was in a unique insider position to facilitate this research that *outsiders* (e.g., from post-secondary institutions) would not have possessed the immediate knowledge associated with identifying the contextual research problem and objectives.

The diverse representation of our participatory team of teachers and our breadth of varying context-specific leadership objectives further augmented the strength of the study and the findings generated. Of the seven teacher-participants, there was a diversity of race, culture, gender, sexual-orientation, and professional experiences between Kindergarten and Grade 8 contexts. Although participation was open to teachers in secondary contexts, there was no participation from high school colleagues. This may be construed as both a strength (as the experiences were focalized in early and middle years contexts), as well as a limitation (as these perspectives undoubtedly would have broadened the scope of interpretation of experiences).

Another notable strength of this participatory project pertained to the community impacts that we co-led alongside our students, colleagues, and administrators. Through collegial engagements, we contributed to various collective leadership endeavours that contributed to students' enhanced engagement, professional learning and development, and sense of improved school-wide relationships. The implementation of photoVOICE as a data generation tool was invaluable, as it provided us with a visual medium to illuminate our endeavours. Photos generated documented our critical teacher leadership experiences, which proved to be rich data in conveying the reflections, feelings, impacts, and/or barriers impeding their practices. We had ample autonomous agency in deciding what would be photo documented (e.g., classroom artefacts, classrooms, hallways, etc.). These visual representations were particularly useful in communicating the professional fervor of these teacher-participants and certainly bolstered the findings. As such, these qualities enhanced the trustworthiness of findings generated from this participatory qualitative research study.

Last, I modelled the qualities of competence, integrity, and benevolence, indicators for ensuring the trustworthiness of bricolage research projects (Pratt et al., 2022). Through my

insider knowledge as a public school teacher and academic diligence in maintaining an informed perspective on contemporary developments on bricolage approaches to qualitative research, I demonstrated the competence to design, implement, and analyze a methodological bricolage. My demonstration of integrity was through my capacity to "cobble together" actualities in the field, ensuring methodological adaptations epistemologically aligned for the contextual purposes of this study. Last, I made conscientious efforts to uphold my commitment to benevolence through sharing research processes alongside my colleagues, sharing all data generated, inviting colleagues to engage in co-analysis, and providing regular updates regarding the thematic analysis process. I also solicited invitations for their input for revisions, if any.

Limitations and Delimitations

The most comment-worthy limitation of this research project was the lack of engagement in the co-analysis stages of the project among my teacher-participant colleagues. The intent was to co-analyze the data generated to be ethically collaborative and dialogical throughout the project and to avoid any risk of co-option. Co-option in participatory research studies is a significant threat to the trustworthiness of findings drawn and may be constituted as unethical (Borda, 2013; Cornish et al., 2023; Herr & Anderson, 2005). Throughout the research project, I made very concerted efforts not to speak *for* the teaching community (even if I am a member of the teaching community), but rather to disseminate findings generated *with* the community. Ensuring all voices are integrated and represented in participatory projects is a complex and difficult endeavour, particularly as there are always inherent power differentials (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007; Rieken et al. 2005). As all research is "positioned" (Creswell, 2007, p. 179), the interpretations of the findings were confined to my reflexive analysis of the phenomena.

Unfortunately, there was limited interest among my colleagues in participating in co-analysis. Some informal responses I received alluded to general apathy and/or indifference in reviewing dozens of pages of text and photographs to generate meaning. There were also expressions of tiredness, which is entirely understandable as these teacher-participants were so generous in volunteering time to participate in other aspects of the research project. Further, the magnitude in which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Manitoba teachers' wellbeing (e.g., Laidlaw, 2023; 2024; Sokal et al., 2021) cannot be understated. Further, there remained various University of Manitoba COVID-19 research protocols in place during the data generation and analysis phases of this project, and all sessions were conducted online. This may have contributed to a sense of apathy in engaging in prolonged online co-analysis meetings. Regardless of the circumstantial variables, attrition and limited engagement in the co-analysis of participatory research projects have been amply documented and remain a methodological dilemma (Fischer, 2007; MacDonald, 2012; Mills, 2007). The analysis would have undoubtedly been bolstered by others' increased engagement and insights. Regardless, to mitigate these challenges, all members of the participatory research team had access to all data generated, including photos, individual and group reflection discussion, and education documents. External research funding may have alleviated some of these challenges, as paid leave-time for teachers to engage in co-analysis may have better facilitated participation. However, formal release time from teaching responsibilities would have also inadvertently identified my colleagues' involvement in the study to the school administration, thus constituting a potential confidentiality issue. As Cornish et al. (2023) acknowledged, institutional infrastructures are not generally conducive to facilitating participatory research projects.

In a sincere effort to circumvent the prospective risk of co-option, I solicited participation in co-analysis through regular research update emails. These included: (a) an open invitation to meet and discuss and/or send in perspectives of findings (June 2023); (b) a preliminary findings report (September 2023); (c) a generated themes report (May 2024); (d) disseminating chapter drafts of the dissertation (June 2024); and a revised themes report (September 2024). In all these email updates, I provided an overview of the proposed developments and expressed ongoing openness to meet, discuss, and/or revise the findings based on their input. I was extremely tactful in soliciting invitations, but not coercing participation. I also further reminded my colleagues that they were welcome, but not obligated, to participate in co-analysis. The informed consent form explicitly outlined that participation was entirely voluntary, and that they may participate in all, some, or none of the research procedures. These gestures were conducted in good faith and with the intent to demonstrate transparency throughout the project.

Last, the delimitation of the research design must be acknowledged. While the research questions, objectives, and procedures of participatory research projects optimally should be informed by participants' input (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Torre et al. 2015), some of these constructs were designed independently by me and may not entirely be constituted as fully dialogical. The research questions, objective to promote critical teacher leadership practices, and the data generation methods (e.g., reflections, photoVOICE, education documents) were established before beginning participant recruitment. As a graduate student, navigating the parameters of a doctoral program and subsequent evaluative expectations in a thesis proposal highly influenced this approach. I felt compelled to have pre-generated research questions, methods, and methodologies, and analysis techniques to justify to my evaluative committee and for an eventual ethics board review. These perceived evaluative pressures compelled me to

approach this project in such a manner. However, it is worth noting that there is no universalism in participatory research procedures (Vaughn & Jazquez, 2020) and that there is a spectrum in the approach to participatory projects (Herr & Anderson, 2006). However, it is of utmost importance to ensure such projects are authentically participatory and conducted *with* (and not *for*) community members (Freire, 1970/2000; Herr & Anderson, 2006). Regardless of these delimiting factors, the research questions continued to evolve throughout the project; my colleagues had full autonomy in designing and implementing their critical teacher leadership agencies and were welcome to fluidly reflect upon their experiences (in some cases, superseding the scope of the semi-structured reflection questions). Regarding the inspirations of action research tenets and similar processes, Herr and Anderson (2005) advocated "action research is inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them" (p. 3). This study was facilitated entirely *by* teachers, reflecting upon social inequities and injustices, and aiming to lead emancipatory grassroots changes in their school communities. While I assumed the dual role of teacher-researcher and was more heavily involved in the design process, our efforts were facilitated *by* us and *with* our colleagues and students. Moving forward as an experienced and autonomous researcher, I wholeheartedly recognize the value in co-designing participatory projects alongside a team, brainstorming objectives and questions, and discussing methods for data generation, and planning for authentic co-analysis meetings. While this study was indeed (inter)action-oriented and participatory, the participative nature will be prioritized for future investigative advocacies.

Practical Recommendations to Educational Stakeholders

Upon contemplating the social and structural barriers impeding our grassroots leadership practices, I have generated four key recommendations to educational stakeholders that may

better cultivate school cultures conducive to foster such initiatives: (a) revision prescribed teacher professionalism rhetoric; (b) structural redesign of teachers' schedules to promote collegiality; (c) promote avenues to enhance teachers' voice; and (d) professional learning for teachers and school administration.

Revision in Teacher Professionalism Rhetoric

This recommendation is not necessarily to *professionalize* in the regard of prescribing additional roles and responsibilities for teachers into formal policy (as such a concerted effort may be conducive to 'top-down' organizational professionalism). Rather, it may be worthwhile to re-examine and subtly redesign the language espoused in Manitoba education documents (as a joint venture alongside teacher representatives) that determine teachers' professionalism, behaviours, expectations, and working conditions. As documented throughout this research project, there were various misalignments between prescribed professional expectations and practice, particularly the general vagueness in defining the full scope of teachers' daily function. A pronounced tension emerged through professionalism rhetoric of professional learning and development through collegial interactions. Divisional policy documents mandated the expectation for teachers to routinely engage in critical dialogue to expand their theoretical and practical knowledge of pedagogy and curricula. Members of our participatory team, however, reflected upon the exceptionally limited time in our schedules to informally discuss pedagogy, professional learning; these practices were consequently deferred to lunch hour and/or after school contexts. Further, there were numerous examples of policy documents mandating Manitoba teachers to engage in advocacy efforts to ameliorate social inequities (e.g., anti-racism, queering practice, etc.), yet do not formally protect teachers from retribution if they constructively challenge their supervisors while embarking upon these endeavours (whether

through formal rebuke or damaging relationships and/or organizational reputation). Teacher-Participant 3, as an example, reflected upon their concern of damaged reputation for expressing public dissent, specifically in their efforts to advance anti-racism efforts as a part of committee work. Although divisional policy mandates teachers to engage in anti-racism work and to cultivate safe and inclusive school communities, facilitating such endeavours, at times, necessitated challenging inequitable infrastructures (as some of the teacher-participants felt their perspectives were disregarded when attempting to challenge the status quo). Therefore, to ameliorate social injustices negatively affecting youth, emancipatory leadership may necessitate provocative conversations with authority figures. Reviewing and revising the professional expectations and duties outlined in Manitoba education documents should be done while being critical of language conducive to subordinate, followership-esque language. Rather, education documents should strategically integrate provocative verbs, such as “lead”, “advocate”, “negotiate”, and “debate” as a part of teachers’ wider organizational function. This recommendation was not presented to merely encourage *unruly* workplace behaviour, but rather to foster teaching/learning environments that embrace diverse perspectives, dialogism, and shared leadership, which may actualize liberatory.

Structural Redesign of Teachers’ Schedules to Promote Collegiality

As critical teacher leadership practices were documented to be very fluid and often exercised as socially collaborative endeavours, I would recommend that educational administrators and stakeholders make concerted efforts to increase teachers’ flexibility throughout the school day. An enormous barrier to practicing informal fluid leadership practices was the inability of teachers to find mutual meeting times to congregate and plan. The obvious parameter for expanding collaborative time is financial constraints, as increased flexibility (or

prep time) is a collectively bargained benefit. To increase teachers' flex time would necessitate increased staffing (e.g., substitutes and/or the creation of new positions) and would certainly constitute a significant budgetary increase. Despite this, the findings generated in this study, as well as other corroborating studies' findings (e.g., Apple, 2012a; Harris, 2003; Simpson, 2021; Wang & Ho; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Zapeda et al., 2023) have found that time and isolation are significant barriers to teachers' function. Lack of workplace autonomy is a strong predictor of demoralization and job dissatisfaction (Ertürk, 2023; Ozga, 1999; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). As such, I urge educational administrators, stakeholders, and teachers to collectively embark upon a creative redesign of teaching schedules to support collaborative and collegial professional opportunities during the instructional day. Depending on school boards' willingness and/or financial capacity to provide increased collegial time for teachers, the Manitoba Teachers' Society may be advised to consider increased flexibility in teachers' schedules as a prioritized item for future collective bargaining.

Opportunities to Enhance Teachers' Occupational Voice

Relating to the tensions and limitations for Manitoba teachers to exercise critical dialogue, I would recommend that teachers have enhanced opportunities to express professional disagreement, dissent, and/or constructive feedback to school administrators (at the school and senior divisional level). Under the current purview of divisional and occupational professional expectations, teachers are to voice any criticisms to individuals in private, and then to further notify that individual if they wish to proceed with complaints *up* the hierarchical ladder. I do not advocate dissolving this procedural framework as there are certainly numerous advantages (e.g., maintaining positive collegiality and transparency). However, there are a few noteworthy hindrances with this exclusive process. For example, some workplace criticisms are not

individual-specific but stem from constructive feedback to change the overarching structures that may be incongruent with equity and social justice efforts. An example relates to one teacher-participant dissatisfied with the division's choice of professional development topics, feeling teachers' voices were not solicited. Involvement in organizational decision-making was a consistent challenge among many of the teacher-participants. Although the prescribed policy acknowledges that teachers are to voice their perspectives and be involved in such processes, many school-based decisions were made without teacher-participants' input or were perceived to be only superficially considered. Teachers' engaging in advocacy work towards equity and social justice may be repetitively liaising with their school principal or local teachers' association president to voice organizational concerns (thus prospectively disrupting cordial relationships). Also, teachers who routinely engage in equity and social justice advocacies may risk damaging their reputation by being branded as an insubordinate *troublemaker* and may limit career advancement prospects. Last, leadership to resist social inequities may be extremely delicate in nature, and being required to engage in critical dialogue about organizational inequities (e.g., racialized pedagogies or school practices) may be emotionally triggering for marginalized workers. Cognizant of these challenges, I would recommend that school boards incorporate new avenues for education workers to voice anonymous constructive feedback. This may manifest in the form of (digital) *suggestion boxes*, annual check-in and check-out workplace surveys, and/or formally hiring independent researchers to collect, analyze, and publicly disseminate workers' perspectives safely and impartially.

Ongoing Professional Learning and Development for Teachers and School Administration

Last, I would recommend that teachers and educational administrators receive professional learning and development in co-facilitating future grassroots leadership practices.

This research has illuminated the pluralistic responsibilities in which Manitoba teachers frequently operate. Critical and informal leadership practices often emerged to be often highly social and collaborative, potentially emotionally exhaustive, and may necessitate difficult conversations between workers and administration. Current professional learning and development for pre- and in-service teachers fixates nearly exclusively on pedagogy and may not necessarily adequately prepare (and maintain) teachers' efficacy in fulfilling their diverse school-based functions. Such professional learning may entail development in navigating tense workplace circumstances, bolster individuals' capacity to engage in uncomfortable dialogues, foster emotional regulation and negotiation skills, and other peacebuilding and conflict mediating and negotiation skills conducive to grassroots leadership practices (e.g., Fisher et al., 2011).

Theoretical Implications for Future Research

In addition to practitioner-focused recommendations to support teachers' capacity to engage in emancipatory grassroots leadership in their school communities, new insights generated from this study provide theoretical implications for future research inquiry. I have categorized these theoretical implications as: (a) critical discourse analysis of followership/leadership binarism; (b) transformative professionalism of equity and social justice labour; and (c) methodological considerations for qualitative research and the methodological bricolage.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Followership/Leadership Binarism

These research findings illuminated the parochial interpretation of school leadership in the Manitoba context, as prescribed legislation and policy frameworks outline a wide array of teachers' professional practice, but seldom explicitly use the terms *lead* or *leadership*. As evidenced by our perspectives and experiences shared in this study, informal grassroots

leadership practices are routinely exercised and often manifest as augmentations of their miscellaneous workplace functions (e.g., critical pedagogies, committee work). Most of our grassroots leadership practices were interactive and collegial in nature, often comprising collaborations shared among students and colleagues. As documented by Ross and the collective efforts of students, teachers, school principals, and senior administration to advocate for and install a Treaty One flag embodied this sentiment. However, the discourse of educational leadership has been historically fixated on individualistic *heroic* foci, emphasizing the formal actions by those in positions of authority as opposed to the collegial interactions of many (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Tierney, 1989). Further, some scholars argue that such a conceptual top-down understanding of educational leadership is theoretically inconsistent with the dialogism necessary for social justice activism (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). These findings challenge this narrow solo-enterprise interpretation and prompt ongoing critical analysis into understanding the complex, interactive nature of grassroots 'bottom-up' leadership in public schools. An implication for future research would be to investigate provincial school leadership frameworks across Canada to ascertain how the discourse of educational leadership is conceptualized and how the role of grassroots agents (e.g., students, teachers, educational assistants, parents, etc.) are espoused in relation to such practice. Further, critical teacher leadership is a novel concept first coined by Bradley-Levine (2018; 2022) and remains fairly unexplored. Research to promote theory generation about critical teacher leadership is certainly warranted.

Transformative Professionalism of Equity and Social Justice Labour

New theoretical insights into teachers' transformative professionalism were generated from this study. Specifically, I argue that participating in shared (critical) leadership is a foundational tenet of teachers' transformative professionalism which, in turn, is predicated on the

qualities of autonomy, collegiality, exercising expert knowledge, and engaging in professional learning (Sachs, 2003; 2016). Through these findings, we see that grassroots leadership is not merely a voluntaristic/philanthropic pursuit, but rather is a core component of teachers' professional practice to support their students' diverse needs. Future research to explore in greater depth the social/structural barriers impeding specific areas of transformative professionalism (e.g., individual autonomy, professional learning and development, collegiality, and organizational voice, etc.) would be recommended. Also, exploring how behavioural expectations of teacher professionalism discourse dissuades social justice labour through implicitly denoting such work to be *trouble-making* (e.g., challenging formal authority and/or organizational structures) may yield new understandings into the controlling nature of teachers' activist potential. A tangible example within this study was some teacher-participants' feelings of unrecognition/unappreciation for their advocacies, which corresponded to sentiments of demoralization. There is a robust pre-existing body of literature on how limited workplace autonomy may contribute to job dissatisfaction and disengagement (e.g., Ertürk, 2023). Some of the teacher-participants in this study also resorted to closed-door conversations, remaining silent, or engaging in microaggressive behaviours (e.g., asking provocative questions at staff meetings) to circumvent organizational restrictions in their agentic potential. Various scholars have also previously documented the restrictive nature of professionalism ideologies (e.g., Mizzi, 2013; 2024; Midgley, 2018). Further theorizing on how activism/critical leadership is situated within teachers' (expected) professional practice/behaviour is timely and necessary.

Methodological Considerations for the Bricolage Approach

Last, this study generates novel insights into the evolving landscape of qualitative research and the utilization of bricolage approaches. There have been ample criticisms of

qualitative templates for being parochial, delimiting, and generating monological knowledge (e.g., Kincheloe, 2001; 2005; Pratt et al., 2020). These scholars argue that researchers should optimize their skill and creativity by responding to the ebb and flow of emergences from the field and adapt their research protocols accordingly. Adhering to a prescribed template may limit the data generation by ignoring the prospective rich nuances and insights that manifest. Rogers (2012), for example, provided the hypothetical example in which an action researcher may pivot to and/or incorporate discourse analysis midway through a project to respond to insights from the field. This study drew upon the tenets and inspirations of participatory action research, namely promoting planning, action, and critical reflection to facilitate emancipatory change in our school communities (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Herr & Anderson, 2005). I pivoted this project based on my colleagues' interests, areas of reflective discussion, and emergence of focus (e.g., document analysis trajectory to understand transformative professionalism broadly). Further, the documentation of individual leadership actions is difficult, as via the distributed perspective (Spillane, 2006) leadership is a *practice* that comprises the socially complex interactions of a multitude of actors. As there is no uniform agreement on what constitutes the 'action' in action research studies (Guy et al., 2020); the alternative interpretation of 'interaction' further broadens this scholarly discussion. This study generated insights into our perspectives and insights on our perceptions and experiences of our (inter)actions we co-performed alongside students, colleagues, administrators, and other agents for social change. The grassroots leadership practices documented by members of our participatory team in this study did not occur in a vacuum and were not isolated to their individual actions, but conversely materialized via these highly social, collaborative interactions. Further research and scholarship on the methodological

bricolage are certainly warranted as the field of qualitative research methodology continues to evolve (Morse, 2010; 2020).

Conclusions

The altruistic will, dedication, and contributions of my teacher colleagues cannot be understated and deserve the accolades of the Manitoba education community. The collective interactions they embarked upon within their school communities led to the establishment of new school initiatives, co-engaged students in emancipatory leadership efforts, manifested into the professional learning and development opportunities of educational staff, and were perceived to widely benefit collegial relationships within their schools. There were also various social and structural barriers impeding critical leadership practices, however. Teaching schedules proved to be somewhat incongruent with grassroots leadership initiatives, as teachers' work assignments were largely isolating and inhibited collegial collaborations. Further, social apathy and overt resistance from colleagues and/or administration negated some of our objectives. While positive experiences were recounted with feelings of enhanced confidence and pride, expressions of demoralization and exhaustion coincided with impeded leadership endeavours. The document analysis of Manitoba education texts further revealed novel insights into the intersections between transformative professionalism and critical emancipatory grassroots leadership practice. Leadership was a term seldom textually mandated in Manitoba education legislative, policy, and/or resource documents outlining teachers' workplace duties. However, many of the teachers' prescribed expectations implicitly necessitated informal grassroots leadership practice, particularly those heeding equity and social justice laborious tasks (e.g., engaging in pedagogical and school-wide anti-racism work). The novel critical teacher leadership conceptual framework, encompassing teachers' transformative professionalism, critical theory, and distributed

perspectives on leadership, generated significant theoretical insights into this novel phenomenon. Further, the utilization of photoVOICE and embracing the bricolage approach broadened methodological innovations and insights.

The findings and conclusions of this project are not universal or generalizable to every context, but rather generated new local understandings of the experiences of Manitoba teachers. The study was strengthened by my professional insights serving the dual role as a teacher-researcher working alongside a representation of my diverse teacher colleagues, as we had an immediate insider knowledge of contemporary Manitoba educational climates and shared a vested interest in improving school conditions to benefit both our practices as well as the wellbeing and academic achievement of our student bodies. My colleagues' limited engagement in co-analysis was constituted as an interpretative limitation, while the foundational research design being conducted primarily by me was an acknowledged delimitation in the overarching research project. Despite these (de)limitations, the project was successful in achieving each of our local objectives, led to meaningful impact in our Manitoba schools, and generated valuable theoretical and methodological insights for the scholarly literature.

Practical recommendations to practitioners and educational stakeholders have been formulated and include advisement to: (a) revision to prescribed teacher professionalism rhetoric; (b) structural redesign of teachers' schedules to promote collegiality; (c) promote avenues to enhance teachers' voice; and (d) professional learning for teachers and school administration. We need to reconceptualize our preconceived notions that teachers are subservient followers who operate under the direction of formal *"school leaders"* (e.g., principals). Teachers frequently engage in bottom-up, grassroots leadership practices to benefit their student bodies, and it is a necessary organizational function to ensure their own

transformative professional potential. Therefore, Manitoba education documents should be revisited to analyze how such language connotes leadership to be reserved to formal positions, and to outline provocative actions (e.g., debate, negotiate, advocate) as a part of teachers' routine practice. As collegiality was a recurrent issue experienced by teacher-participants, educational stakeholders need to reimagine school structures and schedules to cultivate a teaching environment conducive to collegiality, collaboration, and dialogical discussion. As some of the members of our team expressed feelings of demoralization associated with being silenced, unable to freely exercise their voice and judgments, educational stakeholders should further investigate new methods for anonymous feedback by educational workers. This may be achieved by revising education policy and resource documents to encourage critical and constructive feedback by teachers or promote avenues to solicit anonymous input from teachers to improve school function (e.g., surveys, questionnaires). Last, ongoing professional learning and development are essential for teachers and school principals to foster emancipatory grassroots leadership initiatives. Teachers would benefit from further professional learning on developing interpersonal and collegial skills (e.g., learning to promote their ability to negotiate, regulate emotions during high-stakes conversations, and other collaborative endeavours).

Consequent to the theoretical insights generated from this study, there are various implications for future academic inquiry. I may pursue a critical discourse analysis of provincial educational leadership frameworks across Canada, specifically investigating tensions in the leadership/followership binarism, and exploring how students, educational assistants, teachers, and parents are conceived within these documents. This study further illuminated the paradoxical nature of teachers' equity and social justice labour. Teachers are simultaneously expected to be agents of social change and to engage in equity and social justice practices alongside their

students, and yet their local advocacies are impeded by inequitable hierarchical structures of the school system. In short, challenge the status quo through education, but do not challenge the educational system. Therefore, further inquiry into the potential and limitations of teachers' advocacy for equity and social justice initiatives is warranted. Last, the utilization of the methodological bricolage expands discussions on the evolving nature of qualitative research methodology. Adapting to the ebb and flow and the specificities of this local research project, I incorporated tenets of participatory action research, but pivoted beyond the prescribed template to address emergences within the field. Ongoing research and scholarly development of the bricolage approach to qualitative research is certainly warranted as novel epistemological understandings of knowledge and the research process continually broaden.

I end with a quote by professor, cosmologist, and popular educator Dr. Carl Sagan: "The sky calls to us. If we do not destroy ourselves, we will one day venture to the stars." In a century of nuclear proliferation, an evolving ecological crisis, social and systemic vitriol and hate, rising threat of authoritarianism and autocracy, ongoing wars, among a plethora of other societal inequities and injustices, we must remain vigilant to combat and ameliorate these escalating tensions. It is within youth that we must place our hope. Teachers must be empowered as transformative professionals to safeguard their students' academic learning, wellbeing, and overall humanistic potential.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Certificate

University of Manitoba | Research Ethics and Compliance

Human Ethics - Fort Garry
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
T: 204 474 8872
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

Effective: July 18, 2022 Expiry: July 17, 2023

Principal Investigator:	Jordan Laidlaw
Advisor:	Robert Mizzi
Protocol Number:	HE2022-0048
Protocol Title:	*Teachers Leading for Social and Organizational Justice: A Participatory Research Study*

Andrea L Szwajcer, Chair, REB2

Research Ethics Board 2 has reviewed and approved the above research. The Human Ethics Office (HEO) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*- TCPS 2 (2018).

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

i. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the protocol only.

ii. Any changes to the protocol or research materials must be approved by the HEO before implementation.

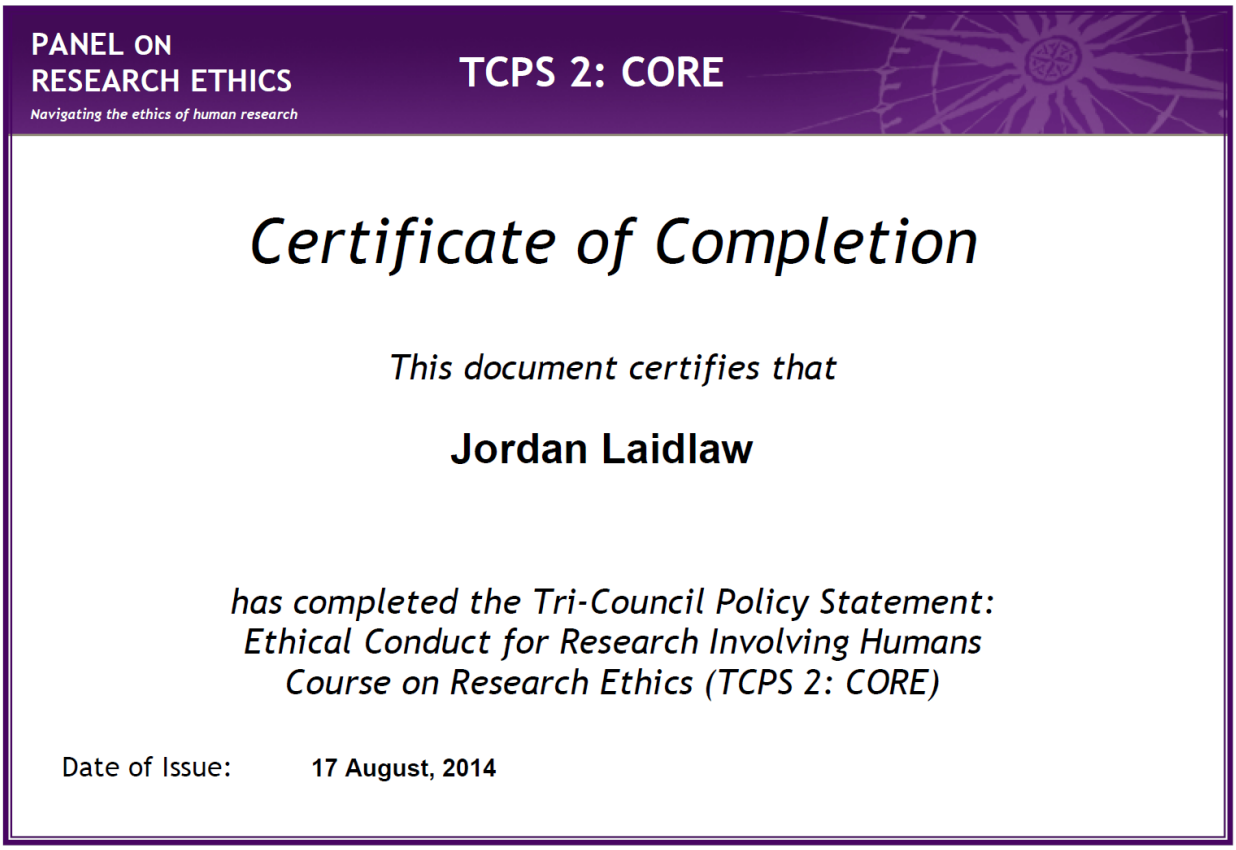
iii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the HEO immediately through an REB Event.

iv. This approval is valid for one year only. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.

v. A Protocol Closure must be submitted to the HEO when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.

vi. The University of Manitoba may request to audit your research documentation to confirm compliance with this approved protocol, and with the UM *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*Ethics of Research Involving Humans policies and procedures.

Appendix B: TCPS 2 CORE Certificate



PANEL ON RESEARCH ETHICS
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Jordan Laidlaw

has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)

Date of Issue: **17 August, 2014**

Appendix C: PHIA Certificate



Certificate of Completion

of

The Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)
Online Training Course
Direct PHI Version

This certificate is awarded to:

Jordan Laidlaw

this 30th day of August, 2022

MB42737
Certificate No.

8/29/2025
Expiry Date

Manitoba

Appendix D: Phase 1 Protocol

Note: This is not a prescriptive script. This is a general outline of the nature of discussion that will take place during the Phase 1 Introductory Planning Meeting between myself and my fellow teacher colleagues (participants).

Introductions and Team Building (15~ minutes)

- I will introduce myself, my professional and personal experiences in school leadership, as well as share my motivations in conducting this research
- I will also invite participants to introduce themselves, their professional and personal experiences in leadership, as well as their hopes and goals for participating in this research project

Overview of the Research Project (20 minutes)

- I will go over the 5 Phases of the research project, reminding participants that they may engage in as many or as little aspects of the study as they wish
- I will remind participants that there may be feelings of discomfort and resistance to their teacher leadership and that they may cease their actions, or that they may document as little or as much of the phenomena as they wish

Introduction to Policy Documents(5 minutes)

- I will read through a few Manitoba educational policy documents regarding educational leadership
- I will upload these policy documents onto our password-protected Google Drive network and ask participants to reflect upon these policy documents as they engage in teacher leadership for social and organizational justice
- Participants will be asked to continually reflect how policy (or the lack of policy) affects their ability and approaches to practicing teacher leadership in Manitoba schools

Planning for Phase 2: Teacher Leadership Action and Photovoice (20 minutes)

- I will invite teachers to either continue engaging in leadership practices they are currently involved with in their schools, to engage in new leadership practices, or both
- I will introduce participants to the concept of photovoice and how it will be used for research purposes
- I will invite teachers to photo document aspects of their teacher leadership
- I will inform participants that photos may document the nature of focus in their teacher leadership (e.g., accessibility issues, hallway posters and signs for social justice, teacher timetable scheduling issues, breakfast programs, etc.)
- I will inform participants that photos may document barriers and successes encountered or visual representations of emotions (e.g., a tissue box to represent sadness and frustration, or a sunset to represent accomplishment and joy in teacher leadership)
- I will remind participants that photos must not be shared with anyone external to the participatory group
- I will remind participants that photos must not contain any human subject (including self)

- I will remind participants that pohotos must not be identifiable to any school or specific location
- I will provide instructions to participants on how they may upload their photos once they have generated them
- I will ask if any participant needs a digital camera to document their experiences
- If so, I will provide participants with a Polaroid iSO48 Waterproof 16MP 4x Optical Zoom Digital Camera for usage during this research project
- I will personally cover costs for these devices, as necessary

Appendix E: Phase 3 Individual Reflection Discussion Questions

As a part of the participatory research team, you have been engaging in leadership for social and organizational justice in your school communities. You have now completed the photovoice experience and have compiled a collection of photographs documenting your leadership engagements.

1. How do these photos embody your experiences engaging in leadership for social and organizational justice? What is the significance of these settings/objects within the photos?
2. Do any of the photographs that you generated evoke any feelings (e.g., joy, sadness, fear, anger, etc.)? Why?
3. Which photograph do you believe is best representative of your pride in practicing teacher leadership for social and organizational justice? Why?
4. Which photograph do you believe is best representative of your challenges practicing teacher leadership for social and organizational justice? Why?
5. What have you learned about teacher leadership for social and organizational justice in Manitoba schools? How might these professional learnings inform your future practice?
6. How do the leadership efforts documented in these photos reflect Manitoba educational structures, policy, and/or law? Did your work assignment and schedule as a teacher impact your capacity to lead for social and organizational justice? Why?
7. Do you have any further thoughts or ideas regarding your leadership experiences, or regarding the significance of the photographs you generated?

Appendix F: Group Reflection Discussion Questions

Phase 4: Focus Group Questions

As a part of the participatory team, you have been engaging in leadership for social and organizational justice in your schools and communities. You have photo-documented and reflected upon your leadership experiences.

1. After engaging in teacher leadership, what have you learned about yourself as a teacher from engaging in leadership for social and organizational justice in your school community?
2. After engaging in teacher leadership, what did you learn about the nature of social and organizational injustices that exist in Manitoba schools?
3. After engaging in teacher leadership, what have you learned about the nature of teacher leadership and what it means to be an informal leader in Manitoba schools?
4. While engaging in teacher leadership actions, did you feel supported by school administration? Did you feel supported by your divisional policies? Did you feel these leadership actions were achieved easily as a part of your teaching schedule, or were your actions largely extra-curricular to your workload? Please explain.
5. What feelings or emotions did you experience while engaging in the teacher leadership in your school community? For example, did you ever feel joy, pride, discomfort, fear, etc.? Please explain.
6. Do you have any other thoughts or ideas you would like to share regarding teacher leadership, social justice, organizational justice, or anything else relating to this study?

Appendix G: Participant Information Form

Microsoft Online Participant Information Form
Teachers Leading for Social and Organizational Justice: A Participatory Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to promote social and organizational justice in Manitoba schools. Successful candidates will be asked to engage in leadership activities to promote social and organizational justice in their school communities. Teachers' leadership experiences will be documented, reflected upon, and analyzed. If you would like to request more information regarding the nature of the study, please contact the principal investigator Jordan Laidlaw at umlaidlj@umanitoba.ca.

This is a participatory research project, meaning that participants will be involved in decision-making and co-analysis of the findings. To participate, you must:
(1) be a Manitoba teacher and member of the Manitoba Teachers' Society;
(2) be a Manitoba teacher working within the [School Division name]; and
(3) not occupy a formal position of authority within the school division (as this study investigates informal leadership practices of teachers not occupying formal position of authority). Thus, you must not be employed as a school principal, vice principal, consultant, divisional coordinator, and so forth.
(4) be willing to be audio recorded for individual and group reflection session discussions.

As there may be limited positions on the participatory team, priority will be given to teachers that reflect a diversity of social and cultural identities, as well as plural professional experiences. Only successful candidates chosen for participation will be contacted and sent informed consent letters.

Eligibility
Are you currently employed as a teacher?
□ Yes
□ No
Are you employed in a formal position of leadership (e.g., principal, vice principal, consultant, coordinator, etc.)?
□ Yes
□ No

Participant Demographics
Note: *Sharing this information is optional. However, if there is an abundance of interest and limited positions for participating, selection of participants will be informed by responses to ensure there is a diverse representation of teacher leaders. Not sharing self-identifying information may exclude you from selection.*
Please check all that apply. Do you identify as …

□ Indigenous □ 2STLGBQIA+ □ Religious Minority
□ Person of Colour[11] □ Person with a Disability

Please check all that apply. Do you have teaching and/or leadership experience working in …

□ Early Years □ Specialist (e.g., music, phys. ed) □ Counselling
□ Middle Years □ Resource/Learning Support □ Other:_____
□ Senior Years □ Classroom Instruction

Participant Information

Name: _____

For confidentiality purposes, please do not provide work emails and/or phone numbers.

Phone (personal): _____

Email (personal): _____

Appendix H: Participant Consent Form

Faculty of Education
Education Building
71 Curry Place
University of Manitoba (Fort Gary Campus)
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada
T: 204-474-9004
F: 204-474-7551
faculty.education@umanitoba.ca



Informed Consent Form

Research Project Title:
Teachers Leading for Social and Organizational Justice in Manitoba Schools:
A Participatory Research Study

Principal Investigator:
Jordan Laidlaw
Email: umlaidlj@myumanitoba.ca

Research Supervisor:
Dr. Robert Mizzi
Email: robert.mizzi@myumanitoba.ca

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 should give you the basic idea of 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 the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Research Project Overview

Eligibility to Participate
There are three (3) eligibility criteria to participate in this research study, you must: (1) be a Manitoba teacher and member of the Manitoba Teachers' Society; (2) be a Manitoba teacher working within the [School Division name]; and (3) not occupy a formal position of authority within the school division (as this study investigates informal leadership practices of teachers not occupying formal position of authority). Thus, you must not be employed as a school principal, vice principal, consultant, divisional coordinator, and so forth. Further, if there is an abundance of interest in participation, priority will be given to teachers that reflect social and cultural diversities, as well as the breadth of professional experiences and expertise of our educational community. Sharing your personal demographic information is not mandatory. However, if there are limited positions available, priority to participate will be given to self-identifying candidates. Not sharing self-identifying information may exclude you from being chosen to participate. Participants must also be willing to be audio recorded during individual and focus group discussion meetings.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to better understand how educational policies impact teachers' ability to lead for social and organizational justice in Manitoba schools. The intent is also to generate recommendations for policy revision and/or construction to support teachers' future leadership efforts across the province.

Research Procedure and Participants' Involvement

This is a participatory research project, meaning participants are invited to be actively involved in the research process. A team of teacher leaders will be established to investigate social and organizational justice in schools. After generating new understandings of teacher leadership in Manitoba schools, this team of teacher leaders will be invited to analyze the data. Participating in all phases is encouraged, but not mandatory. You may participate in as many phases as you choose. If you are unable to attend meetings, the principal investigator will make accommodations to include your input from participation.

Phase 1: Introductory Planning Meeting (1 Hour)

We will meet as a research team, becoming acquainted with one another. We will discuss what it means to be a teacher leader, explore social and organizational justice issues in Manitoba schools, and be introduced to some policy documents on educational leadership. We will explore photography research skills and will plan for the next phase of the research project.

Phase 2: Photographing Your Experiences in Teacher Leadership (3~ months)

You will be invited to go into your school community and practice teacher leadership for social and/or organizational justice over a period of 3 months. You may photograph examples of your leadership, documenting any successes and/or challenges you may have encountered. You will engage with this phase on your own time and your own pace.

Phase 3: Individual Reflection Interview (1 Hour)

You will be invited to participate in a one hour virtual Zoom meeting to reflect upon your experience in teacher leadership and the photographs you generated. The principal investigator will video record and transcribe the audio conversations.

Phase 4: Group Reflection Discussion (1 Hour)

You will be invited to participate in a small group discussion with other participants virtually on Zoom. We will reflect upon our professional learnings in teacher leadership for social and organizational justice in Manitoba schools. The principal investigator will video record and transcribe the audio conversation.

Phase 5: Data Co-Analysis (3~ Hours)

Members of the team will reflect on data generated throughout the study and attend a co-analysis meeting where participants will share what they feel are the most important findings from the study. Together as a team, we will interpret the data to

generate summative findings. The principal investigator will note these suggestions, engage in further analysis, and present the findings to the team for further clarity, feedback, and approval.

Research Procedure for Photographing

The purpose for using photography in this research project is to visually share teachers' experiences leading in schools, to show examples of injustices that still occur in Manitoba schools, and to show how policies, structures and/or social barriers may inhibit teacher leadership. Examples of social and organizational justice issues in schools may relate to library books, classroom resources, learning spaces, work schedules, washroom accessibility, posters and signs, and so forth. Teachers may also document leadership practices they are engaging inside or outside the classroom to promote social and organizational justice (e.g., lessons plans, clubs, etc.).

Photos must never include humans (e.g., self, students, colleagues) and must not be identifiable to a specific school or location. All photos will be uploaded and saved onto a password protected Microsoft OneDrive network. The principal investigator will sieve through photos to ensure all photos are anonymous and non-identifiable to any person or place. Not all photos will be shared in the final research report, only a select number will be publicly shared. Photos will not be publicly shared until after the completion of the principal investigators' doctoral degree. Photos may be withdrawn and deleted by participants prior by to the completion of the project. Photos to be selected for dissemination will be chosen by the participatory research team. Any photos considered for the final dissemination products as outlined in the Dissemination section, need to have participants consent to release for this purpose. As part of this consent, it will be retained indefinitely.

Devices Required

You will need access to the following items:

Digital Camera: A digital camera will be needed to photograph your experiences in school leadership. If participants do not have access to a digital camera, one will be supplied for the usage during the project. Participants may use personal cell phones for photo generation. For whichever device used, participants are encouraged to turn off any location recording settings.

Computer and Internet: A computer and internet access will be needed to upload files online onto a password secure Microsoft OneDrive network. Using personal devices instead of work-related devices is strongly encouraged. We will also be meeting on Zoom after school hours for various stages of the research project.

Potential Benefits in Participation

This is a professional development opportunity whereby participants may acquire new understandings of educational leadership practices, learn about policy analysis techniques, develop new introductory research and inquiry skills, and benefit from new networking

opportunities. Findings generated from this study may contribute to improving Manitoba education community, as this research project aims to promote teacher leadership practices across the province.

Potential Risks in Participation

There are minimal risks in participation in the research study. However, there are potential professional, confidential, and/or emotional risks associated with participating. Through participation you will be asked to engage in leadership practices to promote social and organizational justice in your school. While your school division has granted permission for teachers to participate, it is important to ensure all participants' identities remain confidential (as revealing participants' identities may affect teachers' professional relationships within their organization). All participants will be required to sign an *Oath of Confidentiality* form, a signed statement outlining your agreement not to share your or other participants' identities.

During these experiences, you may encounter social and/or organizational barriers that impede your ability to facilitate such leadership practices (whether from administration, colleagues, community voices, etc.). Engaging in leadership for social and organizational justice may be emotionally challenging. You may document and reflect upon these experiences, which may cause some discomfort. You may document as little or as much as you feel comfortable. If you experience any emotional challenges and need support, you may access free counselling services through the Manitoba Teachers' Society via https://humanacare.com/mts/.

Confidentiality in Participation

The identities of all research participants will be confidential and protected. The practice of pseudonyms (false aliases) will be used in lieu of your name. You will have the option to choose your pseudonym. The name of your school and/or employer will not be shared in the research findings. Participants will be asked to photo document items or locations in their school. Photos are inherently non-anonymous. However, the parameters for photo generation (in the Research Procedures section) will help ensure that photos may not be identifiable to any person or specific location.

Demographics of participating teachers may be shared (including social and cultural identity information, as well as area of professional experience and expertise). Only the principal investigator and fellow members of the participatory research team will be knowledgeable of your participation. All online communications will not be made through work-related emails, participants are encouraged to use personal email accounts.

Credit for Participation

There are no monetary rewards for participating. Participation is entirely voluntary.

Freedom to Withdraw

Participants may choose to engage in various phases of the project. You may participate in all parts, in some parts, or choose to not participate in any parts of the research project. At any

point, you can choose to withdraw your involvement in the research project without penalty. Only the principal investigator will be informed of your decision to withdraw, if you choose to do so. If you decide to withdraw from the project, you most notify the principal investigator by phone or email by June 30, 2023.

During digital meetings, you may exit discussions without needing to provide explanation. It may be difficult, if not impossible, to entirely withdraw your contributions to the project during large group discussion and/or after the co-analysis stages of the project. If you elect to withdraw after participating in these research activities, your contributions (e.g., specific ideas, phrases, and photos) will not be quoted or shared for dissemination.

De-Briefing and Co-Analysis

This is a participatory research project, meaning participants have the right to participate in data analysis with the principal investigator. Following the conclusion of all phases of the research study, you will be invited to review the data, reflect upon our experiences in teacher leadership, and generate findings based on the data. Via Microsoft OneDrive, you will be shared transcriptions of discussions to ensure the accuracy of the texts. Participants will be asked to review their transcripts and contact the principal investigator by June 1, 2023 outlining any necessary revisions. You will be invited to participate in policy analysis practices, drafting recommendations to create or revise educational policies to support teacher leadership across Manitoba. You do not need to have any background skills in photography, data analysis, or policy analysis to participate. The principal investigator will support all members of the research team during these phases.

Dissemination of Research Findings

Research findings will be shared publicly. Findings may be shared locally (e.g., Manitoba Teachers' Society, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents', etc.). Findings may also be shared in peer-reviewed journals, as a part of research conference presentations, and the dissertation online through the University of Manitoba MSpace https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca.

Final Report to Participants

You will receive via email a brief final research report (1-3 pages) within six months after the completion of the principal investigators' doctoral degree. The final report will outline all major findings from the study, as well as outlining recommendations to improve teacher leadership in Manitoba schools. This report will be issued by approximately December 31, 2024.

Storage of Data

As this is a participatory study, participants will have access to data generated. Participants will have access to photos generated in Phase 2 of the project, as well as transcripts of reflection discussions from Phase 3 and 4 of the project. These forms of data will be accessible through a password protect Microsoft OneDrive network. Participants will be able to upload photos and access certain forms of coded and anonymized data generated

throughout the study. However, the principal investigator and Dr. Robert Mizzi (advisor) will have exclusive to directly identifiable data. You will be asked to reflect upon this data as you may choose to engage in co-analysis of the findings.

Deletion of Data

All data generated from the study (including individual and group reflection discussion transcripts and photos not chosen for dissemination) will be deleted by December 31, 2024. Audio recordings of reflection sessions will be deleted earlier, by December 31, 2023. Photos chosen for dissemination may be retained indefinitely.

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UM | Faculty of Education

Informed Consent to Participate

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. The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Officer at 204-474-7122 or HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

By signing this document, the participant:

- Consents to participate in this research study
- Consents to have individual and group reflection discussions audio recorded
- Consents to release their photos generated for research purposes. This includes the potential that the photos may be used in publications, conference presentations, etc., as well as photos being publicly available via MSpace. Photos will not be used for secondary research purposes.
- Acknowledges that confidentiality in participation will be protected, but cannot be entirely guaranteed, even with Oath of Confidentiality agreement and other protocols in place.
- Acknowledges that while the participant may withdraw from participation at any point without penalty, there may circumstances where some of the contributions of the withdrawing participant cannot be entirely omitted from dissemination.

---------- **Provide for Signatures as Required:** ----------

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact Information

Please do not use work-related phone and email contact information.

Email _____

Phone: _____

Preferred Pseudonym: _____

(Please choose a false alias to be used for throughout the study)



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Oath of Confidentiality

I, (print name) _____, am a member of the research team involved in the research project entitled, "***Teachers Leading for Social and Organizational Justice: A Participatory Research Study"*** (the "Research Project"). In connect with the Research Project I hereby agree as follows:

- I will respect the right to privacy and confidentiality of all participants in this research Project.
- I will keep all the research information shared with me, including but not limited to recordings, transcripts, data, research results, data files, inventions, (hereinafter the "Research Information") secure and confidential and will not disclose or share the Research Information with anyone outside the research team.
- I will store all research information in the data management methods outlined in the approved ethics protocol while it is in my possession.
- I will store and use the Research Information in the way it was approved by the research ethics board.
- I will not make any copies, duplications, or transmit the research information unless approved by the principal investigator of the Research Project.
- In consultation with the Principal Investigator, I will adhere to the methods and deadlines of disposal/destruction and retention as outlined by the approved ethics protocol.

I will notify the principal investigator if I discover that the Research Information is not being managed as it was approved by the research ethics board or if it is not being kept confidential or secure as required by this Oath of Confidentiality.

Participant Name (please print): _____
Signature: _____
Date: _____